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A CIO's Guide to Total Cost of Support

The Hidden Cost of "Good Enough"

Introduction:

Today's budget dilemma

CIOs and IT directors are increasingly in a bind. Budgets are tight and corporate leaders are asking everyone to do more with less.

With AI adoption on the rise, boards and CEOs are asking everyone to do much more with less. But IT can't allow flat or smaller budgets to create more work, increase risk or harm productivity.

That can make cheap tools very, very tempting.

But is the cheapest really the cheapest?

Software buyers should never assume that the cost of licenses will be the only cost to the organization. When looking at how much something costs, forward-thinking leaders must take a holistic view of the costs of technology and what will save budgets in the long run.

More often than not, the cheapest license isn't the cheapest to operate.

The real question isn't: "What does this cost to buy?" Instead, it's: "How much extra work will this require from my organization after I buy it?"



Chapter 1:
"You want me to do WHAT?"

Cost-reduction directives often come paired with increased expectations.

The idea that you can "just get AI to do it" can be a dangerous thing. The swift adoption of AI in a very short time has caused both gaps in knowledge and some *incredibly* high hopes.

Many IT directors have found themselves facing expectations that they will cut costs, harden security *and* scale AI.

Scaling AI is not easy.

In fact, Gartner recently released survey results finding that **only 22% of organizations have successfully scaled AI** across multiple business units.[1]

Despite this lack of success, says Gartner in another report released in September 2026, **investment in AI continues to accelerate swiftly**. They predict that worldwide spending on AI will total $2.7 trillion by the end of 2026: a 49.5% increase year-over-year.[2]

Successful organizations must bridge this gap.

ONLY 22%

of organizations have successfully scaled AI

$2.7T

Gartner's predicted spending on AI by the end of 2026

[1] "C-Suite AI Survey Reveals Misdirected Bets and Overlooked Wins," Gartner, 2026
[2] "Forecast: AI Spending, Worldwide, 2025-2030, 2Q26," Gartner, 2026

Chapter 2:
Costs that don’t show up on a pricing sheet

Wanting to cut costs even as other technology costs surge is understandable. But what CIOs and IT directors must get across to decisionmakers is this: cost cutting may be necessary, but operational costs don’t appear on a purchase order.

Beyond direct costs such as software licensing fees, helpdesk hours, maintenance costs and IT overtime, leaders must consider the following before simply choosing a solution by initial price tag.

How much IT time is required to manage using this solution?

Not just how many devices, or how many apps, but the entire picture: security, inventory, provisioning, integrations, compliance, encryption, identity — the list goes on.

Operational surface area matters more than license count.

Will this solution force engineers to become the default helpdesk?

If engineers are tied up fixing tickets, businesses miss out on whatever cost-saving innovations these strategic professionals otherwise would have discovered and implemented.

Strategic capacity should never devolve into ticket-taking.

Does the vendor genuinely support the tool?

Saying that they can technically support a solution can too often be a very different situation from true operational supportability.

Your teams must be able to trust that the solution will be reliable and useful without constant specialist intervention.

Might a lower price tag add complexities you didn’t intend to buy?

A cheaper platform can often be antithetical to accomplishing more with fewer staff. If solutions aren’t built well or lack key features, that means more administration, troubleshooting, scripting and manual interventions — as well as a worse user experience.

Flat headcounts make paying for automation and supportability absolutely vital.

Determining the real cost of tech: a Total Cost of Support

Decisionmakers must consider all costs before making a purchasing decision, including the cost of:

+ Licenses
+ Implementation
+ Ongoing administration
+ Troubleshooting
+ Integration
+ Employee downtime
+ Specialist expertise

= Total cost of support

The same formula applies to AI tooling decisions.

What is true supportability?

A truly supported product should require the least amount of organizational effort to keep the technology working, productive, compliant and secure.

Chapter 3:
Three ways AI raises the stakes in organizations



AI increases expectations for what IT can deliver — without staff increases.

Due to learning curves and limited company capabilities, this can surface serious issues.

Companies feeling enormous pressure to adopt AI in their organizations can sometimes get themselves into trouble. Pressure can cause leadership to demand too much — which in turn can force IT to cut corners, skip vital testing or overpromise.

AI has wonderful capabilities, but there is no "do everything really fast and perfectly accurately" button. AI still needs configurations, restrictions and clear direction in the format that works best for the tool.

Never forget this when you are asking for results, when you are tasked with providing results or when you are estimating costs and timeframes.

Chapter 3: continued

AI has its own hidden Total Cost of Support.

Because companies pay by usage-based tokens, it can be difficult to estimate exactly how much the computational and consumption costs of AI will be, even when employees use sanctioned AI agents.

Worldwide, organizations are trending toward increasing cost overruns. *CFO Dive* recently relayed the results of a **WitnessAI report**[1] that found, in a survey of 300 senior enterprise leaders at organizations with 1,000+ employees, 68% reported at least some of their artificial intelligence initiatives ran over budget in the past year, with 33% reporting that overruns occurred "mostly" or "always."

The trouble gets even worse when organizations are dealing with AI sprawl.

AI sprawl

AI sprawl is the uncontrolled proliferation of AI tools, models and autonomous AI agents across an organization without centralized oversight, governance or strategic alignment.

Larridin's **"State of Enterprise AI 2026" research**[2] found that the average enterprise uses 23 different AI tools, but only 38% maintain a complete inventory of what's running.



[1] "2026 Enterprise AI Risk Survey: The Hidden Cost of Enterprise AI," WitnessAI, 2026

[2] "2026 State of Enterprise AI Report: You Can't Optimize What You Can't See," Larridin, 2026

Chapter 3: continued

AI expands the threat surface in multiple directions.

AI agents often have unprecedented access to an organization's data, networks and more. This puts bad actors who exploit AI security gaps in a powerful position to create havoc. Unfortunately, many first steps in an exploit can look to IT like legitimate activity — or be hidden from IT entirely.

Industrial Cyber recently reported the **results of a SANS Institute survey**[1] of 536 cybersecurity and IT practitioners and 57 senior security leaders worldwide. The numbers were troubling.

> *"AI adoption in cybersecurity and IT operations **jumped from 50% in 2025 to 78% in 2026**, though only 27% describe their deployments as mature production environments."*

In addition, 76% of respondents were responsible for governing enterprise AI — despite **more than half of them lacking formal AI audit frameworks.**

[1] "2026 SANS AI Survey Insights: Poisoned Wells and Pure Springs: Drawing Security and Compromise from the same AI Source," July 13, 2026

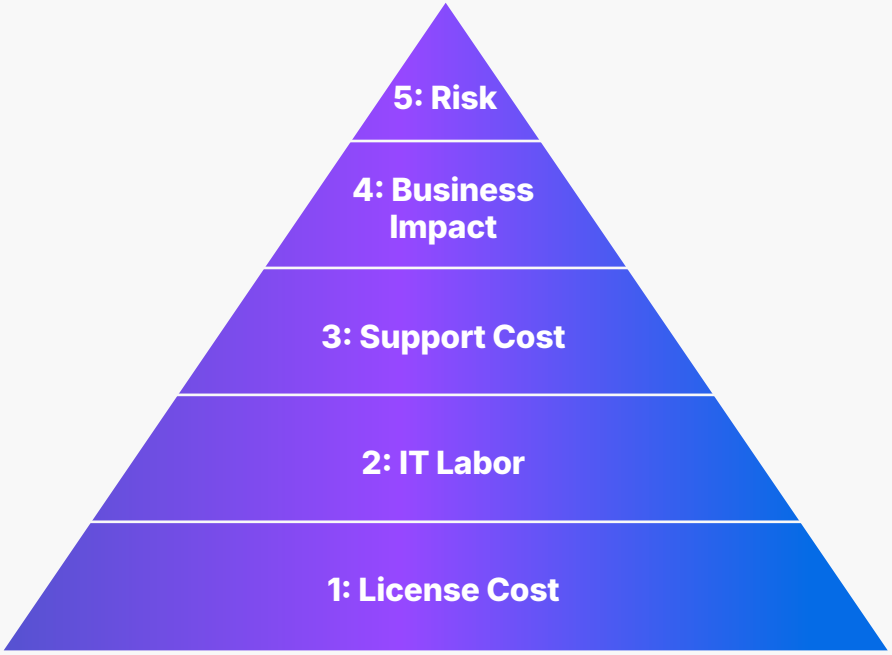
Why Jamf?

Jamf can add a layer of control over previously ungoverned AI agents in the Apple ecosystem with **AI Governance**. Jamf works directly with Anthropic and AWS to ensure that AI agent use in your organization is visible, managed and secured just like everything else.



Chapter 4:
Total Cost of Operation value hierarchy

An excellent framework in which to appropriately measure and judge the cost of any solution is through the TCO value hierarchy:



The higher the level of thinking that you focus on in this pyramid when considering solutions, the better your decision quality will be.

Unfortunately, because risk and even business impact are both intangibles, pressured decisionmakers often optimize for the bottom of the pyramid: the area of the least impact on their organizations, because it's the easiest to measure.

This is a mistake.

An important note:
the skyrocketing numbers of AI adoption, combined with the much lower oversight capabilities companies report, have sharply increased risk.

Chapter 5:
Where value beats upfront cost

Every organization and situation is different, but often the bottom line is the same.
(The below are illustrative examples, not actual companies.)

Gumshoe Investigations, LLC, *ran on a shoestring budget and a dream. The co-owners didn't think they could afford the premium file storage and organization system that would have kept cases, client information and sources secured and at their fingertips — so they went for a cheaper one. As it turned out, nothing worked correctly, their existing data didn't port over cleanly, and they wound up spending far more in labor costs to clean up the mess.*

The CEO of Everyman Dressed, *a global no-nonsense men's fashion brand, decided that he wouldn't pay for a bunch of bells and whistles he didn't need, so he purchased an inventory system that cost half of its competition. There was just one small failure. Unfortunately, that failure was in his cybersecurity coverage, and the large, respected brand took a hard hit financially and reputationally when customer credit card numbers were leaked.*

The board of Health at Home, *a US-based at-home personal services and healthcare nonprofit, told IT to cut back on licenses for their premium patient information system to control costs. After showing the board some scenarios and statistics outlining how this decision would affect employee morale and patient service, IT Director Susan Nopes was able to make a case for everyone to have a license.*

After crafting industry giant Ker & Willow Knits *switched from a well-known MDM to a cheaper, newer company in a cost-savings maneuver, the IT director watched in dismay as exactly what he said would happen unfolded in front of his eyes: the increased dependence on manual updates overwhelmed IT staff, who in turn began making mistakes in their hurry to meet expectations. Other staff complained about their devices suddenly running far more slowly, and bugs and bottlenecks kept increasing staff downtime. It cost the company far more in lost employee time than they saved by switching.*

The new CEO of DaringDynamics, Inc., *was all about embracing change. An early AI adopter, she encouraged her staff to dive in, as well. Faster than she had ever thought possible, this free and creative approach turned into a snarled mess: personal and work IDs all jumbled together, self-contradicting advice from HR's new AI-assisted chatbot, and IT kept uncovering more AI agents with alarming levels of data access. Luckily, her CIO recommended an AI governance platform that offered strong device/identity visibility, and she quickly agreed to the premium price tag. Her previously ungoverned AI surface is now ably managed and maintained, and she sleeps better at night knowing that the company can pinpoint every agent, every device and every ID.*

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Conclusion:

Shift from “buying” to “operating.”

What looks cheaper on the license line can become far more expensive to operate. Before you make a buying decision, use a subtraction framework:

- What tasks can each vendor remove from your team’s workload?
- What risk can each remove?
- What stumbling blocks to productivity can a solution sweep aside?

Remember: your job isn’t to buy the cheapest technology. It’s to buy a solution with the lowest-risk operating model available.



The real cost of technology isn’t what you pay to buy it.

It’s what the organization will spend to keep it working. That shows up as employee downtime, IT overtime and operational risk.

Ready to see it in action?

Experience Jamf today