Court Case Study:
Arlington County Circuit Court

"ImageSoft doesn't provide a one-size-fits-all solution but takes the time to fully understand its customer's needs to implement a system that best addresses them."

The Customer

Arlington County, in Northern Virginia, boasts approximately 220,000 residents and a land area of about 25 square miles. It is nestled between Washington, D.C. and Fairfax County, Virginia. Home to many departments and agencies of the federal government, the county is known for the Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport, the Pentagon, Arlington National Cemetery and the Marine Corps War Memorial, also known as the iconic Iwo Jima statue. The county sits on the south bank of the Potomac River across from Washington, D.C. and is bordered by Fairfax County and the City of Alexandria.

With its solid public schools, accessible public transportation, a healthy population and lots of nightlife venues, it has been named one of the best places to live in America, according to Niche.

The Circuit Court serves Arlington County citizens and the neighboring City of Falls Church. It has original jurisdiction over civil cases having a value of $25,000 or more, all criminal felonies, and misdemeanor and juvenile appeals. It also has three judges who collectively preside over more than 7,000 cases annually. The Clerk of the Court is an elected position serving an 8-year term.

Upon entering office in 2008, Arlington County Clerk of Court Paul Ferguson set out to implement his vision of "Project Paperless" -- an end-to-end digital case flow management environment for civil and criminal court records. Two of the key tenets of "Project Paperless" were to capture and process documents electronically as they entered the court, and to replace the paper case file with a completely electronic version.

The Challenge

In looking at how to process and manage the approximately one-million pieces of paper filed with his office each year, Mr. Ferguson looked at various solutions available in the marketplace. The solution needed to address the following challenges with the Court's existing paper document management system:

- Paper documents were easily misplaced, misfiled, or hard to locate – in fact, staff spent an average of 15-20 hours per week tracking down missing documents and files

- Staff often used different manual processes to accept, index, file and track documents and court files. The lack of consistent procedures for processing documents among court personnel was an ongoing source of frustration within the office and with external court users

- Prioritizing documents for processing was labor intensive and difficult to ensure that documents were processed or added to the file in a timely manner

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- Staff had no way to verify whether missing documents had actually been filed

- Access to documents and files was limited to one user at any given time, which affected the judge's staff in their review of case files

- Remote access by staff and judges was not an option.

- Lack of integration among the Court's case management system, docketing system and paper records required staff to input information into several different systems, wasting time and increasing the chance for errors

- Paper records were bulky, heavy to transport and required staff time to pull and refile after each use

- Mailing paper court documents to parties was labor-intensive and expensive

Beginning in 2010, the court started scanning many of its active criminal and civil pleadings utilizing the County's ERMS platform, OnBase. However, the Court also continued to use and maintain complete paper files for conducting its day-to-day operations – a duplication of effort, but a reasonable first step. The following year, the Clerk's Office hired a consultant to document its existing "as-is" processes in order to better understand areas for process improvement. Next, the Court brainstormed its wish list of desired internal functionality with the judge's chambers and County technology staff. For ideas, Court staff visited other courts and observed multiple vendor demonstrations. This led to the development of the business case for funding, which identified the issues, options and costs of transitioning to a paperless system.

The Court worked closely with the National Center for State Courts to identify available technology and associated vendors. They drafted a list of potential vendors through a Request for Information process, which sought custom off-the-shelf applications that integrated with OnBase. Court staff also visited and/ or viewed systems being used by other courts to better understand differences in system functionality. This led to the development of a sole-source procurement package, which was approved by the County to purchase ImageSoft's TrueFiling solution in the summer of 2012.

The Arlington County Board funded the initial system costs through one-time spending from general funds. With funding assistance from the County's Department of Technology Services, the Court retained a consultant with technical expertise as program manager and a second consultant with OnBase expertise. State authorized user fees coupled with funds from the operating budget covered additional hardware costs and software enhancements. The Court reclassified one staff position to become the business systems analyst and manage day-to-day system operations in-house.

The Solution

"Project Paperless," which was first rolled out July 1, 2013, minimizes paper documents, streamlines court processes, provides 24/7 online access to non-confidential court records to attorneys licensed in Virginia, enables electronic notice and order preparation, and allows judges to work electronically from the bench, as well as remotely. This solution utilizes the following components:

- Virginia's Circuit Court Case Information System (CCMS) for case/docket management and the Financial Accounting System (FAS) for financial accounting

- OnBase by Hyland's enterprise content management software, which includes workflow to automate clerk and court business rules using an electronic case file

- ImageSoft's TrueFiling electronic filing solution

The Results

The solution has improved staff efficiency and morale, reduced time wasted tracking and filing paper documents, facilitated workflow and work assignments and increased both internal use and public access to court documents. It has also facilitated greater transparency and accountability in the Clerk's office.

Process improvements include:

- Files are instantly available to court staff and judges, so no more carrying buckets of paper files back and forth

- Files are easier to locate and review because documents can be tracked using electronic search features

- Documents are handled by fewer people, which eliminates redundant actions, saves time and provides greater accountability

- Judges can review files and sign orders from anywhere and at any time

- Clerks handle more cases with no additional headcount

- Solution has flexibility to evolve as needs change

Efficiencies gained:

- Less time spent looking for files/documents

- More time spent ensuring records are complete and accurate

- Filing and case access for attorneys is 24/7, with automated notice to parties of court decisions and orders

- More space and less clutter

Constituent service benefits:

- Case information is readily accessible, eliminating the need to call customers back with additional information

- Access to case information is no longer dependent on one person or whether the Clerk's office is open

- More secure record retention and greater disaster recovery alternatives

During the first six months, the Court noted the following milestones:

Criminal orders generated and signed electronically:	**5,575**
Paper court records scanned/indexed:	**43,649**
Court records filed electronically:	**1,497**
Law firms registered for TrueFiling:	**85**
Change in headcount:	**0**

The court noted a significant increase in new cases and the number of documents processed from FY2015-FY2017. The system workflow and related efficiencies enable existing staff to handle the increased workload.

	FY2015	FY2017	Increase
Number of civil and criminal cases	6,483	7,681	18%
Total number of documents processed	85,575	90,810	6%
Total number of electronic documents processed	11,046	13,146	19%

Authorized attorneys register with TrueFiling and can immediately start eFiling from anywhere, at any time, into pending Arlington Circuit Court cases. eFiling is not limited to the hours the Court is actually open. Likewise, authorized users can access non-confidential criminal and civil case files from their offices or other locations upon approval of an SRA application and payment of fees.

Staff members from the Clerk's office are able to access and view scanned records immediately, regardless of where the document is in the workflow. The system includes security levels, which regulate individual access. Members of the public and attorneys may view scanned, redacted non-confidential court records at kiosks in the Clerk's office during normal business hours. Judges and court staff may view electronic records and documents in the courtrooms from a variety of devices. At the same time, judges and their staff can access court files at all times from their offices or a remote location. Case files are electronic and accessible in court and in the Clerk's office via laptops and/or public access terminals.

Over time, the Court has worked hard to enhance understanding and use of the solution through ongoing staff training on the system's functionality and workflow. Further, the Court routinely solicits staff and user suggestions regarding process improvements.

The Next Steps

Since the initial implementation and go-live, the Court has added the following new functionalities:

- Enhanced sort/filtering capability for Judicial clerks
- Electronic notifications/document transmission to probation, police, Commonwealth Attorneys and others
- Electronic transcript submission and upload
- Pend queue functionality for certain document types
- Batch signing
- Performance measures/reporting
- Electronic appeal preparation and transmission

Arlington County Circuit Court

The Challenges

- Misplaced, misfiled, or hard-to-locate paper documents
- Labor intensive and slow document prioritization
- Inconsistent procedures and frustration of manual processes
- Lack of integration with Virginia's Case Management System
- Bulky paper records were heavy to transport
- Mailing paper court documents was laborious and expensive
- No reliable verification of whether missing documents had been filed
- Documents accessible by only one person at a time
- No emergency back-up records retention system

The Results

- Electronic case filing of civil and criminal pleadings
- Remote document search and retrieval features
- Paperless order generation and electronic signing
- Judges empowered to work remotely
- Automated workflows based on filing/document types
- Integration with the state of Virginia Court Case Management System (CCMS)
- Automated notifications to attorneys
- Scheduled prompts for hearings/docket management
- Workflow management tools to better manage individual workloads
- Audit trail functionality for greater staff accountability