

Analyst Report: What to Consider when Evaluating Software Maintenance & Support

Purpose and Intent

Assessing costs versus benefits for subscription and support services is key to a user's decision process. Critical inputs for this analysis include an external review of best practices in the management of software licenses, subscription and support, with perspectives from software providers, asset management tools and service providers, and IT managers responsible for utilization and management of software maintenance and support services in their organizations.

This research was conducted by SAI Infocomm LLC, an analyst firm with extensive experience in the monitoring and assessment of technology and business trends in the information technology industry.

Executive Summary

As IT budgets are under continuing pressure, companies are looking for ways to ensure they derive maximum value for their software investments and eliminate expenditures that do not bring direct benefit. Software maintenance may be one of those expenditures that come under scrutiny. All too often, however, organizations overlook the potential risks and future costs associated with eliminating access to new versions and releases of deployed software, code enhancements, feature and fix packs, electronic and expert technical support specialists.

Few organizations calculate the impact of restricted access, not implementing feature and fix packs, and not employing technical support specialists on their processes, systems and internal as well as external operations. The risks of data loss, e-commerce interruption, or a security breach can lead to a significant loss of productivity, not to mention lost revenues and lost continuity of business operation.

Even fewer organizations factor in the measurable cost and performance savings that migrating/upgrading to current software releases can deliver. Upgrading to new versions delivers new and enhanced capabilities that can significantly boost performance, IT, and operational efficiencies and in doing so yield a higher ROI on investment across the entire useful life of the acquired software. By implication, a robust upgrade and migration strategy can deliver measurable business and competitive advantage which may by themselves offset annual software maintenance expenses.

CIOs face a dual challenge of optimizing existing environments and working with business leaders to deliver innovation. As the cost of operating an IT system consumes vital resources and budget, IT leaders must formulate apps strategies to rein in costs, integrate internal and external systems, and accelerate innovation and business value.

This report outlines five optimization strategies that IT leaders should consider in their overall applications strategy, focusing on the effective utilization of subscription and support services. This framework can apply across application types, ranging from ERP to CRM and supply chain management.

Software Maintenance & Support – Documented benefits

The benefits of software maintenance and support can be placed into five distinct categories:

1. Currency

- **Obtain improved performance through updates and new versions:** Providers who continue to invest in their software titles, through product updates and new version releases, continue to add functionality, improve performance, and create an overall enhancement in the usability of its software. When such updates provide new features users have requested, enhanced security, or improved performance and responsiveness, clients with maintenance & support contracts benefit from the investments their software vendors continue to make in their products. Clients should ask their software vendors to provide a “report card” describing their update and upgrade cadence – making sure their vendors aren’t simply pocketing clients’ software maintenance payments without providing tangible benefits. Clients should ask their providers to describe their development organizations – locations, resources, and responsibilities – to hold their vendors accountable for the development process.

A current maintenance & support subscription is the only way clients update their software titles without delay as these updates become available. Without an active maintenance and support subscription, clients might have to purchase new software licenses to obtain access to new software versions, while losing access to important upgrades in between new release versions.

2. Reliability

- **Obtain support without delay:** Clients with ongoing maintenance and support agreements are better protected than clients without a defined technical support strategy.

Clients with contracts can get support for their software in a timely fashion, with the ability to obtain how-to information and resolve configuration and performance issues through a variety of access methods – for many vendors, this can include phone, Internet, or mobile device. In an organization where multiple device types are utilized, the diversity of options means company IT organizations aren't impeded in their ability to be responsive to software issues and requirements.

- **Eliminate risk of significant downtime:** Clients that install patches and updates conscientiously, and ensure their software is kept up to date, can significantly reduce their risk of loss due to downtime, security breaches, or other business interruptions. A software outage can harm the organization in multiple ways:
 - An unpatched security issue can expose sensitive data to potential theft, placing the enterprise at risk because client data and employee data could be exposed, and key business processes could be compromised.
 - As an increasing number of business processes become IT-enabled, the organization's ability to perform its day-to-day operations can be compromised by IT outages, when the underlying service issues cannot be addressed in real time.
 - The “cascade effect” of seemingly isolated outages can impede company workflow and productivity in multiple affected processes and systems; the resulting lost time can significantly eclipse any savings contemplated by avoiding S&S costs, particularly when clients select S&S offerings with enhanced response time commitments (for example, one-hour response for Level 1 severity incidents).
- **Gain improved reliability through improved knowledge:** In one example, 70% of contacts with a major software provider's support organization were to obtain information on how to perform specific tasks – access to support enables access to user communities, a knowledge base, as well as telephone and online-based support; all of these are approaches clients can use to determine how to use a particular feature, how to configure software more effectively, or other tasks that can improve the utilization of software.

- **Recover faster when downtime occurs:** Clients with active maintenance and support subscriptions can easily initiate support requests; some providers allow clients to designate and pre-authorize specific employees to initiate a support request. As noted above, an active maintenance and support subscription for most vendors includes responsiveness commitments for the highest-severity (Level 1) incidents, to help ensure downtime is minimized in case of a software outage.

3. Extensibility

- **Consider investing in advanced support options to access enhanced vendor tools:** Many software vendors offer advanced support options that can help clients derive greater functionality from their maintenance and support investment. Examples of functions regularly offered in advanced support packages:
 - **Quicker problem response:** With an advanced support contract, clients can obtain quicker turnaround for support requests involving items that may not meet the “Severity 1” criteria requirement.
 - **Access to dedicated vendor resources:** Most vendors with advanced support programs provide a dedicated technical support contact for all issues relating to a specific software title, which can help keep communications focused on outstanding issues and prioritize specific needs. This access can enable a client to have more direct input to future software enhancement priorities and strategies.
 - **Onsite assistance for emergencies, technical coaching, diagnostic assistance, and skills sharing:** This benefit brings specialized resources to the client’s location, facilitating communication efforts and marshalling resources to help clients derive maximum benefit from their vendors.
 - **Proactive notification for critical software situations:** Providers offering this benefit will notify clients about corrective solutions to problems others have experienced before these problems affect their organization.
 - **Software environment reviews / health checks:** Some vendors offering advanced support options will also provide regular reviews of a client’s operating environment and also check for optimal software configuration, helping clients improve operational performance and software responsiveness.

4. Predictability of ROI

- **Avoid large outlays for new / updated software:** Maintaining an active maintenance & support subscription levels out peaks and valleys in software investments and expenditures; clients are able to budget for software on an ongoing basis and benefit from continuing updates, enhancements, and upgrades in their software without having to lay out significant lump sums for new software versions. Without maintaining active maintenance and support subscriptions, clients might need to reinvest in new software licenses to take advantage of the enhanced functionality provided by new versions.
- **Avoid large reinstatement payments for maintenance & support lapses:** Reinstating maintenance & support coverage after allowing coverage to lapse can carry substantial reinstatement penalties. In addition to these penalties, clients lose access to updates, feature packs, new releases, and direct technical support. Software Asset Management (SAM) tools can help a client keep a “dashboard” view of their license utilization and contract renewal dates, and these tools can create reminders and notifications in advance of key decision points. Whether formal SAM tools are used, or informal, ad-hoc methods such as spreadsheets are utilized for this purpose, the proactive monitoring of key decision dates and renewal dates can help firms avoid interruption in the availability of maintenance and support benefits.

5. Consolidated management of software assets

- **Use vendor portals to keep track of key license details, new software releases, and overall support management:** Most enterprise software vendors offer online portals for easy consolidation and management of software assets. These portals typically offer the following functionality to help clients manage their software investments:
 - **List of key dates and entitlements:** Expiration dates of current subscriptions are listed, enabling clients sufficient lead times to manage subscription renewals; a client’s portfolio of software titles purchased from a given vendor can be viewed in a single dashboard.
 - **Notification of updates and patches:** Availability of updates and patches relevant for a client’s software titles is indicated, along with downloading / installation instructions.
 - **Access to online support and user communities:** Portal pages typical have live links to access bulletin boards, blogs, or discussion forums where clients can ask questions and obtain information.

- **Ticket submission and open support ticket dashboards:** Portals frequently provide a single, unified view of all open support tickets and responses, a helpful approach when multiple client personnel are responsible for management of their software investments. The same portal often provides a simplified approach for creating new support tickets.
- **Announcements of training opportunities:** Regularly updated schedules for classroom training, online webinars, and virtual meeting sessions are provided.
- **Announcements of new releases and new titles:** Clients can stay up to date on new opportunities to upgrade their software titles or investigate new titles relevant to their business.

Conclusion

With an increasing number of critical business processes reliant on IT for their successful execution, clients need to take appropriate steps to protect the strategic IT assets that support these processes. For enterprise software, Maintenance and Support programs constitute key components in a proactive strategy to enhance the value contributed by IT to the successful enterprise. This paper has documented five examples of how Maintenance and Support programs can deliver this enhanced value.

What is IBM Software Subscription & Support?

IBM Software Subscription & Support is a comprehensive product upgrade and Technical support solution, available through IBM Passport Advantage® and Passport Advantage Express, that delivers:

- Product upgrades — new releases and new versions — at your convenience
- Phone and online Technical Support — when, where, and how you choose

The subscription component provides access to new releases and versions of your licensed IBM software — helping to reduce your software acquisition expenses. You can elect to receive eNotifications to alert you when new releases and versions and new technical support information become available for your licensed products — you choose when to upgrade and what technical support information is of interest to you. This includes the latest technology from IBM ensuring that your IT environment is responsive, reliable and ready for growth and for change.

The support component includes responsive, cross-platform software technical support — around the clock and around the world --- with 24/7 enhanced self-help and search capabilities, voice support for new deployments, migration, and code-related questions, and fast problem resolution by phone for all high-severity situations — 24 hours a day, seven days a week — based on the situations that impact your business.



Additional Resources | Suggested Reading | Learn More

[IBM Software Subscription and Support](#)

<http://www.ibm.com/support>

About SAI Infocomm

SAI InfoComm is a global business intelligence firm specializing in planning and strategy development for high-technology companies in the Information Technology, Communications and Electronics industries.

Founded in 1977, SAI InfoComm was established with a focused vision of providing clients with a new standard of decision support. The business has grown to over 275 professionals globally with specialized functional skills and industry experience including management, technology and research, business development and planning functions.