

Meeting the Web Information Needs of the Courts: An Evaluation of the NCSC Court Information Database

Institute for Court Management
Court Executive Development Program
Phase III Project
May 2003
Madelynn Herman

This document, "Meeting the Web Information Needs of the Courts," is an evaluation of the National Center for State Courts (NCSC or National Center) Court Information Database. This topic-oriented database was made available to the courts and public on the NCSC website in April of 2002. The evaluation of this database will measure whether the content of the current database meets the information and resource needs of the courts in terms of quality, quantity, and usefulness.

Meeting Court Needs: The courts are continuously trying to improve operations and efficiency and often look to the NCSC for information and resources on a variety of topics relating to court administration. With shrinking court budgets, there is a push for more efficiency and improvement of court practices. The need is great for the courts to have access to up-to-date research and information on best practices and innovative solutions to help solve the problems they are facing every day. The resources and information provided in the new Court Information Database will assist them in meeting this need.

The Purpose of the Database: The Court Information Database was designed and built in 2001 and early 2002 by the NCSC Knowledge and Information Services staff to serve as a tool for disseminating information and resources to the courts via the Internet. The database's goal is to provide the National Center's main constituency, the courts, with relevant information and resources in an accessible format that will assist them in making decisions that improve the administration of justice in their courts. We believe that the database is satisfying its goals and objectives by continuously adding relevant information to the database.

Survey Objectives: The 25-question survey instrument evaluates the content of the Court Information Database in terms of quality, quantity, and usefulness. It was sent to a targeted group of NCSC constituents that included court administrators and managers, judges, public information officers, and Institute for Court Management fellows. The objective of the survey was to learn how this new topic-oriented database of information could be more closely focused to meet the needs of its intended users--the state courts.

Because the database is constantly evolving, we think that the survey results will be a timely tool for the Knowledge and Information Services and all of NCSC in their efforts toward developing relevant web content that more closely reflects the information needs of the courts.

Search of the Literature: An extensive literature search was conducted on a variety of topics relating to web design, web content, web usability, web effectiveness, and customer-oriented web content. The literature review provided a context for the development of the survey instrument for this evaluation. The reviewed literature was very consistent in describing what it takes to develop

customer-focused and user-friendly web content. A few basic essentials of a great website include: (1) having a clearly defined purpose, audience, and strategic plan; (2) focusing content on the needs and expectations of your audience; (3) developing content for your "best" customer; (4) keeping the design of your web pages simple, intuitive, and easy to navigate; (5) providing content that is up-to-date and meaningful; and (6) soliciting ongoing feedback from your customers.

Conclusion: The evaluation of the Court Information Database concluded that, overall, the content of the resource guides and frequently asked questions are meeting the needs of our constituents in terms of the organization of the information, the amount of information, the quality of information, and the usefulness of information provided. When the survey respondents were asked to rank the various types of information resources they found to be the most useful, they identified four resources as most useful: links to Internet resources, an executive summary, best practices, and frequently asked questions (FAQ). These survey results, therefore, suggest that the developers of web content keep this in mind and orient web content to focus on these types of information resources primarily. The survey results also showed that improvements were needed in the organization and location of the subtopics. Some technical difficulties in accessing the information were also noted.

Recommendations: Recommendations for improving the Court Information Database included (1) creating a mission and purpose statement for the database; (2) giving more prominence to the alphabetical list of topics to the database or providing a search feature within the database; (3) providing a method for archiving important information; and (4) soliciting ongoing feedback from database users. Future recommendations include looking at accessibility issues, doing a usability study, and segmenting content for different customers.

This [research](#) paper is available in its entirety in portable document format. To access, you must first obtain and install the Adobe Acrobat Reader.



Knowledge Information Services
National Center for State Courts
300 Newport Avenue
Williamsburg, VA 23185
Phone: (800) 616-6164

Visit the Institute for Court Management Web site at:
http://www.ncsconline.org/d_icm/icmindex.html

This document was created with Win2PDF available at <http://www.win2pdf.com>.
The unregistered version of Win2PDF is for evaluation or non-commercial use only.
This page will not be added after purchasing Win2PDF.