

Court Case Study: Yakima County District Court

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The Customer

The City of Yakima, Washington is in the heart of central Washington, an area well known for its agricultural bounty of apples, hops and wine grapes. Yakima is the county seat of Yakima County, with a population of a little over 247,000 residents as of 2013.

The County District Court was looking for new ways to reduce costs and increase efficiency as it moves closer to a 100 percent paperless court. The Court selected ImageSoft to implement JusticeTech, a solution suite powered by OnBase and TrueFiling.

The solution captures case documents and related data and makes them available immediately, regardless of location. TrueFiling from ImageSoft is a 24/7 Web-based eFiling tool that improves efficiency for the courts and filers by reducing paper handling. It creates a paper-on-demand court and streamlines the court's workflow by enabling two-way communication between filing parties and the court, with real-time status tracking for all documents.

The Yakima County District Court operates from two locations, one in Yakima and one 40 miles away in Grandview. It hears the following types of cases:

- Traffic and non-traffic infractions
- Misdemeanor and gross misdemeanor criminal offenses
- Civil matters for damages and contract disputes not exceeding \$100,000
- Small claim matters for recovery of money not exceeding \$5000
- Name changes
- Anti-harassment and stalking protection orders

The Challenge

Prior to deploying JusticeTech's OnBase and TrueFiling, the County District Court was living "in a paper world," according to the District Court Manager, Therese Murphy. Like many courts, it was generating virtually all records and files on paper and storing them in manual files on shelving units lining the office walls. To answer questions or do any work affecting the file, staff had to find the file (unless it was in use by another clerk or misfiled, which is a common occurrence in any court office), and page through it to find the answer. Stacks of paper cluttered staff desks, waiting to be recorded and filed; files and papers lived in bins waiting to be sorted and placed on the shelf; precious resources were spent on forms and file folders and shelving units, not to mention staff labor to move these files from place to place.

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Because the Court hosts two locations, staff had to move physical files the 40 miles between offices if staff in either office needed to refer to the files. For judges to access the court record, staff had to move the physical files to courtrooms and chambers.

It's a pretty typical picture of courts across the country, ready to move toward paper on demand or paperless operations

The Solution

The Court selected ImageSoft to implement its JusticeTech solution powered by OnBase®. It provides integrated court case document management and an automated workflow designed specifically for courts. JusticeTech is a comprehensive suite of technology solutions that allows courts to securely store and manage records and files electronically. It results in improved efficiency and better transparency. Critical documents and content, including photos, videos and audio files, are stored in a secure environment that is quickly and easily accessed anytime, from anywhere. Trial and appellate courts have seen productivity increase by as much as 15-30 percent in a single year. Deployment of the solution began in July 2016.

Later in the project, the Court added TrueFiling, an eFiling solution developed by ImageSoft. Users can eFile their documents in the TrueFiling portal 24/7 using a web browser. Their filings flow seamlessly into OnBase and its workflow for immediate access and review. As filings move through the review process, the status is automatically updated in TrueFiling, providing real-time status tracking for all documents. This self-service access for the parties reduces call volume into the court for status updates and provides a very important public service.

The Results

Using JusticeTech powered by OnBase and TrueFiling, the Court is moving toward a paperless system and caseflow.

Electronic case files are accessible to the entire court staff, from the courtroom to chambers, to staff offices and between the two offices in Yakima and Grandview. According to Ms. Murphy, it is very beneficial for the staff to be able to access all case files from either location.

Court clerks now answer questions for stakeholders in minutes rather than hours. Court staff can easily access files, regardless of the case stage. Efficiency and productivity are up dramatically, with civil paperwork processed and streamlined. Judges, in particular, are able to access documents from any location – paperwork is processed and filed faster and returned to the filer. In the past, it could take several days for paperwork to be processed and for the filer to receive a conformed copy – now filers receive their copy within 24 hours of the court receiving the filing. Files pass seamlessly between Judges and court clerks with just a few clicks – instead of the old way of physically locating a file, printing a calendar and physically carrying it to the courtroom.

The calendaring clerk and in-court clerks have experienced significant timesavings as well. They no longer are creating new paper files and prepping paperwork for each case. Now this is accomplished electronically.

The Court has been able to reallocate labor resources thanks to the case document management system. Managing paper files took up the resources of 1½ full-time equivalent staff members before implementing the solution. Since the go-live date, a half-time position manages the remaining paper files, allowing the Court to move staff resources to work on other strategic projects.

One of the most obvious benefits of the solution is the expansion of office space afforded by the removal of a large shelving unit. Because the Court now accesses and stores files electronically, it was able to eliminate one shelving unit (156 feet long by 23 inches deep, with approximately 2000 files stored on both sides). The Court will remove a second, similarly sized shelving unit soon. In addition to removing the unit itself, associated storage and labor costs are now a thing of the past.

Ms. Murphy identified one of the strengths of the new system revolves around missing files. She stated, "...we no longer end up with missing files, or paperwork. Even if a document was scanned under the wrong case number, you are able to go in, retrieve that document and correct the mistake. Another strength is that we are able to see the history of a document – this has come in very handy for me." Ms. Murphy pointed to the importance of being able to answer questions about the file and do meaningful research on what was done, when it was done and by whom.

Another practical benefit is the cost savings in office supplies of multiple forms and file folders. Previously, the Court used dozens of multi-part forms; the majority of those forms are no longer needed.

The Court still uses another software solution for older archived cases, some infractions and driving with license suspended 3rd degree or DWLS 3s, but it is less user friendly and the retrieval of incorrectly entered files is difficult and time consuming. Using the JusticeTech OnBase solution, the staff has found how easy it is to look up cases, retrieve them and make instant corrections.

In Their Own Words

The ease of integration of JusticeTech's OnBase is a huge benefit to the Court, according to Ms. Murphy. In fact, one of the most talked about and well-liked features was the ability of one of the developers to integrate Box.com (a file sharing platform). Ms. Murphy indicated: "We use Box.com to send paperwork to outside agencies. The ease of being able to send paper seamlessly from within OnBase is invaluable to a court clerk."

Another staff member gave a telling response as to how easy it is to move files around: "I didn't particularly expect how much time it would save me in a work day."

Another staff person reported: "One thing that I am really impressed with is how OnBase has simplified the way that we import infractions and warrants. At first it was a bit of an uphill battle, but we are now starting to see the benefits of the OnBase cases and how much faster and simpler it has made this process."

One of the Court's staff members commented about the solution: "As much as I can use JusticeTech's OnBase, I will." Ms. Murphy agreed that this pretty much sums up the whole Court's experience.

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Several staff members agree that they enjoyed working with the JusticeTech deployment team members, saying “He has been a tremendous help to us. Also, more recently we have had the pleasure of working with customer care (who) has been invaluable to us. Thanks for all your assistance.”

The Next Steps

The Court hopes to expand its use of JusticeTech’s OnBase and TrueFiling to the Civil Department. They would like to add all of the historical civil files into OnBase to use TrueFiling and experience the same benefits as the new cases using both solutions.

They are hoping to set up a Web portal for customers to access and pay for court records electronically to streamline the process. In addition, the Court is looking at integration with the software solution used by the Prosecutor’s Office and the Department of Assigned Counsel.

Yakima County District Court

The Challenges

- A paper-only process requiring manual preparation, access, storage, retrieval often resulting in lost or misfiled documents, documents in use by other staff and similar paper-related problems.
- Growing need for storage space and shelving units.
- Increasing storage costs.
- Stacks of paper to be recorded, filed, sorted and placed on a shelf.
- Labor costs to maintain and move paper files.
- Problems of moving files between two offices 40 miles apart.
- Physical movement of files inside the courthouse.
- Time spent providing status updates to parties on filings.

The Results

- Moving closer to a 100 percent paperless operation.
- Accessibility across the entire Court, anytime, anywhere, and at the same time.
- Accessibility to files from two court locations.
- More efficient and faster response rate to questions from stakeholders.
- Increased productivity and efficiency.
- No more paper file creation and preparation for the calendaring clerk and in-court clerks.
- Reduced time spent on filing status updates.
- Reassignment of staff resources to more strategic projects.
- Expansion of office space following elimination of shelving unit.
- Cost savings in office supplies.

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