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Why It's Time to Refresh PCs: Performance, Security, and Sustainability Over AI Hype

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Abstract: AI PCs might dominate the headlines, but most organizations still care more about fundamentals like performance, security, and reliability. Modern hardware delivers clear gains in these areas while also advancing sustainability and repairability. For SMBs, refreshing PCs is about enabling productivity today and setting the stage for future AI use cases. Dell and Intel together provide the technology and services to make that transition practical and valuable.

The State of PC Refresh Cycles

For years, many organizations have chosen to extend PC refresh cycles to control costs rather than buying less expensive hardware at the same frequency. In 2023, prior to the introduction of AI PCs, research showed that 55% of organizations scaled back expenses by holding onto devices longer.¹ While most businesses still adhered to a three-year cycle or better (57%), another 39% noted they'd stretched refreshes to four or five years or longer.²

Shortly thereafter, market narratives shifted after the introduction of AI PCs. While the idea of AI-enabled endpoints is compelling, the reality is that most AI workloads today remain cloud-based, and developers are still learning how to make the most of local AI processing. For organizations of all sizes, this messaging can feel disconnected from day-to-day priorities. This is especially true for small and midmarket organizations.

Still, the presence of AI PCs has influenced refresh activity. Eighty percent of organizations reported that AI-capable endpoints prompted them to accelerate refresh cycles, with 32% calling the change significant.³ Yet when asked about the most important features in endpoint purchasing decisions, the familiar fundamentals lead the list: security (58%), performance (49%), and reliability (45%). Local AI hardware ranked fifteenth, cited by just 19% (see Figure 1).⁴

¹ Source: Enterprise Strategy Group Research Report, [Endpoint Device Trends: Evaluating a Shifting Desktop and Laptop Procurement, Management, OS, Feature, Application, and Spending Landscape](#), February 2024.

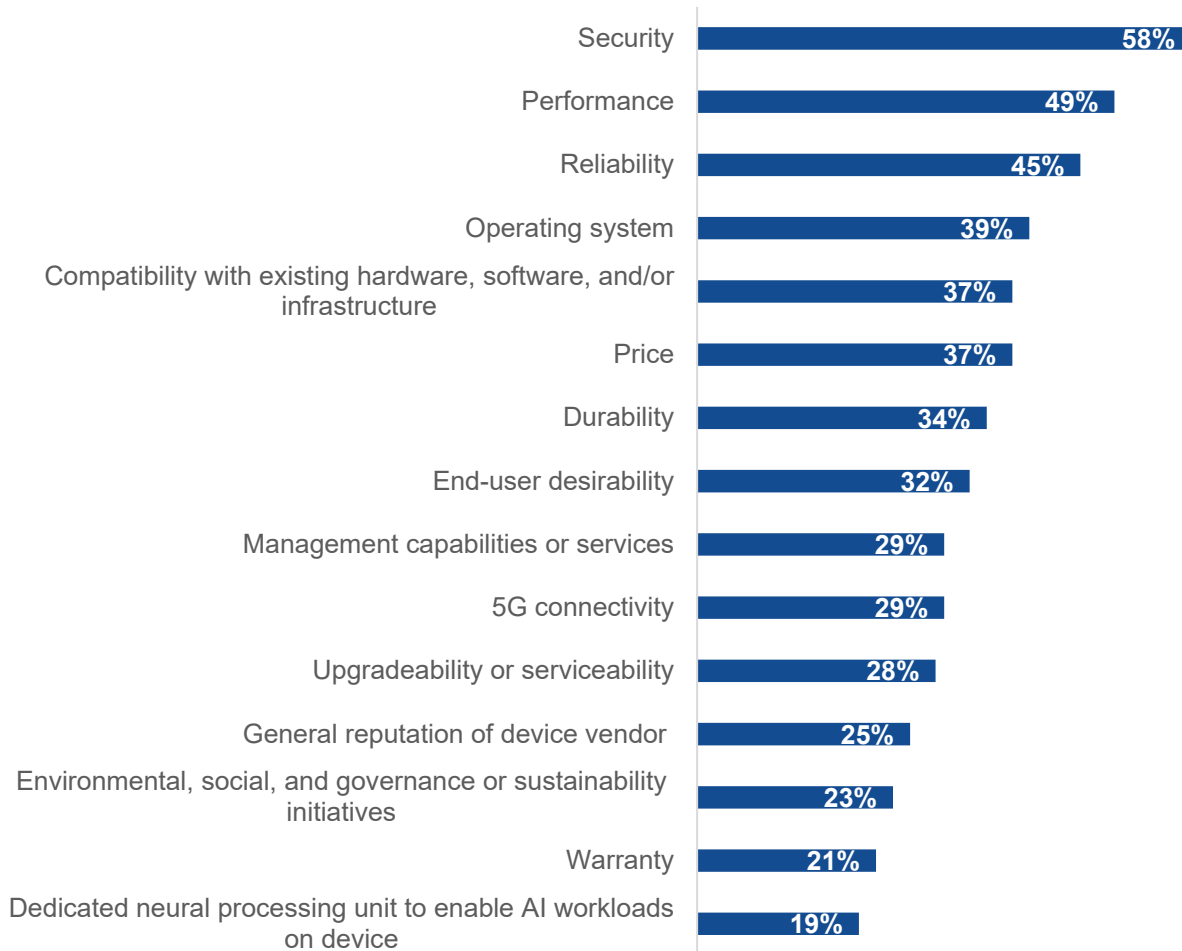
² Ibid.

³ Source: Enterprise Strategy Group Research Report, [AI at the Endpoint: The Impact of AI on End Users and Endpoint Devices](#), April 2025.

⁴ Ibid.

Figure 1. AI Hardware Is Not Yet in the Top 10 Features Driving Endpoint Decisions

Overall, when purchasing endpoints, what features/capabilities are important to your organization? Of the endpoint features/capabilities that are important to your organization, which is the most important? (Percent of respondents)



Source: Enterprise Strategy Group, now part of Omdia

So while AI hardware might not yet be a top purchasing factor, the devices built to support it deliver meaningful value today because the systems built to support AI workloads are also experiencing boosts that meet the productivity, performance, and reliability goals that are important to organizations today.

The latest generation of Dell PCs with Intel processors brings gains in efficiency, security, reliability, and sustainability—areas that SMBs consistently prioritize.

The True Value of Refreshing With Modern Hardware

While “AI PC” might be the headline term, the real story is that the hardware built to enable future AI also delivers immediate improvements where SMBs need them most. Faster systems that last longer on a charge, stronger protection against threats, devices designed to be repaired instead of replaced, and thoughtful use of sustainable materials all add up to more productive employees and more manageable fleets.

Performance and Efficiency

Intel Core Ultra processors are designed to balance speed and efficiency. Performance-cores (P-cores) handle heavy workloads, while Efficient-cores (E-cores) keep background processes running smoothly without burning through battery life. Integrated GPUs take care of everyday graphics needs, and a neural processing unit (NPU) enables certain AI tasks to run locally. Even before AI workloads become common, the NPU contributes by improving responsiveness, extending battery runtime, optimizing audio/video in meetings, and, increasingly, supporting endpoint security platforms.

Dell's engineering further extends these gains, with improved thermals and battery life. Enterprise Strategy Group research found that 85% of respondents said Dell laptops outperformed competitors in battery performance⁵—an outcome that matters directly to SMB employees who rely on mobility throughout the workday.

Security

Too often, the role of hardware in endpoint security is overlooked. The reality is that today's modern hardware has built-in, foundational security capabilities. Specifically, Dell and Intel build safeguards into the system itself, establishing trust the moment a device powers on. Secure Boot and Dell SafeBIOS confirm that only trusted software loads at startup. Intel's TPM 2.0 module stores encryption keys in hardware, and Intel Hardware Shield monitors CPU and memory behavior, using machine learning to detect ransomware, cryptojacking, and other threats early.

These protections work with modern endpoint detection and response tools, which are also beginning to leverage local NPU hardware to detect attacks without overtaxing performance or battery life. For SMBs without large IT security teams, the combination of hardware and software reduces exposure while minimizing day-to-day management.

Reliability, Repairability, and Sustainability

For many SMBs, reliability is nearly as important as raw performance. Dell addresses this by designing devices that are both durable and repairable. Modular components such as USB-C ports, batteries, and I/O boards, which can be swapped out in the field rather than sent in for repair or outright replaced. Common parts are accessible with few, if any, tools, and Dell even offers Dell AR Assistant, an augmented reality app that walks users through repairs.

These design choices have two important outcomes. First, they keep devices running reliably, something confirmed by Enterprise Strategy Group research, which showed 90% of Dell laptop customers and 89% of Dell desktop customers said Dell's device reliability outperforms rival devices.⁶ Second, they help extend the life of the hardware. When a port fails or a battery wears out, simple field repairs can keep the device in service longer, reducing costs and getting more value from each purchase.

Sustainability also plays a role in endpoint strategy decisions, and Dell's design approach helps make it attainable. Smaller mainboards reduce material use, field-replaceable components prevent e-waste, and recycled and renewable materials lower environmental impact. Together, these choices support Dell's circularity strategy, reclaiming and reusing materials without sacrificing durability. And while sustainability might not be a make-or-break factor in overall endpoint device strategy, 84% of respondents in 2024 said sustainability was important or very important in device decisions.⁷

⁵ Enterprise Strategy Group custom research commissioned by Dell, *Dell Commercial Desktops and Laptops Deliver Reliability and Satisfaction Advantage: Enterprise Strategy Group Research Findings*, May 2025.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Enterprise Strategy Group custom research commissioned by Dell, *NEXT-GEN COMPUTING: AI PCs and the Need for Professional Services Are Reshaping the Competitive Landscape for Client Devices in the SMB Market*, December 2024.

Finally, Dell's Asset Recovery Services helps to close the loop, providing secure wipe and responsible resale or recycling for retired systems, including non-Dell hardware.

Manageability for IT

Management rounds out the value story. Intel vPro enables out-of-band remote access, including KVM control, so administrators can diagnose and fix systems even when the OS is unresponsive or the device is asleep. That capability shortens escalations tied to boot issues, blue screens, and driver failures without a desk-side visit.

Dell SupportAssist sits on the device and collects telemetry on health and configuration. It uses analytics to monitor hardware and software status and can predict events like battery or storage failures. When paired with Dell's support entitlements like ProSupport Plus, it can automatically create cases that lead to quick resolution with minimal downtime or disruption.

Conclusion

Extending PC refresh cycles might seem like a cost-saving move, but doing so often leaves employees working on systems that are less secure, harder to manage, and more prone to failure. Modern devices show why refreshing is less about chasing hype and more about delivering value today. Performance and battery life improvements keep workers productive. Hardware-based security and integrated manageability reduce IT strain. Design choices that emphasize reliability, repairability, and sustainability extend device life, while supporting broader organizational goals.

Modern Dell devices with Intel Core Ultra processors deliver the performance, security, and reliability improvements that matter most today, while also introducing more flexible, repairable designs that incorporate thoughtful sustainability measures. Plus, they're ready to support local AI workloads as they become practical.

For SMBs weighing their next refresh, investing in modern Dell PCs with Intel Core Ultra processors is a practical step that improves productivity, security, and manageability now and ensures the organization is ready for what comes next.

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