Laserfiche® speeds the wheels of justice in Cowlitz County, Washington
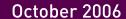
Running a jail is plenty tough without the paperwork problems.

Yet there it was, the stairwell paper shuffle, an extra daily challenge for the staff of Washington's Cowlitz County Jail.

Twenty-five inmates squeezed into the jail's video hearing room on the third floor, the District Court judge receiving their closed circuit televised testimony on the second floor. Meanwhile, a corrections officer ran back and forth between the two, collecting the signatures to make it all official.

"Inmates in various states of sobriety and cooperation would wait an hour, sometimes two, as the paperwork came and went. It was fun," says Corrections Officer Dave Fundingsland, "to sit and watch the bad vibes fester as the wheels of justice worked their way through the stairwells."

With the jail soon to relocate, a more efficient system had to be implemented. The county's choice? Digital document management from Laserfiche®. Now, defendants can simply sign an electronic pad in the video hearing room. No more stairs.

All kinds of documents, from release forms to no-contact orders, are now dealt with in real time, with all the pertinent background information available to the parties involved.

"Now," says Fundingsland, "they're in that room for maybe 15, 20 minutes."

On the other side of the street, District Court administrator Dee Wirkkala says simply, "I can't imagine what it would have been like if we hadn't done this—we would have had a real nightmare."

The success of the Laserfiche installation has, however, caused one unforeseen downside. Explains Wirkkala: "We're never finished. We were supposed to start out with a limited scope, and it's working so well, we keep adding more and more and more to it."

Indeed, thanks to the cooperative creative work of Cowlitz IT ace Patty Kero and Laserfiche vendor VP Consulting, the software has brought into sight a once unthinkable goal: An almost entirely paper-free courthouse.

Organization profile

Located in southwestern Washington, Cowlitz County is home to 93,000 residents. Since 1985, the average daily inmate population at Cowlitz County Jail has tripled.

Situation

The system for processing incoming inmates was inefficient and time-consuming, as a corrections officer had to cycle endlessly between the second and third floors obtaining the necessary signatures to move the process forward. Cowlitz County sought to streamline the process and minimize the time inmates spend in holding.

Solution

By implementing a Laserfiche document management system, the jail has greatly improved efficiency. Inmates now sign an electroinc pad, and documents are instantly available to all parties involved in the booking process. In addition, a custom-written application has virtually eliminated paper in the county's small claims court.

Benefits

• Corrections officers save time by distributing documents elecronically rather than manually.
• The jail has reclaimed physical storage space and reduced labor and paper costs.
• Small claims cases process faster, costing fewer taxpayer dollars.

Laserfiche Components

The Complete Toolkit Pack™
Quick Fields™
Laserfiche Standard Server™
Snapshot™

Laserfiche®

Along with the jail system installation, Kero wrote a program for the small claims court that Wirkkala says is responsible for "a huge efficiency upgrade" since its arrival in March.

When someone comes in with a new small claims case, it's paperless from the start. "When the original file comes in, we use Laserfiche — we don't build a file, we don't use paper," Wirkkala says, noting the obvious advantage over traditional filing.

"We had an old paper file this morning that got misfiled and we probably spent three hours trying to find this physical file, where if it had been in Laserfiche we wouldn't have had to look for it."

Now, any of the court's 16 staffers can instantly view entire case files. That includes the judge, who accesses Laserfiche right from the bench.

But as important as the software itself, according to Kero, has been its ability to adapt to the specific needs of its users, who have made minor adjustments as any issues arose. "We did take it slow," says Kero, explaining that "the software really evolved with them."

Fundingsland, who operates the system at the jail, calls it "pretty much flawless. When we first started we had to make changes here and there," he says. "We called Patty Kero and it was done."

The success has bred more plans. Soon, the judge will be able to sign an electronic pad to finalize, record and print his decisions in one step.

And it's hoped that by the middle of next year, defendants' lawyers will be able to access Laserfiche via the Internet and handle their clients' in-court needs electronically.

Combine that with the notion of scanning and eliminating the tens of thousands of old files stored in cabinets, and Wirkkala says it's a whole new world. Consider that last year alone there were 26,427 cases filed, and each file averages roughly 20 pieces of paper.

"Then we do have some that are 6 inches thick," she says.

All of it, says Kero, will be safer when the work is done. There is password security for all files and disc back-ups stored off site.

"In a lot of ways it's more secure than if you had a paper copy," she says. "What if there's a fire or a flood or an earthquake? If something happens, a document could be gone forever."

The advancement, however, leads to yet another nice-to-have problem: How to use the newly vacated space.

"There's a whole section where we keep small claims, and now there's nothing there," says Wirkkala. "Every once in a while I'll walk up there to pull a file and say, 'Oh, wait a minute…' Just to get rid of even half of this stuff would be amazing."

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>
> **Dee Wirkkala**
> **District Court Administrator**

About Laserfiche

A resource for over 23,000 public- and private-sector organizations around the world since 1987, Laserfiche creates simple, elegant document management solutions that help organizations run smarter. From streamlining digital records management to automating the agenda process, Laserfiche helps improve efficiency while integrating seamlessly within any environment.

Your Next Step

Visit **laserfiche.com/gov** to get a free white paper on implementing an electronic document management system. Or call **(800) 985-8533** to get answers now.

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