

# How Ancestry does privacy at scale



**Industry:** Genealogy



**Product:** Sells DNA kits to consumers for researching geological lines



**Headquarters:** Lehi, Utah



**Founded:** 1983 as a publishing company



**Customers:** More than 3 million subscribers



**Size:** More than 1,400 employees worldwide



**Privacy team:** 5 people



**Steve Stalder**

Senior privacy operations manager  
Ancestry

Historically, privacy has struggled to break out of its siloed existence. That's problematic for a function that requires holistic visibility of what's happening with data at your organization so you can flag risks. In addition, your stakeholder teams often outnumber privacy teams, and the business is forever pushing for faster reviews. As a result, it's essential for privacy to find ways to scale to keep pace with what's moving.

In this case study, we'll discuss how Steve Stalder, senior privacy operations manager at Ancestry, optimized and future-proofed his program by implementing TerraTrue at Ancestry as its privacy-by-design platform solution.

## More than 10,000 terabytes of data to protect

Steve Stalder is Ancestry's senior privacy operations manager, connecting the legal team with product and engineering to ensure the company complies with relevant privacy laws and regulations, as well as engenders customer trust.



*"That is actually one of our top pillars here at Ancestry is trust," Stalder said. "And without that, we're not going to have many customers relying on us for their service."*



It's easy to see why gaining and maintaining customer trust is vital to Ancestry. It manages about 10,000 terabytes of data, including details like births, marriages, deaths, military service, and immigration status.

By 2016, Ancestry had launched its DNA test in more than 30 countries. The company's leadership recognized the need for additional structure to guide its privacy practices and hired a chief privacy officer in 2017. Today, the privacy team is five-deep and focused on protecting customers' privacy rights. After all, they're trusting Ancestry to handle their highly sensitive data to explore genealogical roots.

## Ancestry needed to optimize in three major areas

### 1 Better visibility into data flows

Spotting and tackling initiatives needing review is challenging at any company. Ancestry required a tool that would make it impossibly easy for the business to give privacy eyes on everything through integrations with tools they are already using.

### 2 Better cross-functional collaboration, happening in one place

Ancestry needed to eliminate ad hoc conversations about reviews on email and Slack. It needed a simple process for real-time, automated privacy guidance.

### 3 Faster, more efficient reviews through automation

Conducting assessments is tedious, disconnected, and repetitive. Ancestry needed a tool to integrate engineering and legal tech to encourage adoption, maximize efficiency, and enable the business.

## Outcomes

### Visibility: Privacy now has automated and complete visibility into everything the business is building

Today, Ancestry gets the holistic visibility it needs on data flows by using TerraTrue's software to bridge the divide between product and legal.

Ancestry's product and engineering team use an issue-ticketing system called Rally to organize work and track progress. It's similar to Jira, and legal teams generally don't speak either fluently enough to work within the tools themselves.

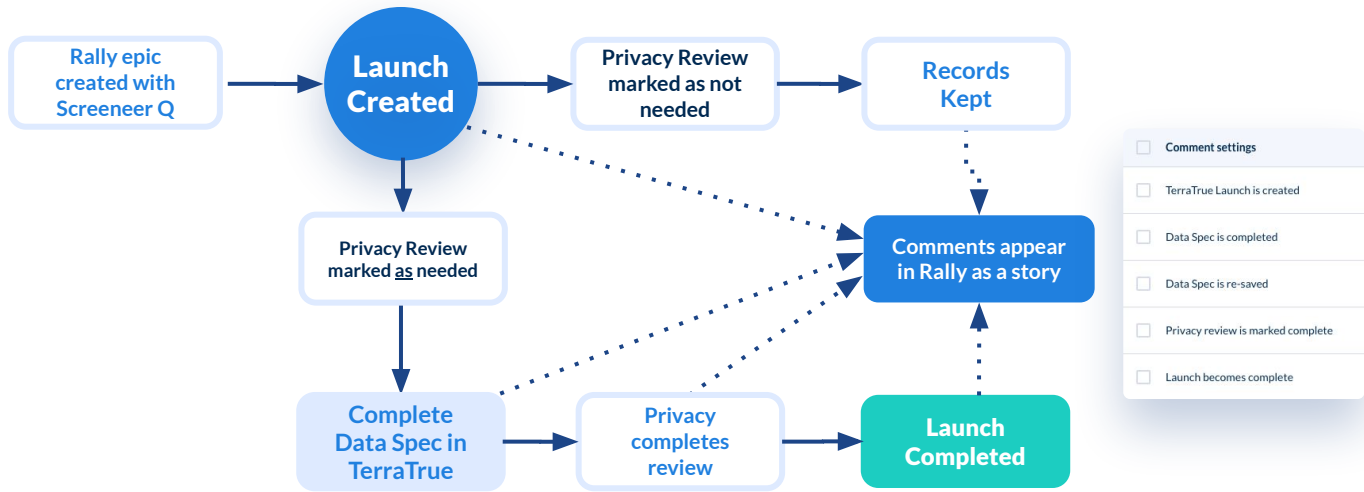
With Ancestry's previous tool, "that was where the disconnect was happening."

Engineering didn't work in privacy tech, and privacy didn't operate in engineering tech. With TerraTrue, Ancestry built the Rally API directly into the platform. "That was huge. That was kind of our selling point, to have that automation," Stalder said. "I feel like we now have the ability to see [data flows]. In the past, I honestly didn't even have a window into that world because they worked on their own stuff, and they never really got us involved in a full vision, holistic approach."

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*Rally epic + screener question → TerraTrue launch*

## Efficient reviews: Privacy now operates at scale with automatic risk-scoring, triaging, and routing

Ancestry’s privacy team comprises five people. To keep pace with the business’s needs, it needed to implement some automation to liberate it from redundant and repetitive tasks, particularly those that posed little risk. After all, not every review is created equal. Today, using TerraTrue as its central hub, Ancestry’s privacy team can instantly triage which reviews contain data sets containing personal information and whether they’ve been reviewed before or require further review.

That triage occurs at the beginning of a review through a “stop-or-go” gating process. When a Rally ticket opens a TerraTrue launch, the gated question keeps unnecessary reviews out and routes critical reviews to the appropriate stakeholders.

“We realize that some features are just cosmetic,” Stalder said. “Maybe they’re just changing the color of a button. So we’ve got a gating question that specifically asks them, ‘Does this deal with personal information?’”

Sometimes, that means legal doesn’t need to tag in.

“If they answer ‘no personal information is being used,’ it automatically closes out that TerraTrue case. But we have it on record, so we know it’s been completed,” Stalder said. “If they say yes, then the review continues to the next step within the TerraTrue process.”

That’s essential to scaling the privacy function to meet the business demands, allowing product and engineering to adopt the framework more willingly.

“We know [the engineers] are busy. We don’t want them to have to fill out a data spec if they don’t need to,” Stalder said.

Let’s look at a visual representation of how this happens.

To the next page!



## Results recap

- **Automated and complete visibility now gives privacy input** into everything the business is building
- **Privacy now operates at scale** with automatic risk-scoring, triaging, and routing
- **Real-time, cross-functional collaboration** yields simple privacy guidance for the business



For more on how Ancestry leveraged TerraTrue's privacy-by-design platform to achieve its goals, [watch this Fireside Chat](#) with Steve Stalder.

## Better cross-functional collaboration: Yields simple privacy guidance for the business

For Ancestry, the ability to communicate within TerraTrue on any product or feature was vital. Previously, if an engineer wanted to ask a product manager a question, they'd do so in a separate email or on Slack. Now, the teams can tag each other in the relevant reviews, and it's all captured in one place.

"The engineers can stay in Rally, within their own tool. It's not something they have to search for, which is a big advantage for them. Now they're not hunting for it," Stalder said. "And, if I'm a product manager and have a question about something, I can quickly just do that. It's all tracked within the system itself," Stalder said. "That was, for us, another selling feature, just to have that ability to keep the conversation going and make it more collaborative rather than very siloed."

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