HotTopics

# The HotTopics Technology Buyer's Shortlist

2026

*The technology partners winning the trust of the C-suite*

HotTopics

# Table of contents


Table of contents 2

Introduction 3

The top 10 technology partners 7

The HotTopics technology ecosystem 12

The ones to watch: Specialists, challengers and rising signals 14

What leaders expect from technology partners 18

HotTopics

# Introduction

## Trust is becoming the ultimate barometer for C-suite relationships

B2B technology buying is becoming increasingly complex. There are larger buyer committees to influence, slower product cycles to navigate and greater boardroom uncertainty at a time when markets are being disrupted by artificial intelligence, geopolitical instability and economic constraints.

With these investments carrying significant financial - and personal - risk, technology leaders can ill afford to get decisions wrong.

Despite this, their decision-making on technology investments continues to be clouded by an increasingly competitive marketplace. New, untested entrants, marketing hype and a deluge of information across all channels also contribute to the noise.

Keeping up with this is almost a full-time job in itself: CIOs, CTOs, CDOs and CISOs are inundated with emails, cold calls from prospective partners, pushy sales executives at transactional events and analyst reports funded or influenced by the vendor community. Given this, it is little surprise that *HotTopics* community members have said that they're finding it increasingly difficult to know who (or what) to trust.

One member recently said that they simply no longer trusted outside information; they were basing their investment decisions almost solely on the recommendations of their peers. Another spoke of becoming an 'intelligent customer', as well as the criticality of educating yourself about market dynamics in order to justify investment decisions to the board, and yourself.

*"It's important to be able to distinguish when a partner is really adding value to your thought process, and when that's diluted through marketing."*

## The Technology Buyer's Shortlist

From this, the *HotTopics* Technology Buyer's Shortlist was born: a neutral, peer-to-peer guide helping digital, data, technology and security executives make smarter technology decisions.

As part of our Technology Leadership Benchmark report, where we surveyed 125 digital, data, technology and security leaders on everything from business priorities to future investments, we also asked them to celebrate the top partners helping them to drive digital business transformation.

Following on from this exercise, conducted between October 2025 and April 2026, another 30 executives provided in-depth qualitative analysis throughout the summer on their chosen providers - and how they were helping them to move the dial.

## Selection methodology

The *HotTopics* Technology Buyer's Shortlist sifts through more than 200 recommended partners, shining the spotlight on the 10 partners who received the most recommendations, the top 45 providers across the technology stack (see the *HotTopics* Technology Ecosystem below) and the 'ones to watch' - emerging start-ups and scale-ups who received positive quantitative and qualitative feedback throughout this process.

Company aliases or acronyms have been consolidated before ranking and, in the *HotTopics* Technology Ecosystem, companies have also been grouped by their primary area of expertise. Organisations had to meet a numerical threshold of recommendations to be included in the Technology Ecosystem.

*"The vendors who stand out are the ones **investing in the relationship, not speed-dating**."*

*"The suppliers that stood out didn't just talk about themselves. They **tried to solve real business problems and show how they could help us deliver**."*

*"Don't turn our community into a sales funnel. **Earn your seat by adding insight, not by buying access**."*

## The findings, at a glance:

The leaders:



**125** respondents, plus **30** qualitative leader insights



**68%** in CIO/CTO/CISO positions



**89%** work in enterprise organisations with 500 or more employees



**38%** have global technology responsibility and budgets

Top investment priority: **Artificial Intelligence**

Biggest challenge: **Limited budgets and resources**

Top business priority: **Operational efficiency and cost reduction**

**The providers:**

Most recommended technology partner: Microsoft

Most recommended cloud providers: aws Microsoft

Most recommended enterprise platform: salesforce

Most recommended data platform: snowflake

Most recommended cybersecurity platform: CROWDSTRIKE

Most recommended AI platform: OpenAI

Most recommended consulting partner: IBM

Most recommended start-up or scaleup: CYERA

# The top 10 recommended partners

## 1. Microsoft




Microsoft is widely praised as being an indispensable *"strategic and delivery partner"* across its entire ecosystem, with Microsoft 365, Azure and Dynamics the prominent figures in the positive commentary we received.

Leaders highlighted that Microsoft is *"willing to go above and beyond"* and offers *"continual development in capabilities"* across an integrated ecosystem of cloud, workplace, data, security and AI applications connecting IT and business functions.

Specific products like Microsoft Defender (which is part of Microsoft 365) were noted as being *"highly effective at security and compliance,"* while Microsoft Copilot was celebrated as *"amazing for improving productivity and efficiency in BAU processes."*

Microsoft appears heavily favoured in certain sectors, such as financial services, where the Redmond giant is seen as the strategic partner to driving growth, resilience and regulatory compliance, rather than simply providing more technology products.

One leader humorously, but perhaps fairly, summarised their relationship as: *"love them or hate them, can't live without them,"* something we've also heard at recent *HotTopics* Food for Thought sessions - along with some concerns on license upgrades, price increases and expedited product releases.

## 2. AWS (Amazon)




Celebrated for its robust cloud infrastructure and varied marketplace, AWS is highly regarded in the *HotTopics* community for its customer-first mindset and rapid product development, as well as the flexibility and scalability of its platforms and applications.

Surveyed leaders noted that AWS is *"always customer-focused," "monitors our usage to help us optimise"* and is *"willing to share investments and operations to reach great [business] outcomes."*

One technology leader remarked that *"every vendor could learn from AWS's customer-centric approach,"* although another noted that such *"critical infrastructure"* does come at *"high cost."*

During recent *HotTopics* events, other leaders have praised AWS for the quality of their senior executives and product specialists, and their robust governance frameworks on AI ethics and trust.

## 3. Salesforce

CRM behemoth Salesforce is highly rated for its *"customer focus, account management, and product breadth."* The company is viewed as a leading platform for customer relationship management (CRM), with advanced AI-powered CRM capabilities which *"quickly enable value."*

*HotTopics* members spoke positively of Salesforce offering market leading software in contract, lead management and account management, supported by dedicated and skilled support teams.

During recent *HotTopics* executive roundtables, Salesforce has been framed as less of a CRM and more as the data and knowledge backbone to give AI agents the contextualisation in order to understand the business. *(Disclaimer: Salesforce is a HotTopics client).*

*"Being recognised as a top partner by the HotTopics community is a real privilege — and a reflection of the trust tech leaders place in Salesforce to help them navigate what's next. It echoes something I hear constantly from our customers: every business is sitting on trapped value - insight and context locked away in departmental silos,"* said Paul O'Sullivan, Senior Vice President Solutions, Salesforce UK.

*"Unlocking that is exactly where Salesforce comes in. We're the data and knowledge backbone that brings it all together, so when an agent truly understands the context behind your business, daily operations become simpler and every customer gets a consistently exceptional experience."*

## 4. Google

Google was recognised as a *"strong strategic partner"* which helps organisations achieve their business targets.

Key themes in the feedback include Google's *"scale, innovation, and customer focus."* Leaders appreciate Google's professional, reliable services and its collaborative tools, specifically highlighting its Workplace suite. In recent *HotTopics* sessions, we have also heard about Google's advanced deep learning capabilities and some member success with Gemini.

## 5. CrowdStrike

Widely praised in the cybersecurity domain, technology and security leaders described CrowdStrike's post-sales support and account management as *"brilliant"* and its technology as being *"the best out there."*

Respondents rely heavily on the CrowdStrike Falcon XDR platform for securing endpoint devices and servers globally, citing its *"real-time threat detection and incident response capabilities"* and noting that they are *"massively supportive in multiple Infosec areas."*

One respondent said that Crowdstrike provided *"scalable protection and visibility across increasingly distributed technology environments"*.

## 6. IBM

'Big Blue' is still regarded as a *"trusted"* and expert partner in deep domains.

Leaders highlighted IBM's capabilities in helping companies to *"innovate and... reimagine their businesses"* in the AI era, supporting successful business outcomes with expertise and strategic guidance.

## 7. Snowflake

Highly rated for data warehousing, adaptability, reliability and interoperability, leaders appreciated Snowflake's *"great focus on getting to our outcome"* and its *"innovation evolution,"* with one respondent specifically praising the direction of CEO, Sridhar Ramaswamy.

## 8. Cisco

Recognised as the leader in the network connectivity space, leaders value Cisco as a reliable *"strategic partner"* and a *"good to have with you"* presence in complex on-premise and cloud infrastructure environments.

*HotTopics* community members endorsed Cisco's maturity, reliability and breadth in enterprise networking and security platforms, its cutting-edge continuous innovation (including opportunities for customers to share capabilities) and, critically, excellent SLAs: 99.9% system availability and over 90% customer satisfaction.

## 9. Databricks

Databricks stands out in the *HotTopics* community for combining an accessible, comprehensive data platform with a highly collaborative service model.

Leaders praised its ease of use, strong data capabilities and breadth of functionality, alongside regular engagement and hands-on support.

One organisation is working with Databricks to develop an innovative edge-based agentic AI use case, demonstrating the strength of the partnership beyond the core product. Community respondents also valued the company's continued reinvestment in product innovation.

## 10. SAP

SAP is acknowledged as *"still the most complete and integrated business software"* with unmatched scale in the enterprise.

While one respondent referred to it as a *"necessary evil,"* they emphasised its indispensable scale, robust integration for business operations and platforms like S4HANA becoming critical operational backbones for complex, multi-national organisations.

With SAP building out of its Business Transformation Suite (with the Signavio, LeanIX and WalkMe acquisitions) the company is now more actively showing up in *HotTopics* conversations as giving CIOs the visibility they need for genuine business transformation. *(Disclaimer: SAP is a HotTopics client).*

# The HotTopics Technology Ecosystem

The following technology providers received the most recommendations from the *HotTopics* community and have been grouped by their primary area of expertise across the tech stack. Brand variants have been consolidated where appropriate.

## AI & Foundation models

OpenAI

## Business applications & experience

Adobe · ATLASSIAN · Epic · ORACLE · salesforce · SAP · servicenow

## Cloud & infrastructure

aws · CDW · Google · IBM · Microsoft · NUTANIX · NVIDIA

## Consulting & transformation

accenture · avanade · Cognizant · Deloitte. · EY · HCL · Infosys · intercity · KPMG · NTT DATA · pwc · tcs · transparity · wipro

## Cybersecurity

CLOUDFLARE · CROWDSTRIKE · CYERA · FORTINET · mimecast · paloalto NETWORKS · WIZ · zscaler

## Data & analytics

CONFLUENT · databricks · dynatrace · Informatica · sigma · snowflake

## Networking

cisco · hp

HotTopics

# The ones to watch

## Specialists, challengers and rising signals

*(Editor's note: Many of the organisations below did not meet the numerical threshold for inclusion in the HotTopics Technology Ecosystem, but received positive commentary throughout the quantitative and qualitative analysis.)*

As technology leaders look beyond incumbent vendors to drive specialised innovation, a distinct cohort of agile start-ups and scale-ups are emerging as our *"ones to watch."*

In the high-stakes areas of cloud security and AI governance, fast-growing scale-ups like data security management platform **Cyera** are gaining traction. Backed by venture capital firms Sequoia Capital and Accel, Cyera was valued at nearly $9 billion at the end of last year.

Prior to its $32 billion acquisition by Google, **Wiz** had also been highlighted as a *"seriously impressive outfit to deal with"* in the cloud security space. Leaders praised Wiz for having an *"amazing product that just works"* and technology that *"does what it says on the tin and better than everyone else."*

Niche startups are also stepping up to solve immediate, and complex, compliance headaches.

For instance, pre-seed start-up **AIWarden** was specifically commended by respondents for helping enterprises *"control our AI governance and be compliant towards the regulator,"* sitting alongside specialised cyber risk players like **Threatspike** (London-based, Series A funding), **Black Kite** (Boston, Mass-based, Series B), and threat intelligence start-up **Cyb3r Operations** (London, seed funding).

In the data ecosystem, leaders are looking to specialised infrastructure and observability tools to modernise their stacks.

Cloud-native analytics platform **Sigma** (series E, now valued at $3 billion) earned several citations, while emerging innovators like **Atlan** (active metadata), **Sifflet** (data observability), and **Dash0** (the Series B, developer-centric observability platform which was valued at $1 billion earlier this year) are being tapped to build more resilient, real-time data architectures.

Similarly, specialised AI workflow platforms like **Moveworks** caught the eye of tech leaders looking for targeted, enterprise-grade automation rather than broader foundational models. Moveworks was acquired by ServiceNow in December 2025.

More broadly, **Writer's** full-stack enterprise generative AI platform was called out for its scalability and regulatory positioning.

Finally, as enterprises seek more agile execution and controlled costs in the face of broader market disruption, progressive boutique consultancies are winning over more traditional global system integrators.

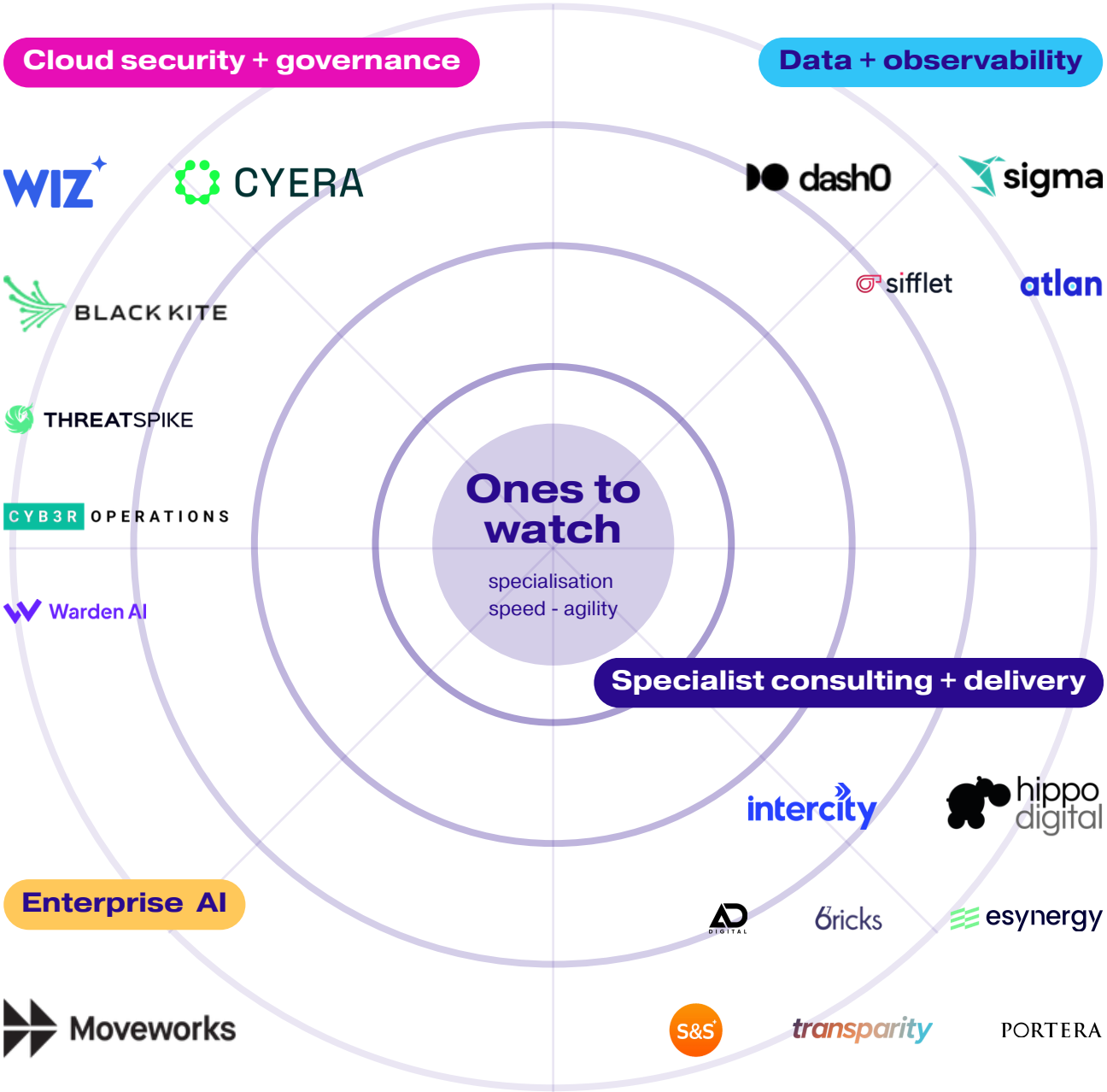
Pure-play cloud specialists like **Transparity** and managed service providers like **Intercity** also earned several citations for their targeted expertise.

Meanwhile, specialised (and largely regional) digital enablement firms such as **ANDdigital**, **Hippo Digital**, **67bricks**, and **Sullivan & Stanley** are being actively utilised to bridge internal tech skill gaps, drive user-centered service design and modernise digital operating models with a speed and specialisation that larger consultancies simply cannot match.

Netherlands-based **Portera** was highlighted for being an agile management consultant specialising in practical AI solution delivery, while UK-based platform, data, cloud engineering and AI consultancy **eSynergy** was celebrated for building out data platforms on Snowflake, and supporting new AI models. *(disclaimer: eSynergy is a HotTopics client)*

## The specialists, challengers and rising signals

Earning positive commentary from entreprise technology leaders



# What leaders expect from technology partners

Throughout this exercise, *HotTopics* has compiled best practices for how technology partners can win the hearts and minds of our C-suite technology leaders.

This insight has been gathered through the quantitative feedback as part of the Technology Leaders Benchmark, as well as qualitative interviews forming the basis of the Tech Buyer's Shortlist.

*"My advice to technology vendors is simple: understand the business outcomes we are trying to achieve before proposing technology,"* said **Kirsty Mason, CIO at The Go-Ahead Group**.

*"The strongest partners take time to understand our operational challenges, regulatory obligations and long-term strategy, then demonstrate clearly how they can reduce complexity, manage risk and deliver measurable value.*

*"Equally important is building trust over time. CIOs are looking for partners who are transparent, realistic about what can be achieved, and willing to work collaboratively across business, technology and supplier ecosystems rather than simply focusing on the next sale."*

**Howard Miller, CIO at UCLA Anderson School of Management**, agrees: *"I'm looking for a business partner, someone who wants to win together with me. Plain and simple.*

*"I value transparency and authenticity; this is less about a transaction and more about a longer-term partnership for our mutual success."*

Other executives have said much the same, arguing that *"if you can't talk to the business problem, you're just another vendor"* and that peer insights help turn the dial; *"If another CIO tells me it works in a similar mess to mine, I'll listen."*

Similarly, selling and consultation is one thing, delivery is quite another.

*"Don't sell to me and disappear. The real work is me selling this into my own organisation,"* said one executive recently.

Another, working in the UK public sector, spoke positively of working with a cloud security provider who spent the first engagements on strategy and prioritisation, not even mentioning products or solutions.

*"Output defines execution. The shift to output-driven execution creates true product differentiation"* added a **CISO at a CEE-based financial services firm**, who asked to remain anonymous.

## The ten principles for earning a place on the C-suite shortlist:

- **Lead with outcomes, not features:** Tie everything to revenue, risk, resilience and/or regulatory impact.
- **Act as an orchestration partner:** Help simplify and integrate the existing technology stack, rather than simply adding another tool.
- **Think long-term, not quarter-end:** Invest in relationships and trust so you're on the shortlist 6–18 months out.
- **Design PoCs as proof of value, not demos:** Use real data, real constraints and clear KPIs the CFO believes.
- **Reduce complexity and risk:** Show concretely how you simplify architecture, operations and exposure.
- **Understand governance and regulation:** Arrive fluent in the customer's regulatory, data and legacy reality.
- **Be transparent and explainable:** No black boxes; make it easy for CIOs/CTOs/CDOs/CISOs to defend you to boardrooms, auditors and regulators.
- **Sell to the whole committee:** Help align business, IT/security and finance, not just charm a single sponsor.
- **Use AI and cloud responsibly:** Avoid hype and licence pressure; focus on adoption, guardrails and practical usage.
- **Add value in communities and events:** Solve real problems, share insight and never treat the community as a sales funnel.

The *HotTopics* Tech Buyer's List shows that technology leaders don't have to go it alone when making the right decisions for their organisation. Through the trusted recommendations of their peers, they can make smart decisions which modernise their organisations for today and tomorrow.