US CLOUD

THE MICROSOFT MONEY TRAP

Pitfalls to Avoid and Proven Strategies for Getting Out of Unified Lock-In

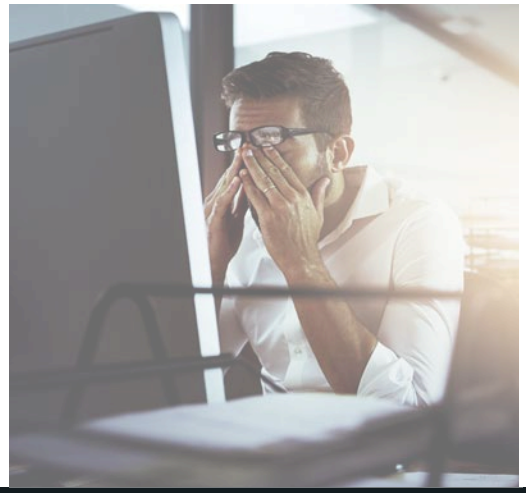
Your Support is 50% Overpriced. Here's Why.

Microsoft has mastered the art of locking enterprises into costly support contracts. These agreements grow more expensive each year—regardless of whether your actual support needs increase. Their Unified Support model ties your service costs to product spend, not usage, creating an endless cycle of ballooning expenses.

Procurement and IT leaders deserve better.

This eBook outlines the realities of Microsoft's negotiation tactics, the pitfalls hidden in Unified Support agreements, and proven strategies to avoid being overcharged or cornered into last-minute decisions.

By the end, you'll see that exploring alternatives like US Cloud isn't just a good idea, but rather a professional responsibility. Without evaluating options, you may be leaving millions on the table.



WHAT'S AHEAD

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The Attractive Three-Year Trap

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Get a Quote–Or Miss the Point

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The Realities of Microsoft Unified Support

When Microsoft replaced Premier Support with Unified Support in 2017, procurement leaders were promised “simplicity.” No more hourly tracking, no more rationing support incidents.

Instead, companies were introduced to a rigid pricing formula—based on a percentage of total Microsoft spend—regardless of whether support tickets ever justified the cost.

In reality, the pricing change ended up being less simple and more stifling.

For most organizations, this meant an immediate cost hike of 30–60%, with some experiencing increases of 200–400%. Unlike traditional contracts where discounts or credits softened the blow, the move to Unified removed almost every lever of negotiation.

To make matters worse, since Microsoft ties Unified Support pricing directly to your overall Microsoft consumption, your Unified costs will grow as your organization grows. As you adopt more O365, Azure, or Dynamics, your support bill inflates—even though those workloads often generate fewer tickets than legacy systems.

The result? You’re trapped in a cycle of escalating costs disconnected from actual service value.

The Microsoft support model is terrible for what you pay for. We simply weren't getting what we paid for. And then every year, or every time we had to true-up, the costs keep climbling and climbing. A lot of the frustration that was had was when you put a support request in. There's a lot of round-robin.

-Ed Lewis, Manager of Enterprise Solutions, Amedisys

The Attractive Three-Year Trap

One of Microsoft's most effective tactics is the three-year Unified Support agreement. On the surface, it feels efficient: fewer negotiations, predictable budgeting. In reality, it's a bait and switch.

Most organizations don't feel the full pain until Year 2, when front-loaded credits and incentives run out.

At that point, costs spike dramatically, and with no real negotiation levers left, procurement teams are left holding the bill.

It's a trap that many a well-meaning procurement expert has unwittingly fallen into. Even worse, Microsoft sales teams are notorious for dragging negotiations to the last possible moment. By the time that team says your renewal is on the table, your window for meaningful evaluation is gone.

The "choice" presented is usually no choice at all—sign now or risk a total loss of coverage.

What feels like simplification is actually a mechanism to lock you into paying more, without escape.

4 Strategies to Navigate Unified Support Negotiations

1

Don't wait.

Begin early to prevent Microsoft's stalling tactics from leaving you cornered.

Educate your organization's stakeholders about the contract negotiation timeline and why you are exploring alternatives.

2

Decouple support from your Enterprise Agreement (EA).

Unified pricing is formulaic and won't improve by bundling it with your EA.

Negotiate it independently.

3

Challenge "proactive support" claims.

Unified's proactive services often amount to DIY toolkits that require in-house expertise you may not have.

Don't accept them as an added value that increases your Unified cost.

4

Demand transparency.

Push Microsoft to specify who will provide your support, where they're located, and what service levels they'll commit to.

These steps won't eliminate cost inflation—but they will keep your team in control of the conversation.

Why You Still Have a Choice

The truth is, Microsoft isn't your only option. Third-party providers now offer full replacements for Unified Support, often delivering faster response times, higher service quality, and 30–50% cost savings.

US Cloud is the leading alternative.

With 100% U.S.-citizen, Microsoft-certified engineers, response times up to 5x faster than Microsoft, and predictable pricing not tied to product consumption, we put enterprises back in control.

Hours never expire, rates are locked in, and your team can focus on innovation—not fighting inflated support costs.

Guaranteed 15-min response SLA

Unrestricted Microsoft escalations

24/7/365 support for all severities

We had been a customer of Microsoft support. As time progressed, we saw a change in the level of support provided by Microsoft—especially when we changed from Premier to Unified Support. We started to see a shuffle in our technical account managers, which then became CSAMs, or more of a customer support role. We found they were more sales-oriented than they were technical. These CSAMs were often people who were not necessarily in the IT field previously, so we started to lose that relationship."

-Michael Rosendale, Associate Systems Director, Brown University

Your Microsoft Renewal Playbook

Renewing your Microsoft support contract doesn't mean you'll need to helplessly accept skyrocketing costs and rigid terms. With a plan in mind, Microsoft support contract negotiations can be tipped in your favor.

Procurement and IT leaders who approach renewal with discipline and foresight can reclaim leverage in negotiations—or pivot to a smarter alternative with US Cloud.

Here's a proven step-by-step process.

1 Start Early — Don't Get Stalled

Microsoft sales teams are notorious for pushing negotiations to the last minute, leaving you no time to evaluate alternatives.

Begin your renewal review 6–9 months before expiration to avoid being cornered.

2 Separate Support from Your EA

Unified Support pricing is formula-based. Bundling it with your Enterprise Agreement won't improve terms and only reduces your flexibility. Negotiate Unified Support separately to maintain control.

3 Pressure-Test Microsoft's Value

In addition to your standard set of inquiries, ask a few more hard questions:

- Why are support costs increasing if our ticket volume isn't?
- What services are actually included beyond the DIY "proactive" toolkits?
- Who will provide our support — and are they outsourced offshore?

Answers to these questions expose how little additional value Unified Support delivers for the premium price. This should help you gauge whether or not you are getting your money's worth from Unified.

Your Microsoft Renewal Playbook

4 Run The Numbers

Don't let Microsoft dictate the formula. Build your own financial model of Unified Support costs under different adoption scenarios (O365, Azure growth, etc.). Many companies discover costs balloon by 30–60% annually — sometimes 300–400% over a few years.

Here's a checklist for auditing your Unified contract:

Complete a Software Assurance Benefits Assessment

You may have Software Assurance (SA) and may not even know it. If that's the case, you are likely underutilizing this benefit.

Even if you were aware of your SA status, run it anyway. Check for the services your organization has been benefiting from as well as options for improved support moving forward.

Confirm your organization is in possession of all contracted Microsoft software licenses and that the entire team has access to Microsoft Unified Support services.

Request a Record of Your Microsoft Software Licensing Contracts and Unified Support Allocations

Ensure all listed Microsoft contracts are for your enterprise only, are classified appropriately, and are currently being used.

Mistakes can and do slip through.

Confirm that no Microsoft licenses have been double-counted by accident.

Your Microsoft Renewal Playbook

For M365, Clarify the Percentage Allocated Toward User Costs vs. Server Costs.

User cost should be at 75%, while server costs should be at 25%.

If these percentages are misallocated, the impact on your enterprise's licensing and Unified Support costs can be enormous.

If applicable, confirm that your multi-year Azure agreement cost is charged against Unified appropriately.

For example, in a 5-year Azure agreement, the total cost should be charged at a rate of 20% per year, not the entire 5-year amount at one time

For True-Ups, Ensure Your Aren't Charged for Corresponding Unified Enterprise Support.

Primarily, true-ups are comprised of the cost of the licenses and should not be included at 100% of spend in the Unified calculation.

Additionally, Software Assurance (SA) paid in true-ups should be spread evenly across the term of the true-up.

Verify that Microsoft's public cloud support rates are competitive with other public cloud support rates, including tiers from Amazon and Google when support costs are included in the comparison.

Your Microsoft Renewal Playbook

Consider the Basis on Which Your Contract is Being Negotiated.

Microsoft Unified Enterprise Support contracts are based on past spends, but you can (and should) negotiate on future trends. Look-back based proposals are ideal for growing customers, but not if an organization is contracting.

5 Benchmark Against US Cloud

Not getting a quote is missing the point. Without a competitive quote, you're negotiating blind. US Cloud typically saves clients 30–50% while delivering faster response and resolution times.

Even if you stay with Microsoft, bringing a validated US Cloud quote to the table forces Microsoft to sharpen its pencil.

6 Decide with Confidence

Armed with data, timelines, and alternatives, you can choose whether or not to:

- Accept Microsoft's terms, but with real visibility into the long-term costs
- Break free from the cycle and partner with US Cloud for predictable, high-quality support at a fraction of the costs

Either way, you've done your job. You've established a clear, best-fit rationale for your support choice that secures your budget and vendor quality.

At the time of my renewal with Microsoft, I was paying about $80,000. They wanted $140,000. I started making some phone calls to see what else was out there. I got a quote from US Cloud for about $27K. I thought it was worth a shot. We made the transition, and everything worked the way we wanted it to.

-Ryan Holcomb, Computer Operations Manager, Aegion

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Get a Quote–Or Miss the Point

If your Microsoft support contract is up for renewal, you have one critical responsibility: explore alternatives. Even if you ultimately remain with Microsoft, failing to benchmark pricing and performance against US Cloud means walking into negotiations blind.

Procurement leaders are tasked with protecting smart budgets. IT leaders are tasked with ensuring high-caliber service. Both responsibilities demand that you get a quote.

Don’t leave money—and leverage—on the table. Talk to US Cloud today.

Get a Free Quote Now

- Get insights with no risk or obligation
- See targeted costs on real savings
- Gain intelligence with no risk or obligation

Request More Info >

The Bottom Line

Staying with Microsoft Unified is no longer a safe choice, but a costly trap. Your freedom to choose isn't just philosophical—it's your most valuable strategic asset. The question isn't whether to explore alternatives. It's whether you can afford not to.

The next move is yours. The consequences are too.

Next Steps

If you're ready to reduce costs, improve service, and take back control of your IT roadmap, contact US Cloud for a side-by-side comparison with your Unified quote.

Book a Call

Learn how you can save 30-50% over Microsoft Unified Support.

Let's Go >

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Read our latest thought leadership, including updates on Copilot, Azure, Dynamics, Microsoft 365 and more.

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