



The AI Free Zone: Why Infrastructure Modernization is Important Even if Your Midsized Business Isn't Investing in AI Technologies

It's pretty hard nowadays to have any technology-related conversation where AI doesn't come up. Get any two IT decision makers together and soon they'll be asking "How are you using AI? What are you running it on? Are you seeing any results?" plus a lot of other questions.

But the feeling that AI is everywhere and that everyone is using it doesn't match up with the data. Aberdeen research shows that among midsized businesses, only 37% currently have a strategic deployment of AI.

In fact, no key data metric in Aberdeen's most recent IT infrastructure survey had a majority of businesses using AI. And when we asked what was driving midsized organizations to modernize their IT infrastructures, only 32% chose AI.

Now, I'm not saying that AI isn't extremely important, and I think no matter what your current roadmap for AI is, you should have some people in your team testing and piloting potential ways AI could be used in your business. But our research shows that there are many other critical drivers and goals that are pushing midsized businesses to modernize their infrastructure.

So let's look at the AI-free business case for midsized organizations to modernize their IT infrastructure. Even for organizations that are not currently pursuing AI initiatives, many of the same investments in compute, networking, security, and operational efficiency create the foundation for future innovation and help ensure the business is ready to take advantage of emerging technologies when the need arises. To understand this, we filtered our data to compare businesses not currently deploying AI with those who are. For many midsized organizations, infrastructure modernization is driven less by AI initiatives and more by the operational, security, scalability, and resilience requirements needed to support business growth.

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Getting on the Road to Modernization

Aberdeen research shows that 47% of midsize businesses are currently in the consideration or evaluation phase of IT modernization. These organizations are setting goals, evaluating emerging solutions, and analyzing precisely where their legacy systems are coming up short. They are doing the hard work of diagnosing structural vulnerabilities before committing capital to massive digital overhauls.

For these midsize IT decision-makers, modernization isn't about chasing industry hype. It is a calculated initiative aimed at eliminating daily technical friction, preserving operational efficiency, and ensuring the company remains resilient against external threats.



What's Really Driving Infrastructure Upgrades?

When you strip away the elephant in the room of new technology trends, the actual catalysts pushing midsize companies toward hardware and network updates become more pragmatic. The data shows that organizations not currently prioritizing AI initiatives are motivated by four core business pressures: reducing cybersecurity risks, replacing infrastructure that can no longer support growth, managing runaway IT complexity, and expanding capacity for new users and digital services.

Reducing risk tops the list for good reason. Older hardware platforms, outdated operating systems, and unpatched legacy environments represent easy entry points for cybercriminals.

Midsize organizations often occupy a precarious position in the market: big enough to possess valuable customer data and financial assets, but small enough to lack the massive security budgets of global enterprises. Upgrading underlying systems allows these firms to embed modern security protocols directly into their compute and network layers.

Beyond security, growth bottlenecks are a top driver for modernization. An older infrastructure stack was likely sized for fewer workloads, lower data volumes, and a less distributed workforce. Over time legacy servers and limited bandwidth create performance degradation, low integration with critical new systems, and frustrated employees.

Modernization removes many of these barriers, allowing IT to aid in organizational expansion rather than hinder it. Storage infrastructure can also become a constraint as organizations grow. Legacy storage environments may struggle to keep pace with increasing data volumes, application performance requirements, backup demands, and business continuity objectives.

At the same time, managing IT complexity has consistently been seen as a top IT infrastructure and technology hurdle. Years of ad-hoc hardware additions and software patchworking can leave many midmarket environments fragmented and difficult to manage. By consolidating legacy systems into updated and modernized solutions, IT managers can reduce administrative chaos, lower maintenance overhead, and free up staff to work on higher-value business projects.



The Modernization Blueprint: Core Tech Investments

Midsize enterprises operating without automated intelligent platforms built with recent trendy technology are hardly standing still. Instead, they are directing their IT infrastructure investments toward reliable, proven technology stacks that deliver immediate, measurable improvements to stability and throughput.

According to Aberdeen's findings, the top technologies currently being deployed by these organizations include private and hybrid cloud architectures, network optimization tools, and comprehensive business continuity systems.

The pivot toward private and hybrid cloud gives midmarket firms the best of both worlds. It delivers the flexibility and elastic scaling of cloud environments while allowing sensitive corporate workloads to remain under strict, localized control. Paired with network optimization initiatives, companies can eliminate latency and maintain high application performance across branch offices and remote employee setups.

Business continuity systems are similarly receiving renewed investment. Recognizing that downtime translates directly to lost revenue and customer dissatisfaction, IT leaders are implementing automated backup and disaster recovery solutions capable of restoring critical operations within minutes of an outage or ransomware event.

Modernization is not limited to compute resources. Many midsize organizations are also refreshing storage platforms to improve application performance, strengthen cyber resilience, support business continuity objectives, and better manage expanding data demands.



Server Refreshes Remain a Staple

Aberdeen research finds that businesses not currently investing heavily in AI technologies are just as likely to have recently refreshed their server infrastructure. With a server refresh they can improve application performance, reduce data center energy footprints, and receive improved hardware vendor support. Core line-of-business applications, corporate databases, and enterprise resource planning systems rely heavily on resilient, modern hardware to maintain high availability.

Ultimately, building a strong and growth-ready IT infrastructure does not require a splashy headline initiative or a total pivot in business strategy. For the vast majority of midsize organizations, lasting success comes from executing the fundamentals with precision: securing the network perimeter, eliminating single points of failure, and ensuring that compute capacity can seamlessly scale alongside the business.

The most successful midsize organizations are not defined by how quickly they adopt every new technology trend. They are defined by their ability to build secure, resilient, and scalable foundations that support today's priorities while preparing for tomorrow's opportunities. Success comes from continuously strengthening business capabilities and being ready to embrace innovation when it aligns with strategic needs.

Trying to deploy a new technology before your business has an actual need for it is just adding unnecessary strain and complexity and making it more difficult to stay competitive. Whether or not AI initiatives are on today's roadmap, the research is clear: midsize organizations benefit most when they focus first on building secure, scalable, and resilient infrastructure foundations that support both current operations and future innovation.

For over twenty-five years **Jim Rapoza, VP & Principal Analyst at Aberdeen**, has been using, testing, and writing about the newest technologies in software, enterprise hardware and the Internet. He previously served as the director of an award-winning technology testing lab based in Massachusetts and California. Rapoza is also the winner of five awards of excellence in technology journalism, and co-chaired a summit on technology industry security practices. He is a frequent speaker at technology conferences and expositions and has been regularly interviewed as a technology expert by national and local media outlets including CNN, ABC, NPR, and the Associated Press.

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