

SELLING THE VALUE OF GIS TO THE ENTERPRISE

Passion is not enough. GIS practitioners have an almost spiritual conviction in the power of Geographic Information System (GIS) technology to improve analysis, decision making, and overall operations. They are right – but the challenge is how to sell that message to enterprise executives.

How Not to Sell It

Let's start with identifying methods that are proven to fail. In general, it will not help your case to impress them with your in-depth scientific knowledge of geographic technologies. Unless your organization is in the GIS marketplace, that approach will hold no relevance to your target. Here are a few other tactics that will not work with the corner office:

- “It is incredibly cool technology.”
- “All of our peer organizations have it.”
- “The value is intangible, we can't put a \$\$ figure on it.”
- “We need to migrate away from non-versioned DBMS editing to build an SOA architecture that also supports GeoRSS.”
- “Here's an aerial photo of your house!”

Most of these methods didn't work with mom either. Why not? All of these tactics are describing the value GIS has for you, not for them. An enterprise GIS operation can be a very expensive undertaking in both time and money. **What's in it for them?**

Do Your Homework

What are the overall goals of the enterprise? What targets are measured? How will your GIS Proposal impact the bottom line? Invest time in understanding executive level goals. Once you can translate how GIS will align, support and help deliver these goals, you will have their attention. Here are the primary steps:

1. Understand Enterprise Priorities
2. Align GIS Investment to Achieving Enterprise Priorities
3. Define a tangible Return on Investment
4. Line up CIO support
5. Deliver

Enterprise Alignment

Enterprise Goals are rarely a secret. Read the strategic plan. How are parts of the organization measured? What is the core line of business? What are the competitive pressures? What are the political pressures? What risks threaten the organization?

Anywhere GIS can be leveraged to improve workflows, there should be tangible benefits.

Sample Enterprise Priorities	GIS Potential
Increase speed while reducing costs of service delivery.	More efficient job routing, reduced crew trips, resource allocation to geographic clusters.
Reduce unbudgeted labor costs of overtime and outsourcing.	Workflow improvement through visual maps, data integration, automated address matching.
Protect and promote public health & safety.	Disease tracking and prevention, crime analysis & prevention, emergency situational awareness.
Decision Making	Correlation of services to demographics, trend analysis, service effectiveness, new location site analysis.

Measuring Return on Investment

Measure everything – even the “intangibles”. Everyone can quantify the cost of software, equipment, leases, vehicles and consultants. Intangibles are harder to quantify because they are seen as subjective. However, these intangibles are often the most powerful and measurable impact.

The Intangible...	Making it Tangible...
Productivity	Staff Hours saved per month times x% of related staff salary. Reduce payouts of fees related to missed turnaround time targets. (“Delivery in 20 minutes or its free!”)
Decreased Risk	Reduction in cost of risk insurance strategies. Quantify x% of cost incurred if risk occurred without this mitigation.
Lives Saved	<i>This is a tough one – who can put a value on a life? But avoiding this metric places the value at zero. Pick some number, even if clearly low, to make your point.</i>
Increased Safety	Reduction in x% of damage / liability suits. (Eg: cracked sidewalks)

The Intangible...	Making it Tangible...
	Reduction in x% in annual medical fees Reduction or lack of increase in insurance fees. Reduction in cost of criminal justice system per arrest.
Better Quality	% Reduction in returned mail. Hours saved in verifying / correcting quality issues. Hours saved in replacements and warranties.
Good Will	Estimate %impact on customer retainment Estimate %impact on achieving high bond rating, or high comparative rating. Impact on re-election? (<i>You may want to avoid that one...</i>)

In these areas, your case may be best made by underestimating the impact to a level that all stakeholders will recognize as low estimates. If you can demonstrate a real return on investment while clearly underestimating the benefits side, your case has been made.

Make sure this is not an exercise you do just once. Budgets come around every year, and executives change. Sell and sell often!

Make Friends with the IT Department

If your GIS program is not already part of the Information Technology (IT) department, get to know the CIO as soon as possible! GIS is a technology. As its potential has grown exponentially, so has its complexity. Any successful Enterprise GIS will require support from Information Technology.

This group is also most able to learn and understand the value of GIS applications and data integration. Many GIS groups have grown out of environmental or planning departments. Expansion of capability will require some alliance with the IT Department.

Success here provides an ally for presenting your case to the enterprise.

Deliver

The credibility of your case is made when it is delivered.

Select small demonstration projects that can provide a visible, tangible impact without major technology risk. Target these demonstration projects towards influential stakeholders that you need in your camp. Import resources as needed to make sure these early projects go well.

Especially with GIS, the simple projects are often better understood and valued than the complex, behind the scenes architecture. Use the small successes to build leverage for the larger projects.

Need some help getting started?

Use our [GIS/ROI worksheet](#) as a guide and reach out to your colleagues.

[FDGC's Fifty State Initiative](#) also provides strategic plan and business plan templates for GIS. [GITA](#) (*Geospatial Information & Technology Association*) has published an ROI workbook available to member organizations. Be prepared though, GITA's workbook is pricey, so you may need an ROI argument to purchase it!

About the Author

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ROI PROJECT ASSESSMENT TEMPLATE

Project Name: <<Enter Project Title Here>> _____

Project Description:

Sponsor: _____

BENEFITS		
Benefits	Description & Assumptions	\$\$ Impact
New / Increased Revenues	• •	
Productivity & Workflow	• •	
New / Enhanced Services	• •	
Risks	• •	
Health & Safety	• •	
PR / Customer Relations	• •	
Future Returns	• •	

COSTS		
Costs	Description & Assumptions	\$\$ Impact
Expenses	• •	
Consulting	• •	
Salaries & Benefits	• •	
Training & Org Change	• •	
Ongoing Support	• •	
	• •	
	• •	

Total Benefits:

Total Investment:

Net Return:

GIS Return on Investment Study Sheet

High-Value GIS Initiatives

Quick Hits	Mid-Size	Major Applications
Address Standardization	Service Call Mapping	Mobile Asset Management
License Consolidation	Crew Assignment Maps	Facility Management
Self Service Tools	Interactive Mapping of Existing Enterprise Applications	Underground Utility Management
Web-based Geocoding	Property Permits & Ticketing	Crime Analysis
Raster Georeferencing of Paper or CAD Maps	Disease Tracking	Property Assessments
Interactive Map Websites		Emergency Management
Property Information Portal		Market Analysis

GIS ROI Factors

INFORMATION	PRODUCTIVITY	PUBLIC SERVICE
Improve Data Quality	Improved Dispatch	Transparency
Reduce Time & Cost of Address Reconciliation	Efficient Routing	Disease Detection & Prevention
Improved Decision Making	Digital Maps replacing Paper	Environmental Health
Data Integration between disparate sources	Asset Management	Emergency Dispatch
Communication across disciplines & backgrounds	Resource Management	Crime Analysis & Prevention
	Simplify Workflows	
	Faster Service Delivery	