

Court Case Study: Monroe County, MI Prosecutor's Office

“We wanted state-of-the-art software and programs that enhance our abilities. That's the difference between ImageSoft and competitors.”

— **William P. Nichols**
Prosecutor,
Monroe County, MI

The Customer

Monroe County, located in Southeast Michigan, is home to about 150,000 residents. The prosecutor's office, led by elected prosecutor William Paul Nichols, employs 22 and runs on an annual budget of about \$2.5 million. Prior to implementing The Paperless Prosecutor solution, the prosecutor's office was relying strictly on paper records for court files. More than just an inconvenience, relying on paper files was making communication with other agencies - including law enforcement, the courts and state officials - difficult and time consuming. There were no checks and balances to ensure that important files had been sent or received, and driving from one office to another to deliver paper records was inefficient and cumbersome. ImageSoft's paperless solution allows court and public safety officials to securely store and manage all of their information electronically. By integrating with existing case management systems, key parties in the justice system can work collaboratively as a single, connected unit. The result is improved efficiency, better transparency and improved public safety. Trial and appellate courts, prosecutors' offices and law enforcement agencies have seen productivity increase by as much as 15 to 30 percent in a single year.

The Challenge

Prior to late 2011, the Monroe County prosecutor's office was solely reliant on paper court files. Pulling case files on a daily basis was a major task for support staff - a file could be on someone's desk, with the typist, in the discovery unit, or elsewhere. Searching for a lost file could consume hours of a staff member's time, distracting from other tasks. Most often, when someone would call to check on the status of a case or request case information, an employee had to take a message, work to track down the file and compile the appropriate information, and then return the call. Without instant computer access to information, time and energy was lost.

Beyond that, communicating with other agencies was far from seamless. All nine law enforcement agencies in Monroe County used their own records management systems, and the systems were not interconnected. Documents were formatted differently, and all records - criminal history information, lab reports, warrants and more - had to be physically driven to their correct location. They might be tossed in a bin, so there was no way for an agency to know if a document or case file arrived or was received by the right person. Waiting for records to arrive and be processed was slowing the justice system. Monroe County was also facing budget constraints due to the tough economy. They were forced to lay off about 20 percent of their staff.

Luckily, county administrators set aside an additional \$250,000 to help improve efficiency in the office after staff cuts. Decision makers decided that moving to electronic records would improve communication and workflow, so they began researching the best options.

The Journey

The Monroe County prosecutor's office put out a request for proposal when they decided to move from a paper-based system to an electronic process. They received 15 bids from across the country, and the clear winner was ImageSoft. A respected content management provider since 1996, ImageSoft was not only the most professional, according to Nichols, but their paperless solutions were far more sophisticated than other, more basic document management systems. More than just an electronic case file system, the Paperless Prosecution solution is a complete case management system that streamlines workflow for

all employees, saving time and money.

The implementation process started in 2010. Nichols and his colleagues worked with ImageSoft closely for more than a year to design a system that was customized to reflect the way the prosecutor's office wanted to work. Nichols was able to personalize the document management process, deciding how information would flow from one employee to the next, one agency to the next, and how colleagues would be notified when important documents were ready for review or action. The prosecutor's office was able to play a significant role in designing a system to solve their challenges.

In late 2011, ImageSoft began the implementation in other county law enforcement agencies, first the local sheriff's office and then all other offices in 2012. Now case files and information can be sent from one agency to another with the click of a button - there's no need to drive paper files from one location to another. Employees are notified when documents are available and need attention. Today, the district court and the circuit court are completely paperless. The juvenile court and traffic ticketing records are on their way to being completely paperless, too.

The Results

Although no formal study has been done to analyze cost and time savings, Nichols said the office is far more efficient than it was in 2011, despite losing a significant portion of staff due to budget cuts. "Without a doubt we are more efficient today than we were when we had a paper office, number 1," he said. "Number 2, we have 20 percent less employees than we did back then, and we slashed about a half million dollars in salary." Having a paperless office has created great efficiencies, but that's really only about 10-15 percent of the overall benefit," Nichols said. The overwhelming benefit is workflow efficiency and improved communication with law enforcement agencies, courts and the state.

The Benefits

- No paper - Monroe County is well on its way to eliminating paper records for the prosecutor's office, law enforcement and the courts, so need to drive documents around town.
- Seamless communication - Case files, police reports, and other legal documents are automatically shared between agencies and among employees, so no one has to wait on a file's arrival or wonder if it's been received and reviewed.
- Instant notifications - Automatic email notifications alert all interested parties when a document, such as a police report, is ready. Workflows are set up to deliver documents to the appropriate people or flag a document that needs attention.
- Document tracking - Notifications eliminate guessing by sending automatic alerts when a document has been received. Also reporting who received it, lost records are no longer an issue.
- Interdepartmental integration - Technology is no longer a barrier to the prosecutor's office, law enforcement and courts sharing information. They all use the same system and can access the same information.
- Cost savings - Despite having fewer employees, the paperless office is far more efficient. Eliminating paper records allowed the office to run more efficiently, even with smaller staff.
- No redundant data entry - Workflow's storage and indexing allows instant access to all electronic records.
- Automated redacting - Say "goodbye" to manual mark-ups thanks to completely automated redactions.
- Relationship building - Improved communication between departments and agencies has strengthened relationships between the prosecutor's office, law enforcement and courts.

Monroe County, MI

The Challenges

- Reliance on paper documents - not knowing where critical files were located
- Inefficient communication between the prosecutor's office, law enforcement and courts, delaying the speed of justice
- No oversight of the location of documents or whether they had been received

The Results

- Instant access to case digital case files - no more reliance on paper documents
- Automatic email updates when case files need attention or signatures
- Improved working relationships among law enforcement departments