

Superior Court of California, Riverside County

E-Filing Solution Speeds Up Processing of Child-Support Cases for County Courts

With a population of 1.4 million, Riverside County, Calif. is the sixth-largest county in the state. In keeping with the national trend, a majority of civil cases processed by the Superior Court of California in Riverside County focuses on family issues, especially child-support claims. The county's Department of Child Support Services (DCSS) adds 110,000 such cases to the Court's caseload each year.

In order to streamline its document-intensive workflow, the Court's Family Law Division (FLD) deployed a SQL Server-based electronic filing solution that integrates all child-support case data and routing tools. The Court's Web-enabled system—based on the commercial "E-Filing" solution from Image-X Enterprises (Santa Barbara, Calif.)—automates the document stream between FLD, DCSS and other remote users that work with the Court to process child-support cases.

One of biggest challenges for a manual paper-processing system is that child-support cases need to be processed within certain timeframes specified by law. In other words, if the Court doesn't produce legal papers and deliver them to defendants in a timely manner, custodial parents could lose the opportunity to receive child support.

Thus, the Court faces constant pressure to shorten processing time as much as possible, explains Jose Guillen, CEO of Riverside County Courts. "Internet enabling our document processes is a very important part of our productivity strategy," he says. "We started with our biggest case segment—child support—but we hope in the future to apply e-filing to other areas like small-claims filings too."

As the Courts' largest case filer, DCSS currently e-files some 400-600 cases—or approximately 1,400-2,800 pages of legal forms—each month. "That's about 65 percent of our total volume that we're processing electronically at substantial time and cost savings," says John Gaustad, chief deputy child support attorney at DCSS.

Prior to Web-enabling its child-support filing system, Riverside County already had some enterprise technology in place, including document imaging and a "cross-filing" solution that allowed citizens to file claims in any location, Guillen reports. The next-step in the Court's paper-elimination strategy needed to support electronic processing and workflow management so that data from claims documents could be centrally stored, processed, and analyzed by all of the stakeholders in a child-support case.

Solution Overview

Customer Profile

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Business Situation

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Solution

Benefits

- Integrated workflow speeds up filing of child-support cases
- XML-based global correction improves accuracy of data
- Centralized e-documents cut need for paper records

Software and Services

SQL Server™ 2000
Windows® 2000 Server
BizTalk™ Server 2000
Internet Information Server 5.0

Partner

Image-X Enterprises
Santa Barbara, Calif.
(805) 964-3535
www.imagexusa.com

In order to file a case under the new automated solution, DCSS transmits two files to the Courts: a data file to be added to the case management system and a .PDF image of the forms. A case number is automatically assigned and indexed. Controlled by a password authentication tool, an electronic "stamping" process allows a court clerk to affix the court stamp to the forms and electronically sign the document. Finally, the accepted case is forwarded to the central repository, which contains some 60 million images of forms. If rejected, the case is returned to DCSS with an email attachment explaining the cause of rejection.

"Before we rolled out the e-filing system, every office involved in a case would have to maintain a paper copy of all the forms presented to the court," says Guillen. By law, the Court must still house an original paper form, but all of its workflow can now be performed online on a central application, which not only helps to minimize data-entry errors, but also drastically improves productivity and turnaround times for filings.

The old manual process was not only slow, but also costly, observes DCSS' Gaustad. "We used to have eight full-time employees whose only job was to physically deliver printed documents to our various courthouses in the County. Now that we deliver documents electronically, those employees can be working on quality control of case data, which is a far more valuable use of their time. And their transportation expenses have been eliminated altogether, which is a major cost savings to the department."

"Improving the accuracy of form data was a critical implementation requirement," recalls Dr. Mohammed Shaikh, president of Image-X, which developed the Courts e-filing system to include an XML-based "global correction feature." By recognizing the XML-tagged data fields, the solution can detect data that doesn't correspond to its counterparts in other forms and intelligently fix typos or reconcile information that was keyed inconsistently.

The Court's e-filing system runs on two Pentium II servers, each running Windows 2000 Server and SQL Server 2000. Housed at DCSS, the first server generates case-filing documents before transmission to the Courts. Acting as the central hub for all users, the second server is currently hosted by Image-X but will soon be moved to Court headquarters, Dr. Shaikh says.

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