

AI-enabled PCs offer small and medium-sized businesses enhanced performance, security, and efficiency. However, tapping into their benefits requires holistic upgrades, strategic IT alignment, and addressing integration, cost, and skills challenges.

How AI PCs Can Power Up SMBs for Growth

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Introduction

AI is fundamentally transforming the way organizations operate, and the technology has a particularly profound impact on small and medium-sized businesses (SMBs). With leaner staff and fewer resources, SMBs are tapping into the many uses of AI. In fact, 47.5% of SMBs worldwide view AI as an investment priority in the next 12 months, according to 2025 IDC data (see Figure 1). However, as the nature of work evolves — especially in increasingly hybrid or remote work environments — SMBs' outdated or legacy systems often struggle to support the demands of modern workflows.

AI-powered PCs, when paired with optimized infrastructure, are emerging as essential tools that can help SMBs unlock new efficiencies and reduce operational risks. AI-enabled PCs can offer small and medium-sized businesses enhanced performance, security, and productivity, positioning them to thrive in a rapidly changing business landscape and better compete with their larger counterparts.

Benefits

According to IDC's data, 41% of SMBs are prioritizing PC renewal — upgrading or replacing either desktops or laptops over the next 12 months. PCs also remain the largest segment of hardware investment for SMBs, with SMBs on average indicating that they will devote 25% of their hardware budgets to PC upgrades or renewals. This prioritization of PC investment, in combination with SMBs' increased interest in AI, makes AI-enabled PCs a wise IT investment option for SMBs. AI-enabled PCs can deliver significant benefits to organizations, particularly SMBs, by bringing on-device intelligence to a range of tasks, such as transcription, image generation, and workflow automation. These PCs are designed to enhance security through advanced chip-to-cloud protection, zero trust architecture, and local AI processing, which collectively minimize exposure to external threats. This is key because SMBs list implementing new technology securely as the number 1 challenge to achieving their business goals, according to IDC's data. AI-enabled PCs are particularly beneficial in that they provide security by design.

AT A GLANCE

KEY STATS

- » 47.5% of SMBs say AI is a top forward-looking technology investment for the next 12 months.
- » In tandem with this, 41% of SMBs are also prioritizing PC renewal, including upgrades or replacements.

WHAT'S IMPORTANT

AI-enabled PCs can greatly benefit SMBs. However, security and clear ROI are essential to SMBs when evaluating AI PC offerings.

KEY TAKEAWAY

More SMBs will invest in AI-enabled PCs over the next few years, unlocking benefits in productivity and efficiency. However, SMBs will need to address barriers, including privacy concerns, ROI, skills gaps, and legacy systems, by taking a holistic approach to adoption.

FIGURE 1: **Top 5 forward-looking technology investment priorities for SMBs**

AI as the main priority

Q Which of the following forward-looking technology areas will be priorities for your company in the next 12 months?



Note: This displays the top 5 answers from the list of 11 options.

Source: IDC's Worldwide Small and Medium Business Survey, February 2025

AI PCs offer faster load times, improved multitasking capabilities, longer battery life, and greater personalization than older, traditional PCs. They also provide increased privacy and speed. On-premises AI can reduce reliance on cloud services, resulting in lower latency and stronger data security. Because of these personalization capabilities, lower latencies, and improved security, on-premises AI PCs are better poised to securely leverage key company data for insights, ultimately providing a customized experience that fits employees' needs for their day-to-day tasks. This enables SMBs to boost productivity and overall output, freeing up employees to focus on mission-critical tasks.

In addition, deployment is often simplified so that SMBs without technical expertise can easily set up AI PCs. This includes customized programs that specifically serve SMBs' needs, as well as in-person support such as device imaging, deployment services, and training. This ensures seamless integration for both IT teams and end users. Integration is especially crucial for SMBs. They frequently cite it as a major factor in selecting vendors for hardware, software, cloud, and third-party services, according to IDC's data. For example, a number of hardware vendors are offering tailored deployment programs when SMBs purchase business-grade devices, including preconfigured and pretested AI hardware, onsite setup, and certified technicians for setup and user guidance. These solutions are often customizable for SMB workloads and may include options such as remote management tools to ensure smooth deployment and scalability.

Trends

Trends in AI-enabled PCs include lower price points, increased compliance capabilities, and improved efficiency in deploying these devices. Further:

- » Vendors are offering affordable, modular solutions for AI PCs and platforms, featuring flexible, usage-based pricing and tiered models. These offerings often include pretrained models and AI-as-a-service options designed for price-sensitive SMBs, reducing the need for heavy up-front investment and making advanced AI benefits more attainable.

- » AI PCs and software are also increasingly designed for plug-and-play integration, allowing the two to more easily connect with existing cloud setups and business applications, such as CRM, ERP, and HRM systems. As integration is a top concern for SMBs, according to IDC's data, minimizing business disruption and complexity is a key benefit. This integration enables offloading AI tasks to endpoints, freeing up datacenter capacity and reducing dependency on cloud resources. Ultimately, this will help lower computing and storage costs, a boon for price-sensitive SMBs.
- » Increased data sovereignty is another key industry trend. AI-enabled PCs are integrating security and compliance features to support local processing and regulatory requirements. Many services, including AI as a service, are now designed with security by default, ensuring robust protection of sensitive data.
- » Hybrid infrastructure designs allow alignment of endpoint upgrades with datacenter modernization efforts. This includes modernizing endpoints, upgrading infrastructure through hardware refreshes, implementing virtual desktop infrastructure, deploying edge computing, and providing managed life-cycle support, all of which contribute to a more resilient and future-ready IT environment for SMBs.

Considering DHE Computer Systems

DHE Computer Systems, LLC is a technology solutions provider with more than three decades of experience delivering IT services to small and medium-sized businesses. Founded in 1989, the company offers end-to-end capabilities across endpoint procurement, device life-cycle services, infrastructure modernization, cloud and hybrid environments, and managed IT services. Through partnerships with leading technology vendors, including Lenovo, DHE supports SMB adoption of business-grade and AI-enabled PCs alongside the infrastructure, security, and management capabilities necessary to support modern workloads. DHE emphasizes a holistic approach to endpoint modernization, helping SMBs address challenges related to limited IT staffing, security and compliance requirements, budget constraints, and legacy system integration. By aligning AI-capable endpoints with broader infrastructure and life-cycle planning, DHE enables SMBs to pursue productivity and efficiency improvements while maintaining control over cost and operational complexity.

Challenges

Despite the compelling benefits of AI-enabled PCs and hybrid infrastructure solutions, challenges and market inhibitors remain for SMBs looking to tap into them:

- » **Privacy, data security, and compliance are top concerns for SMBs.** According to IDC's data, 49% of SMBs cite security concerns as a challenge to achieving their technology goals. Concerns about the privacy of internal data are therefore a top barrier to AI PC adoption. While steps are being taken to mitigate this concern, many organizations remain cautious about how AI PCs handle sensitive information, especially given the complexities of on-device AI and cloud integration.
- » **Cost, ROI, and pricing uncertainty also pose significant barriers.** Per IDC's data, 33% of SMBs feel that their technology budgets are too low to invest in innovation. Exact ROI can be difficult to measure, and high up-front costs and external factors, such as tariffs and macroeconomic volatility, can complicate investments for SMBs. Skills gaps and challenges in change management are also barriers. According to IDC's survey data, 36% of SMBs do not have a single full-time IT employee, which means many may not fully understand AI or AI-enabled PCs and their potential benefits.

- » **Legacy systems, manual processes, and toolchain incompatibility further complicate integration efforts.** Disparate environments, a lack of standardized tools, and outdated infrastructure can make the adoption of AI PCs both complex and costly. The market is characterized by intense vendor competition and feature parity, with many vendors offering similar AI capabilities, which makes differentiation challenging. ROI and change management are additional concerns.
- » **Vendor perception can be a hurdle.** Some organizations may still view partners such as DHE primarily as hardware resellers rather than comprehensive, full-stack solution providers, which can limit their ability to position themselves as strategic partners in AI transformation.

Conclusion

IDC forecasts that more SMBs will embrace AI PCs over the next few years, driven by their need to modernize their IT environments and align technology investments with business objectives. For SMBs, a holistic approach is essential. This means not only upgrading endpoints to AI-capable devices but also optimizing infrastructure and ensuring that IT strategies are tightly integrated with broader business goals. Hybrid cloud and on-premises integration, data quality improvements, and container platform automation will significantly impact businesses' operations in the next two years. But through all this, cybersecurity, data compliance, and skills gaps remain top considerations for IT purchasing decisions.

Forward-thinking SMBs will leverage modular, scalable AI solutions that are easy to integrate into their existing cloud and business application environments with minimal business disruption and complexity. Vendors such as DHE can address the challenges of privacy, security, cost, skills gaps, and legacy system integration and are in a good position to help SMBs realize the full potential of AI PCs and infrastructure modernization. Finding a trusted vendor partner can help SMBs overcome selection and implementation challenges and competitive pressures, enabling them to boost efficiency, improve customer satisfaction, and realize robust, long-term ROI.

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About the analysts



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