

THE STATE OF SMB IT FOR 2026

INSIDE THE DATA ON ITSM
MATURITY, TOOLING GAPS,
AI, AND AUTOMATION

by

EASYViSTA® &  **OTRS**



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INTRODUCTION

Small and medium-sized businesses (SMBs) are facing a defining moment in their IT evolution. This is shaping up as a year when the pressure to modernize is no longer optional, it's operationally essential. Fragmented systems, growing cyber risks, rising user expectations, and limited resources have created an environment where standing still is no longer sustainable.

Yet in the face of these challenges, many SMBs are at a crossroads. The recognition that IT service management (ITSM) and IT asset management (ITAM) can drive business value is clear—but turning that aspiration into action is harder than ever. Organizations across the globe are asking the same urgent questions: Are we keeping pace with peers? Are we investing in the right areas? How can we stretch limited budgets to strengthen IT resilience and performance?

Drawing on fresh survey data and in-depth analysis, *The State of SMB IT for 2026* provides a candid look at where SMBs stand today. It examines the operational risks of poor integration, how the combination of limited IT personnel, budget pressures, and the rising complexity of maintaining secure, compliant systems is shaping everyday realities, and the emerging role of AI as a lever for resilience and growth.

Whether you're setting IT budgets, refining strategies, or simply trying to make sense of evolving demands, this report equips you with practical benchmarks and actionable insights to navigate 2026 with clarity and confidence.

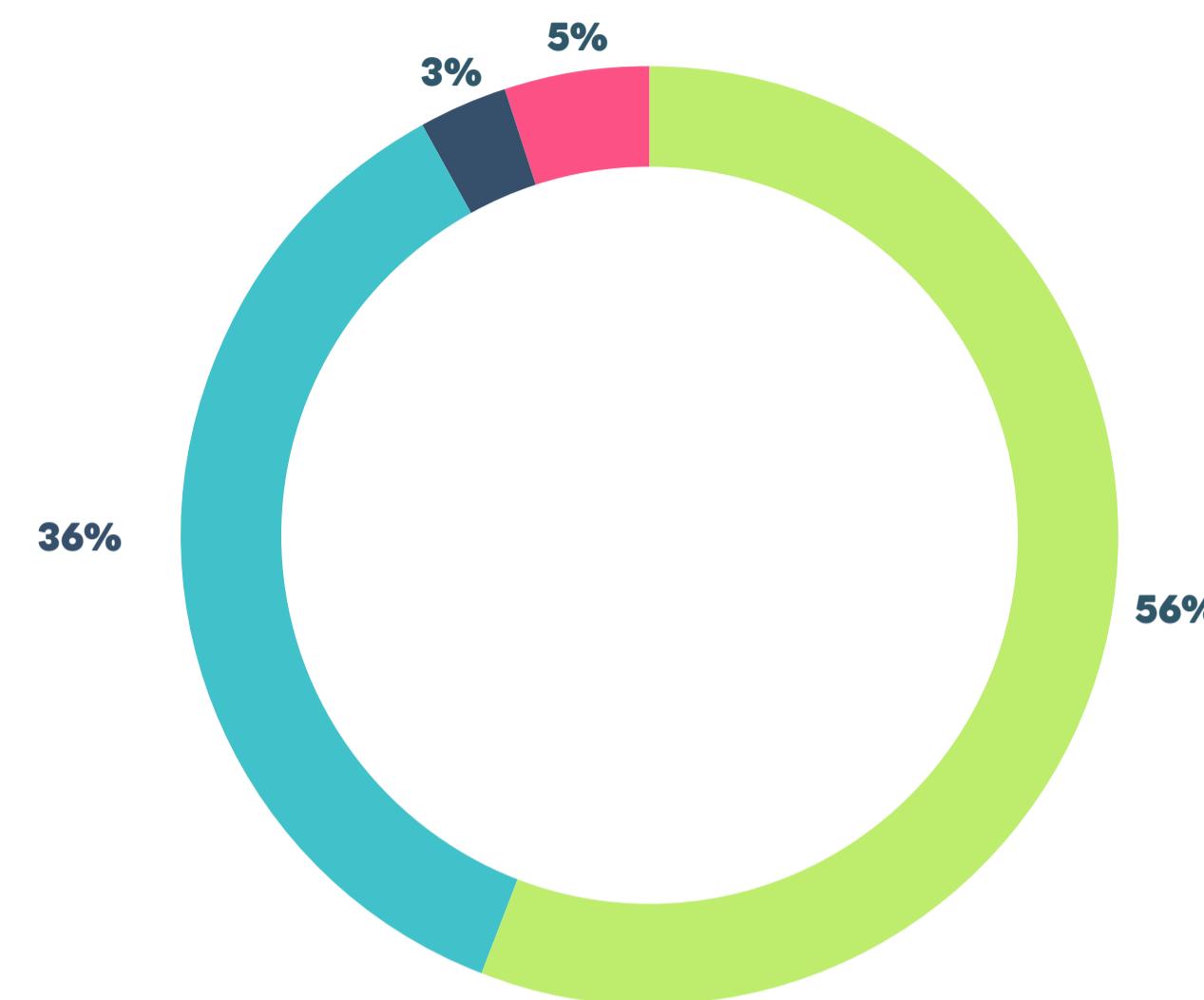


CHAPTER 1

MATURITY WITHOUT MUSCLE: WHY SMBs ARE STUCK IN THE ITSM MIDDLE

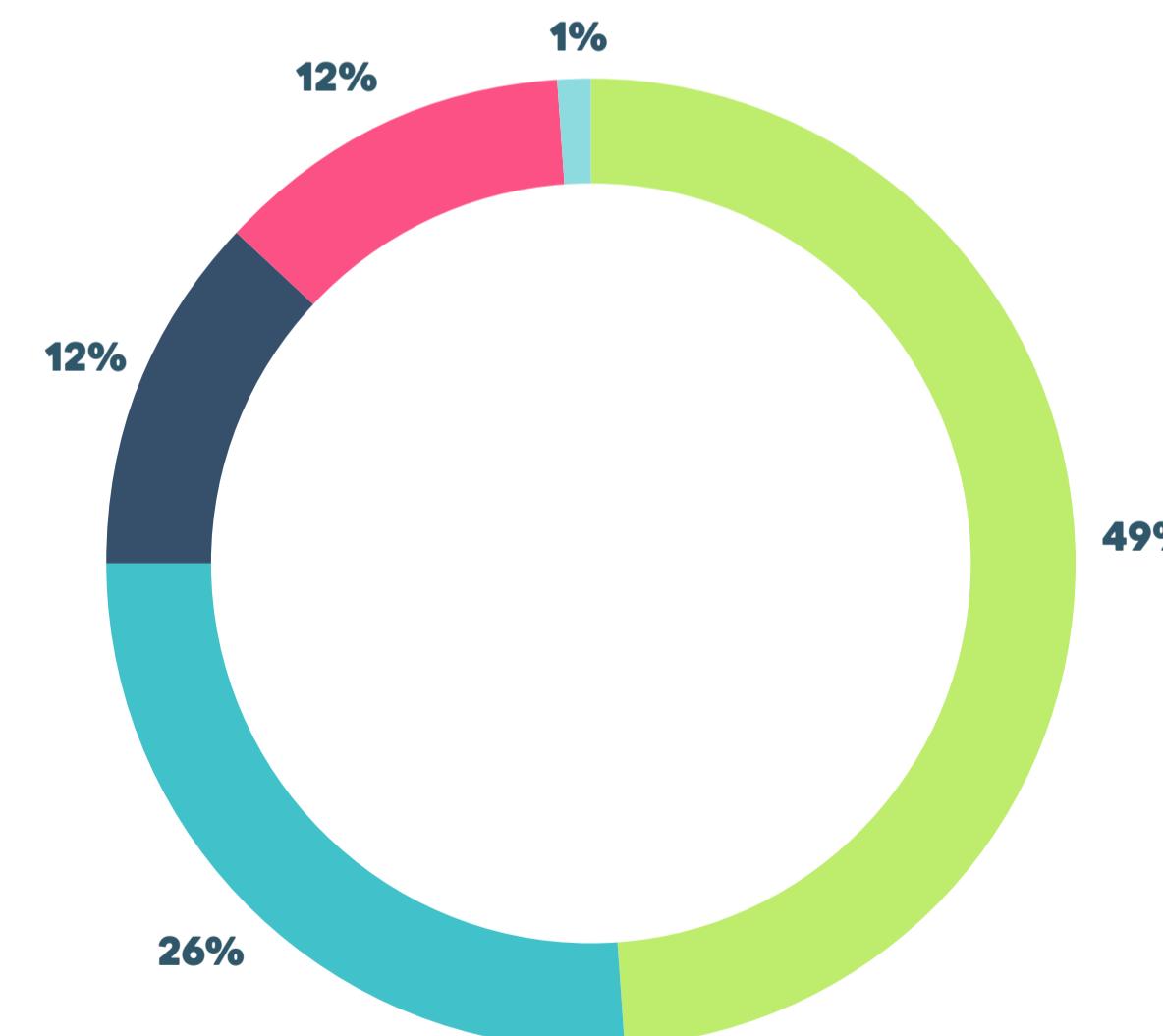
Despite growing recognition of IT service management (ITSM) as a strategic business driver, most small and medium-sized businesses (SMBs) remain stuck in early maturity stages, relying on fragmented tools and reactive approaches.

Only **12%** of organizations describe their ITSM approach as proactive and mature, while nearly **40%** still operate without well-defined or consistent processes. This gap between aspiration and execution is striking, especially considering that more than half of respondents (**56%**) see ITSM as a strategic opportunity to improve efficiency and business outcomes.



HOW IS ITSM VIEWED IN YOUR ORGANIZATION?

- Strategic driver for business success
- Operational necessity
- Cost center
- Don't know



HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOUR CURRENT ITSM APPROACH?

- Well-structured processes
- Some formal processes
- Ad-hoc and reactive
- Proactive, fully mature framework
- Don't know

HOW DO YOU TRACK AND MANAGE IT SERVICE REQUESTS?

ITSM software

45%

Basic ticketing tools

28%

Outsourced

14%

Manual tracking

11%

Not formally tracked

2%

Don't know

1%

HOW DO YOU CURRENTLY MANAGE IT ASSETS (ITAM)?

Basic tools

45%

Dedicated software

38%

Manual tracking

13%

No formal process

4%

Don't know

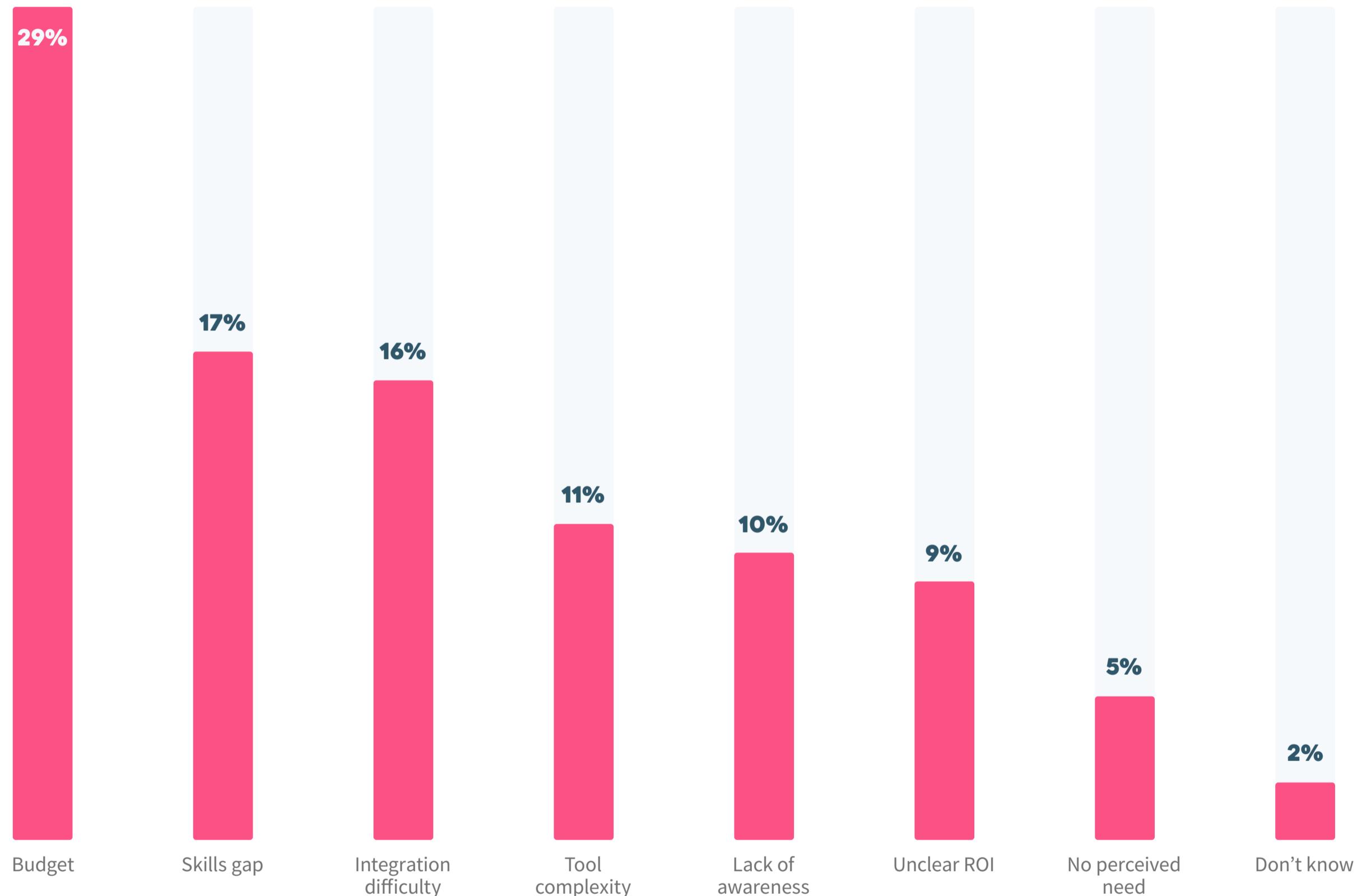
1%

One of the most telling indicators of this disconnect is tool adoption.

Fewer than half (**45%**) of SMBs use dedicated ITSM software for tracking and managing service requests. Instead, many rely on basic ticketing platforms or spreadsheets tools that may help track incidents but do little to support scalability, accountability, or service-level consistency. These lightweight solutions offer limited workflow automation and reporting, which means even modest growth or complexity can overwhelm internal IT teams.

Asset management practices follow a similar pattern of fragmentation. Thirteen percent of respondents still track IT assets manually—a process that's not only error-prone but nearly impossible to sustain in hybrid or remote environments. An additional **4%** admit they have no IT asset management (ITAM) process at all, further exposing gaps in control and visibility that are critical to IT operations. Without unified ITSM and ITAM strategies, organizations risk compounding inefficiencies across their service lifecycle.

WHAT'S THE BARRIER TO USING DEDICATED ITSM TOOLS?



The factors keeping SMBs in this transitional phase are common, yet still hard to address. Budget constraints (**29%**) and lack of skilled personnel (**17%**) are identified as the top barriers preventing SMBs from adopting advanced tools for ITSM, ITAM and device management. This is followed by the difficulty of integrating modern ITSM tools into legacy environments (**16%**), where siloed systems and outdated infrastructure create real friction for transformation. These issues aren't just operational headaches—they're inhibitors to progress.

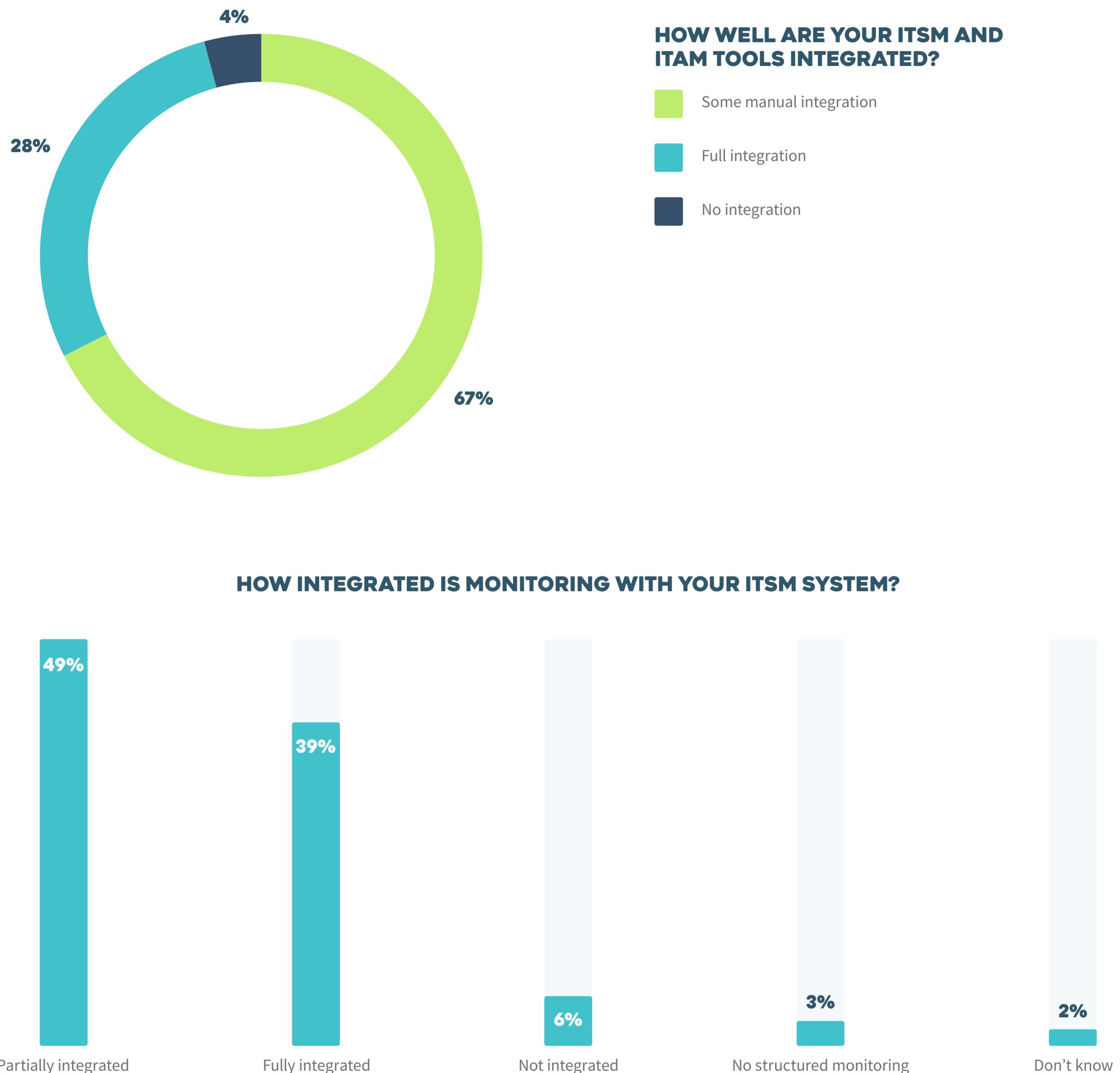
In effect, many SMBs are caught in a loop: the need for modernization is clear, but the path forward is obstructed by underinvestment and technical debt. Until organizations can align their tools and processes with their strategic intent, they'll remain stuck in a reactive posture but not yet positioned to turn IT into a true business enabler.

CHAPTER 2

A SYSTEM DIVIDED: THE HIGH COST OF POOR INTEGRATION

If maturity is one issue, integration is another—and it cuts across every layer of IT operations. The majority of SMBs (**67%**) are still relying on manual work or spreadsheets to bridge ITSM and ITAM processes, indicating that even foundational workflows often lack systemic cohesion. While these methods may help teams meet immediate needs, they create long-term inefficiencies, make data harder to trust, and increase the risk of human error. It's no surprise that **32%** of respondents cited lack of integration between IT tools as one of their biggest challenges in delivering IT services effectively.

The challenges extend beyond ITSM and ITAM. Monitoring tools remain largely disconnected: only **39%** of SMBs say their infrastructure alerts are fully integrated into ITSM workflows. This means that for most organizations, critical alerts may still require separate handling, which delays issue resolution, complicates root cause analysis, and impairs service continuity. Fragmented systems leave IT teams with more to manage and fewer tools that talk to one another in real time.

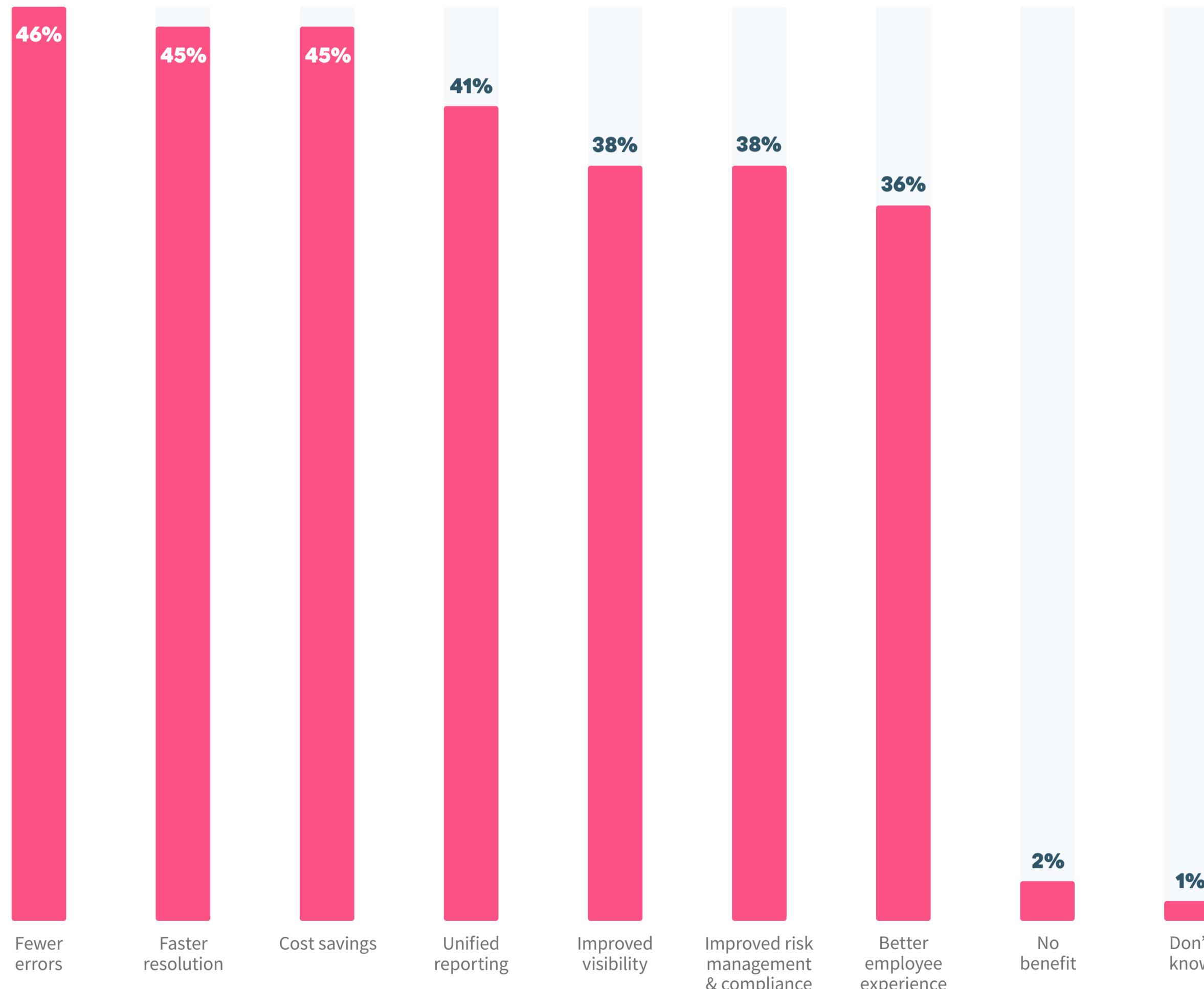




Remote support is another area where the cost of poor integration becomes clear. Thirteen percent of respondents say limited integration is the most significant shortcoming of their current remote support solution. Combined with other related limitations, such as lack of automation (**15%**) and slow or unreliable remote access (**12%**), this highlights how difficult it is to scale remote troubleshooting or support hybrid work environments without a unified platform. Without integration, remote troubleshooting becomes disjointed, increasing both response times and frustration for end users.

Integration challenges also act as a barrier to tool adoption itself. Sixteen percent of SMBs said difficulty integrating new solutions into existing systems is a key reason they have not implemented dedicated ITSM, ITAM, or device management software, while another **11%** pointed to the perceived complexity of tools. The underlying concern is clear: many SMBs hesitate to add new platforms out of fear that it will only complicate an already fragmented environment.

WHAT BENEFITS DO YOU EXPECT FROM ITSM-ITAM INTEGRATION?



What makes this situation more frustrating is that SMBs clearly see the value of integration. Respondents expect stronger ITSM-ITAM integration to deliver measurable improvements, from cost reductions (**45%**) and error reduction (**46%**) to better, more unified reporting (**41%**) and improved visibility (**38%**). More than a third (**36%**) anticipate a better employee experience as a result. These expectations reflect not just a wish list, but a business case—SMBs recognize that smoother integration can unlock efficiency, support strategic decision making, and improve satisfaction for both IT teams and end users.

In short, the current state of disjointed systems is undermining both performance and potential. Integration isn't just about eliminating redundancy—it's about creating the operational resilience and responsiveness that modern businesses require. Without unified systems, incident detection, response, and resolution become fragmented and inefficient—particularly problematic for distributed teams working across locations and devices. For SMBs, solving this challenge could be the key to turning IT from a cost center into a strategic differentiator.

CHAPTER 3

OVERCOMING TODAY'S BIGGEST BARRIERS TO EFFECTIVE IT SERVICE DELIVERY

While poor integration fractures IT environments, three other persistent challenges weigh heavily on SMBs striving to deliver reliable IT services: lack of skilled IT personnel, budget constraints, and the increasing complexity of securing compliant IT operations. These barriers are interconnected—and together, they define the pressure points shaping ITSM strategies for 2026.

First, the talent gap. Forty percent of SMBs identified lack of skilled IT personnel as one of their top challenges in delivering IT services effectively—a figure matched exactly by the percentage who cited budget constraints. Without sufficient expertise, IT teams struggle to manage complex environments, deploy advanced tools, or optimize service delivery. This talent shortfall does more than slow day-to-day operations; it undermines efforts to modernize and automate. The data reinforces this: **17%** of SMBs said lack of skilled personnel is a core reason they haven't adopted dedicated ITSM, ITAM, or device management solutions, and **62%** ranked training and education as the top resource they need to improve their ITSM practices.

Budget limitations compound the problem. Nearly one-third (**29%**) of respondents said budget constraints are the primary reason they have not invested in modern IT management tools, and **40%** flagged budget pressures more broadly as a top operational challenge. These resource constraints prevent many SMBs from implementing the capabilities that could reduce overhead and free up staff capacity.

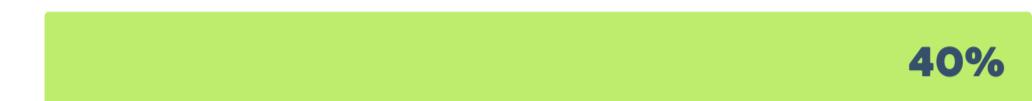
Finally, security and compliance weigh heavily on IT leaders. Thirty-seven percent cited ensuring secure, compliant IT support operations as a key challenge, and **21%** pointed to security risks like unauthorized access as the biggest limitation of their remote support tools. These concerns are amplified in distributed environments where safeguarding endpoints and ensuring timely updates are already uphill battles.

WHAT ARE YOUR BIGGEST IT SERVICE DELIVERY CHALLENGES?

Skills shortage



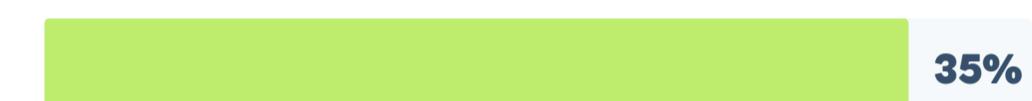
Budget constraints



Ensuring secure/compliant operations



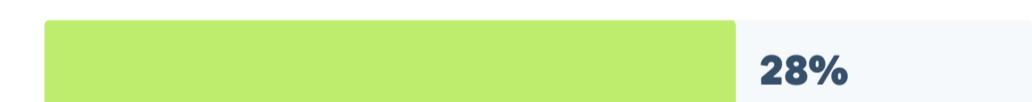
Slow response times



Poor tool integration



Lack of automation



Growing ticket volume



Lack of standard processes



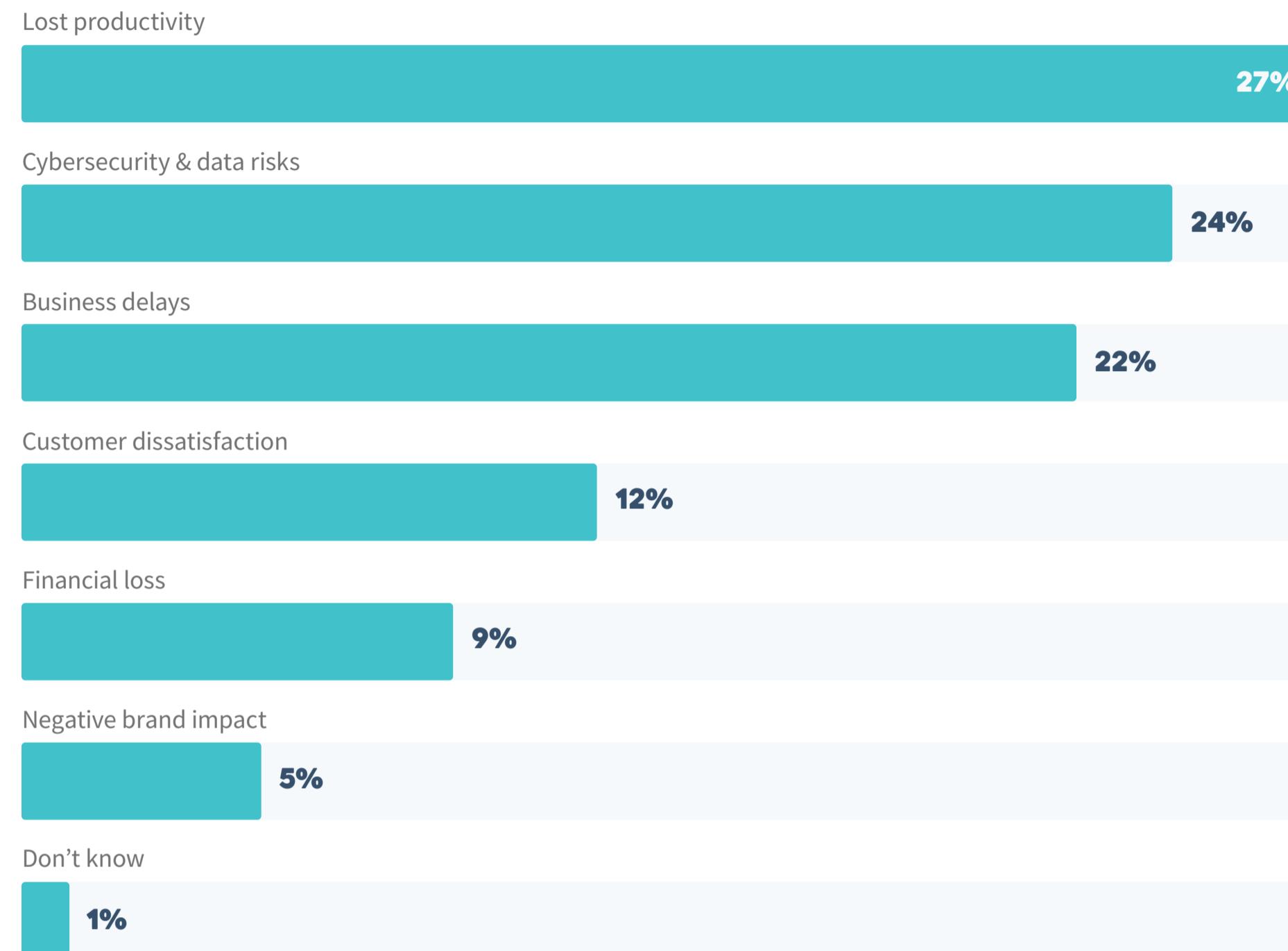
Distributed environments



Don't know

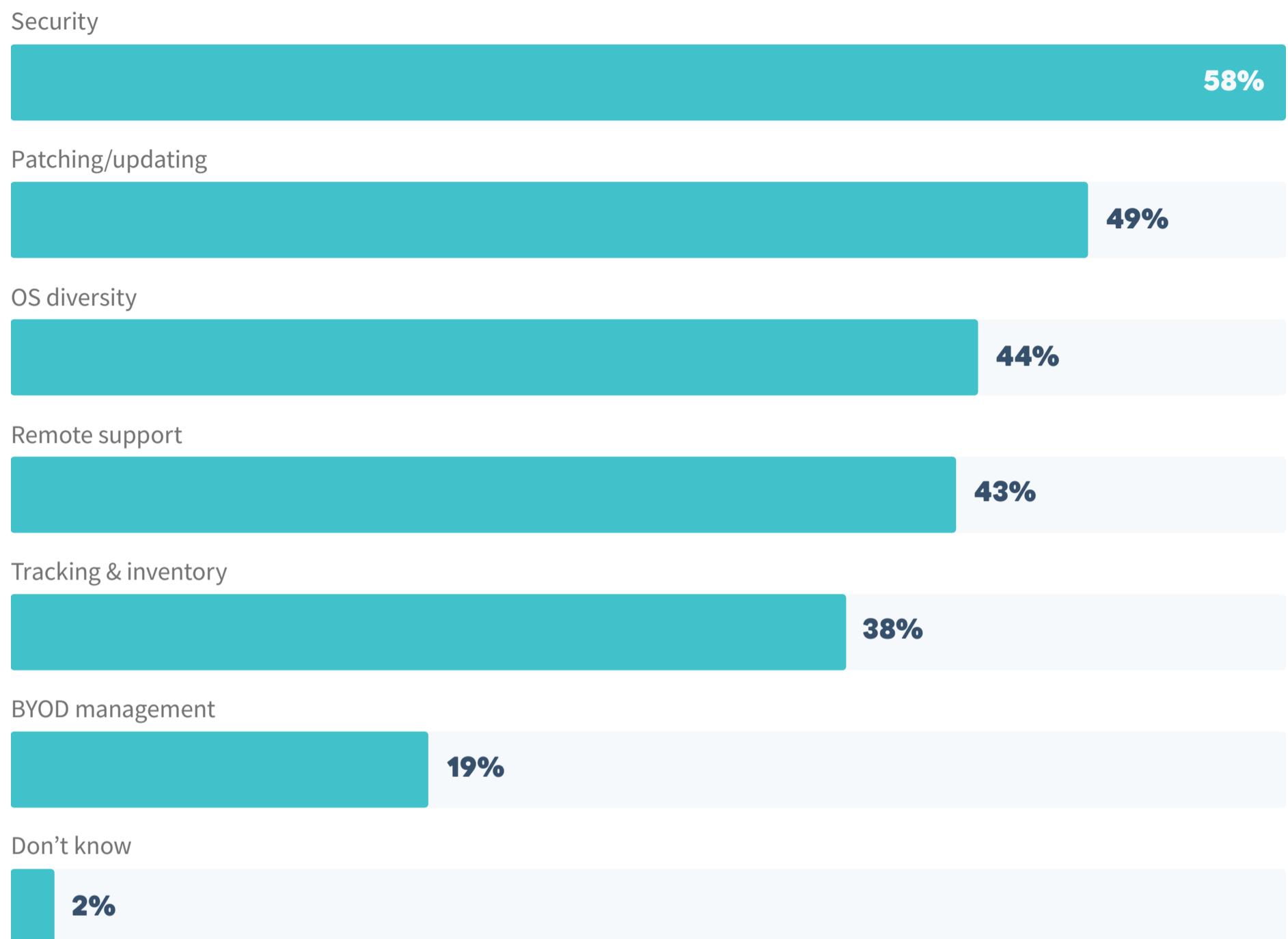


WHAT'S THE BIGGEST IMPACT OF IT DISRUPTIONS?



Despite being a top priority for many, cybersecurity remains a deeply uneven area of focus. Only **25%** of organizations say managing and mitigating cybersecurity risks related to IT devices and assets is “one of our highest priorities.” A larger portion—**43%**—are “somewhat concerned,” recognizing the issue as important but not urgent. Meanwhile, **27%** believe they pose a minimal threat, and **5%** say it’s not a major issue. This fragmented approach is concerning when **58%** of SMBs say that securing devices against cyber threats is their biggest challenge in endpoint management, and **24%** report that data or cybersecurity risks have been the biggest impact of IT disruptions. These incidents are not rare—nearly half of SMBs experience disruptive IT issues several times a month.

WHAT CHALLENGES DO YOU FACE IN MANAGING DEVICES?



Taken together, these three barriers—talent, budget, and security—form a reinforcing cycle. Breaking it will require SMBs to make targeted investments that simultaneously strengthen skills, streamline costs, and harden security—particularly through automation, easy-to-integrate tools, and continuous staff education. The organizations that succeed won’t be those that spend the most, but those that align limited resources to maximum effect.

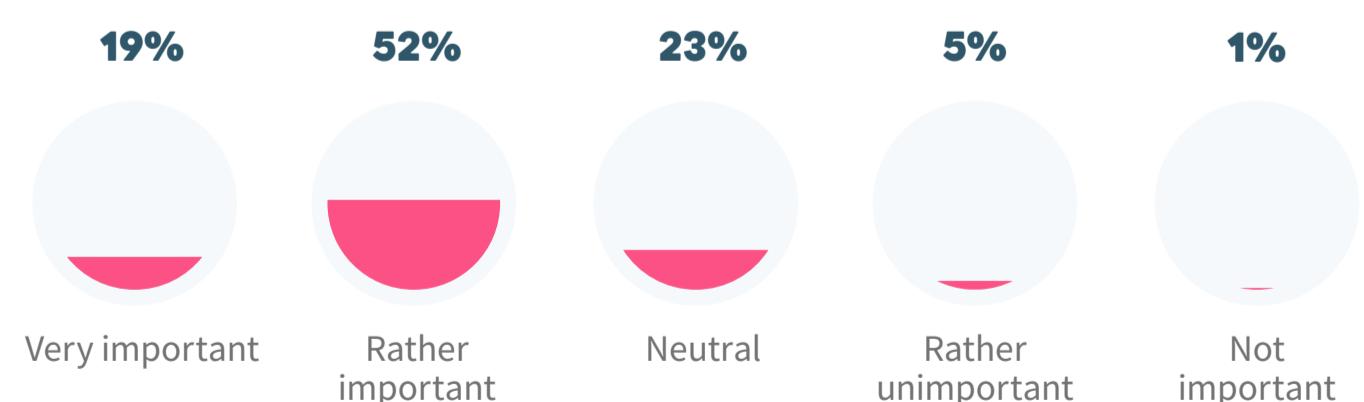
CHAPTER 4

THE RISE OF AI IN ITSM AND ITAM

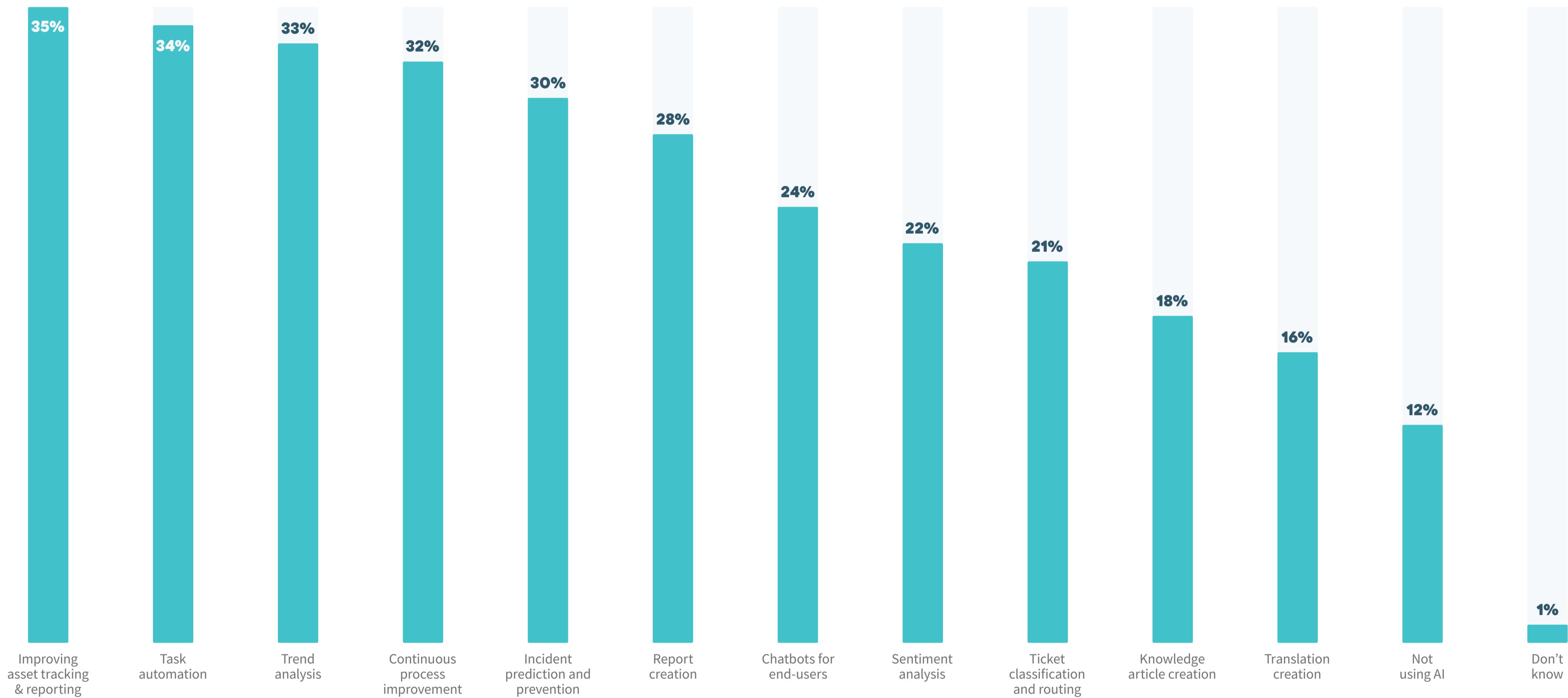
As SMBs contend with operational complexity and limited resources, artificial intelligence (AI) is emerging as a meaningful area of focus—but its current role in ITSM and ITAM reflects both opportunity and constraint. Nearly three-quarters of respondents (**71%**) describe AI as either “very important” or “rather important” for success in ITSM, suggesting strong overall interest. Yet only **12%** say they aren’t using AI in any capacity within IT operations, indicating a clear majority are exploring at least some use cases, even if adoption is still in early stages.



HOW IMPORTANT IS AI IN YOUR ITSM STRATEGY?

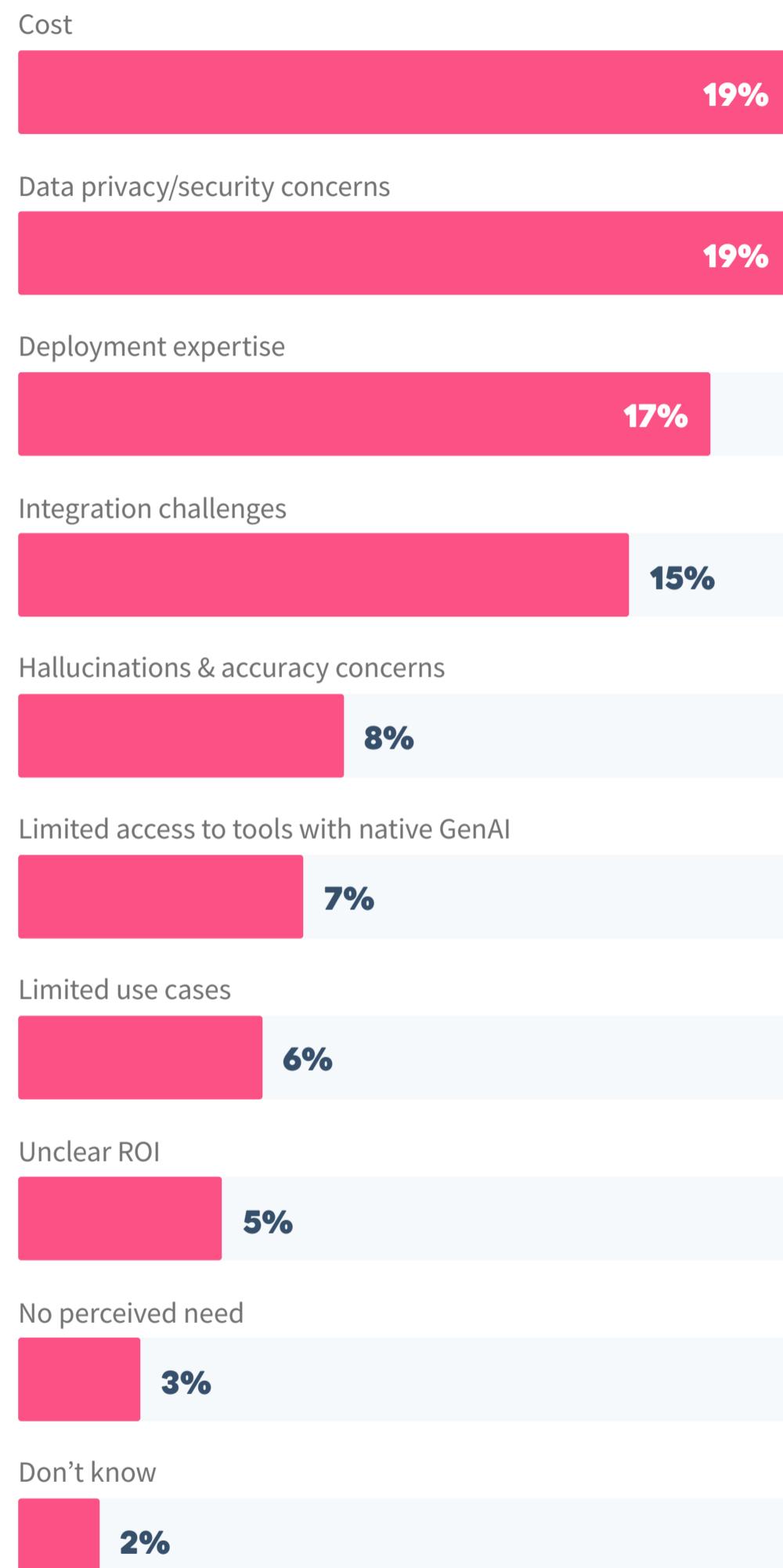


HOW ARE YOU USING AI IN ITSM OR ITAM?



Where AI is being applied, its use tends to concentrate around improving tactical efficiency. The most commonly cited areas include IT asset tracking and reporting (**35%**), automating repetitive tasks (**34%**), and analyzing IT trends to inform decision making (**33%**). These applications align with the needs identified throughout the survey—specifically the desire to reduce errors, improve responsiveness, and gain better visibility across the IT environment. They also reflect a practical approach: many SMBs appear to be deploying AI not as a disruptive force, but as a complement to existing workflows.

WHAT'S HOLDING YOU BACK FROM USING GENERATIVE AI?



AI is also playing a role in enhancing end-user support. Nearly one in four organizations (**24%**) report using AI-powered chatbots, while others are applying AI to classify and route tickets (**21%**) or generate knowledge base articles (**18%**). These capabilities may be especially valuable in environments where limited IT staff must manage growing ticket volumes, a top challenge reported by **25%** of respondents.

However, the survey also reveals several factors that may be slowing broader adoption. Cost, as well as data privacy and security, were tied as the top two obstacles to deploying Generative AI in IT operations, each cited by **19%** of respondents. A lack of knowledge or expertise (**17%**) and integration challenges with existing IT systems (**15%**) also ranked high, echoing earlier findings about tool fragmentation and limited ITSM/ITAM integration. Even among those open to AI, concerns around "hallucinations" and data accuracy (**8%**), unclear ROI (**5%**), and limited use cases (**6%**) point to a cautious and pragmatic mindset.

Notably, the level of AI adoption appears to reflect the broader state of ITSM maturity. While nearly half of respondents say their ITSM processes are "well-structured," only **12%** describe their approach as "fully mature." In that context, it's perhaps unsurprising that AI is being used primarily to support existing operations rather than transform them. Without mature ITSM or ITAM systems in place, AI adoption may remain limited to narrow use cases where benefits are immediate and easy to quantify.

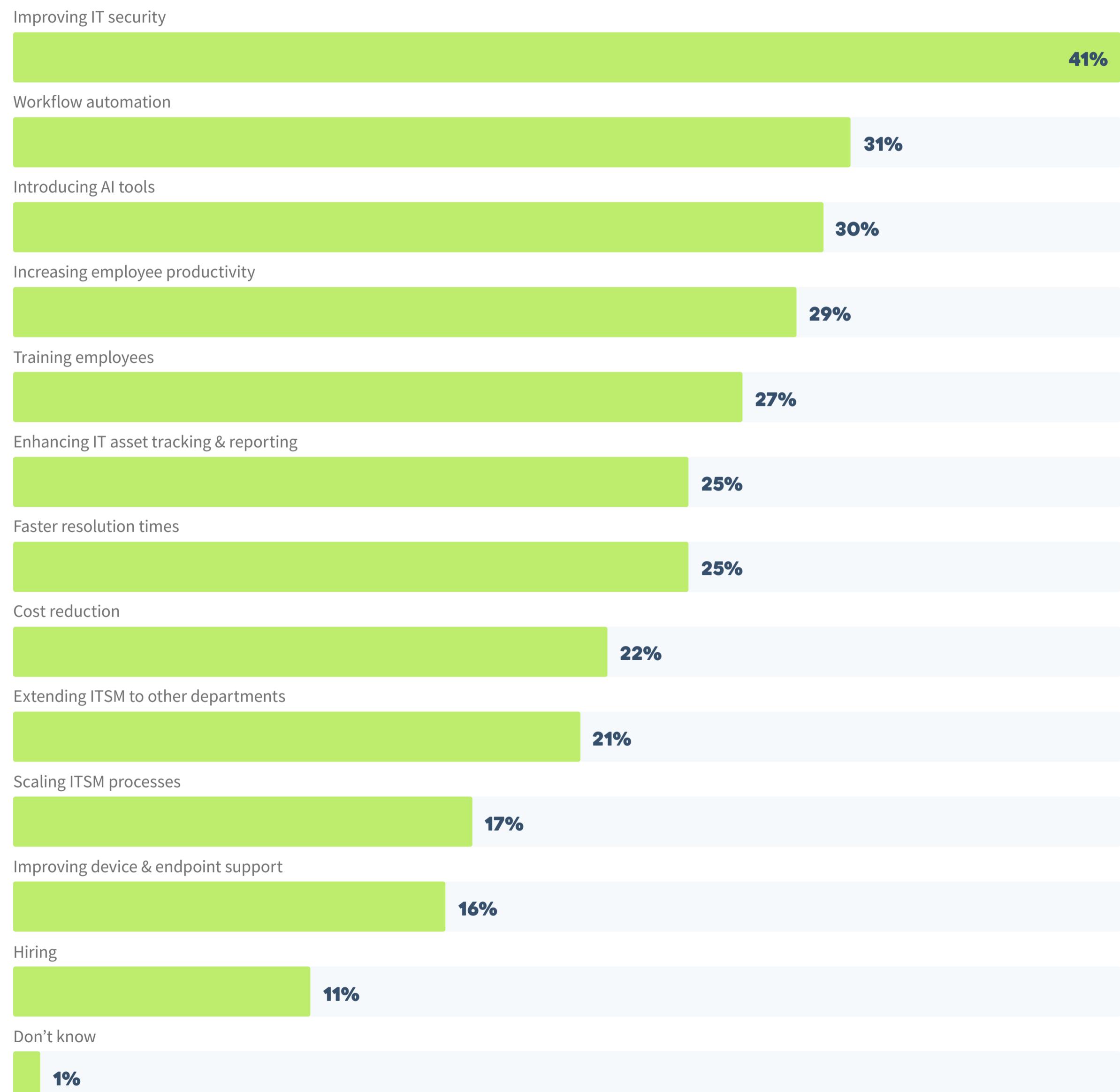
CHAPTER 5

CHARTING THE PATH FORWARD: WHERE SMBS ARE INVESTING IN 2026

If fragmentation, resource constraints, and cautious experimentation have been the norm, SMBs' priorities for the next 12 months suggest a shift toward building greater resilience and strategic value. The focus for the coming year is not just about addressing gaps—but about positioning IT to support broader business ambitions.

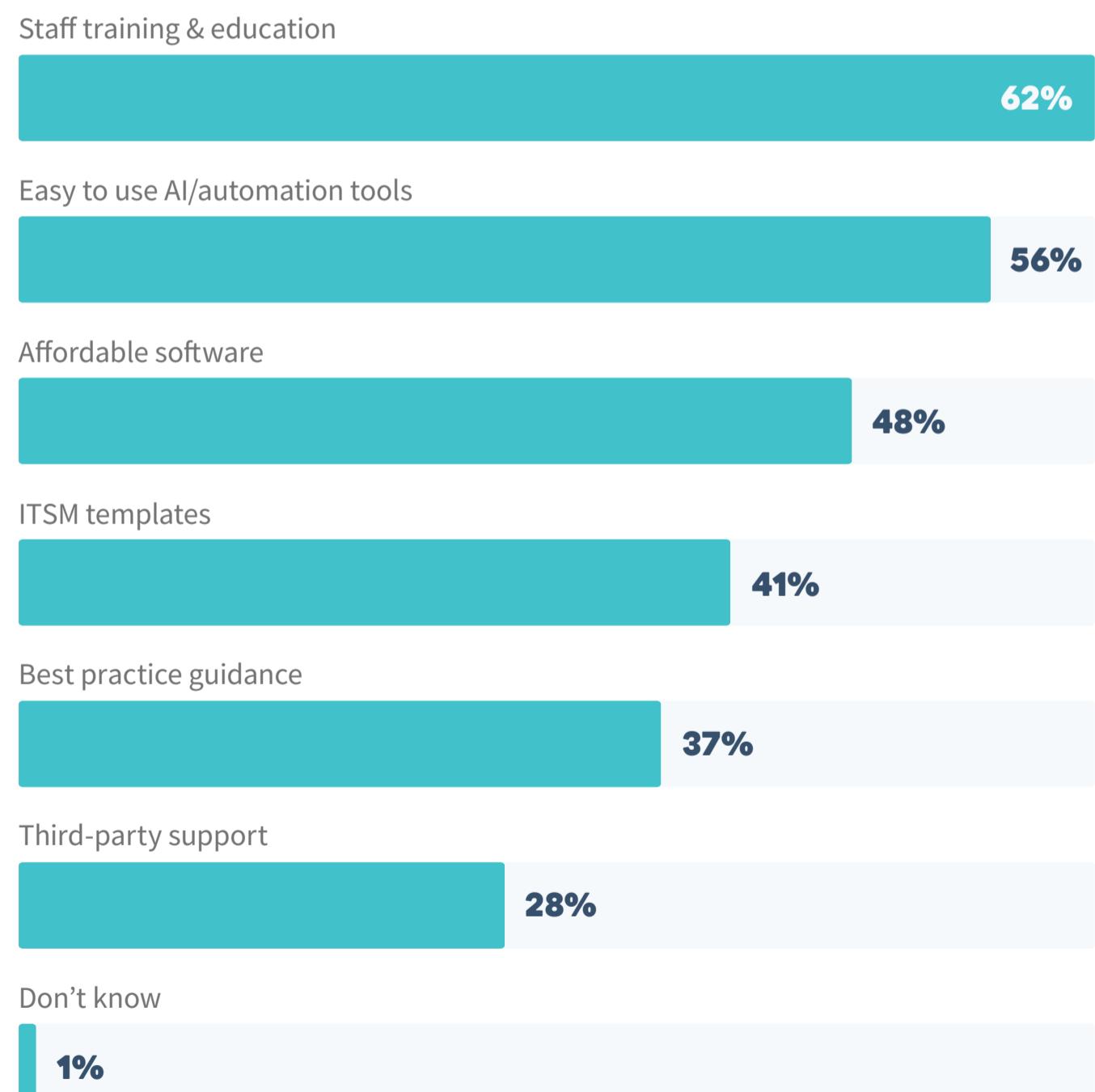
Security is the clear starting point. **41%** of SMBs rank improving IT security as their top priority, reflecting the demands of managing hybrid environments and safeguarding sensitive data. Thirty-one percent of organizations plan to automate IT workflows, matched by an almost equal share (**30%**) looking to introduce AI tools or services to enhance efficiency. Nearly one-third (**29%**) aim to boost employee productivity with better IT tools. Combined with efforts to improve IT asset tracking and resolution times (**both 25%**), these priorities signal a practical, incremental approach to modernization that favors tangible gains over sweeping changes.

WHAT ARE YOUR TOP IT PRIORITIES FOR THE NEXT 12 MONTHS?

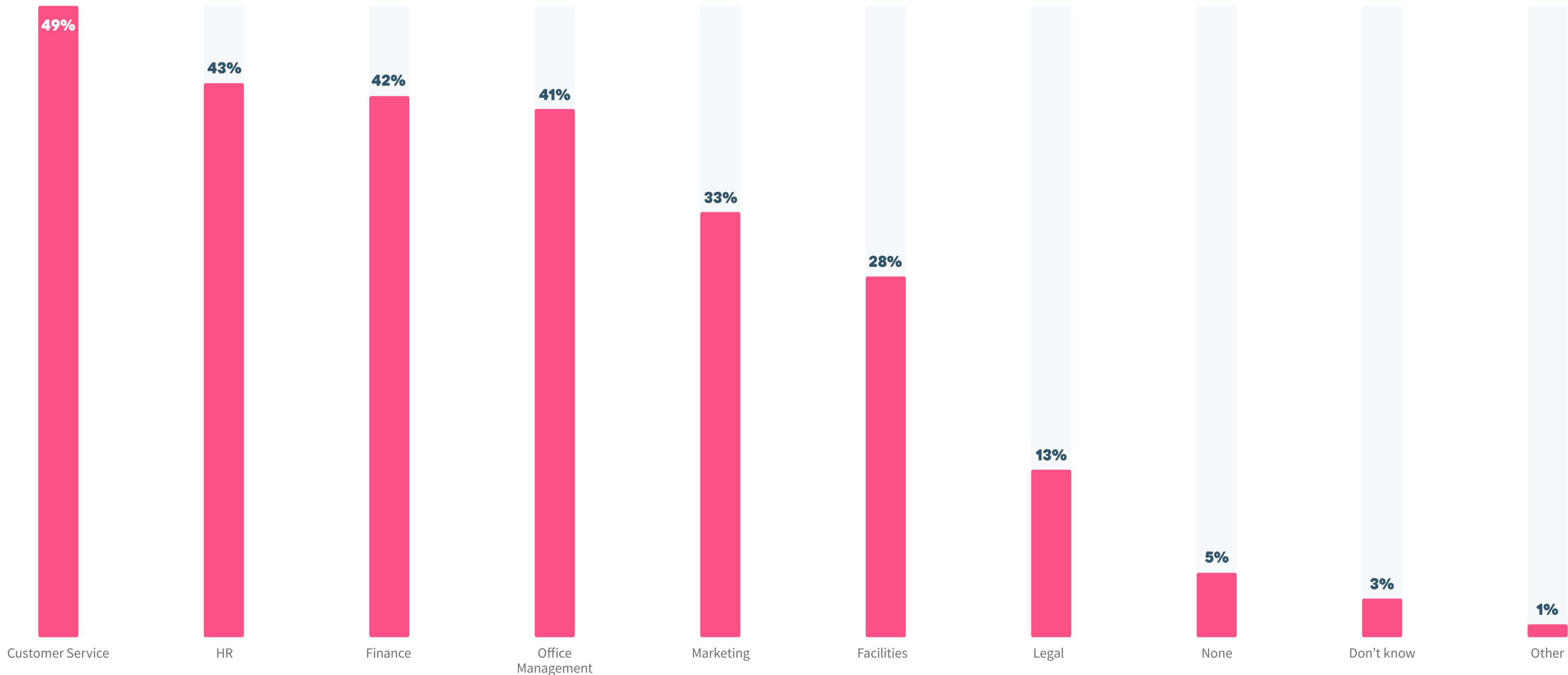


Delivering on these goals will require more than new technology. When it comes to the resources SMBs need to improve their ITSM practices, **62%** want training and education for staff, while **56%** cite easy-to-use AI and automation, and **48%** want affordable tools. These findings underscore a clear mandate: solutions must be intuitive, integrate easily with existing systems, and paired with guidance that enables rapid adoption and meaningful results.

WHAT WOULD HELP IMPROVE YOUR ITSM SUCCESS?



WHICH OTHER DEPARTMENTS USE ITSM-BASED TOOLS OR WORKFLOWS?



Finally, the extension of ITSM practices beyond IT continues to gain momentum. SMBs are applying structured workflows to departments like Customer Service (**49%**), HR (**43%**), Finance (**42%**), and Office Management (**41%**) to streamline service delivery and boost accountability. The outlook is one of cautious optimism—SMBs are aligning investments with priorities that promise measurable returns, advancing ITSM and ITAM through smart, sustainable modernization.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION: KEY INSIGHTS TO GUIDE SMB IT STRATEGIES IN 2026

IT is no longer a behind-the-scenes function but a frontline business enabler, especially in the AI era. But the road to modernization remains complex. In 2026, SMBs are encountering an IT landscape defined by both opportunity and friction. On one hand, there's broad recognition of ITSM's strategic value and strong interest in emerging technologies like AI. On the other, fragmented tools, talent shortages, and constrained budgets are real obstacles that continue to slow progress.

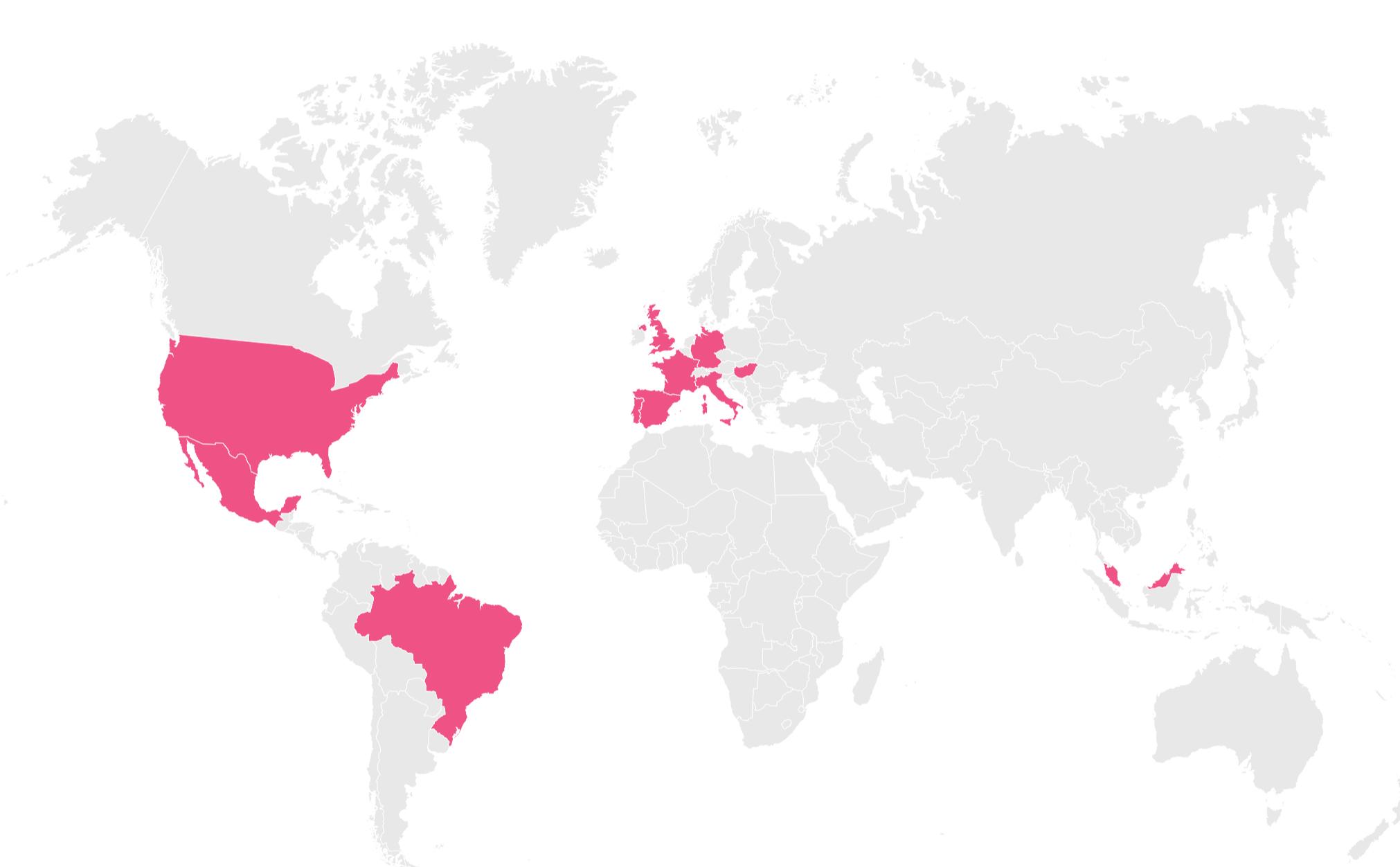
SMBs that succeed in 2026 won't necessarily be the biggest spenders—but those that can make deliberate, integrated moves to simplify operations, strengthen security, and empower teams with the right skills and tools. The priorities are shifting from “keeping up” to building resilience and creating business value.

KEY TAKEAWAYS FOR SMB LEADERS

- Integration is not negotiable: Fragmented systems are undermining efficiency, visibility, and service quality. Unifying ITSM, ITAM, monitoring, and remote support workflows should be a top priority to reduce redundancy and improve responsiveness.
- Practical AI adoption starts small: AI is gaining traction, but successful use cases focus on incremental improvements—automating repetitive tasks, enhancing reporting, and supporting end-user services. Start where the benefits are clear and measurable.
- Security demands sustained focus: Securing IT operations, especially in hybrid and distributed environments, is now the top priority. SMBs should balance technology investments with process improvements and regular staff training to mitigate risk.
- Invest in people, not just tools: Technology alone isn't enough. More than half of SMBs say training and education are critical to advancing ITSM maturity. Equip teams with both intuitive tools and the know-how to use them effectively. Consider meeting talent gaps by taking on IT services that support the solutions.
- Standardize beyond IT: Many SMBs are applying ITSM principles to functions like Customer Service, HR, and Finance to streamline service delivery. Extending structured workflows across departments can improve accountability and efficiency enterprise wide.
- Build for flexibility and scale: Whether through automation, cloud-based solutions, or AI-driven support, aim for systems that can adapt as business needs evolve without creating additional complexity.

ABOUT THE SURVEY

“The State of SMB IT for 2026” is based on an online survey conducted between March 14 and April 4, 2025 on behalf of EasyVista and OTRS Group. The survey gathered responses from 1,051 SMB leaders and IT professionals working at organizations with 51 to 1,000 employees in Brazil, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Malaysia, Mexico, Portugal, Spain, the United Kingdom and the United States of America.



34%
SMB Leaders - Executive Management

66%
IT Professionals - IT Service Management or Support



ABOUT EASYVISTA

EasyVista is a global technology company dedicated to empowering IT. With a long-standing commitment to innovation, security, and customer success, we help organizations transform data governance into a competitive advantage and navigate the AI revolution with confidence and agility. Our purpose-built platform delivers seamless automation, robust service management, and global scalability, enabling IT teams to standardize, secure, and optimize operations at scale. Now including OTRS Group, EasyVista expands its expertise in enterprise service management and security solutions. Trusted by leading organizations worldwide, EasyVista supports businesses in every industry in developing tailored solutions that enable them to thrive.



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