

## **THE NEW and IMPROVED COURT WEBSITE**

A Review of and Recommended Changes to the  
South Dakota Unified Judicial System's Website

[www.sdjudicial.com](http://www.sdjudicial.com)

Institute for Court Management

Court Executive Development Program

2007-2008 Phase III Project

May 2008

Jill M. Gusso

Director of Public Information

South Dakota Unified Judicial System

Pierre, South Dakota

## ABSTRACT

This focus of this project, "**The New and Improved Court Website,**" reviews an existing court website of the South Dakota Unified Judicial System (UJS) and identifies areas of improvement.

Improving the appearance, content, usability of the UJS' website by redesigning the existing web page to be more user-friendly and accessible to the public, the Judges and our court staff, as well as enhancing the webpage with additional information will be very beneficial for all users. This project will propose an entirely new UJS webpage. This will include a new look, the "front page", the method of maneuvering around the webpage, the search engine, as well as providing much more information than is currently available on the existing webpage.

The project will conduct a review of several other states court web pages that have made the "Top 10" list and a survey to those courts. A survey of past public web page users, members of the state bar, judges and justices, state agencies and other court personnel to request input on content and accessibility. The goal is that these recommended changes be implemented and a new webpage be made public. In addition, this paper will provide an overview on the internet and provide suggestions on what is important to include on a government website and what users are generally looking for. Creativity and technology must work together in balance to provide materials and a website

that look professional, reflect the court's goals, are easy to use, and are effective. "Technology creates many opportunities for courts. The opportunity to improve customer services is here now, and courts should consider taking that opportunity."<sup>1</sup>

**Review of existing website.** The existing website of the South Dakota Unified Judicial System (UJS) can be found at [www.sdjudicial.com](http://www.sdjudicial.com). The UJS continuously strives to improve operations and efficiency. The need is present to implement best practices and innovation solutions to help solve the problems facing us every day. Resources and information included in this review will assist other court operations in developing and/or improving their court website.

**Survey Objective.** A 15-question survey instrument evaluates the content of the existing UJS website in terms of quality, quantity, and usefulness. It was sent to a targeted group consisting of justices and judges, members of the media, court employees, contractors or government employees, attorneys, and past defendants. The goal was to identify key areas that the UJS should focus on in order to improve the appearance, content and usability of this website.

Because the internet is constantly evolving, these survey results will be a timely tool for all courts to develop relevant web content that closely reflects the information needs of court website users.

---

<sup>1</sup> Future Trends In State Courts 2007, National Center for State Courts, Page 24.

**Conclusion.** This evaluation of the survey results concluded that, overall, the content of the existing UJS website is meeting the needs of our users in terms of organization of the information, the amount of information, the quality of information, and the usefulness of various types of information. However, many suggestions were made of areas that could be enhanced and developed in order to make the website more user-friendly. It took years to get the UJS' website to where it is today but a “clean-up” plan is needed.

## Steps for the “Clean-up” Plan

- |                                                                |                                                                                                      |                                                  |
|----------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|
| 1. Find out what users want and need from the website          | 2. Develop and maintain an agency mission, goals, and policies for the website.                      | 3. Inventory the website content.                |
| 4. Compare the inventory with audience needs and agency goals. | 5. Decide what to do with current content and whether it is really needed. Then add missing content. | 6. Convert all PDF files to HTML as appropriate. |

**Recommendations.** Recommendations for improving the existing UJS website at [www.sdjudicial.com](http://www.sdjudicial.com) include, but should not be limited to: keeping content up-to-date; keep it simple; organize for ease of use; and ensure convenience for users.