

Chapter 9: Summary

Electronic filing is a revolutionary approach to conducting court business that will significantly change the way courts work. Electronic filing combines existing and new technology to bring cost savings and efficiency to many court processes. When all case information is available as searchable text, it will be possible to integrate it with databases of legal precedent, courtroom testimony and evidence in its electronic form. This will allow the creation of sophisticated decision support systems that will help courts administer swifter and more effective justice.

Documents, once read from beginning to end, will be prepared in layers accessible through hypertext links. Readers will *drill down* to view greater detail if they desire. Footnotes will link World Wide Web documents stored all over the world. Electronic filing will allow court leaders to revolutionize the way documents are processed in the court.

Computerization of court information began this revolution, which was followed by the introduction of the personal computer. The PC did two things: it extended the use of this tool to areas not previously considered for automation, and it allowed the separate areas of court technology development—case data, office automation, records, legal information, evidence, and testimony—to begin to merge. Of the three stages of evolution of technology, the use of electronic documents might prove the most significant.

In the short term, there are many benefits gained with electronic filing. Most costs associated with paper handling and storage are eliminated in addition to redundant data entry at the courts. Case materials are readily accessible and protected from loss and

destruction. Court employees who work with records will be more productive as paper handling is eliminated, and they will be able to redirect their efforts to other court administration functions. Attorneys will save time and money transporting materials to the courthouse. In addition, they will have greater access to court materials stored in electronic format. Finally, document processing will be easier to manage than today's paper system, providing greater productivity and effectiveness in the court's work.

As this guidebook explains, there are many important factors and issues that must be considered and understood in order to successfully implement electronic filing in the courts. Court administrators must understand the many implications of changing existing court processes. Throughout the process of gaining funding and political support, adopting new court rules, installing new technology, and redesigning the everyday workflow of the courts, those involved in the implementation of electronic filing must be dedicated to the electronic filing revolution.

By way of advice to court leaders, don't be overwhelmed or discouraged by potential challenges related to modernizing today's courts. These first steps will provide tremendous benefits that in turn will create momentum for future progress. It is possible to learn from early pioneers with electricity. They did not foresee the development of the computer as a consequence of their work. In the same way, the effect of electronic document processing on the nature of future decision support systems and court case processing techniques is unclear. We do not know what shape progress will take, but we know it will occur.

Just because progress is inevitable, it doesn't mean it will be easy or that we won't make mistakes. Instead, we will learn more about our destination as we approach it. Good luck on the journey.

Appendices

