

Missouri Statewide Automation

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ICM Phase III Project

Executive Summary

In 1985 the Missouri Supreme Court through Administrative Rule 1 authorized the development of a Statewide Judicial Information System to provide statistical and management of information to the state courts. In 1989, the Chief Justice issued an order providing for a committee to study the needs of the judiciary for automation.

An automated court system would link all Missouri courts with each other, with other agencies in Missouri and, ultimately, with agencies across the nation. Lawyers, private citizens, and participants in the judicial process would be able to access court information without visiting the courthouse. Litigants and their legal counsel should be able to file documents electronically, and the burdens of storage would be alleviated and eventually eliminated. Court automation was to be founded upon a total information network and all judicial assets: personnel, facilities, and equipment was to be deployed and utilized to achieve maximum efficiencies. The judiciary would be able to better assess caseloads and distribute workloads fairly without artificial restriction imposed by circuit boundaries. In the future, advanced technology such as voice-response systems, interactive video, and information centers (kiosks) would expand the realm of possibilities and further the significant improvements that an automated court system could provide in the delivery of justice services. From its inception, the automation project has been designed with input from existing data processing staff in the courts, court clerks and personnel, and judges throughout the state who recognize the need to move toward an integrated justice system. Thus, both in design and implementation, Missouri's court automation system was to be acquired, operated, and maintained in accordance with a statewide strategic plan.

In 1994 the legislature passed legislation (Senate Bill 420) to implement the statewide court automation project to be funded by a \$7 per - case court fee and overseen by the newly created Missouri Automation Committee. Funding was authorized for ten years. The project was designated EC 2004 (Electronic Courts 2004). The committee was to oversee the activities necessary to build this electronic network and to connect all courts across the state. The cornerstones of the project were: Service, Justice, Access and the objectives of the committee were as follows:

- A sophisticated and integrated justice system with great potential for improvement in the provision of services;
- An integrated court system that renders geography largely irrelevant and presents a modern justice system with reduced costs to the litigant and taxpayer, with greater efficiency, wider access and enhanced accountability;
- A system that takes advantage of new technologies to improve the day-to-day operations of the

courts;

- Timeliness in processing of cases without sacrificing the quality of justice;
- Economies of scale and efficiencies within the judiciary by utilizing similar facilities statewide based on standards for hardware, software and common data definitions;
- Facility selections which will be viable solutions for long-term implementation and low lifecycle cost;
- Compatibility, or ability to interface electronically with other state and local systems and network.

This paper examines the legislation and focuses on the leadership of the Chief Justices of the Missouri Supreme Court (from 1994-2000) through their speeches to the General Assembly as the catalyst for initiating and speeding up the process in order to meet the goals outlined above. The Missouri Court of Appeals/Eastern District was the appellate pilot site. The paper also focuses on the difficulty in trying to adopt a case management system specifically designed for trial courts into a successful appellate case management module. The final part specifically features interviews by those who had to work with the above system, their problems and conclusions. The paper's conclusion is that the system in Missouri is working well. It is a success and that the problems encountered can and will be worked out as the system progresses toward the year 2004.

Chronology of Missouri Court Automation

- **1994:** The Vision of statewide court automation gains support of The Bar, judges, the Governor, and the user groups. The General Assembly, in the Senate Bill 420, authorized a \$7 per case fee for court automation. Missouri Court Automation (MCA) Committee established to govern the project.
- **1995:** Andersen Consulting retained to design the equipment foundation (infrastructure and architecture) necessary for a statewide automated system. Design completed in 1996.
- **1996:** The Supreme Court's Internet website debuts. Now the website offers the public access to Supreme Court and appellate court opinions, growing numbers of case records, docket information and Supreme Court oral argument summaries, judicial biographies, electronic mail for inquiries, and much more. www.osca.state.mo.us
- **1997:** Systems & Computer Technology Corporation (SCT) selected to provide the software for statewide case management. Although courts implement the system on a volunteer basis, the goal (at that time) is to implement the system statewide by 2004.
- *Lotus Notes* connects all circuits and all appellate courts in a statewide judicial information network, enabling electronic mail transfer and shared databases. This helps earn Missouri courts a Number Five spot in *Digital States* nationwide technology rankings.
- **1998:** First three sites-all the pilots-begin running the new case management system, Montgomery County, the Court of Appeals-Eastern District, and Jackson County (civil, domestic and probate).

- Facing increasing criminal and civil caseloads, the courts ask the legislature to speed up case management implementation with additional funding, to beat the 2004 goal. The Governor recommends and the General Assembly authorized \$7 million, keeping judiciary funding at less than one percent of state's budget.
- Juvenile offices in all forty-five circuits tie into the courts' communication network-linked like never before-to share information about juvenile offenders and troubled families. To further reduce juvenile crime and protect children, the juvenile system's requirements to integrate into the courts' case management system are established. Missouri's juvenile plan wins federal funding as a national model.
- Small courts infrastructure project: A federal grant allows courts staffed with fewer than seven people to acquire the infrastructure needed to join the case management system.
- **1999:** With all pilots running, statewide delivery of case management begins. Public access to care records via the web site debuts.
 - "Case.net" gives the public, media, attorneys, and other users access via the web site to case record information of those courts using the new case management. All Court of Appeals offer Case.net.
- The Office of State Courts Administrator, with a Public Safety grant, developed a remote filing project to allow victims of abuse to file for protective orders from Jackson County-area shelters via the Internet.
- The Central Fines Bureau will permit counties to adopt statewide fee schedules and allow centralized payment, alleviating the public's confusion and a large part of courts' growing caseload.
- **Goal 2000 to 2001:** Case management statewide.

Chronology furnished by Missouri Supreme Court Communications Counsel, Tracy Synan.

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