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Full Child Support for Everybody

One out of every three children in the United States lives apart from at least one of their parents, representing 23 million children in 1997. Only one in five receive full support payments.¹ Child support payments from nonresident parents to their children are the key to their financial security. By federal mandate, each state has a child support program to collect support for these children. In California alone, more than 3.5 million children depend on the state’s child support program for their financial security. The state child support collection system affects more children than any other state program except the public schools. Unlike the school system, the interaction between support services and the parent is largely carried out through court orders or wage garnishing. There is little direct interaction between parents, children and support services. Implementing online payment systems, like Image-X’s ChildSupportCollection.org, allow support services to interact directly with parents and give them greater options to pay their support.

One of the largest challenges for a manual processing system is that child-support cases need to be processed within a certain time frame. 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.

The Department of Child Support, the courts largest case filer, currently files some 400 hundred to 600 cases translating to anything in between 1500 and 3000 legal forms each month! With the exponential increase in population these days these numbers are soon to become overwhelming if they haven’t already done so already. The manual paper system will not be able to cut it anymore in the near future.

The current manual system is not only slow but also costly. Many use employees whose only job is to physically deliver printed documents to various courthouses. Then many employees are used for data entry and paper filing alone! These expenses overshadow those other major paper and printing costs.

Pauline Burton, the Colorado IVD director for Child Support, has identified the need for a solution. Some of the problematic documents include Non Custodial Forms (NCP), Custodial Parent Forms (CP), Worker of the Child Support Department forms and other interstate departments that interface with the Colorado DCS. These forms have to physically filed, delivered and filed. There are two answers to the problem. One is to maintain the current system available, which encompasses a variety of paper forms. This leads to high paper, filing, storage and delivery costs. The idea is to make all

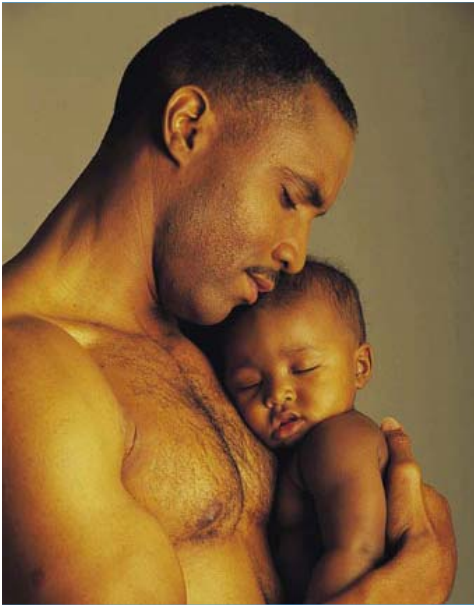
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www.childsupportcollection.org

1. The Urban Institute, “To What Extent do Children Benefit from Child Support,” January 15, 2000
www.urban.org

2. <http://www.childrennow.org/california/CSuppastdue/ChildSupport.html>



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the necessary forms available online. In this scenario the user can fill and submit the forms online. The form would then be routed to the appropriate parties eliminating redundant data entry, filing, routing/delivery and paper costs completely.

In order for an electronic solution to function properly, it is crucial to employ a system that is fast, reliable, efficient and easy to use. One of the most effective solutions available combines new XML based electronic form technology combined with a portal structure. This enables a quick and precise electronic document delivery.

Image-X, a document imaging system with more than fourteen years experience, has developed electronic XML based forms that are dynamically generated on the fly. The unique integration capabilities of the eXternal Markup Language make for a very powerful application. Often referred to as the common language for all computers, the XML architecture is quickly becoming the standard tool for data transfer.

BizTalk Server enables businesses to achieve application integration through five key processes: document transport and routing, data transformation, application integration, process automation, and scalability and manageability services. Each process is achieved through receive functions, channels, ports, schedules, and tools. The software has many benefits including reduced time, easy integration, scalable architecture, reliable document delivery, secure document exchange and reduced complexity.

A combination of Image-X's dynamic and interactive forms is a perfect fit with Microsoft's BizTalk Server. Since the XML architecture is designed with document transfer capabilities in mind, many of the benefits offered by Microsoft would interlink perfectly to create a unique case management system. The child support department would benefit most from such a solution because of the overwhelming number of cases filed each month.

When child support files the case data or the necessary forms and documents, the information has to be routed or delivered to the court. Only then the courts can accept the data for child support. The problem in the past was that because many districts had different laws regarding the issue, the non-custodial parent simply moved to another state, escaping child support fees. The federal government responded to this issue by developing uniform Intrastate Filings enabling child support agencies to transfer forms from state to state. Though this was a step in the right direction, the actual filling and filing procedures are still different from place to place. Also every state has different terms regarding the casework.

Because of the large differences in case procedures and terms, the child support department is desperately seeking an answer. The optimal solution would make the filing process standard. The solution proposed would make this form electronic with a standard schema.



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To provide a quick transaction of forms via a secure intranet system one would have to employ such software as Microsoft’s BizTalk and Share Point Portal. However as far as the actual form filling, or the visible output, Microsoft does not have an answer. Microsoft new product, Infopath, does not cut it since it cannot be viewed outside the firewall. Hence Image-X has developed Infopath+, which provides Infopath the necessary tools to be viewed outside a firewall and to help it integrate with a variety of different application structures.

The benefits are clear. It is up to Child Support Departments nationwide to respond in kind to the dilemma presented. The beauty of such a project is not only the tremendous financial savings but also the marvelous impact it would have on our society. Which such a system at hand, child support departments would ensure that all our youth will grow up with a household, an education and most important of all: **happy.**

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