

# Geographical Information Systems (GIS)



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<sup>1</sup> "GIS Day", ESRI, [http://blogs.esri.com/Info/photos/gis\\_day/picture4951.aspx](http://blogs.esri.com/Info/photos/gis_day/picture4951.aspx)  
[accessed 12 Dec 2010]

## What is GIS?

**GIS** means "geographic information systems". GIS is a computer system capable of capturing, storing, analyzing, and displaying geographically referenced information; that is, data identified according to location.<sup>1</sup> It's a combination of hardware, software and data that allows you to view and analyze places, and to communicate with others about them.<sup>2</sup>

**GIS** has four interactive components: an input subsystem for converting into digital form (digitizing) maps and other spatial data; a storage and retrieval subsystem; an analysis subsystem; and an output subsystem for producing maps, tables, and answers to geographic queries.

In general, GIS is applied for:

**Mapmaking:** Maps are generally easy to make using a GIS and they are often the most effective means of communicating the results of the GIS process

**Site selection:** Maps are generally easy to make using a GIS and they are often the most effective means of communicating the results of the GIS process

**Emergency response planning:** A GIS was used to combine road network and earth science information to analyze the effect of an earthquake on the response time of fire and rescue squads<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> "Geographic Information Systems", U.S. Geological Survey, Eastern Geographic Science Center, [http://egsc.usgs.gov/isb/pubs/gis\\_poster/](http://egsc.usgs.gov/isb/pubs/gis_poster/)

<sup>2</sup> "What is GIS?", Land Trust GIS, <http://landtrustgis.org/technology/what-is-gis>

<sup>3</sup> "Geographic Information Systems", U.S. Geological Survey, Eastern Geographic Science Center, [http://egsc.usgs.gov/isb/pubs/gis\\_poster/](http://egsc.usgs.gov/isb/pubs/gis_poster/)

**GIS** is frequently used by environmental and urban planners, marketing researchers, retail site analysts, water resource specialists, and other professionals whose work relies on maps.<sup>1</sup> It is often used in the following industries:

**Banking:** Financial analysts employ GIS for targeting their markets by visualizing service needs.

**Insurance:** Many insurance companies have made GIS a central component of their business, using it to visualize, analyze, and distribute risk.

**Logistics:** Logistics management requires planning the distribution fleet's activities, route locations, and schedules. The GIS logistics routing solution shown to the right to increase the number of daily deliveries without increasing resources.

**Media:** GIS is used by media bureaus for everything from analyzing circulation and attracting advertisers to creating the maps used in the material itself. GIS maps can help the media keep the public informed about street closures or openings and other emergency services, as in this map of lower Manhattan from the AP.<sup>2</sup>

**Forestry:** Inventory and management of resources

**Police:** Crime mapping to target resources

**Epidemiology:** To link clusters of disease to sources

**Transport:** Monitoring routes

**Utilities:** Managing pipe networks

**Oil:** Monitoring ships and managing pipelines

**Central and local government:** Evidence for funding and policy e.g. deprivation

**Health:** Planning services and health impact assessments

**Environment agencies:** Identifying areas of risk from e.g. flood

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<sup>1</sup> "GIS", **Encyclopædia Britannica Online**,  
[www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/1033394/GIS](http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/1033394/GIS)

<sup>2</sup> "Business", **GIS.com**, [www.gis.com/content/business](http://www.gis.com/content/business)

**Emergency departments e.g. ambulance:** Planning quickest routes

**Retail:** Store location

**Marketing:** Locating target customers

**Military:** Troop movement

**Mobile phone companies:** Locating masts

**Land Registry:** Recording and managing land and property

**Estate agents:** Locating properties that match certain criteria

**Agriculture:** Analyzing crop yields<sup>1</sup>

In 1963, the English-born Canadian geographer Roger Tomlinson began developing what would eventually become the first true **GIS** in order to assist the Canadian government with monitoring and managing the country's natural resources. Because of the importance of his contribution, Tomlinson became known as the "Father of **GIS**."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> "Who Uses GIS and Why?", **Royal Geographical Society (with IBG)**, [www.gis.rgs.org/10.html](http://www.gis.rgs.org/10.html)

<sup>2</sup> "GIS", **Encyclopædia Britannica Online**, [www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/1033394/GIS](http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/1033394/GIS)

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