US CLOUD

Research and Strategic Insights

Microsoft Enterprise Support

Independent research. Practical buyer decisions.



FEATURING RESEARCH & PERSPECTIVES FROM

Gartner / Forrester / ISG /UpperEdge / Uptime Institute / FinOps Foundation
Flexera / McKinsey / Deloitte / Anthropic

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A stronger support decision starts with evidence.

Microsoft enterprise support deserves the same scrutiny as any major technology investment. This guide brings together analyst research, industry findings, and US Cloud leadership perspectives to help Finance, Procurement, and IT evaluate cost, service delivery, and operational fit.

THE RESEARCH FOUNDATION

Gartner at the center

The November 2026 Market Guide anchors this research brief with a framework for evaluating coverage, escalation, customer references, and transition readiness.

Forrester adds perspective

Forrester complements that assessment with a broader view of independent support: cost pressure, roadmap control and continuity, with security and compliance central to the decision.

THREE THEMES FOR THE BUYING GUIDE

1. **Align cost with actual need.**
   Review the pricing baseline, incident demand, and services used. Obtain a comparable independent proposal before renewal.

2. **Validate delivery and ownership.**
   Assess engineering coverage, case accountability, and Microsoft escalation alongside fees, using evidence and relevant references.

3. **Connect savings to readiness.**
   Consider support in the wider financial review as AI investment grows. Define diagnostic evidence, governance, and operating responsibilities.

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GARTNER RESEARCH: SUPPORT ALTERNATIVES

Independent support. An established alternative.

Gartner's 2026 Market Guide places third-party software support in an established enterprise market. For Microsoft buyers, it provides a basis for evaluating alternatives on cost, coverage, and demonstrated capability.

> **"... most services offered are mature and continue to be enhanced and expanded."**
>
> Gartner, November *2026 Market Guide*

50%

Typical annual savings

Across the broader megavendor support market. Gartner cites provider briefings, customer inquiries, and reference interviews.

24/7

Help desk and remote support

Gartner identifies round-the-clock help desk and remote support as a mandatory capability for third-party software support providers.

WHAT MAKES THE CATEGORY WORTH EVALUATING

Service flexibility

Gartner's Market Guide describes 24/7 support, specialized services, and customized contract options.

Negotiating leverage

Lower-priced proposals can strengthen bargaining power with some megavendors.

Evidence before action

Gartner recommends relevant references and a 60-to-90 day pilot to test provider fit.

ILLUSTRATIVE ANNUAL SAVINGS

$2M support baseline x 50% = $1M potential savings

Illustration only. The 50% benchmark is not Microsoft-specific or a guaranteed result.

GARTNER RESEARCH: ENTERPRISE DELIVERY

Enterprise scale. Documented delivery.

US Cloud focuses exclusively on Microsoft enterprise support across cloud, hybrid, and on-premises environments. Gartner's US Cloud profile brings the evaluation down to measurable evidence.

452

Unified replacements

Organizations that fully replaced Microsoft Unified Support.

53

Fortune 500 customers

Enterprise adoption described in Gartner's US Cloud profile.

OPERATIONAL PERFORMANCE REPORTED IN THE PROFILE

16,659

Support cases handled

506

Severity 1 incidents

4.55 min.

Average initial response time

98.8%

15-minute response SLA compliance

WHEN MICROSOFT INTERVENTION IS NEEDED

Gartner describes US Cloud retaining case ownership and managing escalation through applicable customer entitlements or its authorized partner channel. Coverage spans cloud, hybrid, and on-premises Microsoft environments.

BUYER TAKEAWAY: **Compare coverage, case ownership, and delivery evidence alongside price.**

Gartner US Cloud profile reporting period for the 12 months ended September 22, 2026.

APPLY GARTNER RESEARCH: PROVIDER EVALUATION

Build the evidence before you switch.

A buyer worksheet informed by Gartner's evaluation recommendations.

1

Assess the fit

Map support needs to your technology roadmap and the workloads under consideration.

2

Request a comparable proposal

Ask for product-specific coverage, services, and pricing. Make scope differences visible.

3

Test the risk-benefit case

Review security, entitlements, contracts, and the last 12–24 months of incident history with IT and key stakeholders.

4

Speak with relevant customers

Gartner recommends at least three references with comparable enterprise size and environments.

5

Validate delivery in a pilot

Agree on workloads, case handling, and success criteria before committing to a transition.

Adapted from Gartner's evaluation recommendations by US Cloud.

BUYER TAKEAWAY: **Validate coverage, assess risk, and confirm delivery through references and a pilot before switching providers.**

FORRESTER RESEARCH: COST, CONTROL, & CONTINUITY

Cost relief. Roadmap control. Operational stability.

A broader framework for evaluating independent third-party software support. Forrester describes growing adoption across mature Microsoft, IBM, Oracle, SAP, and VMware environments as enterprises seek lower costs, more control over technology decisions, and dependable operations.

THREE PRESSURES BEHIND ADOPTION

Support-fee pressure

Rising fees from original software vendors increase the incentive to examine alternatives.

Vendor-led transitions

Cloud and subscription transitions prompt buyers to reassess their technology roadmap.

Transformation fatigue

Risk and disruption from multiyear programs strengthen the appeal of operational stability.

> **"... compliance rigor and security controls have become even more central to TPSS [third-party software support] decision-making."**
>
> Forrester, *Understanding The Options for Independent Third-Party Software Support*

TURN THE RESEARCH INTO BUYER QUESTIONS



Security & Compliance

What access controls, data protections, and audit evidence can the provider demonstrate?



Roadmap & Continuity

Can coverage support your current environment and planned changes? Who owns incidents and escalation?



Cost & Service Fit

Does the proposal match actual support demand, service requirements, and total cost?

Adapted from Forrester's research by US Cloud.

BUYER TAKEAWAY: **Compare coverage, case ownership, and delivery evidence alongside price.**

ISG RESEARCH: OPERATIONAL VALUE

Value grows through ongoing operations.

AI readiness requires governance, cost visibility, and accountable delivery.

ISG's US Microsoft ecosystem research briefing shifts the focus from initial deployment to ongoing value. It identifies fragmented environments, inconsistent agent controls, and unpredictable consumption costs as barriers to production-ready AI.

> **"Value compounds in operation rather than initial deployment."**
>
> ISG, Sameen Mohammed Siddique,*ISG Focal Points*

FOUR CAPABILITIES BEHIND ONGOING VALUE



Integrated Stack

Connect platforms and workflows.



Data Governance

Establish trusted, controlled data.



Agentic Scale

Scale agents with oversight.



Managed ValueOps

Sustain operational and financial value.

Adapted from ISG's Governed Data Foundation.

THREE CHALLENGES BUYERS SHOULD ADDRESS

Fragmented estates

Disconnected applications and data hinder AI readiness.

Agent governance gaps

Inconsistent controls create security, compliance and accuracy risks.

Unpredictable costs

Consumption growth can outpace falling token prices.

BUYER TAKEAWAY: **Confirm how providers oversee AI agents, track costs, and stay accountable for ongoing performance.**

UPPEREDGE: RENEWAL LEVERAGE

A credible alternative changes the conversation.

UpperEdge, an independent IT sourcing and vendor negotiation advisory firm, published an analysis that connects the removal of online-services volume discounts to potential Unified Support fee increases. Mansfield recommends evaluating viable alternatives, including third=party support, to strengthen negotiations.

> **"A credible alternative strengthens your negotiation position."**
>
> **UpperEdge,** Microsoft Ends EA Volume Discounts: What It Means and How to Respond

FOUR STEPS BEFORE THE RENEWAL MEETING

1. **Validate the baseline**
   Reconcile the support calculation with eligible Microsoft spending.

2. **Obtain a scoped proposal**
   Use the same workloads, service commitments, and escalation needs.

3. **Document the differences**
   Compare coverage, proactive services, exclusions, and total cost.

4. **Set the decision timetable**
   Allow time to evaluate an alternative while it is still actionable.

BUYER TAKEAWAY: **Obtain a comparable independent support proposal before renewal to strengthen your negotiating position and evaluate cost, coverage, and service commitments.**

UPTIME INSTITUTE: OUTAGE RISK

The contract fee is only part of the exposure.

Uptime Institute's Annual Outage Analysis 2026 reports that outages per site are becoming less frequent, but improvement is slowing and costs continue to rise.



57%

said their most recent major outage cost over $100,000.



1 in 5

said their most recent major outage cost over $1 million.

Uptime Institute, *2025 Annual Survey*

THREE FINDINGS THAT STRENGTHEN THE EVALUATION

External Dependencies

Fiber and connectivity incidents are rising and are more likely to produce extended disruption.

Operational Discipline

Failure to follow procedures remains the leading driver of human error–related outages.

Risk Assessment Gaps

Resilience assessments still focus more on internal systems than external and systemic risks.

"But further resiliency gains are becoming harder to achieve."

Uptime Intelligence Executive Director Andy Lawrence, *Annual Outage Analysis 2026*

WHAT TO ASK YOUR SUPPORT PROVIDER

Case ownership: Who stays accountable from diagnosis through closure?

Escalation readiness: How are Microsoft interventions and supplier handoffs coordinated?

Communication: Who provides business-impact updates and next actions?

Delivery evidence: What response and resolution results and references can you review?

BUYER TAKEAWAY: **Compare the annual fee alongside engineering access, escalation arrangements, and demonstrated incident handling.**

FINOPS & FLEXERA: SPENDING & SAVING

Make support part of the financial review.

Broader industry research strengthens the case for examining every major commitment.

FINOPS FOUNDATION

90% of respondents manage SaaS or plan to in the coming year; 64% manage licensing. The FinOps Foundation report also describes pressure to self-fund AI through optimization savings.

FLEXERA

Software spend optimization is the leading software asset management initiative for the coming year. The study highlights the need for visibility and coordination across an increasingly complex estate.

THREE QUESTIONS BEFORE RENEWAL

Demand: What did your organization use over the past 12–24 months?

Value: How did coverage, engineering access, and incident handling meet operational needs?

Reinvestment: If savings are validated, which priority should receive the funding?

Guidance from US Cloud.

> **"FinOps is no longer just explaining past spend. It's shaping future technology decisions before commitments are made."**
>
> FinOps Foundation, *State of FinOps 2026*

BUYER TAKEAWAY: **Include Microsoft support in that review. Compare actual demand, coverage, and delivery against the annual fee, then assess whether savings can fund other technology priorities.**

GARTNER, MCKINSEY, & DELOITTE: AI INVESTMENT & READINESS

Fund AI without losing control.

Treat AI investment, operating readiness, and support spending as connected decisions.

20%
report AI operating costs constrain their AI use.

37%
report at least some enterprise EBIT impact attributable to AI use.

McKinsey's 2026 survey describes rising adoption alongside pressure tot urn individual productivity into enterprise financial results. These measures concern respondents' organizations (not support provider performance).

DELOITTE

Scaling also requires operating readiness.

Deloitte's State of AI in 2026 report finds that 74% of surveyed companies plan to deploy agentic AI within two years, while 21% report a mature governance model for autonomous agents. Its findings reinforce the need to build oversight as adoption grows.

GARTNER

Over 5x

Higher workflow costs ahead

Gartner predicts AI inference costs per agentic workflow will increase more than fivefold through 2028. Falling token prices can be outweighed by more complex, token-intensive tasks.

Buyer note: budget for workflow consumption, not token price alone.

DELOITTE

48%

Infrastructure readiness remains a gap

Only 48% of surveyed US leaders reported preparedness in technology infrastructure for agentic AI. This gap suggests AI ambitions are advancing faster than infrastructure needed to support operations.

Buyer note: Validate infrastructure readiness and support coverage.

BUYER TAKEAWAY: **Review support commitments algonside AI budgets. Validate coverage and service value before deciding whether savings can be redirected to priority investments.**

US CLOUD INSIGHT: AUTOMATION & ACCOUNTABILITY

More automation needs clear ownership.

Reliable AI operations require traceable actions, controlled access, and accountable support.



Make the whole workflow visible.

Agents can span model calls, data retrieval, tools, and external services. Gartner recommends tracing across those boundaries to support incident response, audit, performance, and cost decisions. An agent's explanation does not verify why it acted; teams need evidence connecting actions and outcomes.



Give every agent an identity and a human owner.

Gartner recommends managing agents as workload identities, requiring registration, and human accountability. Limit access to each task's requirements. Assign responsibility for permissions, credentials, access reviews, and suspending an agent when needed.



Plan for failures across components.

Anthropic's multi-agent research system highlights the importance of production tracing, recovery mechanisms, and coordinated deployments. Teams need visibility into agent and tool interactions to diagnose failures and restore service.

DEFINE OWNERSHIP BEFORE YOU SCALE

WORKFLOW OWNERSHIP

Who approves the use case, defines acceptable results, and authorizes changes?

ACCESS AND CONTROL

Who manages permissions and can pause or disable the agent?

DIAGNOSIS AND RECOVERY

Who collects traces, investigates failures, and restores services?

SUPPORT AND ESCALATION

Who coordinates providers, manages Microsoft escalation, and confirms contracted coverage?

> **"Ownership is credible only when the provider remains accountable through technical handoffs, Microsoft escalation, customer communication, and measurable progress..."**
>
> Mike Jones, US Cloud Chief Revenue and Product Officer, *7 Questions enterprise Buyers Should Answer After Microsoft's FY26 Earnings.*

YOUR NEXT SUPPORT DECISION

Put the research to work.

Make your next support decision count..

Evaluate Microsoft support against your costs, operational needs, and technology roadmap.

Compare Your Microsoft Support

Bring your current agreement and support priorities. Explore how US Cloud compares across pricing, coverage, engineering access, and transition requirements.

Request a Support Comparison

Talk Through Your Requirements

Discuss your Microsoft environment, renewal timing, critical workloads, and support challenges with a US Cloud specialist.

Talk to an Expert

Why US Cloud

24/7
Microsoft Support

SENIOR
Microsoft-Certified Engineers

30–50%
Typical Client Savings

About US Cloud

US Cloud is the world's only independent third-party provider of Microsoft enterprise support, serving Global 2000 and Fortune 500 organizations worldwide. US Cloud delivers reactive and proactive services without affecting access to Microsoft products or services.

Contact US Cloud USCLOUD.COM | (800) 200-8440

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