

SUPPLIER INQUIRY MANAGEMENT

The Smarter Way to Handle Supplier Inquiries

How AI-driven automation helps
AP & Procurement respond faster,
reduce risk & keep suppliers happy

ESKER®





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Introduction

The challenge of supplier inquiries

“What’s the status of payment on this invoice?” “Can you update our banking details?” “Could you resend that remittance advice?” All day, every day, questions, updates, reminders and confirmations from hundreds (or even thousands) of suppliers come pouring into Procurement and Accounts Payable (AP) teams.

Trying to manage that deluge of supplier communication can feel like trying to contain a waterfall with a net. And the more messages that slip through the cracks, the greater the chances your team will miss payment deadlines, frustrate your suppliers or fall victim to fraud attempts.

Most common types of supplier inquiries:

- Invoice payment status requests
- Overdue payment reminders
- Supplier information updates
- Invoice questions

Every supplier message is important in some way. Each one requires some sort of action, whether it’s updating the ERP, tracking down an invoice status, forwarding information to another department, doing research, validating data or sending a response.

Typically, companies rely on a shared inbox monitored by multiple team members to handle their incoming supplier communication — and the process is anything but efficient.

15-20%

of invoices generate inquiries

5-20 minutes

average time to handle an inquiry

36%

of AP professionals say they’d like to eliminate responding to supplier inquiries by using automation

Approx. 60%

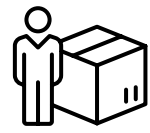
of inquiries have to do with already paid invoices

Traditional supplier inquiry process



Message hits the shared inbox

Depending on how swamped your team is, it could take hours to days for the message to even get looked at.



Triage

A team member must open and read the email to understand its content, determine what the next step should be and prioritize it.



Response

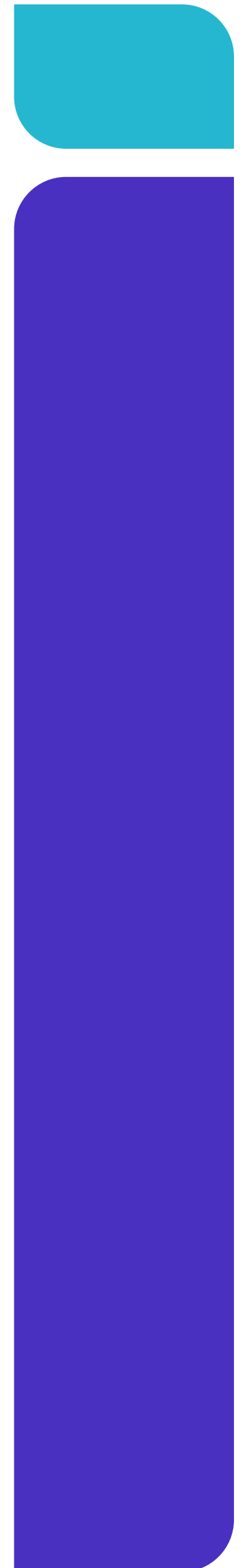
If the request is simple (it doesn't require any outside information or research), a team member can draft and send a response. However, many requests are more involved, requiring communication internally with fellow team members, collaboration with other departments, and looking up information in the ERP or another system before a response can be sent. This can take hours, days or even weeks.

The impact on AP and Procurement teams:

- Reduced focus on strategic tasks due to constantly having to help with supplier inquiries
- Frustrated suppliers and strained relationships due to slow or incomplete responses
- Missed discounts and fines due to inefficient processes and delayed payments
- Greater potential for fraud due to suspect requests not being caught

Why fast, accurate supplier inquiry resolution matters

- **Better operational continuity:** Delays in resolving supplier inquiries can halt production, delay shipments and increase costs.
- **Improved cashflow and forecasting:** Unresolved disputes tie up working capital and reduce financial predictability.
- **Stronger supplier trust and retention:** Fast, clear communication fosters stronger supplier relationships and improves negotiation leverage.
- **Higher customer satisfaction:** Late deliveries or quality issues caused by unresolved supplier problems can lead to lost customers.
- **More effective risk mitigation:** Quick responses help contain issues before they escalate.



Leveraging AI without losing the human touch

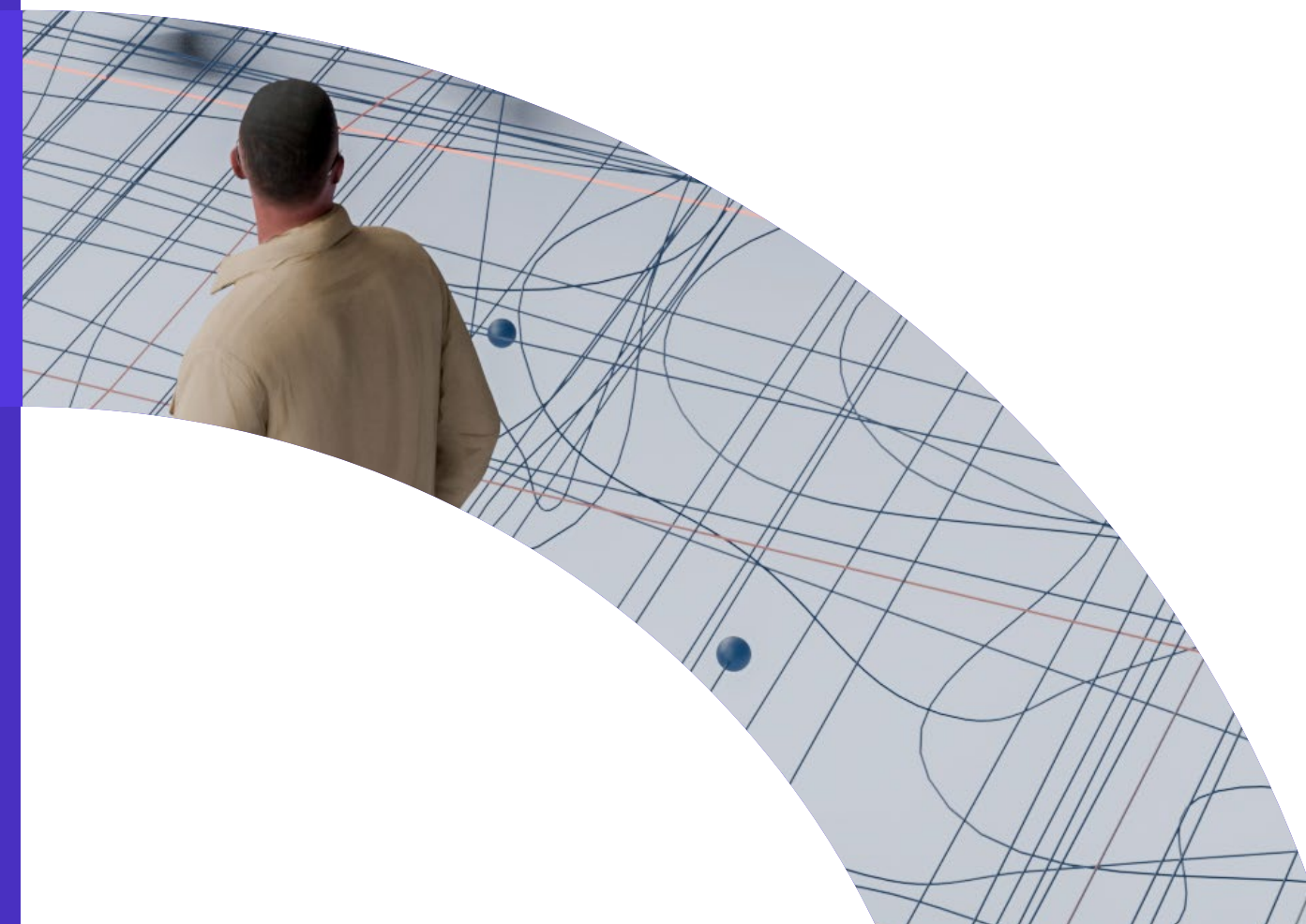
Today's companies face a conundrum. How can your team ensure fast, accurate responses to supplier requests without spending their entire day drowning in emails? This is exactly the sort of situation where AI-driven automation shines.

Technologies under the AI-driven automation umbrella such as generative AI (GenAI), retrieval-augmented generation (RAG) and AI agents can rapidly analyze data, retrieve relevant documentation and handle new queries based on past interactions. (Check out the AI glossary on page 13 to learn more AI terms.)

It takes the load off your team members by recognizing customer-specific nuances, helping handle complex inquiries, and finding answers and resolutions amidst multi-person or multi-department processes.

But far from taking over human roles, AI-driven automation augments your team's abilities. While AI is an intelligent assistant and can automate workflows, humans are the ones who understand your business relationships, can negotiate agreements and make judgment calls that can't be programmed. The best approach to supplier inquiries seamlessly blends AI's speed and analytical capabilities with the strategic guidance and relational intelligence of human professionals. Because no matter how advanced the technology, humans remain the ultimate decision-makers.

So how does AI-driven automation in supplier inquiry management help your team without taking over? In the following pages, we'll explore four key features of Esker Supplier Inquiry Management that bring speed, efficiency and transparency to the process so your team can more easily keep up with supplier communication.





Smart inquiry triage

When faced with an inbox full of supplier inquiries, Esker's Synergy AI can determine what each inquiry is about in seconds. Here's how it works.

Using natural language processing (NLP) algorithms, Synergy AI analyzes the content of incoming messages and then classifies them into the correct category — invoice question, payment status request, overdue payment reminder, data modification request, statement, etc. Then, it routes each inquiry to the correct workflow for the appropriate next steps.



Esker Synergy AI categorizes incoming supplier emails and routes them to the right workflows with up to 95% accuracy.

By quickly sorting supplier inquiries, smart inquiry triage helps your team:

- Respond faster because inquiries are immediately sent to the appropriate person or team for resolution
- Reduce risks by ensuring no supplier requests are overlooked and fraud attempts don't slip through the cracks
- Keep suppliers happy with clear, timely responses

Sentiment analysis & prioritization

Angry or unhappy suppliers need extra attention and delicacy to protect the supplier relationship. Synergy AI uses different AI engines (including Synergy-GPT) to conduct sentiment analysis on supplier inquiries so your team knows which ones need some extra care.

By examining messages at both the sentence and document levels, it classifies the overall sentiment expressed in supplier messages as positive, negative, mixed or neutral. If a message contains negative or mixed feelings, it's prioritized for faster resolution.

By giving insight into the tone and urgency of supplier messages, AI enables your team to provide more tailored, timely responses that can smooth over problems before they become serious issues.



AI-generated responses

Knowing what your suppliers have requested and whether or not it's urgent are one thing — actually answering the query is another.

Esker's GenAI makes replying to supplier inquiries as easy as a click. Once a supplier message has been triaged and analyzed, the AI gets to work querying different systems to retrieve the relevant information needed to answer the supplier's questions. Then it creates a response customized to the emotional sentiment of the inquiry that's accurate, professional and aligned with your company's communication standards and brand voice.

At this point, an AP or Procurement team member can review the response and make edits before sending it. And voila! One more supplier inquiry answered.

Having AI assist with answering supplier inquiries means:



Faster response times



Consistency and professionalism across supplier communications



More time for team members to focus on higher-value tasks



Built-in analytics dashboards

Think of it as your command center for managing supplier communications. Esker's built-in dashboard gives you immediate visibility into key metrics and performance trends so you always know what's happening and can act quickly to resolve issues.

Easy-to-read graphs visualize open inquiries organized by category and priority, track the sentiment of inquiries (for example, are there a lot of negative sentiments?), track compliance with response time SLAs, evaluate the team's performance levels and identify trends around the types of inquiries you're receiving (for example, if you're getting a lot of a certain type of inquiry, you could proactively communicate with your suppliers to reduce that).

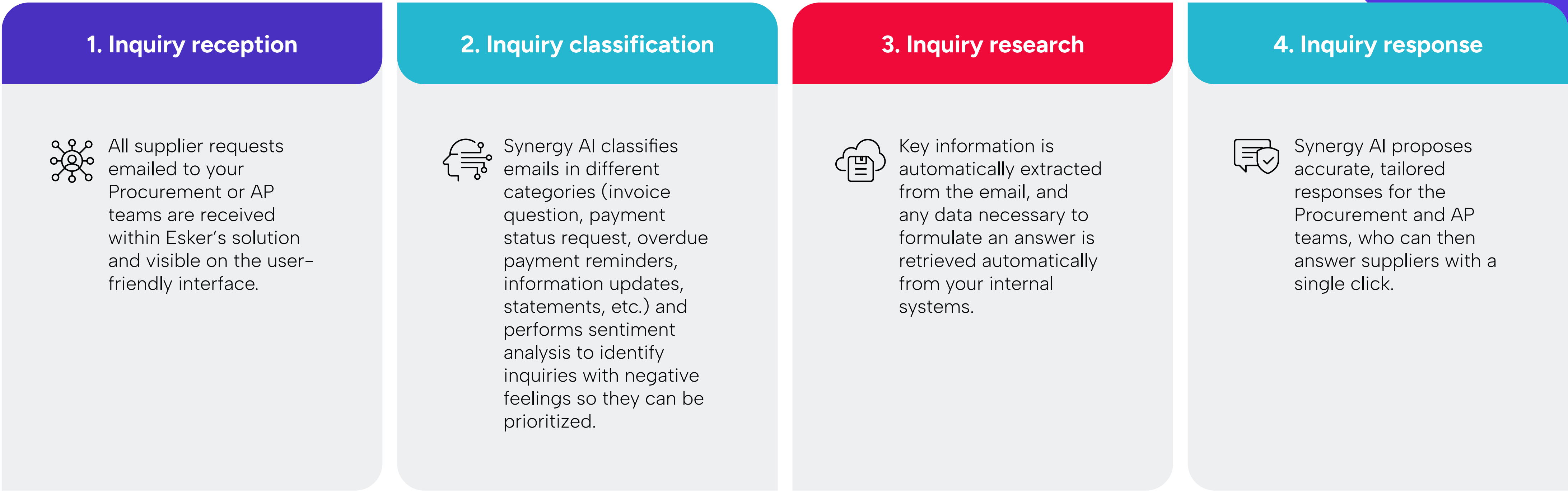
In addition, counters show the status of inquiries, such as:

- Number of open inquiries
- Inquiries with negative or mixed sentiment
- Unanswered inquiries older than 4 hours or 2 days
- Inquiries with new messages
- Failed inquiries
- Inquiries set aside



A better supplier inquiry process with AI-powered automation

Remember the traditional supplier inquiry process we outlined way back on page 4? Thanks to the capabilities of AI and automation we just learned about, your supplier inquiry process can now look like this.





So what does it all mean for your business?

Smoother supplier communication benefits everyone. Esker's AI-powered Supplier Inquiry Management solution makes it easier for your team to quickly, yet thoughtfully, handle incoming supplier messages while providing your valued suppliers with fast, accurate and thorough responses to their needs.

End-to-end automation of supplier inquiries from categorization to response:

- Shortens resolution time from hours to minutes (or even seconds)
- Enhances your operational efficiency, saving time and reducing costs
- Minimizes repetitive tasks and manual work, freeing employees to focus on complex inquiries and more impactful tasks
- Improves visibility into your supplier communication so you can pinpoint areas for improvement
- Provides greater transparency to your suppliers about overdue payments, invoice discrepancies and other common concerns

We do AI differently

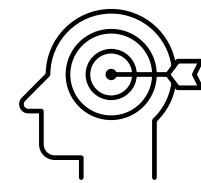
Esker Synergy AI has been in the making for over 15 years, and we continuously work on addressing the evolving questions about AI usability, security and sustainability. Our wealth of AI experience and patents creates a solid foundation that good businesses and relationships are built on.



Security — your data stays yours

All Esker solutions are hosted on Microsoft Azure, including Synergy GPT functionalities, to ensure that the data is not used or saved by a third party. Customer data does not travel over the internet, ensuring data security and privacy. The Esker-trained AI models only respond to specific tasks. They do not process personal information, and conversations are not saved.

Esker registers at Levels 3 (limited risk) and 4 (minimal risk) for the European Union AI Act and continues to maintain the ISO 27001 certification.



Purposeful & responsible

We only use AI in targeted, purposeful and value-added scenarios. Since some Esker Synergy AI features don't require a big model, Esker trains its own LLM. The result is a model that is approximately 600 times smaller than ChatGPT-4.

Features requiring a larger model use shared servers. This directly results in a lower carbon impact.

New models are continually evaluated for finding the best ratio between performance and carbon footprint.



LLM as a Service

GenAI features are integrated into Esker solutions and do not require a separate contract with LLM providers. Esker manages the prompt engineering, version updates and secure scaling, bringing down the cost of ownership by reducing the need for AI-trained staff.

AI-assisted responses are generated using each customer's own data to make it as up-to-date and relevant as possible, while maintaining solution-inherent data security.

AI glossary

Agentic AI:

AI that is designed to interact with data and tools in a way that requires minimal human intervention. With an emphasis on goal-oriented behavior, Agentic AI can accomplish tasks by creating a list of steps and performing them autonomously.

AI agents:

Tools built to perform specific, usually simple, repetitive tasks like answering questions or managing an email inbox.

ChatGPT (Chat Generative Pre-Trained Transformer):

An AI chatbot developed by OpenAI based on an LLM that enables users to refine and steer a conversation towards a desired length, format, style, level of detail and language used.

Deep learning:

Part of the machine learning algorithms based on artificial neural networks that use multiple layers to progressively extract higher-level features from raw input. In Esker, it recognizes layouts and structures on documents and extracts relevant data.

GenAI (generative AI):

AI capabilities for generating text, images or other media by learning the patterns and structures of the training data to generate new data with similar characteristics.

LLM (large language model):

AI that uses massive data sets and deep learning to perform a variety of NLP tasks.

ML (machine learning):

An umbrella term for problem-solving algorithms. Rather than being programmed, ML helps machines “discover” their “own” algorithms. In Esker, it improves data extraction by auto-learning from user corrections, while also utilizing historical data analysis to predict outcomes.

NLP/NLU (natural language processing/understanding):

Technology that includes tools capable of understanding/processing text and extracting data, discerning the meaning, intent and emotion behind the input, and even proposing appropriate answers.

Neural networks (in AI):

A subset of machine learning that simulate the human brain’s connective neurons and nodes to translate input data into desired output data.

KNN (K-Nearest Neighbors):

Machine learning classifier algorithm using proximity of data points to make predictions and classifications.

Hi, we're Esker

Esker's AI Automation Suite for the Office of the CFO leverages the latest in Agentic AI and automation technologies to optimize working capital and cashflow, enhance strategic decision-making, and improve human-to-human relationships with customers, suppliers and employees. Esker's Source-to-Pay and Order-to-Cash solutions automate any business process while supporting long-term growth strategies.



40+

years of experience with 20+ years focused on cloud solutions



1,200+

employees serving 1.12M+ users and 3,000+ customers worldwide



15

global locations with headquarters in Lyon, France



~€205

million in revenue in 2025



Business success is best when shared

At Esker, we believe the only way to create real, meaningful change is through positive-sum growth. This means achieving business success that doesn't come at the expense of any individual, department or company — everyone wins! That's why our AI-driven technology is designed to empower every stakeholder while promoting long-term value creation.

