

The 2026 State of Legacy Software Modernization Report

How Legacy Upkeep Is Quietly Becoming Everyone's Job

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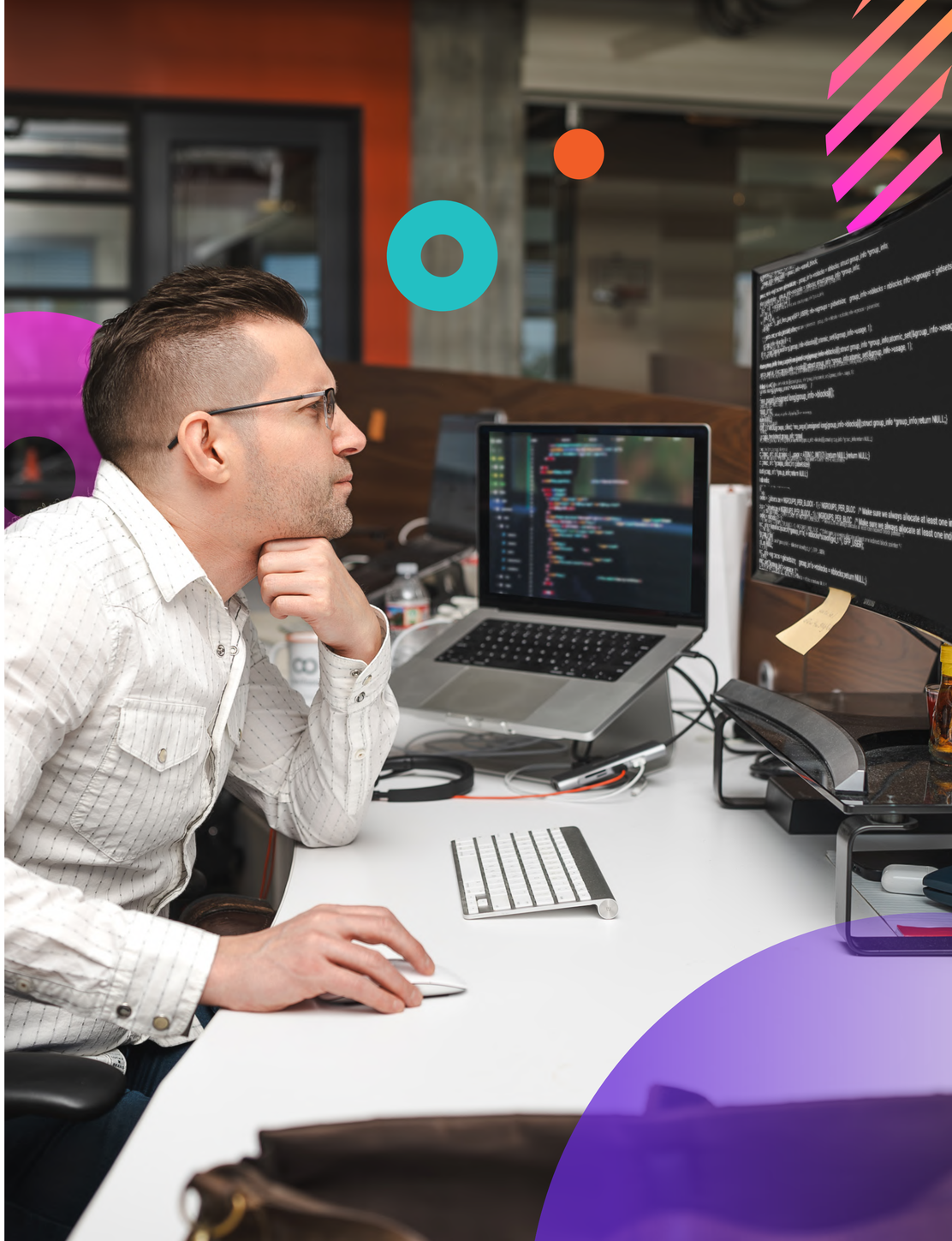
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Executive Summary

Legacy software modernization is the process of updating, integrating, or replacing aging software systems to improve security, scalability, and compatibility with modern technologies.

In 2025, our inaugural State of Legacy Software Modernization Report uncovered the heavy burden aging software places on organizations.

Re-evaluating this landscape in 2026 reveals an escalating problem: **reliance on legacy systems grew from 62% to 68%**, proving platforms are aging faster than teams can update them.

The issue extends beyond system age to a critical resource shift: **legacy support has moved from dedicated specialists (20% down to 12%) directly to internal IT staff (68% up to 77%)**. As original experts retire or move on, IT teams are inheriting brittle, decade-old infrastructure while simultaneously being tasked with implementing modern AI, cloud, and security mandates.

This specialist drain is pushing operational pain points to critical levels. Security vulnerabilities and escalating maintenance costs have spiked, forcing teams to prioritize integration and security over quality-of-life upgrades. Yet modernization efforts remain stalled because “the system still works”, while concerns about operational disruption keep leaders paralyzed.

Business leaders must treat this shift as an urgent warning. As expert talent disappears, **delaying modernization drastically increases the risk of system failure**. Relieving IT staff of routine legacy upkeep through phased modernization is critical to protecting business continuity and unlocking future growth.

The Troubling Rise of Legacy Systems

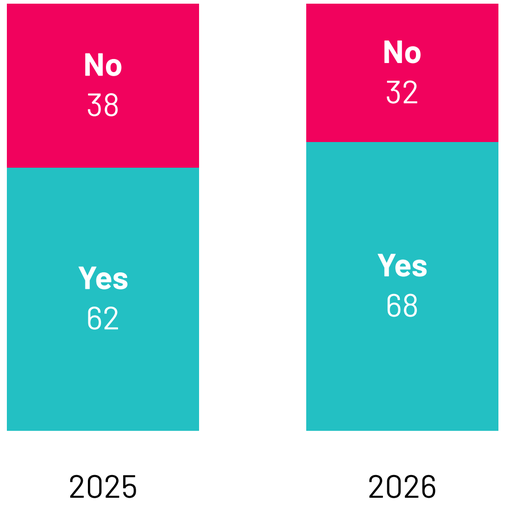
Reliance on legacy systems is increasing year over year, a stark contrast to where modern enterprises should be. According to our 2026 data, **68% of organizations now depend on at least one legacy software system**, up from 62% in 2025.

Rather than retiring outdated platforms, organizations are seeing software age faster than internal teams can modernize or replace it. Ideally, reliance on legacy tech should shrink each year as companies embrace scalable cloud applications and modern API architectures. Instead, the opposite is happening.

This growing reliance stems from a dangerous paradox in executive decision-making: leadership is hesitant to modify core systems that are technically still running, driven by a growing fear of disrupting daily operations. However, staying still compounds operational risk. The longer an organization defers modernization, the greater the likelihood of catastrophic system failure, severe security exploits, and costly unplanned downtime down the road.

> *"Standing still is an illusion of stability. Delaying legacy upgrades only turns today's minor friction into tomorrow's major operational crisis.*

Does your organization currently use any legacy software systems?



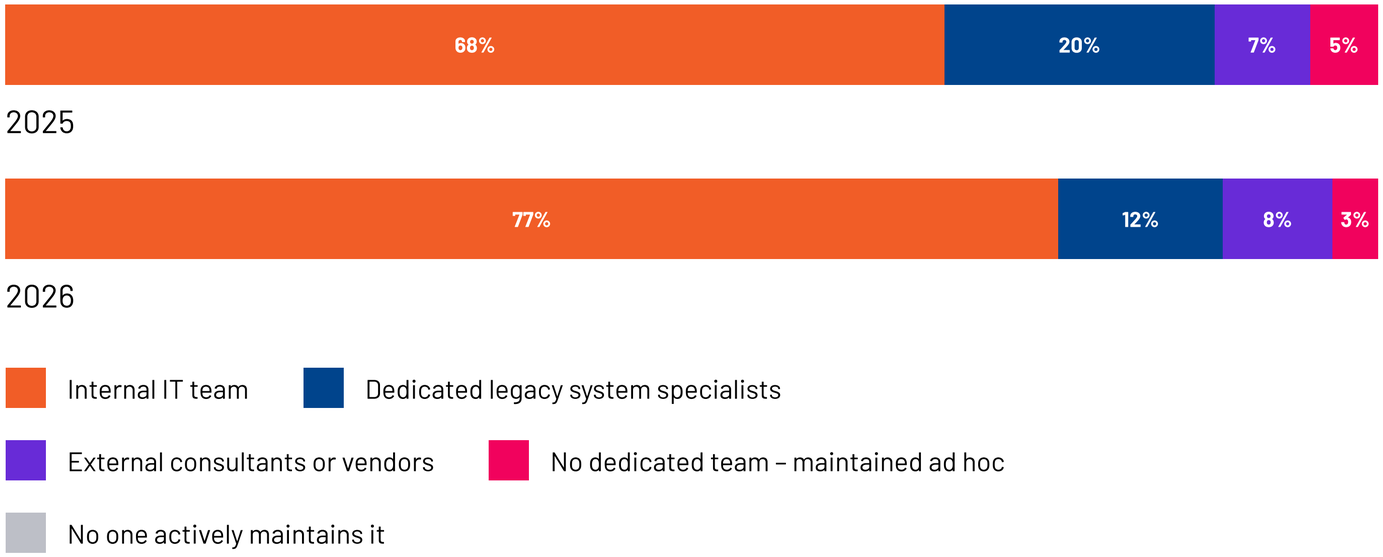
2026 Base:513 (51% of respondents)

The New Custodians of Legacy Systems

IT departments are notoriously overextended. Positioned as the backbone of modern business, internal teams are tasked with maintaining complex infrastructure, countering mounting cybersecurity threats, and supporting daily operations, all while operating under tight budgets and headcount constraints.

The burden on IT is now reaching a breaking point. According to our 2026 data, **77% of organizations rely on their internal IT team to maintain legacy software**, representing a 9-point jump from 68% in 2025.

Who is primarily responsible for maintaining your organization's legacy system?



2026 Base [Question "Does your organization currently use any legacy software systems?" is "Yes, we actively use one or more legacy systems"]: 344 (34% of respondents)

This spike directly correlates with a steep decline in specialized support

Coverage from **dedicated legacy specialists plummeted from 20% to 12% YoY**.

This talent drain indicates that the original engineers and domain experts who built or managed these custom platforms for decades are retiring or transitioning out of the workforce. Instead of replacing these specialists, organizations are passing brittle legacy codebases down to general IT staff.

In-house teams are forced to act as custodians for aging, undocumented software at the exact moment executive leadership is pushing them to deploy modern AI models, cloud architecture, and updated security protocols. Balancing continuous legacy preservation with modern digital transformation creates an unsustainable operational bottleneck where something has to give.

"When legacy upkeep becomes everyone's job, driving strategic digital transformation becomes no one's priority.



The Compounding Cost of Delaying Legacy Software Modernization

Far from saving money, keeping legacy software running in "maintenance mode" actively compounds operational debt. Between 2025 and 2026, nearly every major operational challenge associated with legacy systems escalated significantly.

Four critical pain points have now crossed the 50% threshold:

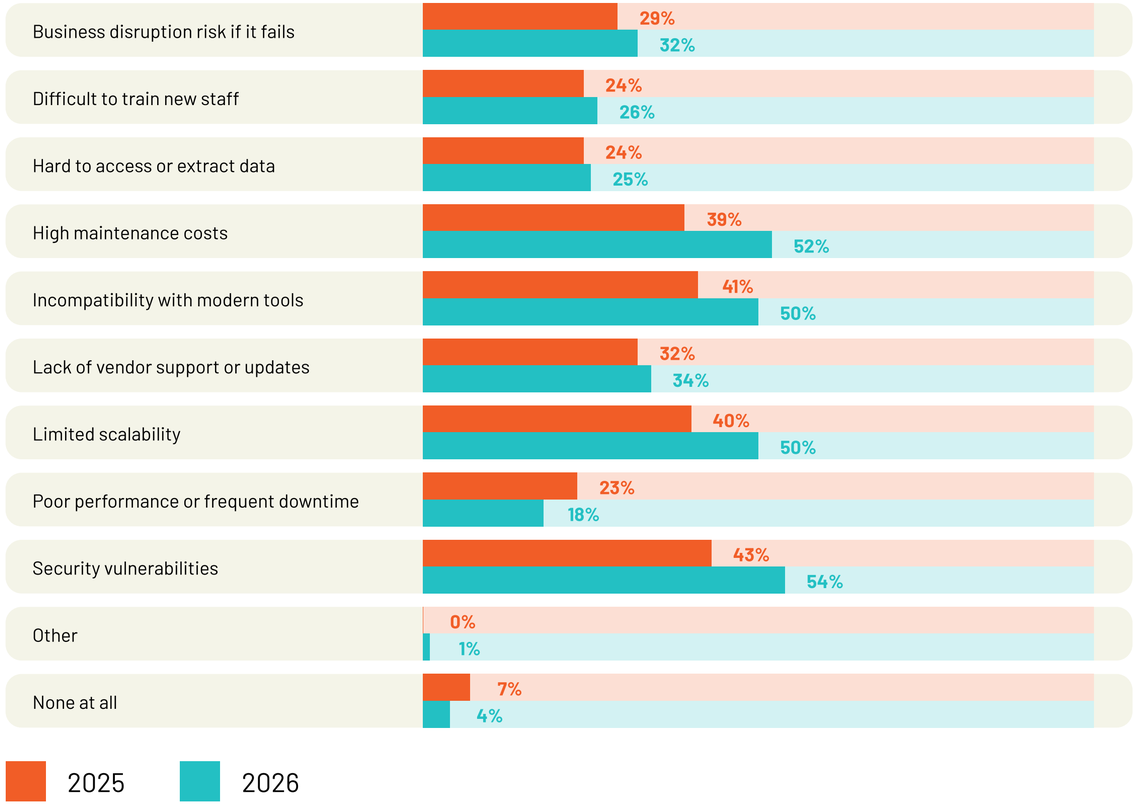
Security Vulnerabilities (54%, +11 pts YoY): Unpatched, legacy frameworks represent an expanding attack surface, leaving businesses vulnerable to costly breaches and compliance penalties.

High Maintenance & Support Costs (52%, +13 pts YoY): Maintenance expenses saw the largest jump, rising from fourth to the second-highest challenge.

Limited Scalability (50%, +10 pts YoY): Rigid architectures prevent companies from expanding workloads, entering markets, or adapting to sudden shifts.

Incompatibility with Modern Tools (50%, +9 pts YoY): Legacy platforms lack modern API structures, creating severe integration bottlenecks for cloud adoption and AI implementation.

What challenges does your legacy software system present?



2026 Base [Question "Does your organization currently use any legacy software systems?" is "Yes, we actively use one or more legacy systems"]: 345 (35% of respondents) Note: Respondents could select multiple options.



"A system that isn't crashing is not the same as a system that is serving your business. Squeezing a few more years out of an outdated application quietly drains budget, exposes you to security threats, and blocks modern innovation.

What challenges does your legacy software system present?

54%
Security vulnerabilities

52%
High maintenance or support costs

50%
Limited scalability

50%
Incompatibility with modern tools or systems

The only challenge to decline YoY was poor performance and frequent downtime (18%, -5 pts). However, keeping fragile software technically "running" comes at a steep price: platforms remain functional, but they are increasingly expensive, security-exposed, and completely isolated from modern technological advances.

Why Legacy Software Modernization Is (Still) Getting Delayed

In 2025, a passive "if it isn't broken, don't fix it" mindset was the primary driver holding modernization projects back. By 2026, that mindset evolved into something far more restrictive: execution paralysis driven by the fear of operational disaster.



While inertia ("the system still works" at 54%) and budget limits (48%) remain top obstacles, four categories saw dramatic YoY spikes:

Risk of Disrupting Current Operations (47%, +9 pts YoY): Technical teams fear touching legacy architecture will cause downtime or break critical workflows.

Concerns About Data Migration (43%, +8 pts YoY): Migrating decades of unstructured or custom data to modern databases is a major risk for IT leaders.

Other Priorities Taking Precedence (32%, +9 pts YoY): Urgent business needs constantly divert IT teams, pushing long-term modernization down the backlog.

Lack of Internal Resources or Bandwidth (28%, +6 pts YoY): Overstretched IT staff lack the capacity to manage a major migration alongside daily support.

What factors are preventing your organization from updating or replacing the legacy system?

54%
The current system still “works”

48%
Budget limitations

47%
Risk of disrupting current operations

43%
Concerns about data migration

“In 2026, fear of operational risks became a major barrier to modernization, replacing the old “if it isn’t broken, don’t fix it” mindset.

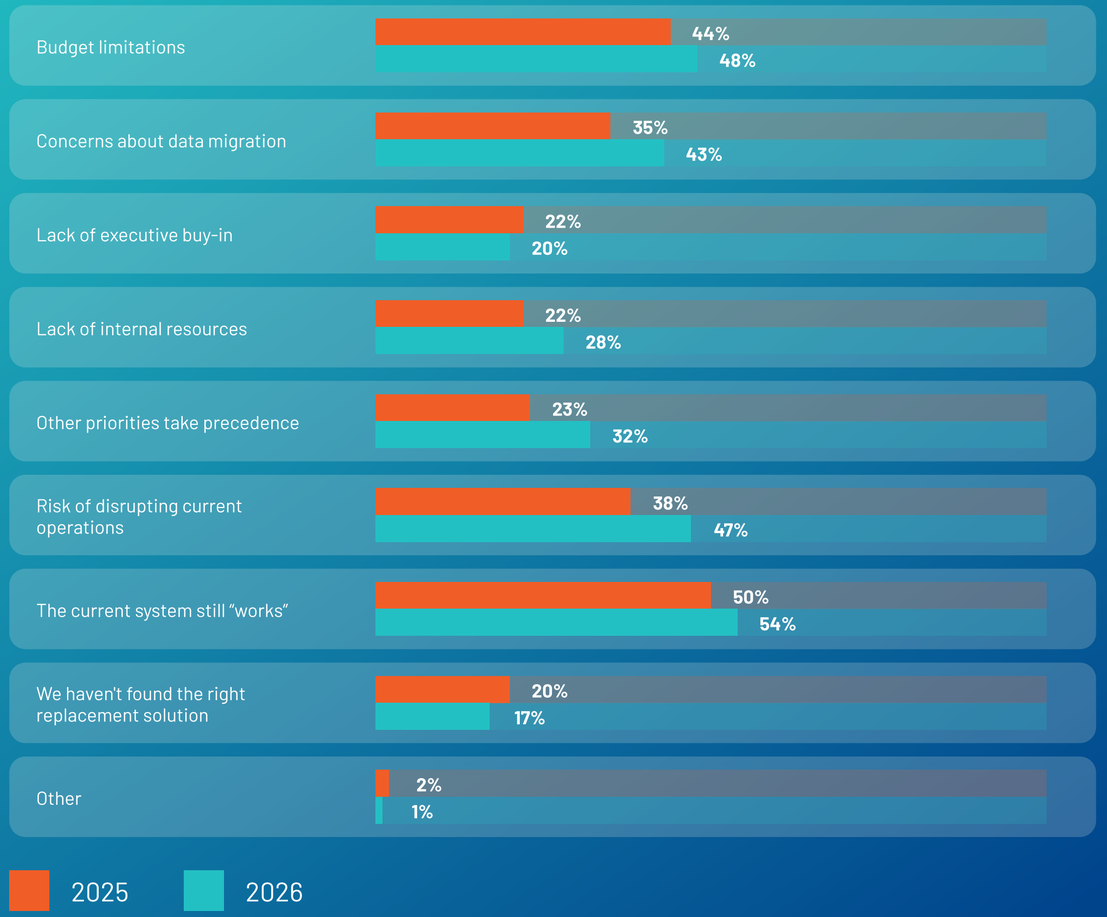


Conversely, executive buy-in is no longer the bottleneck, **dropping to 20%**. More and more, leadership is understanding the need to modernize and agrees on the value. However, teams remain paralyzed because they lack a clear, low-risk execution strategy.

The positive takeaway from these rising numbers is that organizations no longer underestimate the sheer level of effort required to overhaul outdated systems. Business leaders and technical teams now comprehend the scope of these transformations and recognize the serious consequences of getting them wrong.

However, rather than taking proactive steps to mitigate risk and prevent eventual catastrophe, organizations are becoming paralyzed and hoping that standing still will protect them from operational failure.

What factors are preventing your organization from updating or replacing the legacy system?



Legacy Software Modernization Priorities for 2026

When IT leaders consider modernizing their legacy infrastructure, their priorities have fundamentally shifted. In 2025, goals were split between performance, cloud access, and user experience. In 2026, convenience features fell sharply to make room for structural capability, security, and enterprise connectivity.



What factors are preventing your organization from updating or replacing the legacy system?

56%
Better integration with other tools or platforms

53%
Greater scalability or flexibility

52%
Improved performance or speed

50%
Enhanced security and compliance

The top 2026 modernization priorities reflect a clear focus on core infrastructure over quality-of-life upgrades:

Better Integration with Other Tools or Platforms (56%, +12 pts YoY): Integration surged to the number one spot with the largest gain in the survey, proving that connecting legacy backends to modern platforms and AI tools is now the top objective.

Greater Scalability or Flexibility (53%, +9 pts YoY): Organizations need foundational architectures that can grow alongside business demand without requiring constant refactoring.

Improved Performance or Speed (52%, +4 pts YoY): Speed remains essential for daily operational efficiency.

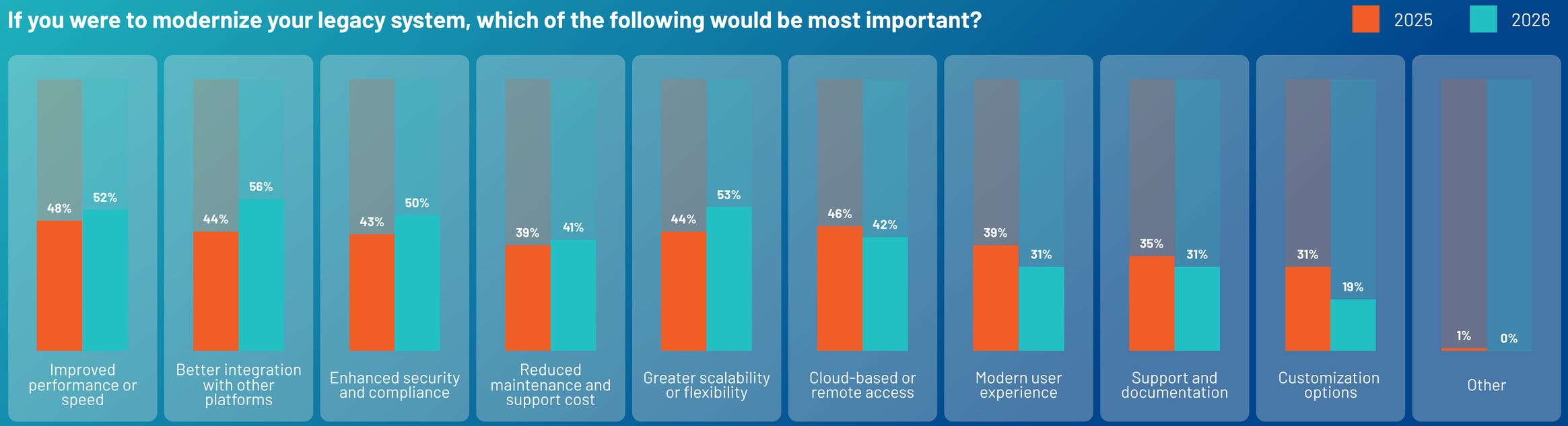
Enhanced Security and Compliance (50%, +7 pts YoY): Half of all IT leaders prioritize security upgrades to protect aging platforms from escalating cyber threats.

In stark contrast, cosmetic and convenience features experienced steep declines. **Modern User Experience (UX) dropped to 31% (-8 pts)**, and **Customization Options plummeted to 19% (-12 pts)**.



"In 2026, modernization priorities shifted from convenience and user experience toward security, performance, and enterprise connectivity.

If you were to modernize your legacy system, which of the following would be most important?



2026 Base [Question "Does your organization currently use any legacy software systems?" is "Yes, we actively use one or more legacy systems"]: 345 (35% of respondents) Note: Respondents could select multiple options.

This priority flip signals that IT teams are done asking for quality-of-life updates. Instead, they need the structural plumbing necessary to bridge legacy systems with new technology, like AI. Advanced tools like AI can only perform as well as the data architecture supporting them. Because legacy backends were never built to expose data cleanly to AI engines, integration has become an urgent prerequisite.

By delaying modernization out of fear of operational disruption, business leaders are effectively guaranteeing an operational crisis down the line. The problem will not fix itself, and the gap between legacy capabilities and modern requirements grows wider every day.

5 Steps to a Successful Legacy Software Modernization Strategy

Across every department, the organizational burden of legacy software is growing. Overwhelmed internal IT teams struggle to balance maintenance tickets with complex security mandates, while business units suffer as sluggish platforms throttle workflows and block competitive innovation. When your core tools fail to perform, the entire business slows down. Sharing the weight of outdated tech is not a viable strategy. Leadership must take responsibility and drive the upgrade.

Breaking free from execution paralysis begins with abandoning the high-risk, "all-at-once" approach in favor of a controlled, phased roadmap.

Here is how forward-looking organizations safely transition from maintenance mode to momentum:

1 Audit Your Existing Architecture

Identify which legacy platforms are business-critical, high-risk, or prime candidates for retirement. Pinpoint specific security gaps, bandwidth bottlenecks, and missing integration points.

2 Prioritize by Risk and Business Impact

Focus first on high-pain areas, such as: systems blocking new technology initiatives, limiting access, or causing compliance vulnerabilities. Target low-risk, high-reward updates to build early momentum.

3 Align Stakeholders Early

Involve technical, operational, and executive leaders from day one. Frame modernization as a core business driver and risk-mitigation strategy, not just an isolated IT project.

4 Adopt a Hybrid, Phased Approach

Avoid high-risk "rip-and-replace" overhauls. Leverage microservices, APIs, and middleware to bridge legacy databases with modern platforms, gaining fast value without operational downtime.

5 Bring in Specialized Expertise

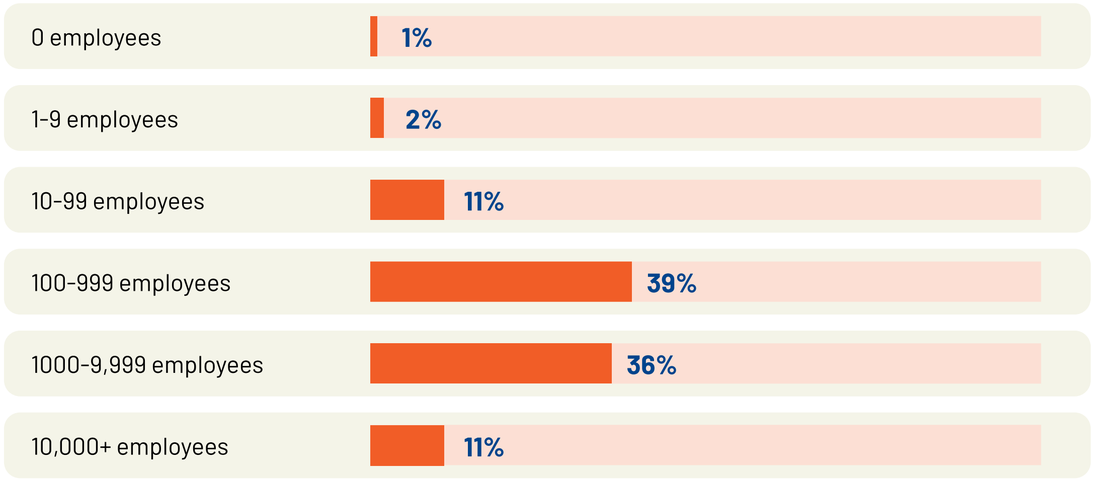
Offload the legacy burden by partnering with modernization specialists. These experts provide the architectural design and execution bandwidth to safely accelerate migration.

About the Survey

This report is based on original research conducted by Researchscape International on behalf of Saritasa. The results in this report are from an online survey of 1,017 respondents that was fielded first on March 28, 2025, and most recently on August 20, 2026.

Respondents represented a range of industries, though most were concentrated in software/technology, and company sizes, from small businesses to enterprises with over 1,000 employees. Most participants work in IT roles and at varying levels, including individual contributors, middle management, and senior leadership.

Approximately how many employees work at your organization?



2026 Base: 510 (51% of respondents)



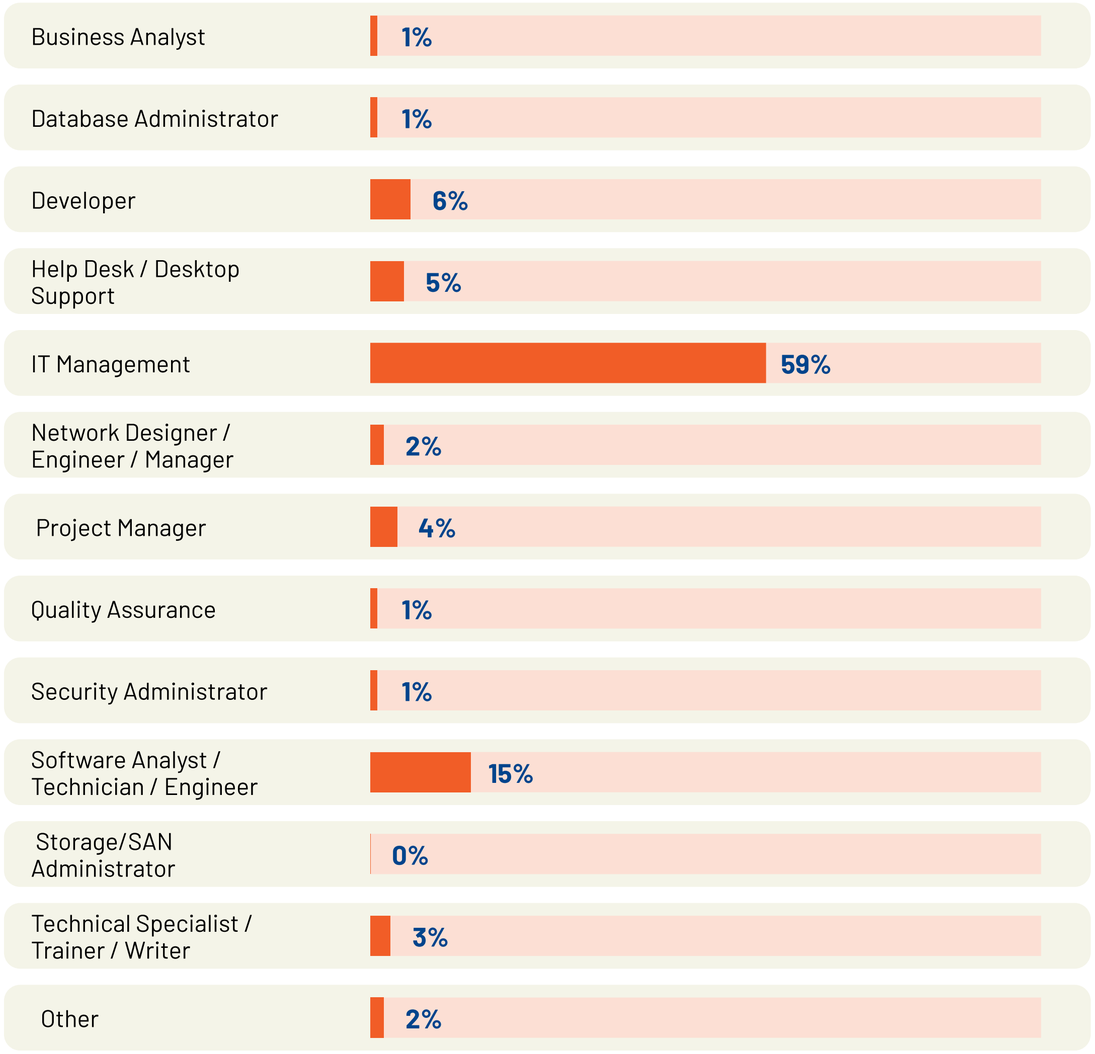


Which of the following best describes the primary industry of your organization?

Construction	1%
Education	2%
Finance, Insurance & Real Estate	4%
Government	2%
Healthcare	4%
Hospitality	1%
Manufacturing	4%
Professional Services	4%
Retail	2%
Software/Technology	73%
Other	3%

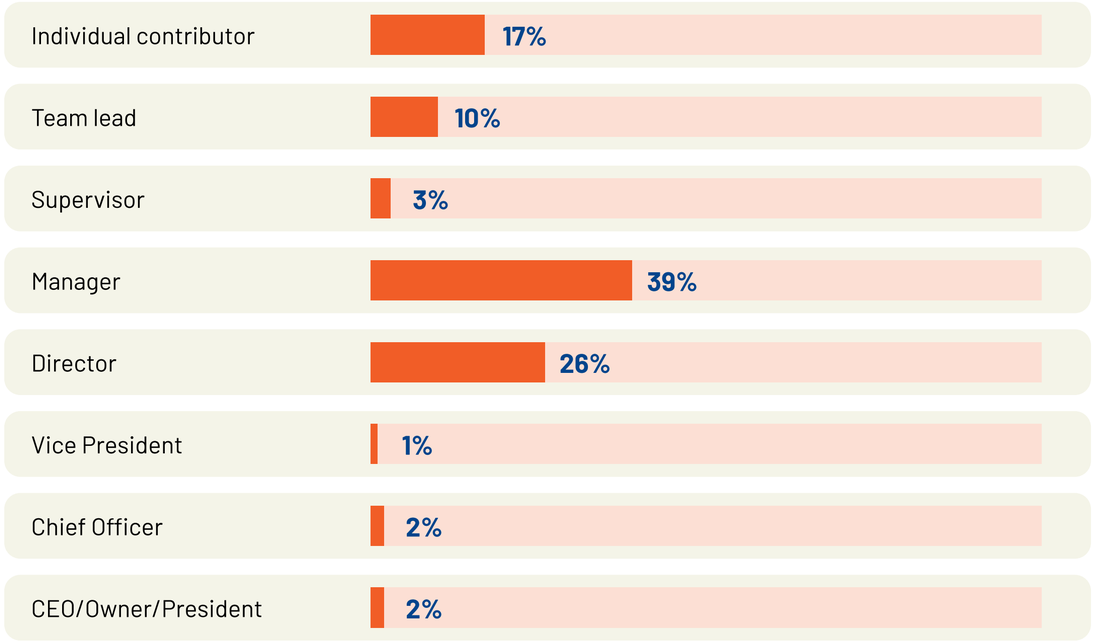
2026 Base: 510 (51% of respondents)

What is your role in technology?



2026 Base: 510 (51% of respondents)

Which is closest to your job title, level, or responsibility?



2026 Base: 510 (51% of respondents)

About Saritasa

Saritasa is a full-service custom software development company dedicated to empowering businesses through technology. For over two decades, we have partnered with organizations across industries to solve complex technical challenges and bring digital transformation to life.

Our team helps companies overcome legacy infrastructure limitations with scalable, secure, and future-ready software solutions. We handle everything from cloud migration and system integrations to full legacy software rebuilds. Our capabilities include custom web and mobile applications, data architecture, IoT, and emerging technologies like artificial intelligence.

As Builders of Better, we believe in building more than software: we believe in building better businesses. **Because when your tools work better, your people can, too.**

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