

Charting the course towards authentic customer connection

How Esri navigated their digital transformation and accelerated revenue growth



Founded 1969

Staff of 4,500 with 49 offices worldwide
Based in Redlands, California
esri.com

50% of Fortune 500 companies use Esri

Products:

- [Adobe Analytics >](#)
- [Adobe Audience Manager >](#)
- [Adobe Experience Manager >](#)
- [Adobe Target >](#)
- [Intelligent Services >](#)

Objectives

- Accelerate revenue growth and market share through personalization
- Improve web experience and page performance
- Deliver relevant content and drive engagement

Results

- 60% increase in unique web visitors
- 70% reduction in file size on desktop, 8% on mobile
- 25% increase in conversions

“That’s the answer — creating a relevant customer journey. It’s like a light bulb turns on when our customers realize that we really care about them. And when our message resonates with customers, they care about what we’re doing, too.”

Steve Schultz
Head of Marketing Technology, Esri

At the intersection of cartography and data, you’ll find Esri, the company that put geographic information systems (GIS) on the map. As the software that underscores the vast majority of digital maps, Esri is responsible for what they call “location intelligence” — turning otherwise static maps into reservoirs of information that can be used for urban planning, predicting climate change, finding rover paths on Mars, pinpointing loci of racial inequality, and so much more. While not precisely a household name, it’s likely you’ve interacted with the company if you’ve ever used a digital map.

Today, the importance of Esri’s work is more visible than ever in their contributions toward solving the COVID-19 pandemic. As part of the company’s mission, the Esri Disaster Response Program offers organizations data, software, configurable applications, and technical support — free of cost for emergency GIS operations. The

World Health Organization and Johns Hopkins University, among many other institutions, are currently using Esri technology, trends, and insights in the fight against the global crisis. Their contributions during the pandemic — along with their recent digital transformation — are helping the company develop the reputation it deserves.

With a long-standing history as a global leader in location intelligence, there's no GIS organization that's better prepared to help solve major global issues than Esri. The company has been around for over 50 years, during which they've worked with over half of Fortune 500 companies and been named one of Fast Company's "Most Innovative Companies." Within their field, they are celebrated for their product ArcGIS, the gold standard in mapping and analytics platforms. From their humble beginnings as a land-use consulting firm to working with NASA to make maps of planets, Esri has come a long way in helping people understand — and make better decisions about — physical space.

Over the past five years, Esri has charted a course toward improved customer experiences with the objective of accelerating revenue growth. With five decades of history behind them, the company has been working to bring their marketing prowess up to speed with their location intelligence technology. At the helm of this ambitious project is Steve Schultz — the martech guru with a mission to get Esri technology into more hands than ever before.



Setting the stage for transformation

"Esri is one of the coolest companies to work for because we do so much good in the world. Our customers are solving for things we're not even aware our technology can do. Then, we're mapping planets with NASA on top of that," said Schultz.

Before Schultz joined Esri in 2014, he didn't know the impact the organization was making worldwide — nor could he predict how his vision would help extend that impact across the globe. Bringing over two decades of marketing technology experience along with him, Schultz had all the skills necessary to quickly move the company in the right direction. But Schultz knew that, as a decades-old organization with a well-established culture, his approach would need to be judicious and strategic. He started with a simple audit of Esri's marketing tools.

What Schultz found was that, like many companies, Esri faced the challenge of silos — siloed data, siloed assets, and a siloed organizational structure. To add complexity to the situation, Esri's business model relied on more than 80 global distributors, which amplified the siloed nature of the organization. Without a centralized marketing platform, data and assets were scattered across the company. And with over 100 different marketing technology products, it was hard for their internal marketing team to stay aligned. To meet their goal of accelerating revenue growth, Esri would have to double down on customer experience. But this seemed impossible without a platform that could take Esri's marketing to the next level.

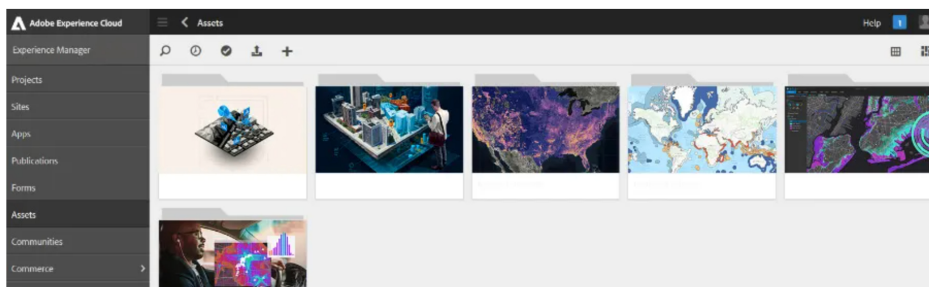
While the company had risen to great heights in their existing state, a true digital transformation would require the organization to shift attitudes not just toward technology, but toward the organizational structure itself.

Building a culture to support customer experience

Esri's CEO, Jack Dangermond, is a well-known advocate for creating human connections in the digital age. Drawing inspiration from the company's leader, Schultz initiated a culture transformation at Esri as the precursor to the company's digital transformation. The siloed organizational structure at Esri had created distance between leaders and their teams. By breaking down siloes and creating connections internally first, Esri could structure a new, customer-focused approach to marketing.

"It's essential to start with change management to enable people to leverage new technology," said Schultz. While Schultz and team were laying out a plan for Esri's digital transformation, the company engaged change management and data stewardship specialists to help prepare the company for new technology — and a whole new way of working. The endeavor was a grand success. Per Schultz, "We changed the culture here. The objectives and key results we all strive for come from the CEO and CMO on down. That didn't happen five years ago."

With Esri's culture and operations shaping up to support large-scale change, Schultz faced the question of where and how to start bringing new technology into the company. "I knew that we had to take a platform approach," said Schultz. He had narrowed his plan down to four focus areas: marketing automation, customer relationship management, digital asset management, and web content management. Already familiar with [Adobe Experience Cloud](#), Schultz anticipated that Adobe technology would provide Esri with a holistic solution that would enable their digital transformation — and facilitate his CEO's imperative for creating deeper human connections. The only question was where to start.



Setting up the not-so-basic building blocks

To ease Esri into a new world of marketing technology, Schultz decided to start with digital asset management (DAM). With [Adobe Experience Manager Assets](#), he could help the company break down the silos that prevented their assets from being as useful as possible and slowed down their workflows with time-intensive tagging and maintenance. Between almost 1 million assets and Esri's 88 distributors, the company needed a solution to keep things organized and moving fast. In Schultz's estimation, Adobe Experience Manager Assets would quickly show Esri what a profound difference the right technology could make with a culture to support it. "I said, 'Let's start deploying the DAM immediately,'" Schultz said.

His plan worked.

Esri's assets went from unruly to streamlined. Previously, their assets numbering close to 1 million were spread over numerous databases. This made it difficult to source, share, control, and edit assets across the company and with their distributors. "Before, we didn't have a formal way to ensure our partners were using, say, the right Esri logo file. People would save old files to their hard drive and push those out," said Schultz. And without asset management, issues like duplicates were all too common. This added unnecessary bulk to their storage and made sourcing the right assets overly complex. But with Adobe Experience Manager Assets in place, the difference was profound.

"We have close to a million assets in our DAM. With the duplicate detection feature in Adobe Experience Manager Assets, we reduced the number of assets by 25%. Now, we can ensure brand compliance that we couldn't have achieved previously."

Steve Schultz

Head of Marketing Technology, Esri

The benefits to the Esri brand were immediately palpable. Not only did Adobe Experience Manager Assets make brand consistency a reality for Esri, but it also helped them achieve content velocity. With newfound control over their assets, the company was in a better position to deliver content when and where customers needed it. Plus, their new DAM meant that Esri could create and edit content faster — a necessary step in their overall move toward driving growth while creating genuine customer connections. "We are gaining more control over our assets and becoming more consistent. It's making an impact on our brand. We've started moving in a positive direction and seeing nice growth in the last few years after having our international distributors leverage our DAM," said Schultz.

Empowered with a modern operating model and a dynamic DAM, it was time for Esri to take the next step — setting the stage for personal customer experiences.

Launching a workhorse website

With Adobe Experience Manager Assets already in full swing, it was only natural for Schultz to pull in the full power of [Adobe Experience Manager](#). Before deciding to transition their website to [Adobe Experience Manager Sites](#), Schultz had a long list of requirements that it had to meet. First, it needed to provide a strong base for the organization's overall digital transformation. Second, it needed to make authoring, publishing, and delivering content something his team could do without having to go through IT. And lastly, it needed to be a resource for Esri's distributors, giving them access to the tools, insights, and power they needed to succeed.

"I did my research, and we could actually pull it off with Adobe Experience Manager," said Schultz.

The ability to extend Adobe Experience Manager capabilities to distributors was especially important to Esri. Because so much of their revenue depended on their network of distributors, they needed to be able to leverage their technology investment outside of the Esri offices. Adobe Experience Manager did not disappoint. With Adobe Experience Manager, distributors received access to Esri assets and analytics, allowing them to be both on brand and relevant to potential customers. "They can actually see who's engaging with them at a level they didn't even know existed," said Schultz. And because distributors could get better visibility into customer journeys through Adobe Experience Manager, they could build or even repurpose Esri campaigns that would hit home with their audience. "It's been a big coup for Esri and our success as we grow internationally," Schultz said.

Adobe Experience Manager also helped Esri strengthen their overall web presence by improving site performance. Because they were already using Adobe Experience Manager Assets, the company had a head start on streamlining assets and ensuring brand compliance across internal and distributor websites. With Adobe Experience Manager Sites features like Experience Fragments, Smart Imaging, and Dynamic Renditions, Esri was able to reduce the number of unique instances of content across their website. This lightened the load on the website, speeding up page loading times and improving overall functionality. It also streamlined internal processes to create assets with reusable web components, which meant the Esri team only had to update content once to make changes across the entire website. In total, the move to Adobe Experience Manager helped Esri reduce the size of their website from 20,000 pages to a mere 1,500. And because Adobe Experience Manager comes with analytics and SEO baked in, site visits increased dramatically.

"With features like Smart Imaging and Dynamic Renditions, we improved both our page performance and overall site performance. I was skeptical at first when my team told me the results of using Adobe Experience Manager, but it's true," said Schultz.

"We reduced the number of JPGs by 50% and image file size by 70% on desktop, 8% on mobile. So it's been a huge win on site performance."

Steve Schultz

Head of Marketing Technology, Esri

But the new Esri.com didn't just give the company the benefits of a modern website. It provided the basis for the personalization and authentic customer connections the company was determined to achieve.

Bringing personalization to the forefront

"Before, we didn't know what type of content our audience really cared about. We were stumbling on that all the time," said Schultz.

Using [Adobe Audience Manager](#), Esri could finally get the clarity they needed to better understand who their audience was and what mattered to them. With Esri's account-based marketing approach, Audience Manager was foundational to creating strategic segments that allowed them to deliver the right content via the right channels. Esri found that, with imagery and messaging personalized for each segment, customers were much more engaged than they had been previously. Audience Manager gave Esri the ability to pinpoint accounts based on persona, company, location, and even what Esri products customers already owned — a

critical step forward in developing deeper customer connections.

With their newfound customer clarity, Esri turned to [Adobe Target](#) to push their website even further. Although Esri.com had gone through a major evolution, improving page and site performance, Schultz and team knew that personalization was mission-critical if they were going to achieve their goals. With Target, Esri was able to deliver the most relevant content to every website visitor. And with Target's testing capabilities, they could ensure that they were delivering an optimal experience to each customer, no matter the segment. According to Schultz, "We built out three landing pages for three different personas. By simply delivering more relevant content, our conversion rates went up 25%. It's just common sense to move forward with a product that can do that."

Using their website as a jumping-off point, Esri began to construct fully personalized customer journeys. Without a centralized platform, there had been no way for the company to link together and personalize every touchpoint in their campaigns. This meant that customers would receive inconsistent — and possibly impersonal — experiences as they moved through the sales funnel. But Target helped Esri close the loop on their campaigns, giving properly segmented customers a common thread throughout their entire experience. And with [Adobe Analytics](#), Esri could track and get insights about the full journey, even outside of Adobe Experience Manager.

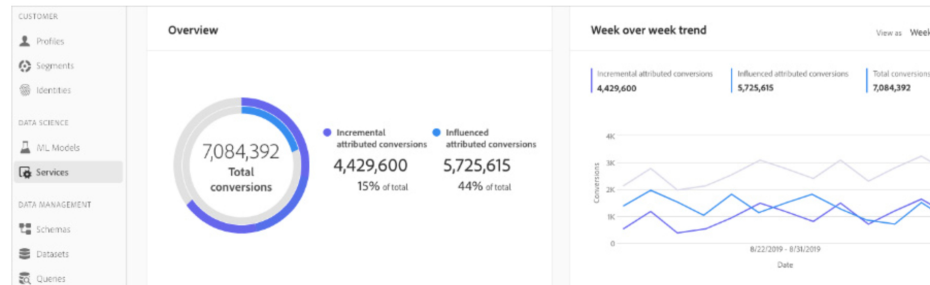
"I'm proud of the team, what they've built out, and the insights we're delivering," said Schultz.

Getting customer-smart

Currently, Esri is using [Intelligent Services](#) to discover innovative ways artificial intelligence (AI) can streamline workflows and deliver more incremental sales and marketing ROI than before. As part of Adobe Sensei, these new "AI as a service" capabilities can help marketers uncover business-changing insights — even for organizations that might lack the IT infrastructure or data science resources typically required to benefit from AI.

Esri uses Customer AI, part of Adobe's Intelligent Services, in combination with Adobe Analytics to gain predictive insights based on past and real-time events. This is a big benefit to Esri for two reasons. First, they can use Customer AI with Adobe Audience Manager to target prospects based on their purchase propensity. "We've learned that customers in the propensity score range of 90 to 100 converted three times higher than average — that's a 3x higher conversion rate," said Schultz. Secondly, they can deliver personalized web experiences that intelligently nudge prospects down the sales funnel. Per Schultz, "We're building out two separate campaigns to target visitors with a high propensity to buy two key products on our e-commerce platform. We've narrowed down the audience size to visitors with a propensity score of 95 plus." With more precise targeting, Esri can connect with customers based on their real-time needs and truly streamline the path to purchase.

Esri also uses Attribution AI, another part of Adobe's Intelligent Services, to help measure their overall marketing effectiveness. By quantifying the incremental impact of every campaign, channel, and touchpoint for every customer path, the company can find out what's working — and what's not — automatically. This means that Esri can invest more heavily where they are seeing success — and spend their time and energy developing strategies and workflows they know will succeed.



Becoming a data-driven, customer-first company

With help from Adobe, Schultz was able to re-envision and rebuild marketing at Esri to ensure their relevance and success well into the future. "It's probably been one of our best partnerships," said Schultz of Adobe. And the partnership continues to thrive. On the horizon, Esri and Adobe are working together to find ways to enhance the company's omnichannel and multitouch attribution. "We're becoming a true data-driven company," said Schultz. At their core, Esri embraces their ability to make authentic digital connections and empower their customers with their state-of-the-art location intelligence. At their current rate of progress, there's no limit to the potential their future holds.

As Schultz said, "We're merely at the cusp of what Esri is going to help solve for on the planet."

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