

## Electronic Document Management Streamlines Florida Court System

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The United States annually uses about 4 million tons of copy paper -- the type used in fax machines and computer printers -- and spends \$4 billion yearly on it, according to *Cutting Paper*, a Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory Web site that's sponsored by the U.S. Department of Energy. Some businesses use more paper than others. Courts, for example, are notorious consumers. Records are created for each court case and must be accessible to all parties involved, which means generating multiple copies.

So wouldn't it be nice to reduce paper consumption -- and streamline work processes?

The 13th Judicial Circuit court in [Hillsborough County, Fla.](#), is doing just that after enlisting a document management system to digitize records. It drastically cut the amount of paper used and enabled information to be distributed electronically.

"Printing presents a challenge for us because, No. 1, it introduces a lot of time into the whole workflow process because of the handling of the paper," said Abdiel Ortiz, the court's chief technology officer. "So it makes sense for us to streamline things by either having access to that information online or being able to look online at the files and documents. And that, in essence, is what is driving us to go ahead and do this initiative."

The 13th Judicial Circuit court implemented the Xerox DocuShare ECM (enterprise content management) system to digitize documents, thus eliminating the need to make multiple copies of each record. The judicial court also added a storage area network to ensure adequate room to electronically store all the documents.

One court division is saving 8,000 to 10,000 pages of paper per day by using the content management system, Ortiz said. The department completes approximately 1,500 orders daily -- they are created in Word, printed, sent to a judge to sign, reprinted if the judge makes any changes, and then filed with the clerk. "It was introducing, on average, about 260 hours a month that they were spending just on the process," Ortiz said. "Then we have to archive our paper documents, and that was another 120 hours a month -- for a total of 380 hours."

The system reduced the amount of time the department spends on the order process to fewer than 3.8 hours each month, Ortiz said. The DocuShare system, storage area network and servers cost \$180,000 to \$200,000, he said. Because of the time savings the court is realizing, he expected to reach the return on investment in six months.

### Streamlined Processes

Lila Stello, a hearing officer of the 13th Judicial Circuit court, attends approximately 40 hearings each workday and is responsible for writing a seven-page order for each one. Moving to digitized documents has reformed the work processes in Stello's office.

Before implementing the document management system in her office, the process for each court case was laborious: Stello would handwrite her recommended order in court and then make a copy of it. The original document would go to the judge to sign off on if he or she agreed with Stello's order. The signed order would be returned to Stello's office, where her secretary would make three copies to be distributed to others in the system, like the state Attorney General. Finally the original document would be filed with the clerk.

Stello said her secretary spent about two and a half hours every day making copies of the orders, which used about 1,120 sheets of paper daily. "We no longer do any copying. Not one copy is made of the original order with DocuShare," she said.

Now the original order is scanned into the DocuShare system. After the judge signs off on it, the order is ready for electronic distribution, which is set up through Omtool's AccuRoute, a Web-based document distribution platform. James Demel, systems operator for Xerox Services, works in the courthouse as part of the company's contract to run a copy center and provide support for DocuShare and Xerox equipment. Stello said Demel created a cover sheet in AccuRoute that allows the documents to be automatically distributed to different parties.

"They can scan to DocuShare and then to the AccuRoute server, and automatically send out that one document to multiple locations, including e-mail addresses, fax machines and printers," Demel said. The server permits encoded routing be added to the cover sheets, which eliminates redundant work by letting Stello and her secretary select the appropriate cover sheet; the document is automatically sent to the corresponding parties.

Ortiz said five of the 15 court divisions within the 13th Circuit court were using the document management system and four more divisions planned to add the technology.

## **Public Improvements**

The content management system has made the court's documents more accessible for the public. Before documents were scanned into the system, physical records were kept, but old records were moved out of the courthouse to a storage location due to limited space. Stello said if a citizen needed a court record, he or she would have to order the court file. If the file had been moved to storage, it could take two to three days for it to be picked up.

Now the court staff can find documents by searching for the hearing date and person's name. "[A woman] walked in and said, 'I never got it. Where do I go? How much do I pay?'" Stello said. "Because that's what it would be -- they would have to pay the clerk for a copy and get it certified, which is more expensive. My secretary was able to hand her a copy immediately."

Another improvement the court implemented was a disaster-recovery site at a remote location. Ortiz said this project was important because information used to be backed up on tapes that could be shipped to an offsite location to preserve records. "It would take several weeks, if not months, to get back to a state where we could do business," he said. "This way -- assuming that a disaster didn't cover a huge region -- we should be able to return to business as usual within minutes."

## **Digital Signature**

The court hopes to find even more savings in the future by letting judges sign off on electronic documents. The court has submitted paperwork to the electronic forms committee of the Office of the State Courts Administrator to get permission to use electronic signatures, Demel said.

"We want to be able to do the order originally online, and then get a signature block," Stello said, later adding, "Once that's done, this is really going to be fast because as I do the orders in court, while the parties are sitting here, they're going to go to the judge, get signed and sent right back to me automatically. I'll be handing out their orders right in the courtroom without mailing costs."