Court Case Study:
Friend of the Court, St. Joseph County

> " *OnBase is a wonderful product. It changed our lives. Our employees are so much more efficient.”*
>
> **— Mary Herendeen,**
> Deputy Friend of the Court
> *St. Joseph County*

The Customer

St. Joseph County in Southern Michigan is home to about 60,000 residents. The county's Friend of the Court is a small department that helps residents establish, collect and enforce child support orders. The department also offers mediation and investigative services to resolve custody, parenting time and support issues.

Like so many small county departments across the United States, funding for enterprise-grade technology is limited. St. Joseph's Friend of the Court was relying on an antiquated paper filing system to store and access crucial documents, leading to wasted time and effort, and, in some cases, lost or missing documents. It's a problem all too common for paper-based departments and organizations.

That all changed when St. Joseph's Friend of the Court discovered OnBase by Hyland, a document management system that allowed them to eliminate paper records and increase productivity. Most importantly, the county was able to secure state funding that covered two-thirds of the cost for much-needed technology that has boosted productivity and communication. St. Joseph's experience is a model for similar-sized counties that believe they cannot afford the technology to bring their record keeping into the 21st century. Even on a tight budget, it is possible with public funding.

The Challenges

One of the greatest challenges of relying on paper records, according to Mary Herendeen, Deputy Friend of the Court, was locating paper files. Did a judge have the paperwork in his chamber? Was a clerk using the file to provide information to a client? Was the document lost or placed in the wrong file? Clients had to wait on hold while clerks searched for important information. Searching for lost files wasted valuable time that could have been spent accomplishing other tasks. In some cases, searching for a lost file could take days.

Just a couple years ago, St. Joseph County's circuit court was holding on to paper files for 10 years after emancipation - requiring rooms filled with bulky filing cabinets. Older documents were kept on microfilm, requiring a tedious process to access them. Today, accessing files is instantaneous, seamless and purely digital. Multiple people can view the same documents at once with the click of a mouse. Communication vastly improved, as did office workflow and productivity.

ImageSoft

For many county departments and organizations across the country, the process of moving to online record keeping has been slow, even seeming impossible due to budget constraints. St. Joseph's County has been a leader, paving the way for others to follow and eliminate paper records permanently. Eventually, all county departments will eliminate paper files in favor over electronic documents, and St. Joseph's recognized that early. Tasks that were once a challenge have become simple.

The Journey

Mary Herendeen was a champion for the project from the start, seeking to streamline the flow of information within the office by relying on digital documents, rather than paper records. One of her judges attended a technology summit where he learned about the advantages that OnBase could bring to St. Joseph County, and he brought that information back. Mary didn't have a technical background, but she was able to easily navigate the OnBase platform because of it's intuitive qualities. The county was not able to dedicate an IT person to the project, so Mary took it upon herself to act as the system administrator, building lifecycles and workflows that made the transition simple for everyone involved. The technology was intuitive enough to use that it didn't need IT support.

The technology integrator St. Joseph County used was OnBase premier partner ImageSoft, which specializes in government clients. The company has more than 25 county government clients in Michigan alone, and they understand the challenges county governments face, both in terms of technology and budget constraints. One of the top resellers of OnBase products nationwide, ImageSoft was able to customize a solution for St. Joseph County that not only eliminated paper records, but made the transition process simple.

ImageSoft provided Mary step-by-step support to ensure the transition was smooth, and they taught the Friend of Court team how to expand their use of OnBase beyond just the basics. Today, all the Friend of Court's new documents and case files are digital. More than that, OnBase has vastly improved communication and workflow. Employees can now see which new documents have been entered and which need action such as signatures. Automatic reminders are sent to the appropriate employees when signatures or case updates are required, ensuring that no task is overlooked.

The Solution

St. Joseph County was able to take advantage of an FOC Title IVD grant that funded 66 percent of the system and implementation, making the project affordable. Other Friend of Court departments are also taking advantage of this, as it is a way to fund enterprise-grade platforms for counties in Michigan. Other states have similar funding programs that can make sophisticated technology within reach for counties that once believed they couldn't afford it. Unfortunately, some departments just don't know the funding exists.

OnBase has been so successful for St. Joseph's Friend of Court office that the county is planning to expand the solution to other departments. The county prosecutor's office has signed on and is planning a launch, and expansion is also planned for the District Court and the Circuit Court for criminal cases. Ideally, judges would like to expand the system countywide.

Among the many benefits OnBase and ImageSoft were able to provide St. Joseph County:

- **Instant access to all data and documents—**There's no searching for lost files or waiting for documents that are being reviewed by employees or judges, which saves employees hours or even days of waiting time. OnBase automatically captures, stores and shares content, allowing users access whenever they need it in a central location that is simple to navigate.

- **No information silos—**All of St. Joseph's systems are able to communicate and easily share records and information with OnBase, speeding processing and productivity across the department. The process is completely automated.

- **Automatic updates—**Mary is automatically informed when documents that need attention have been in the queue too long, so she is able to closely monitor employee productivity and what has or hasn't been accomplished. A second type of email alert automatically goes out to the warrant office when a bench warrant has been removed from a lien, which avoids mistakenly serving a warrant.

- **Seamless integration—**It doesn't take an IT professional to navigate OnBase and integrate it with other critical business systems. OnBase is configurable without using code, so employees who are not technology experts are able to take advantage of features such as checkboxes, radio buttons and drop-down menus to customize the platform to meet their specific needs. To boot, ImageSoft is a fully-committed partner to clients, providing hands-on support when and if it is needed.

- **Scalability—**St. Joseph County wasn't forced to purchase the solution for all court departments, as some other platforms require. They started small with the Friend of the Court office and are able to expand as needed.

The partnership between OnBase by Hyland and ImageSoft has helped multiple county government customers move their record keeping into the 21st century. Beyond just county courts, OnBase has become a trusted solution for accounting and finance departments, human resources departments, large enterprises and more. St. Joseph County is just one success story of many, but their experience has proved that efficiency and productivity can be vastly improved by eliminating paper documents, even on a budget.

St. Joseph County

The Challenges

- Reliance on paper documents — not knowing where critical files were located

- No oversight of employee progress on important case files

- Waiting hours or even days for paper signatures to come back

The Results

- Instant access to case digital case files — no more reliance on paper documents

- Automatic email updates when case files need attention or signatures

- Seamless integration with critical business systems and software

About ImageSoft

ImageSoft was founded in 1996 to provide innovative content management solutions that enable organizations to operate more efficiently and effectively.

We create document and process management solutions to automate, streamline and improve workplace processes. Our technology and automated workflow solutions have increased productivity, reduced operating costs and saved time and money for our customers in government, the courts, healthcare, insurance, education and manufacturing.

Most ImageSoft customers realize a full return on their investment within the first 12 months of implementation. We're headquartered in Southfield, Michigan and serve customers throughout the United States, Canada and Mexico.

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