



Clark County Municipal Court makes an unbeatable case for business process transformation

Overview

■ Challenge

Clark County Municipal Court sought to improve customer service by allowing the public to conveniently access court records.

■ Why Become an On Demand Business?

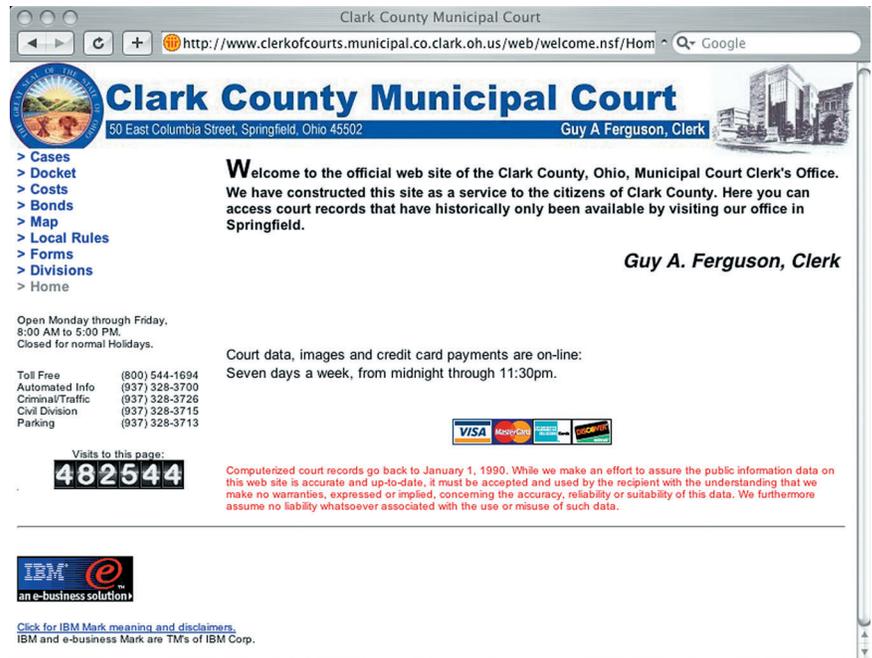
By replacing its paper-based, labor-intensive records systems with an automated, Web-based documentation workflow, Clark County Municipal Court could deliver a higher quality of public service while saving taxpayers money.

■ Solution

Working closely with IBM Business Partner MAPSYS, Clark County Municipal Court launched an innovative automated records system based on an IBM® @server® i5 520 Enterprise Edition system running IBM Lotus Notes® software, and transformed interactions with court members and the public.

► On Demand Business defined

An enterprise whose business processes—integrated end-to-end across the company and with key partners, suppliers and customers—can respond with speed to any customer demand, market opportunity or external threat.



■ Key Benefits

- Significantly enhanced public interaction with the court system
- Online payment capabilities expected to increase annual revenues by US\$240,000 while cutting annual payment processing costs by US\$30,000
- Electronic imaging system expected to yield US\$60,000 yearly savings in reduced copying costs alone
- Automated workflows and online records access expected to lower court labor costs by 50 percent



On Demand Business Benefits

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– Guy Ferguson, Clerk, Clark County Municipal Court

Located in Springfield, the Clark County, Ohio, Municipal Court oversees the county’s civil, criminal and traffic legal proceedings through three municipal divisions. The court’s criminal and traffic division processes misdemeanor cases, preliminary hearings for felony trials and all traffic offenses occurring within the county. Its civil division handles small-claims cases, evictions, landlord/tenant disputes, appeals of state license suspension cases, contract disputes and personal injury cases. And finally, its trusteeship division helps debtors and creditors reach mutual agreements on payment plans. All told, the court currently processes more than 20,000 cases annually—a caseload that continues to grow.

Even so, Clark County Municipal Court strives to provide expanded services to the public. “I never lose sight of the fact that I am an elected official,” says Guy Ferguson, Clark County Clerk. “I work for the people, and providing better service to them is my job, first and foremost.”

Like most government organizations, the court is often constrained by budget pressures. And so Ferguson and his team continually seek innovative ways to transform business processes while reducing operating costs. “We are always trying to make our operations better and more efficient—and we keep a close eye on evolving technology to see how we can use it to our advantage.”

Document management challenges raise operating costs, block revenues

In keeping with this mission, the Clark County Municipal Court recently completed an innovative transformation of its records management system. Traditionally, the court maintained case files on hard copy only, severely limiting public access to these records and greatly complicating document management processes. Members of the public were required to telephone, send a mail inquiry or visit the court to gain access to case data. Paying a traffic fine required a courthouse visit, and fines often went unpaid due to an individual’s inability to reach the courthouse during its limited business hours.

At the same time, the court’s paper-intensive filing and distribution processes generated reams of records and required extensive personnel to manage. For each of the court’s thousands of active cases, staff members were required to manually copy files and route them to the appropriate departments, such as the county’s

Safety Services, Financial Services and Probation departments, as well as to individual judges. Employees were also responsible for responding to all inquiries from the general public. As its caseload grew, Clark County's record-keeping system drove up operating costs and burdened the court's limited resources.

The combination was costing the county: In addition to creating less than optimal public interactions, the court lost significant revenue opportunities in unpaid fines while simultaneously spending excessive resources and hours on operations. Clearly, Clark County needed a new system for recording and managing documentation—one that would improve its service to the public while dramatically reducing costs.

Self-serve records system improves public service, employee productivity

Working closely with IBM Business Partner MAPSYS, the court began its technology evolution by first automating its records management system internally using a custom application built on IBM Lotus Notes software. The court then extended access to records to the public by adding a custom, Web-based inquiry system that allowed citizens to check case status over the Internet without stepping inside the courthouse.

With the new system, not only was the public better served but courthouse employees were also much more effectively engaged. Freed from responding to telephone, mail and in-person case inquiries, staff members could now focus on other key tasks. "Court staff members were so much more productive that we began to consider what more we might do with IBM iSeries™ systems and IBM Lotus® software," says Steve Bernard, president of MAPSYS.

Online payments bolster revenues

Extending the online case inquiry system, Clark County Municipal Court and MAPSYS enhanced the Web site to accept credit card payments, enabling people to pay traffic fines over the Internet. Says Ferguson, "We leveraged our technology infrastructure to help eliminate the hassles that go along with paying a traffic fine—like taking time out of the workday, driving to the courthouse and finding a parking spot."

Key Components

Software

- IBM Lotus Notes software

Servers

- IBM @server i5 520 Enterprise Edition server
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By making it easier and more convenient to pay fines, the courthouse exponentially boosted revenues while dramatically reducing operating costs. “Simply by implementing the online payment system, we expect to increase annual fines revenues by US\$240,000,” notes Ferguson. “What’s more, the related mail workload has been cut in half, reducing payment processing costs by about US\$30,000 a year.”

Imaging system clears the paper clutter

Following the success of the online case inquiry and payment systems, Clark County Municipal Court began investigating further business process improvement and innovation. They immediately targeted hard copy case files. Each of the thousands of cases processed annually still required paper filing, the judge’s verdict and supporting documentation. Additionally, by law, these documents must be kept on record for 40 years after the case’s conclusion. So the courthouse still housed and managed a staggering number of paper documents.

Although the court earlier had investigated an imaging solution to transform paper files to electronic ones, existing solutions were too expensive. However, the revenues and cost savings generated by the new Web-based self-service and payment systems gave Clark County Municipal Court the funds required for the next step in its business process transformation. In March 2005, the court and MAPSYS implemented a new records imaging system. The goal? To convert all of the court’s paper-based documents to electronic versions and make them accessible to attorneys, judges and the public.

MAPSYS created a customized imaging application to capture the court’s hard copy documents and store and catalog them as electronic files. This solution runs on an @server iSeries i5 520 Enterprise Edition system alongside the court’s existing case management and online payment applications. Now the court’s case files and related documents exist in electronic form—and are available on the Internet at any time and to multiple users simultaneously.

“Before the records became electronic, prosecutors, attorneys, judges and various authorized personnel could borrow the actual case files and remove them from the clerk’s office,” explains Ferguson. “Keeping tabs on the files was extremely difficult, and sometimes case files were misplaced. Now the files are available online, 24x7, to everyone who needs them—and they need never leave the office.”

The new file format has also yielded significant cost savings for the courthouse. Says Ferguson, “We spent many man hours searching for cases and re-filing them. Since implementing the imaging system, we estimate that we have saved between five percent and seven percent in annual operating costs.”

Workflow automation slashes operating costs

Clark County Municipal Court took the imaging system one step further. By combining the electronically captured images with the workflow capabilities of the Lotus software, the court created automated workflows for a previously manual and labor-intensive business process. Explains Bernard, “When a case is filed, a series of document packages must be generated and sent to numerous parties throughout the court. The prosecuting attorney, the plaintiff, the defendant, the judge and others all receive copies of this document package. Previously, the responsibility of copying and routing these reams of paper fell to a member of the court’s staff.”

Now when Clark County personnel file a case or an event such as a case being dismissed occurs, the Lotus workflow application routes the pertinent data to the appropriate groups or persons within the county. Instead of court personnel copying, sorting and manually distributing case records, recipients can access records through the Lotus interface—a tremendous savings in court resources.

In fact, reports Ferguson, since implementing the new automated workflow system, the court has realized an estimated US\$60,000 yearly savings in copying costs alone. By automating workflows and allowing online access to records, they have further cut labor costs by 50 percent while handling the same workload. “Many IT projects take a long time to demonstrate a payoff,” says Ferguson. “But with this one, the return on investment was immediate.”

Court leads innovation by example

Given the impressive cost savings and revenue enhancements, it is easy to see why other courts in the state are beginning to follow in Clark County Municipal Court’s footsteps, investigating imaging and automated workflow projects of their own. None, however, have yet reached Clark County’s level of advancement in electronic record keeping. “I like to feel that we are innovating all the time,” concludes Ferguson. “But for now, we are just really proud of our accomplishments.”

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December 2005
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