Microsoft small and medium business (SMB) voice and attitudes to technology study

Prepared for Microsoft by Analysys Mason
Contents

03 Executive summary
10 Introduction
14 Market landscape
28 Technology adoption and attitudes
41 Best practices from early adopters of technology
55 Conclusion
Contents

Executive summary

Introduction

Market landscape

Technology adoption and attitudes

Best practices from early adopters of technology

Conclusion
Introduction

Small and medium businesses (SMBs)

Employees 1–300
they make up almost the entire population of all businesses worldwide

Based on a survey
over 3,000 SMBs
in 10 high and middle-income markets worldwide

Study surveyed
Technology Decision Makers
in the top-5 verticals by spend on technology in each country

SMBs play a crucial role in society and the global economy through
• Ability to innovate
• Serve market niches
• Contribute to local communities
• Adapt to change effectively

SMBs look at how digital technology can help them to grow, cut costs, improve efficiency, and access new markets. However, SMBs have different needs and behaviors than larger organizations. SMBs may be more heavily influenced by individual executives responsible for decision-making.

Historically, SMBs bought technology from solution providers. The Covid-19 pandemic, and the need for more resilience and working from home trends, accelerated digital transformation. SMBs, are now looking for more than just technology solutions; they are looking for technology strategy advice and support i.e., a true partnership*.

This study, commissioned by Microsoft and prepared by Analysys Mason, Microsoft’s research partner, seeks to better understand SMBs’ unique voice. It examines the relationship between SMBs’ technology adoption, technology partners, and business results.

*Throughout the rest of this report, technology partners refers to both technology solutions and service providers, and external providers or advisors supporting SMBs’ technology strategy.
SMB landscape summarized in 60 seconds

Early adopters demonstrate how technology drives business results

- 71% of SMBs report revenue growth over the last year
- 70% focus on growth as their primary business objective
- Early adopters of technology show investment into technology can improve SMBs’ performance
- SMBs face many dispersed and context-driven business challenges

SMBs concerns:
- 64% geopolitical landscape
- 46% inflation
- 42% energy prices

SMBs want technology to help with their business objectives but need help to make this link

51% of SMBs expect technology partners to proactively suggest new solutions and help shape their technology strategy

Reliability and Security are important when selecting new technologies, but cost

- 47% is the main barrier to adoption

SMBs’ technology budgets will grow as SMBs adopt more cloud solutions in the next 2-3 years

SMBs value a range of CSR/ESG goals, environmental sustainability

- 37% is the most common

CSR/ESG goals have been embraced by SMBs; they are no longer only exclusive to large enterprises
SMBs are gradually moving to the cloud and looking to technology to support their business objectives

Most SMBs view technology as important (but not essential) to achieve their business objectives

Survey respondents fell into four categories in terms of their attitude to technology, from early adopters – who always use the latest technology – to slow adopters. Only 17% are early adopters, who show higher revenue growth and more progress towards their business objectives.

SMBs want technology to directly support their business objectives, whether that is business growth, maximizing profits or achieving operational excellence. Most SMBs view technology as important to these objectives, but 16% believe it to be essential to their business.

How do SMBs invest in technology? A third of SMBs invest more than 10% of their revenue in technology, and those with larger budgets typically expect to invest more over the next year. Most SMBs continue to rely on on-premises solutions but SMBs are gradually moving to the cloud.
Investing in technology can improve SMBs’ business performance

Early adopters of technology show higher revenue growth and more progress towards their business objectives

Ten truths about early adopters of technology

01 **Two times** more likely to achieve high revenue growth.

02 **Four times** more likely to be highly confident in their business. Executives feel more confident in their role and are more optimistic and adaptable to change.

03 They see the link between technology and business more clearly; unlike most other SMBs, they see technology as essential.

04 Typically, big spenders and two times more likely to invest more than **10%** of revenue in technology.

05 They are cloud proponents: **Five times** more likely to depend on cloud technologies today and more ambitious for future deployments.

06 Clearly stated and measured ESG goals; **82%** of early adopters report on CSR/ESG issues on a yearly basis.

07 Achieve more progress against business objectives; they are more able to improve brand perception and employee satisfaction.

08 They look beyond the obvious applications of technology and believe that it can play a role in solving fundamental business questions.

09 They have a strong focus on security while prioritizing reliability when selecting new technology solutions.

10 Appreciate collaboration with technology partners.

Comparison of early adopters of technology and technology laggards

- **x5.3**: Five times more likely to be heavily dependent on cloud technology
- **x3.5**: Over three times more likely to have annual CSR/ESG-specific reporting
- **x1.8**: Almost two times more likely to have achieved some of their business objectives
- **x1.9**: Two times more likely to have achieved higher revenue growth over the past year
- **x7.5**: Over seven times more likely to view technology as essential to achieving their objectives
- **x7.5**: Seven times more likely to view collaboration with technology partners as essential
Costs are a key barrier to SMBs’ technology adoption

Less than a third of SMBs consider cost or value for money when assessing new technologies but half see it as a barrier to adoption

When SMBs evaluate new technologies for their businesses, they consider a range of different factors. Reliability and security are the most important – SMBs want their technology to work and to be secure, without having to worry about down time or cyberthreats affecting their business. Efficiency and the quality of customer support are other important factors according to more than a third of SMBs.

SMBs selecting new technologies don’t lead with cost, but when it comes to deploying and adopting new technologies cost is the main barrier

Cost and value for money are less important to SMBs when they are looking to select new technologies; fewer than a third of SMBs rank either cost or value for money as an important consideration. However, when it comes to deploying and adopting new technologies, cost is a critical challenge for half of SMBs. Specific examples of the cost of new solutions include ongoing costs of maintenance, management or those attributed to SaaS solutions.

SMBs also struggle with the uncertainty of a new technology’s business impact and when comparing or decision-making for new technologies. Both present uncertainty over the value of technology, either because the SMB wants to focus on running their business, or they consider deploying new technologies a leap of faith.

Barriers to adopting new technologies
The role of technology partners is becoming a more strategic one

SMBs expect technology partners to proactively suggest new solutions and help to shape their technology strategy

SMBs' technology stakeholders and technology partners have key influences on the business's technology decision-making. Three quarters of SMBs have dedicated, internal IT staff, but these employees are less common the smallest businesses and typically focus on the maintenance and management of technology within the business. SMBs' internal IT staff rarely specialize in areas that are essential to the adoption of new technology, such as platform development or cyber security. As such, 45% of SMBs also use external consultants to manage their technology.

SMBs are increasingly looking to technology partners to support their strategy

With the accelerated focus on resilience and digitalization, SMBs are increasingly looking to technology partners to support their strategy in this regard. Half of SMBs want their technology partners to proactively suggest new technologies that will support their business. Security remains a concern and SMBs look to technology partners to provide specialist support with this ever-evolving field.

SMBs favor different partners, but MSPs/CSPs are the common preference

Managed service providers (MSPs) or cloud service providers (CSPs) are the preferred channel for managing and procuring new technology. These partners fulfil SMBs' expectations through advice and guidance on technology and access to specialists that enable technology adoption.

SMBs use a broad range of criteria when evaluating technology partners. While fulfilling the SMBs business requirements is most common, the partners' CSR/ESG goals are becoming increasingly important.

Common influences in SMBs’ technology decision-making

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Technology management</th>
<th>Technology services</th>
<th>Technology partner preferences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Have internal, dedicated IT staff</td>
<td>Want suggestions for new technology</td>
<td>Partners’ technology must match business requirements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rely on external consultants/partners</td>
<td>Want better and up-to-date security</td>
<td>Prefer to partner with MSPs or CSPs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

77% 45% 51% 47% 30% 31%
SMBs account for 99.9% of businesses worldwide

They exhibit unique needs and behaviors which are different to those of large enterprises.

Small and medium-sized businesses (SMBs) with 1–300 employees, make up almost the entire population of businesses and play a crucial role in society and the global economy.

SMBs represent the vast majority of businesses worldwide and are vital job creators, contributing 61% of GDP in high-income and 45% in middle-income markets.

SMBs account for more than 50% of employment worldwide, and this proportion is even higher in middle-income markets.

Key to this contribution is SMBs’ ability to innovate, serve market niches and adapt to change more effectively than larger businesses. SMBs also play an important social role by localizing business and employment within their communities, and by providing opportunities to minority business owners and employees.

Many large businesses indeed started out small; today’s giant corporations such as Amazon, Apple, Google, HP, Microsoft and even Disney started from a garage. As such, some of today’s SMBs will grow to become tomorrow’s industry leaders.

Like larger businesses, SMBs look to digitally transform to cut costs, improve efficiency and access new markets. However, the SMB market presents significant differences to larger corporate enterprises or organizations. SMBs have different needs and behaviors – for example, they may often be more customer-/relationship-focused than larger businesses. SMBs may also be heavily influenced by individual executives responsible for decision-making, resulting in businesses that act more akin to consumers.

Source: Analysys Mason, SMB Technology Forecaster, World Bank, ILO
This study seeks to better understand the SMB landscape and SMBs’ preferences and attitudes to technology

This study reviews the outlook and technology futures of SMBs and their relationships with technology partners, with three key objectives:

- To understand the firmographics (business characteristics) of the SMB landscape, as well as SMBs’ objectives, challenges, concerns and their approach towards CSR/ESG
- To understand SMBs’ attitudes to, and adoption of, technology, and the interrelationship of technology and SMBs’ business objectives and challenges
- To understand SMBs’ relationships with technology partners, and to help technology partners better serve SMB customers

Each of the above is analyzed across several factors to understand how they influence the SMBs’ reported results, technology adoption and technology preferences.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study objectives and topics covered</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Understand the SMB landscape</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Company profile (firmographic)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Impact of macroeconomic events</td>
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<tr>
<td>CSR/ESG* reporting and objectives</td>
</tr>
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*CSR/ESG: Corporate Social Responsibility / Environmental, Social, Governance
This study presents findings from over 3,000 SMBs with 1–300 employees in the top-5 industry verticals* across 10 markets worldwide.

*The top 5 industry verticals are manufacturing, professional business services, AMTUC, retail and FIRE

**Other services include, among others, hospitality, healthcare and administration

***Agriculture, mining, transport, utilities and construction

****Finance, insurance and real estate

This survey is completed in April-May 2022, targeting:

- SMBs with 1-300 employees, equally weighted across four SMB size bands, in 10 countries
- The top-5 industry verticals (by SMB spend on technology) in each country
- SMBs’ technology decision-makers, responsible for the procurement and adoption of technology

Survey sample by SMB size band:

- **100-300 employees**
- **25-99 employees**
- **10-24 employees**
- **1-9 employees**

Total survey sample: N=3065

Survey sample by country and industry vertical quotas:

- Australia: 312
- Germany: 310
- Mexico: 310
- Canada: 308
- UK: 308
- South Africa: 307
- China: 305
- France: 302
- USA: 302
- India: 301

Total vertical split:

- Manufacturing
- Other services**
- Retail
- Prof. business services
- AMTUC***
- FIRE****
Market landscape

SMBs are important to the economy but exhibit a range of unique behaviors ……14

The focus on growth continues despite the challenging macroeconomic context .......................18

CSR/ESG focus is no longer exclusive to large corporations ..........................................................24
Just 11% of SMBs are start-ups, with 51% being in the growth phase of the business lifecycle

SMBs’ technology needs and behaviors vary depending on their years in business and stage in the business lifecycle

SMBs tend to be either well-established or young businesses; two thirds have been in operation for 6–19 years and only 12% have been in business for more than 20 years. The COVID-19 pandemic initially disrupted business creation, but during the recovery the pace at which new businesses are set up has rapidly accelerated in most regions. Similarly, few businesses in operation over 20 years may result from succession issues, such as when the current leader retires or leaves without a continuation plan.

Prior research suggests that almost two-thirds of SMBs in the UK and USA have no succession plans in place.*

SMBs in China report the longest average tenure, with 53% having been in operation for 10 or more years, vs 44% in other countries.

SMBs in India report the shortest average tenure, with only 38% of SMBs in operation for 10 or more years, vs 46% in other countries.

SMBs are at different stages of the business lifecycle, beginning as start-ups (11% of our sample), and growing until they become a mature businesses. Start-ups are particularly invested in the potential of technology, being 1.6 times more likely than mature or declining SMBs to increase their technology budgets by more than 10%.

Most SMBs are in either the growth or maturity phases. Almost all SMBs that are in operation for 20 or more years are in the maturity phase.

Millennial executives are more common among younger SMBs, those that have been in operation for less than 10 years

Q: How long has your business been in operation? (n = 3065).
Q: Which stage of the business lifecycle would you say your business is in? (n = 3065).

Source: Analysys Mason, PwC, Legal & General *Defined in previous research as firms with up to 500 employees.
Most SMBs operate in only one or two countries

The number of sites and countries that SMBs operate from affects their technology choices

SMBs by number of countries they operate in

- 43% in one country only
- 27% in two countries
- 30% in three or more countries

SMBs by number of separate business locations

- 3% HBBs*
- 35% in one site only
- 33% in two sites
- 20% in three or four sites
- 9% in five or more sites

Only a third of SMBs have a truly international presence or operate from multiple business locations

While international operations can allow an SMB to access a wide range of markets, there are significant logistical costs. A narrow majority of SMBs operate in more than one country; 27% operate in a second market and 30% operate in three or more markets.

SMBs in South Africa are more likely to operate in one country only. 54% of these SMBs are single-country businesses, vs 42% of other SMBs.

SMBs in China are the most international, with 40% of SMBs operating in three or more countries, vs 29% among others.

SMBs in Canada are the most likely to only have one business location, with 45% either working from home or a single office, compared to 37% of SMBs in other countries.

SMBs in China had the highest number of sites, with 13% having five or more locations, compared to only 9% of SMBs reporting the same in other nations.

SMBs’ number of sites and countries that they operate from affects their technology choices

SMBs’ number of business locations and international presence are all heavily correlated with size. Larger SMBs have larger technology budgets, as a proportion of revenue, but smaller firms place a higher value on the role of technology, demonstrating their awareness of its importance to strategy.

*Home-based business

Q: How many countries does your business operate in? (n = 3065). Q: How many separate business locations does your business currently have? (n = 3065).
SMBs’ technology decision-makers tend to be responsible for more than just IT

Technology decision-makers’ responsibilities commonly also include product development and operations

Technology decision-makers in SMBs often take responsibility for product development and operations and logistics

SMB technology decision makers’ may commonly be responsible for other areas of the business, other than just technology and IT services. Product development is the most common area for respondents to also take responsibility for, followed by operations and logistics.

Executives are commonly male and of the Gen X generation, and most of the rest are Millennials

A growing body of evidence suggests that diverse teams perform better and are more innovative; 21% of SMBs have female technology decision-makers.

Female executives are found in 31% of SMBs in China, vs 19% in all other countries.

SMBs’ technology decision-makers’ areas of responsibility

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Product development</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Operations</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Procurement</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customer service</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marketing</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Other areas of responsibility not shown are selected by fewer than 25% of SMB executives and included sales, financing, HR and other administrative roles.

Gender and age of SMBs’ technology decision-makers

21% Female

79% Male

Gender and age of SMBs’ technology decision-makers

Millennial leaders comprise 41% and are considered to think and process information fundamentally differently to previous generations and are considered more able to use technology and digital media and channels.

Millennial executives are most common in the USA and least common in the UK; 48% of SMBs in the USA and 30% of SMBs in the UK.

Q: What are the different functional areas of business that you are responsible for? (n = 3065).
Q: Which age band represents you? (n = 3065).
Market landscape

SMBs are important to the economy but exhibit a range of unique behaviors ………………………..14
The focus on growth continues despite the challenging macroeconomic context …18
CSR/ESG focus is no longer exclusive to large corporations ……………………………………………...24
Most SMBs are back on the path of growth

71% of SMBs reported revenue growth and 54% reported making significant progress towards their business objectives

Most SMBs reported revenue growth in the last year, potentially resulting from economies recovering after the COVID-19 pandemic

A quarter of SMBs increased revenue by 5% or more, with most seeing less revenue growth. Most SMBs operate in countries that were heavily affected by COVID-19 lockdowns, suggesting that their rapid revenue growth is influenced by the general economic recovery, but even accounting for this, early adopters displayed exceptionally quick growth.

SMBs reported mixed progress towards their objectives last year

While SMBs share common business objectives (see next page), they have different approaches towards these goals – such as improving brand awareness for business growth. SMBs achieved different levels of success, with almost a fifth of SMBs achieving more than 60% of their business objectives.

SMBs in the USA reported the highest revenue growth; 38% report an increase of 5% or more, vs 22% in other countries.

Q: How has your business’s current annual sales revenue changed compared to last year’s? (n = 3065).
The focus on business growth continues

Over two-thirds of SMBs prioritize business growth and improving profits as their primary business objectives

Two-thirds of SMBs focus on growth as their primary business objective

Business growth covers SMBs' revenue, headcount, locations and product/service offerings. SMBs' key strategies to achieve business growth are improving brand awareness/growing customer base and increasing sales.

Improving profit margin covers reducing costs and improving return on investments. SMBs' key strategies to improve profits are improving productivity/automation and reducing supply chain costs.

Improving operations covers everything from innovation, automation and logistics. SMBs' key strategies to improve operations are improving customer satisfaction and productivity/automation and upgrading IT infrastructure.

Social goals include similar aims to SMBs' CSR/ESG goals. SMBs' key social goals are related to improving sustainability, and diversity and inclusion.

SMBs in Canada are most likely (56%) to prioritize social goals.

Survival as a goal refers to staying in business. SMBs' key strategies to survive are finding new customers and digitally transforming to sell online or offer digital products.

Very small businesses (1–9 employees) have struggled to stay in business recently and are more likely than larger SMBs to be focused on keeping the doors open.

Primary business objectives and strategy actions (% of SMBs)

- Business growth: 69%
- Improve operations: 64%
- Survive ('keep the doors open'): 48%
- Improve profit margin: 67%
- Social goals: 50%

Q: Thinking of the next 2–3 years, what would you say are the most important objectives for your business? (n = 3065).
SMBs face a diverse and context-dependent range of challenges

Competition intensity is a greater challenge in India than elsewhere, likewise for employee training in Germany

**Most common primary business challenges among SMBs (% of SMBs)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Challenge</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High competition intensity</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supply chain issues</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintaining customer satisfaction/loyalty</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cash flow issues</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Migrating IT to cloud-based solutions</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complying with industry-specific and legal regulations</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Other types of challenges included lack of technical understanding, pressure to reduce pricing and inadequate employee technological training. All others are selected by fewer than one quarter of SMBs.

SMBs face challenges that are unique to their business

Every business, large or small, encounters challenges, but SMBs must overcome a variety of different obstacles, some of which are unique to them. No single business challenge is common to more than one third of SMBs – competition intensity and supply chain issues are most common. Competition intensity may directly limit SMBs’ customer (and revenue) growth goals or cause pricing pressure, reducing their profitability. Supply chain issues arise from shipping and production problems that affect SMBs’ profitability and operations.

**SMBs in India** are the most likely to view competition intensity as a major obstacle (35%).

**SMBs in Germany** are more likely to be worried about the lack of employee training on new technology (29%).

Customer loyalty, cash flow, cloud migration and regulations are equally challenging to approximately a quarter of SMBs.

**SMBs in middle-income markets** (27%) are somewhat more concerned about cloud migration than their counterparts in high-income markets (22%).

Less than one quarter of SMBs cite other challenges, such as a lack of technical understanding and pricing pressures.

**High debt levels**, although relatively uncommon, are a greater challenge to very small businesses with 1–9 employees.

Q: What major obstacles do you anticipate your business will likely face in attempting to achieve its current business objectives? (n = 1634).
Working from home and hybrid working models are here to stay

56% of SMBs expect no change to the proportion of their workforce which works from home over the next 1–2 years

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, it was rare for SMBs to have employees working from home. Comparable previous surveys from 4Q 2019 indicate only 8% of SMBs reported >10% of their workforce are able to work from home.

Work-from-home trends appear to continue during 2021, following the end of many national lockdowns. By 4Q 2021, comparable previous SMB surveys indicated that 91% of SMBs reported that more than 10% of their workforce are able to work from home. Not only are more SMBs enabling work from home, but they are doing so much more extensively; 26% of SMBs reported more than half of their employees are working from home.

Hybrid working models are here to stay

While many SMBs will see a small decrease in the proportion of their employees who work from home from over the next few years, most SMBs plan to continue to support hybrid working models. With just 16% of SMBs expecting to have no remote workforce in the future. As of 2Q 2022, the share of SMBs with 10% or more of employees that are able to work from home has dropped, but most SMBs still have some flexible working. SMBs expect little further change during 2023–2024.

SMBs’ work-from-home trends (% of SMBs)

56% of SMBs expect no change to their remote workforce over the next 1–2 years

Q: What percentage of employees work from home currently? (n = 3065).
Q: What percentage of employees do you expect will work from home over the next 12 to 24 months? (n = 3065).
SMBs worry about the impact of geopolitical and macroeconomic trends on their businesses

Most SMBs are concerned about the geopolitical landscape (64%), inflation (46%) or energy prices (42%)

SMBs are concerned about the impact of geo-politics to their businesses

The changing geopolitical landscape presents the most common concern for SMBs and this includes the Ukraine crisis and Brexit, among other situations.

More SMBs in high-income markets are concerned about the impact of Brexit than those in middle-income markets, and SMBs in Australia are most likely to be concerned about it.

Half of SMBs are concerned that COVID-19 will affect their business

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to be a common business concern, largely because of the impact of social distancing and lockdowns.

SMBs in South Africa (56%) are still concerned about the impact of COVID.

SMBs in France (47%) are the most concerned about high energy and oil prices.

Inflation and specifically high energy prices follow closely as major concerns among SMBs. Both issues are closely related to geopolitical situations and COVID-19.

SMBs in Canada (56%) and the USA (53%) are the most concerned about inflation.

Concern about inflation is particularly common among Millennials; 52% of millennial executives are concerned, vs 43% of executives of other ages.

Q: What current or emerging major event(s) may affect your confidence and sense of security in your business and achieving its objectives? (n = 3065).

*The geo-political landscape is an amalgamated category of multiple responses which includes SMBs that are concerned about the impact of the Ukraine crisis, Brexit and other geopolitical situations.
Market landscape

SMBs are important to the economy but exhibit a range of unique behaviors ..................................14
The focus on growth continues despite the challenging macroeconomic context .................................18

CSR/ESG focus is no longer exclusive to large corporations .........................................................24
CSR/ESG goals have been embraced by SMBs

SMBs value a wide range of CSR/ESG goals, but environmental sustainability is the most common objective.

SMBs have a wide range of CSR/ESG goals. Half of SMBs recognised social goals as primary business objectives, including sustainable business practices and diversity and inclusion.

The most common aim, held by 37% of SMBs, is improving their level of environmental sustainability.

A third want to increase employee satisfaction, an example of a CSR/ESG goal that benefits the SMB, in the form of higher retention of employees, and improves the lives of people in the community.

Another third want to improve their ability to protect their customers’ data with high-quality cyber-security solutions; this fulfils legal requirements and ensures that they are acting as responsible businesses.

**Key CSR/ESG objectives (% of SMBs)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Objective</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Improve environmental sustainability</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve employee satisfaction</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve Diversity and inclusion</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Create more jobs</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customer Data protection</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve supplier diversity</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support quality education</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethical procurement and supply policies</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support local communities</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental health and support</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support quality education</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial empowerment</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reduce poverty</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q: What are the most important corporate social responsibility (CSR) goals or environmental, social and governance (ESG) practices for your organization today? (n = 3065).
SMBs’ CSR/ESG priorities vary by country, industry vertical and the demographics of SMB executives

Millennial executives prioritize employee diversity and inclusion

Differences in CSR/ESG objectives by executives’ demographics

- Millennial executives are the most likely to want to increase employee diversity and inclusion, with 34% of Millennial executives prioritizing this goal vs 27% of Gen X or older executives
- 21% Male executives are more concerned with reducing poverty
- 34% Female executives are more concerned with creating jobs
- Technophile executives are especially focused on environmental sustainability (42%) and improving employee diversity and inclusion (38%).
- Cautious followers and slow adopters principally view CSR/ESG goals in terms of environmental sustainability (34%) and employee satisfaction (32%).

Differences in CSR/ESG objectives by SMB country and industry

- **SMBs in India** are the most likely to want to improve environmental sustainability (45%).
- **SMBs in Canada** have a particular focus (36%) on improving employee diversity.
- **SMBs in Germany** are more interested in ethical procurement procedures and supporting quality education than SMBs elsewhere.
- **SMBs in South Africa** place more emphasis on creating jobs, with more SMBs prioritizing this goal over environmental sustainability.

- 34% of SMBs in the AMTUC sector want to increase the amount of ethical procurement in their supply chains, a greater proportion than in other industries
- 28% of SMBs engaged in professional business services are engaged in supporting local communities, more than SMBs among other industry verticals

While it is difficult to justify CSR/ESG goals on the basis of business outcomes, there does appear to be a correlation between those SMBs who show the highest level of CSR/ESG engagement and attainment of business objectives. Early adopters demonstrate both the highest degree of interest in CSR/ESG issues and the highest rate of achievement of their business objectives.

Q: What are the most important corporate social responsibility (CSR) goals or environmental, social and governance (ESG) practices for your organization today? (n = 3065)
SMBs are serious about their CSR/ESG goals and policies

Two thirds of SMBs have annual CSR/ESG assessment and monitoring and reporting frameworks

Methods to measure and assess CSR/ESG goals among SMBs (% of SMBs)

- **26%** Annual CSR/ESG-specific assessment
  A dedicated CSR/ESG assessment, which is compiled every year – this is likely to include concrete data on ESG matters

- **39%** Annual assessment that includes CSR/ESG
  A standard annual report, which includes discussion and analysis of CSR/ESG issues as well as specific data points

- **23%** Ad-hoc monitoring and reporting of CSR/ESG
  Assessment and reporting of CSR/ESG issues only when they arise without any regular schedule

- **10%** No assessment or reporting

- **1%** ‘I do not know’

CSR/ESG assessment and reporting plays an important role in a company’s actual commitment to CSR/ESG goals. Having an annual assessment provides consistency to SMBs’ measurement and reporting of their goals, which may demonstrate more engagement from the SMB towards their CSR/ESG goals. These reports often include the SMB’s environmental impact, measured in carbon tons, the effect of social projects, and employee diversity.

Most SMBs are now annually assessing and reporting on their CSR/ESG goals. A quarter of SMBs now have specific assessment and reporting frameworks in place for their CSR/ESG goals.

- **SMBs in China** are most likely (41%) to have an annual CSR/ESG-specific assessment.

- **SMBs in the UK** are the most likely (51%) to have no or only ad-hoc CSR/ESG reporting.

A little under a quarter of SMBs only engage in CSR/ESG reporting on an ad-hoc basis, which may represent the frequency of their engagement in CSR/ESG goals (on an ad-hoc basis only).

- **Very small businesses** are the most likely (39%) to only have ad-hoc or no monitoring and reporting.

- **Medium businesses** are much less likely (29%) to have such an unstructured approach.

- **Millennial-led SMBs** are the most likely (31%) to have an annual CSR/ESG-specific report while Gen X and older are least likely (23%).

Q: How do you measure and assess corporate social responsibility (CSR) goals or environmental, social and governance (ESG) practices in your business? (n = 3065).
Technology adoption and attitudes

SMBs are investing more in technology but struggle to link it to business objectives 28

The role of SMBs’ technology partners is becoming more strategic 33
SMBs want technology to help with their business objectives but need help to make this link

SMBs expect technology to help them to cut costs, improve sales and marketing, and retain and acquire new customers

SMBs want technology to directly support their primary business objectives – business growth, maximizing profits and achieving operational excellence

SMBs see technology fulfilling a range of roles to support their business, with improved operational efficiency, sales and marketing, and customer retention the most common among a third of SMBs. Process automation, online sales and marketing and customer relationship management (CRM) software are all examples of how technology may fulfill these roles.

SMBs in India look to technology to help them to grow their customer base (39%) and improve customer retention (38%).

SMBs in South Africa are more likely (38%) to want technology to help them to increase their sales.

SMBs in the USA are more likely (33%) to believe that technology will help them with product innovation.

Most SMBs perceive technology as very important, but only 16% of SMBs believe technology to be essential to their business

When asked how important these technologies are for the SMB to achieve its objectives, 75% of SMBs recognized technology as important or very important. Very few SMBs suggested technology is unimportant, and some 16% described technology as essential to their business.

Q: How will technology help your business achieve its business objectives over the next 2–3 years? (n = 3065).
Technophile SMB executives may drive early adoption of technology in the businesses they work for

Technophile executives are nine times more likely than skeptical executives to lead SMBs that are early adopters

Most SMBs are technology followers – deploying new technologies only when there is a competitive advantage or proven business benefit

In this report, we surveyed SMBs with four attitudes to technology, including internal infrastructure and customer-facing products/services. These attitudes present a spectrum, from early adopters who always try to use the latest technology, to slow adopters, who are simply not interested. Most SMBs fall between these two extremes; only 17% of SMBs are early adopters.

SMBs in India and Canada are the most likely to be early adopters; 26% of SMBs in India and 24% of SMBs in Canada are early adopters.

Slow adopters and cautious followers are presented as ‘technology laggards’ throughout the rest of this report, representing 37% of SMBs. These SMBs rely on manual processes, on-premises software and physical/offline sales.

Executives’ personal technology adoption influences their business’s adoption

Technophile executives are a group of leaders who quickly take on board technologies in their personal lives. They are nine times more likely than indifferent executives to head early adopter firms. It is rare for a technophile executive to be in a cautious follower or slow adopter business.

Executives influence on business’s attitude to technology adoption (% of SMBs)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>‘My business adopts new technologies as an…’</th>
<th>Technophile executives</th>
<th>Techno-skeptical executives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Early adopter</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fast follower</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cautious follower</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slow adopter</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q: Which best describes how your business adopts new technologies, for both internal infrastructure and customer facing products/services? (n = 3065)
**SMBs’ technology budgets are growing**

A third of SMBs invest more than 10% of their annual revenue into technology and most expect to increase budgets further.

Most SMBs plan moderate increases in their technology budgets

Technology spending is an essential cost of running a modern business. Early adopters, who spend the most, show the benefits of this spending, as they have increased their revenue the fastest of all segments. Most SMBs spend between 6% and 10% of their revenue on technology. Roughly a third of SMBs are high technology spenders and invest more than 16% of their revenue in IT.

There are significant differences between industries; only 24% of AMTUC SMBs spend more than 10% of their revenue on technology, but 32% of SMBs in the professional business service industry do so.

**SMBs in India** are the most likely (35%) to spend more than 10% of their revenue on technology.

**SMBs in Canada** are the most likely (33%) to spend 5% or less of their revenue on technology.

SMBs with larger technology budgets expect to invest more over the next year

Most SMBs plan to increase their technology budgets, with a small proportion predicting an increase of 10% or more. The largest increases are planned among SMBs who are already spending the most on technology, indicating that they are raising spending to maintain their technological advantage.

**SMBs in India** are most likely (22%) to plan on an increase of over 10%.

**SMBs in Canada** and the **UK** are jointly most likely (8%) to plan on decreasing their technology budget over the next year.

---

**Current technology budget, as % of revenue (% of SMBs)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage of Revenue</th>
<th>1%</th>
<th>4%</th>
<th>21%</th>
<th>45%</th>
<th>22%</th>
<th>7%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Current Technology Budget</td>
<td>Less than 1% of revenue</td>
<td>1-2%</td>
<td>3-5%</td>
<td>6-10%</td>
<td>11-15%</td>
<td>16% or more of revenue</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Expected change in technology budget over the next year (% of SMBs)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Change in Budget</th>
<th>Decrease (any %)</th>
<th>Remain about the same</th>
<th>Increase by up to 10%</th>
<th>Increase by 10% or more</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>26%</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q: Approximately, what proportion of your company’s annual revenue is allocated for your overall technology budget? (n = 3065).
Q: How will your business’s overall technology budget change over the next 12 months? (n = 3065).
Cloud deployments will increase in the next 2–3 years

A fifth of SMBs are mostly or all cloud-based, but this proportion will rise to 27%

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SMBs’ main technology deployment – now and in the future – (% of SMBs)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Today</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Cloud</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mostly cloud, some on-premises</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equal cloud/on-premises split</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mostly on-premises, some cloud</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All on-premises</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Most SMBs report greater use of on-premises solutions than cloud solutions today**

SMBs are positioned along a cloud deployment spectrum, much as they are in terms of attitudes towards technology adoption. Very few SMBs reported having an all-cloud technology deployment, while under a fifth reported a ‘mostly cloud’ deployment.

- **SMBs in India** are the most likely (27%) to be all or mostly cloud-based.
- **SMBs in Canada** (22%) are the most likely to be all on-premises.

The **largest SMBs** (100-300) are marginally more likely to use a combination of on-premise and cloud computing, while very small businesses (1-9) are more likely to either be all cloud or all on-premise.

- **Start-ups** are slightly less likely to use cloud computing services.

**Cloud adoption among SMBs will increase in the next 2–3 years but not drastically**

SMBs foresee a steady move to the cloud in the next few years, as the majority of SMBs expect to deploy more cloud solutions. However, the share of SMBs that expect to be all or mostly cloud-based in 2–3 years will remain modest.

- **India** is the most optimistic about future cloud adoption; 35% plan to be mostly or all in the cloud.
- **Germany** is the most pessimistic about cloud adoption; 17% plan to be mostly or all in the cloud.

Q: Which best describes your business’s main technology deployment today? (n = 3065).
Q: Which best describes the main technology deployment your business expects to use in 2-3 years? (n = 3065).
Technology adoption and attitudes
SMBs are investing more in technology, but struggle to link it to business objectives .................................28
The role of SMBs’ technology partners is becoming more strategic .................................................33
SMBs typically employ IT generalists to manage their technology

Even when they have full-time IT staff, 45% of SMBs rely on external support for specialist technology needs

Most SMBs have internal IT staff but many look to external support for specialist technology support

SMBs want to make the most of technology, but tend to hire generalist IT personnel who can handle day-to-day issues such as systems management and maintenance. As a result, to fully capitalize on the opportunities that technology offers them they tend to turn to technology partners. Specialized external assistance, covering technically complex areas such as cyber security and platform development, plays a key role in their IT strategy.

Internal IT teams can be composed of either full-time or part-time employees, most often managing existing systems. 77% of SMBs use internal IT staff to help manage their business technology. External IT teams can supplement these teams by providing specialists, and 45% of SMBs make use of these partners. The smallest businesses are the least likely to have full-time internal dedicated IT employees, as they tend to lack the size and flow of continuous IT tasks to justify their cost.

SMBs in Canada are most likely (93%) to use internal IT employees.

Very small businesses are much less likely (45%) to use dedicated, full-time internal IT staff to manage their technology.

The largest early adopters are the most likely (92%) to have full-time dedicated internal IT employees.

Early adopters in Australia are most likely (64%) compared to laggards (44%) to use external business consultants.

Personnel managing technology services and IT support (% of SMBs)

- 77% of SMBs have either full-time or part-time internal IT employees
- 64% Full-time, internal, dedicated IT employees
- 27% Part-time, internal IT employees
- 26% Non-IT internal employees
- 45% External business consultants/partners

In 1% of SMBs, no one looks after technology services

Q: How are technology services and IT support managed across most locations in your business? (n = 3065).
Q: What type of supplier is your main technology partner for procuring technology and services for your business? (n = 3065).
Reliability and security are important factors when selecting new technology solutions

Security is particularly important among SMBs in the USA and ease of use among those in South Africa

Most important factors when selecting a new technology solution (% of SMBs)

- Reliability: 41%
- Security: 40%
- Efficiency: 36%
- Customer/technical support: 36%
- Ease of use: 35%
- Value for money: 34%
- Range of functionalities/capabilities: 34%
- Cost: 30%
- Ease of change: 29%
- Analytics/insights: 28%
- Customizability: 25%

Reliability and security are the most important factors to 40% of SMBs when selecting any new technology. The popularity of reliability suggests that SMBs want technologies that ‘just work’ without excessive complications. In terms of security, SMBs see significant threats to their business and data.

SMBs that are in the ‘other services’ category* are most likely to value security (46%), while this factor is seen as less important among manufacturing SMBs (38%).

Efficiency, high-quality customer support and the ease of use of new technologies are the clear second ranking factors.

SMBs in South Africa are most likely (46%) to focus on ease of use. This stands out because ease of use is seriously evaluated by only a third of the overall sample, however South African respondents selected factors at a higher rate than in other countries.

SMBs in the USA are more likely (47%) to prioritize security.

Cost and value for money are not critical when SMBs are selecting technologies

At the evaluation stage, cost and value for money are selected by fewer than a third of SMBs, suggesting a preference for other factors over the absolute cost when evaluating technology options.

Q: Which of these are important factors to your business when selecting a new technology solution? (n = 3065).
Cost of solutions remains the main barrier to adoption of new technologies

Over a third of SMBs also struggle with comparing solutions, technical concerns and uncertainty over the business impact

Primary challenge – and key inhibitors to SMBs’ technology adoption behind these challenges

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Challenge</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The cost of new solutions</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulty comparing solutions and making decisions</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical concerns</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncertainty over the business impact</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulty researching or finding information</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resistance to change</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SMBs explicitly specify high ongoing costs of new technologies as an inhibitor while less than half of SMBs are concerned about the upfront costs.

The cost of new solutions is by far the most common challenge to SMBs during technology adoption. These SMBs explicitly recognize the costs as an inhibitor.

SMBs in South Africa are the most likely (54%) to view cost as a challenge.

Decision-making, technical concerns and uncertainty limit over a third of SMBs’ adoption

After cost, the difficulty of making technology decisions and uncertainty are frequent challenges to SMBs. Both present uncertainty over the value of technology, either because technology is a low priority, or SMBs fear adopting new technology.

Technical concerns are more common among SMBs in the USA (45%) than in other countries (38%).

Millennials are more likely (34%) to view resistance to change as a key challenge, with older executives (26%) less likely.

Q: What are the main types of challenges your business faces when selecting and adopting new technology solutions? (n = 3065).
SMBs use a variety of different sources when exploring new technology

Social media is a particularly important source of information for Millennial executives and SMBs in India

SMBs most frequently consult reviews on specialist websites when researching new technologies

SMBs do not consistently use one single source of information to research technology applications, instead preferring a wide range of different sources. Documentation and reviews from the technology providers’ website, and content shared on social media appear the first ports of call for many SMBs.

**SMBs in India** more commonly use social media content (39% of SMBs).

**SMBs in France** are the most likely (29%) to use the technology provider’s website.

More personal sources of information, such as colleagues, external peers, and online influencers are alternative sources, but SMBs use these less frequently.

**SMBs in Mexico** are the most likely (31%) to use white papers.

**SMBs in India** are more likely (27%) to listen to online influencers.

Millennials are the most likely to consult social media when researching a prospective new technology (31% always consult social media), with executives aged 40+ being the least likely (23%).

Q: When initially gathering information to research new technology applications such as cloud software, how often do you use the following sources of information? (n = 3065).

Primary sources of information for technology decision-making used by SMBs’ leaders (% of SMBs).

- **27%** Reviews on specialist websites
- **26%** Social media
- **24%** White papers
- **24%** Reviews on specialist websites
- **22%** Technology provider reps
- **25%** Technology provider’s website
- **24%** Industry analysts
- **24%** Internal colleagues
- **22%** Professional associations
- **21%** External peers
- **22%** Discussion forums
- **22%** Industry analysts
- **22%** Professional associations
- **22%** Discussion forums
Half of SMBs expect technology partners to proactively suggest new technologies

The role of technology partners is becoming a more strategic one with the accelerated focus on resilience and digitalization

SMBs want to work with technology partners that are proactively bringing them technology solutions. When asked about the most important services from a technology partner for business success, SMBs most often want their technology partners to suggest new technologies.

**SMBs in the UK** are the most likely (60%) to want technology partners to suggest new technology.

**Security is a key concern and SMBs want partners to support them**

Similarly, SMBs want help with digitally securing their business. Specifically, SMBs may look to technology partners to cover new, emerging problems so that the executives can focus on their business.

**Most important services from a technology partner (% of SMBs)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Suggest new technology to help my business</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offer complementary products/services</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upgrade security to cover new problems</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide accessible customer support</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide contingency and business continuity planning</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offer flexible payment terms</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide technical support to employees working from home</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q: Please rank how important the following services are from a technology partner may be for the success of your business over the next 2-3 years (n = 3065) [Top 3 ranks used]
SMBs select technology partners that offer solutions that match their business requirements

The potential partner’s CSR/ESG is a selection criterion for almost a quarter of SMBs when choosing a technology specialist

As opposed to the factors used when selecting and deploying new technologies, SMBs may choose the technology partner over the solution. SMBs may consider non-technical, business criteria for evaluating the partner rather than their solutions, such as their brand, expertise and capabilities.

SMBs use a broad range of business criteria to evaluate technology partners

SMBs favor no single criterion when selecting partners, however, unsurprisingly the partners’ ability to match the SMBs business requirements is most common. However, cost is a less important criterion, suggesting that SMBs will choose preferred partners over the absolute cost of their solutions. Brand came in last, with only 15% of SMBs evaluating partners based on their brand.

Partners’ commitment to CSR/ESG objectives is becoming increasingly important

Almost a quarter of SMBs compare CSR/ESG goals when evaluating partners. While this is still emerging, it has already become more important than criteria such as specific industry vertical expertise and partners’ communication with senior executives.

SMBs in high-income markets more commonly evaluate their partners based on their CSR/ESG goals, with 25% of SMBs in high-income markets using this criteria, vs 19% among middle-income markets.

SMBs in Australia lead this trend, with 29% using CSR/ESG as a criterion.

Q: What are your top 3 business-related criteria for evaluating technology partners for your business? (n = 3065).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Business criteria for evaluating technology partners (% of SMBs)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Technology solutions match our requirements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expertise in specific areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to use data to create value</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding of our business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outsourcing services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corporate social objectives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range of business services</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Not shown are options selected by fewer SMBs, including experience redesigning business processes, customer support, vertical specific expertise, executive communication, and branding.
MSPs and CSPs are the most preferred technology partners for a third of SMBs

SMBs are actively looking for partners with advisory and guidance capabilities

### Preferred technology partner for procuring technology and services (% of SMBs)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Preferred Partner</th>
<th>% of SMBs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Managed Service Provider (MSPs) or Cloud Service Providers (CSPs)</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Application developer or Independent Software Vendor (ISVs)</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reseller or Value Added Reseller (VARs)</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telecommunications operator</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retailer</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Systems Integrator (SIs)</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vendor</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In most SMBs, internal IT staff focus on the management and maintenance of existing systems. As a result, they may struggle to implement new technologies and processes. To help overcome this obstacle, 45% of SMBs partner with external firms for technology management and implementation.

Due to the impact of the pandemic, SMBs are more willing to invest in managed IT services and cloud solutions. SMBs favor partners that can offer advice and guidance, such as MSPs/CSPs and SIs.

SMBs favor a variety of partners, but MSPs/CSPs are the preferred choice

31% of SMBs prefer to buy technology products and services through MSPs and CSPs. Many SMBs do not have the capacity or the requirement to onboard IT specialists. As a result, MSPs and CSPs are ideally placed to support SMBs’ technology challenges by supplementing SMBs’ internal IT teams with specialist skills.

**For example:**
- Security requires constant development to keep up with cyber threats.
- MSPs and CSPs can provide effective, up-to-date solutions to help SMBs to overcome this problem.

The second most common preference among SMBs is to partner with ISVs. Some SMBs may feel that they can access more customized solutions by working with ISVs, rather than the mass-market products of MSPs/CSPs.

SMBs in India prefer (25%) working with application developers/ISVs.

Early adopters in Australia most commonly (42%) use application developers and ISVs, and relatively rarely partner with MSPs/CSPs (23%).

Q: How are technology services and IT support managed across most locations in your business? (n = 3065).

Q: What type of supplier is your main technology partner for procuring technology and services for your business? (n = 3065).
Best practices from early adopters of technology

Less than a fifth of SMBs represent early adopters.............................41
Early adopters are better able to grow their revenue and customer base ..................46
Early adopters have unique behaviors when it comes to technology adoption ................50
Early adopters of technology are big spenders and plan to invest more going forward

Early adopters are twice as likely to invest more than 10% of revenue in technology and to increase this budget by 10% next year

Early adopters of technology represent 17% of SMBs, and always try to use the latest technology in their business. They have the largest budgets for technology, as a proportion of revenue, and are planning the most radical increases. Most early adopters spend more than 5% of revenue on technology, with almost half spending over 10%. Early adopters are overall two times more likely to predict a greater than 10% increase in their technology budgets than technology laggards.

We already know that SMBs with larger budgets plan to increase the budget the most in the next 12 months and this is particularly true among early adopters. **28% of early adopters who spend over 10% of their budget on technology are planning to increase these budgets by over 10% compared to just 17% of laggards who currently spend similar proportions.**

SMBs in some countries already spend a lot on technology, so the difference between early adopters and laggards in these countries is limited

Among all SMBs, those in the USA and India report the largest technology budgets. As such, the disparity between early adopters and technology laggards is less pronounced (**16% in the USA and 12% in India**). This may be due to a limit on the size of technology budgets as a result of diminishing returns on the budget, or the impracticality of investing too much in technology when managing a business.

The difference in technology spending between early adopters and technology laggards in Australia is particularly large: **early adopters are three and a half times more likely to spend over 10% on technology.**

---

**SMBs’ current and future technology budget, by attitude to technology adoption**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Early adopters of technology</th>
<th>Technology laggards</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>‘... of annual revenue is allocated to technology budgets’</td>
<td><img src="chart.png" alt="Graph" /></td>
<td><img src="chart.png" alt="Graph" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 10%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between 5-10%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than 5%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Over the next 12 months, this technology budget will ...’</td>
<td><img src="chart.png" alt="Graph" /></td>
<td><img src="chart.png" alt="Graph" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase by &gt;10%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase by 0-10%</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decrease (by any %)</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Q:** Approximately, what proportion of your company’s annual revenue is allocated for your overall technology budget? (n = 3065).

**Q:** How will your business’s overall technology budget change over the next 12 months? (n = 3065).
Early adopters are leading the shift to the cloud

They are five times more likely to depend on cloud technologies than other businesses

Not only are early adopters investing more in technology, but they are also investing more specifically in cloud technologies. 42% of early adopters describe their technology deployments today as all or mostly cloud, compared to only 8% of technology laggards.

This difference is largest among SMBs in China, where 57% of early adopters are all or mostly cloud-based compared to only 7% of technology laggards.

Early adopters see the benefits of cloud technologies differently. They recognize how a cloud ecosystem may provide better access to new technologies and for market entry.

Early adopters are also much more ambitious with their future cloud deployments

SMBs in all segments plan to scale up their cloud deployments. While the proportion of all cloud early adopters will remain small, it will grow rapidly, quadrupling from 3% today to 12% in 2–3 years.

Q: Which best describes your business’s main technology deployment today? (n = 3065)
Early adopters are more engaged with their CSR/ESG objectives

Half of early adopter SMBs have annual, CSR/ESG-specific assessments

While almost all SMBs now identify CSR/ESG objectives, what may indicate SMBs’ engagement in these objectives is how they assess and report on them.

Early adopters have broadly similar CSR/ESG objectives to technology laggards, except for diversity and inclusion where 38% of early adopters prioritize this objective compared to 26% of technology laggards.

Early adopters demonstrate more engagement with their CSR/ESG goals

Early adopters’ high level of engagement with CSR/ESG issues is shown through their rigorous assessment of their efforts to achieve their CSR/ESG objectives. Most early adopters use CSR/ESG-specific assessments to report these objectives on an annual basis, making them 3.5x more likely to do so than technology laggards. Only 4% of early adopters do not report on CSR/ESG issues, while 16% of laggards engage in no reporting.

While both ad-hoc reporting and CSR/ESG-specific annual reviews may include metrics such as carbon footprint, gender pay gap, levels of employee diversity, employee satisfaction ratings, and the impact of any social initiatives it may be running in the wider community, it is only regular annual reports which provide evidence of a consistent structure in an SMB’s approach to CSR/ESG issues. These reports display the year-on-year changes, showing how the SMB is improving or worsening in its impact on the world.

Early adopters in Australia are the most likely (72%) to have an annual CSR/ESG-specific assessment. Early adopters in Mexico are the most likely (10%) to have no CSR/ESG reporting.

Q: How do you measure and assess corporate social responsibility (CSR) goals or environmental, social and governance (ESG) practices in your business? (n = 3065)
Technology decision-makers are more likely to be Millennials in early adopter SMBs

This trend is particularly pronounced in middle-income markets

Early adopter SMBs are slightly more likely to be led by millennials than technology laggards. This may be because younger generations have grown up with more technology in their lives and so are more confident and able to adopt new technologies within their businesses.

Millennials are more commonly found in technology decision-making roles in middle-income markets across different SMB segments. Despite this general higher prevalence, Millennial executives are specifically 1.5 times more common among early adopter SMBs than laggards in middle-income markets, such as China, India, Mexico and South Africa.

Similarly, 57% of early adopters in South Africa are led by millennial executives compared to 34% of technology laggards.

This result is more muted among SMBs in high-income markets, such as France (40% vs 41%), with an almost equal frequency of Millennial executives among early adopters and technology laggards.

SMBs in the UK are the least likely to have Millennial executives and this remains true among early adopters where only 21% have a Millennial executive.

SMBs’ current and future technology budget, by attitude to technology adoption

Early adopters of technology

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Millennial (25-40)</th>
<th>x1.2</th>
<th>47%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gen X (41-56) or older</td>
<td></td>
<td>52%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Technology laggards

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Male</th>
<th>78%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>22%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

x1.0

Q: Which age band represents you? (n = 3065)
Q: What gender do you identify as? (n = 3065)
Contents

Executive summary
Introduction
Market landscape
Technology adoption and attitudes
Best practices from early adopters of technology
Conclusion

Best practices from early adopters of technology
Less than a fifth of SMBs represent early adopters .........................................................41
Early adopters are better able to grow their revenue and customer base ..........46
Early adopters have unique behaviors when it comes to technology adoption .......................50
It’s worth it! Early adopters are more successful against their business objectives

They improved their brand perception and employee satisfaction more than other SMBs over the last year

Early adopters have the same objectives as the other SMBs, but approach them differently

SMBs share similar objectives – the growth of their business, improving their finances and operations, and social goals – but early adopters of technology approach these objectives differently. Early adopters’ actions to achieve their business objectives tend to involve greater use of technology than laggards. To pursue an improved profit margin and greater operational efficiency, early adopters focus more on automation and supply chain improvements and IT infrastructure than technology laggards.

Early adopters of technology have achieved more progress towards their business goals over the past year

When asked about the progress towards their business objectives, two-thirds of early adopters achieve or improved over 40% of their planned actions over the past year. This compares to less than half of technology laggards, which achieved the same.

Early adopters improved their brand awareness and employee satisfaction more than other SMBs

Most SMBs want to grow their businesses and improve their profit margins but have differing views over how to achieve these objectives. Early adopters, who are more successful overall in achieving their objectives, are more able to improve their brand awareness – contributing to customer growth – and improve employee satisfaction. Early adopters are also better able to improve innovation, productivity and automation within their business.

*We estimated this by comparing what SMBs planned to do to achieve their objectives, and which of these actions they had accomplished over the past year

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Progress against last year’s business objectives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Early adopters of technology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>‘Last year, my business achieved or improved upon … of actions towards my business objectives’</strong>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than 40%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Early adopters are more able to… (vs. % of laggards)

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Improved brand awareness/grew customer base</td>
<td>70% (vs. 53%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improved employee satisfaction</td>
<td>60% (vs. 40%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
It's worth it! Early adopters report higher revenue growth

A third of early adopters grew their revenue by over 5% in the past year, compared to less than a fifth of technology laggards

Early adopters are almost two times more likely to have achieved high revenue growth

As countries emerge from lockdowns after the most intense phase of the COVID-19 pandemic, most SMBs have experienced some degree of revenue growth. Early adopters have seen particularly large increases, and are two times more likely to have increased their revenue by over 5% in the past year. Early adopters are also much less likely to have suffered stagnant or declining revenue; only 17% of early adopters report issues with revenue growth compared to over a third of technology laggards.

Early adopters in Australia have the widest gap with technology laggards, being 31% more likely to have increased revenue by over 5%.

Early adopters in China have the smallest gap with technology laggards, being less than 1% more likely to have increased revenue by over 5%.

Technology laggards in the USA are the most likely (46%) to have had revenue remain static or decrease.

Technology laggards in France are the most likely (22%) to have had revenue increases of over 5%.

Early adopters in the AMTUC industries report the most positive shift in revenue, with 86% growing their revenue in the past year, while 77% of early adopters in the retail sector achieved the same feat.

Impact of attitude to technology adoption on change in annual revenue

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Early adopters of technology</th>
<th>Technology laggards</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>‘In the past year annual revenue has changed by...’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased by 5% or more</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased by less than 5%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remained about the same</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decreased (any % change)</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q: How has your business’s current annual sales revenue changed compared to last year’s? (n = 3065).
It’s worth it! Early adopters are more confident about achieving their current business objectives

Their executives also feel more adaptable to change, optimistic for the future and confident about their own impact

Early adopters are four times more likely to be highly confident in their business

Not only did early adopters achieve better results over the past year, but they also remain much more confident in their business looking forward. Early adopters are four times more likely to be highly confident than technology laggards, showcasing the positive impact of embracing new technologies. A quarter of technology laggards are, at best, neutral about attaining their objectives, illustrating the risks of being slow to adapt to new technology.

Early adopters in UK show the highest confidence gap compared to laggards, being 9.5 times more likely to be highly confident.

Early adopters in China show the lowest confidence gap compared to laggards, being 3.0 times more likely to be highly confident.

Early adopters in the retail sector show the highest level of difference in intra-industry confidence, with 42% of early adopters displaying high confidence in their objective achieving ability, against only 21% of technology laggards.

Executives at early adopters feel more confident in their role

Technophile executives are more than 3 times as confident in their personal judgement than technoskeptical executives. The gap between early adopter SMBs and technology laggards is larger in terms of the SMB’s confidence, with three times as many early adopters reporting high confidence. Technophile executives also have an exceptionally positive attitude in terms of optimism about the future and adaptability to change.

Q: How confident are you that your business can achieve its current objectives? (n = 3065).
Q: As a business leader, how confident are you that you are doing the right thing for your business? (n = 3065).
*Includes ‘neutral’, ‘not very confident’, ‘not at all confident’

Confidence in the business and the leaders’ role, by attitude to technology adoption

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Early adopters of technology</th>
<th>Technology laggards</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>‘I am … that my business will achieve its objectives’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highly confident</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fairly confident</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral/Not confident*</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| ‘As a business leader, I am … that I am doing the right thing for my business’ | |
| Highly confident | 60% |
| Fairly confident | 38% |
| Neutral/Not confident* | 3% |
|  | 20% |
|  | 99% |
|  | 21% |
Best practices from early adopters of technology

Less than a fifth of SMBs represent early adopters ................................................................. 41
Early adopters are better able to grow their revenue and customer base .............................. 46
Early adopters have unique behaviors when it comes to technology adoption ............ 50
Early adopters see the link between technology and business more clearly

Unlike most other SMBs, early adopters see technology as essential for their business

Early adopters are 7.5 times more likely than technology laggards to make technology essential to their business

Among all SMBs, only 16% recognize technology as essential. Early adopters are overwhelmingly more likely to fall in this category and make technology essential to their business and for it to achieve its objectives. 45% of early adopters rate technology as essential compared to only 6% of technology laggards.

Early adopters in the USA are the most likely to view technology as essential to achieving their business objectives. They also had the largest gap with technology laggards, with 52% of early adopters rating technology as essential vs only 4% of laggards.

Early adopters in Mexico are the most likely (21%) to view technology as being only important or neutral to achieving their business objectives.

Early adopters in the professional business services industry are the most likely (48%) to view technology as essential to achieving their objectives.

Indeed, it is hardly a surprise that early adopters of technology perceive it as more important than other SMBs. However, this perception of technology may also indicate how it is used within their business and may affect their strategy.

Q: How important is technology to your business achieving its objectives over the next 2-3 years? (n = 3065).
Early adopters look beyond the obvious applications of technology

They believe that technology can play a role in solving fundamental business questions

Early adopters use technology differently than technology laggards to support their business objectives

Early adopters and technology laggards have similar overall objectives but different views on how to use technology to achieve their goals. The biggest gap is in business decision-making where early adopters are 1.7 times more likely than technology laggards to believe technology can help them. Early adopters are also significantly more likely to believe technology has a role to play in improving competitive positioning, business valuation and investor perception.

Early adopters also think that technology gives their business a better reputation in the market, being 1.5 times more likely than technology laggards to feel it will improve their business valuation and, separately, give them a stronger reputation among current and potential investors.

SMBs in Germany are the most likely (50%) to think that technology can help improve the effectiveness of marketing and sales. SMBs in South Africa are the most likely (48%) to believe that technology can help improve their competitive positioning.

Q: How will technology help your business achieve its business objectives over the next 2–3 years? (n = 3,065).
Early adopters value data analytics/insights and customizability of solutions more

Ease of use is not a key criterion for technology selection, apart from among early adopters in Mexico

All SMBs want functional technologies that provide clear improvements to their business. What sets early adopters apart is the range and depth of the factors they take into account when evaluating novel technologies. Early adopters have a particular interest in customizing technology to fit their specific needs and then deploying analytical solutions to achieve fresh insights.

Almost half of early adopters focus on security and reliability when choosing a new technology

Early adopters have a strong focus on security and reliability. Early adopters’ interest in security may be driven by their greater awareness of cyber threats and their impact. Additionally, early adopters are 1.4 times more likely than technology laggards to prioritize customer/technical support and 1.2 times more likely to evaluate the efficiency impact of a new technology.

Early adopters in the UK are the most likely (60%) to prioritize security when selecting a new technology solution. Early adopters in France are much more concerned by security (60%) than technology laggards (35%). Early adopters in Mexico are the most likely (59%) to focus on ease of use when selecting a new technology solution.

Q: Which of these are important factors to your business when selecting a new technology solution? (n = 3065)

Factors for technology selection by attitude to technology adoption*

Not shown are other options including, among others, efficiency, ease of use, range of functionalities and cost
Early adopters value the collaboration with their technology partners a lot more

They want partners’ input, insights and advice across all areas of business improvement

Collaboration with technology partners means the SMB works with their partner to jointly plan their business strategy and solve business challenges, rather than simply buying off-the-shelf technology products.

Early adopters collaborate more extensively with their technology partners

For most SMBs, collaboration with technology partners is very important. However, early adopters see their relationship with technology partners are more important and make this collaboration essential to their business. Early adopters are seven times more likely than laggards to view collaboration with technology partners as essential.

This discrepancy is greatest among SMBs in the UK, where 48% of early adopters make collaboration essential compared to 7% of technology laggards.

Early adopters collaborate with technology partners directly to identify and solve their business challenges

Early adopters collaborate with technology partners differently to technology laggards. Half of early adopters look to this collaboration to identify and solve their business challenges, instead of focusing on new technology solutions. Early adopters do, however, look to their technology partners to key them up-to-date on the latest technology trends.

Q: How important will collaboration with technology partners be to your business achieving its objectives over the next 2–3 years? (n = 3065).

*Includes ‘neutral’, ‘unimportant’ and ‘not at all important’.
Investing in technology can improve SMBs’ business performance

Linking technology and business strategies, and close collaboration with partners are key success factors

Study sought to better understand SMBs' unique voice. It examined the relationship between SMBs’ technology adoption patterns, relationships with technology partners, and how these affect business results.

The overwhelming result:
It’s worth it! Early adopters represented 17% of our sample of SMBs. They adopt the latest new technologies for their business and are more invested in cloud solutions. They demonstrate the positive impact of technology on business performance, reporting more progress towards their business objectives, higher revenue growth over the past year, and more confidence and positive mindset than other businesses. SMBs’ mindsets and behaviors will not change overnight.

3 Ways SMBs get the most from their technology:
1. The decision to invest into technology should be driven by its potential business impact.
2. Look beyond the obvious applications of technology.
3. Closely collaborate with technology partners

Technology partners may support SMBs by proactively suggesting new solutions and shaping their technology strategy.

Ten truths about early adopters of technology

01
Typically big spenders and 2x more likely to invest more than 10% of revenue in technology.

02
Cloud proponents: 5x more likely to depend on cloud technologies today and have ambitious plans for future deployments.

03
Socially responsible businesses, with 82% reporting on CSR/ESG issues on a yearly basis.

04
Achieved more progress against business objectives: more able to improve brand perception and employee satisfaction.

05
2x more likely to achieve high revenue growth.

06
4x more likely to be highly confident in their business. Executives are more confident, optimistic and adaptable to change in their role.

07
Link between technology and business clearly; unlike other SMBs, they see technology as essential.

08
Look beyond the obvious applications of technology and believe it plays a role in solving fundamental business questions.

09
Strong focus on security while also prioritizing reliability when selecting new technology solutions.

10
Appreciate collaboration with technology partners.
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