

Court Case Study: St. Clair County, MI Prosecutor's Office



Implementing ImageSoft's

Paperless Prosecutor Solution has significantly improved our efficiency and effectiveness. Digitizing the office and the way we communicate with law enforcement has been transformational. I don't know what we'd do without it,"

– **Michael Wendling, St. Clair County Prosecuting Attorney**

The Customer

Neighboring the bank of the St. Clair River and a short drive from the Blue Water Bridge, historic St. Clair County has been seated in Port Huron since 1820 and expands its small-town welcome to home roughly 160,000 people. Because of its proximity with an international border, the St. Clair County prosecutor's office has always worked vigilantly with law enforcement to keep both the local community and America safe.

Early on, the prosecutor's office knew a long-term solution was critical for efficiently and successfully prosecuting its high volume of cases. ImageSoft was the first recommendation by many as it had already implemented several paperless solutions throughout the county, including the Friend of the Court, the clerk's office and St. Clair County's District Court. It wasn't long before St. Clair County Prosecutor Michael Wendling and Chief Assistant Prosecuting Attorney Stephen Guilliat partnered with ImageSoft to help design one of the first paperless solutions specifically for prosecutor's offices. Today, St. Clair County continues its successful prosecution with the support of ImageSoft's Paperless Prosecutor Solution.

The Challenge

Prior to any electronic workflow, St. Clair County operated like many prosecutor offices around the nation still do: with paper files, sticky notes, and an office crowded by filing cabinets and boxes.

At one point, they hired an additional staff person just to assemble files, which were complete with manila folders, hand-written labels and, of course, file cabinets. Once a case was filed, it was time consuming to rummage through cabinets of paper to find and pull it. This is exactly why so many phoned-in tips or messages never made it to their respective files – a clerk would write the sticky note, but never make the effort to file it. From a prosecutor's perspective, this made taking phone calls from victims or their emotional loved ones extremely difficult because there was no background information. Moreover, cases risked losing steam if make-it-or-break-it details were never included on the file. It was also not uncommon to lose a file because it was either tossed on someone's desk and never re-filed, or it flew away while being lugged into court. Not only was this a threat to confidentiality, but it meant that if one person was working on a file, no one else could. In and of itself, the charging process was also effort intensive. Weeding through an extensive warrant manual was demanding enough, but the challenge of interpreting an attorney's handwriting meant there was also a risk of recording the wrong code.

The Process

Once working with ImageSoft, blueprints for a targeted electronic workflow quickly came to life. In 2008, St. Clair County was among the first to embark on the paperless journey. With ImageSoft's implementation team customizing the process

to fit the prosecutor office's comfort and schedule, most behind-the-scenes work was done without interrupting the support staff or drawing attention away from cases. With the short-term assistance of temporary workers, St. Clair County back scanned and indexed five years' worth of documents and data within a couple months.

The Success

The advancements in efficiency were felt as quickly as The Paperless Prosecutor Solution was implemented! With all their files now digitally managed, there was suddenly no use for the numerous file cabinets and boxes that crowded the office. After clearing out their paper storage, the office gained an entire room's worth of space that now comfortably seats three to four clerks. Electronic files have also strengthened the integrity of their cases, as the full-audit trail tracks each file's viewing and editing history for complete transparency.

With an automated workflow directing every document, information is shared instantaneously with prosecutors, support staff, and the public. Being able to simultaneously open and work on a file means criminal cases are processed faster and people can move forward with their lives sooner. With electronic redactions, fulfilling a Michigan FOIA request is as easy as a few clicks. This also better protects prosecutors and support staff from conflicts of interest, as they can easily be blocked from viewing anything they shouldn't be seeing.

St. Clair County's relationship with law enforcement has seen one of the greatest benefits. Streamlined information eliminates the need for officers to travel, and electronic notifications immediately alert officers of arrest warrants, subpoenas, and other important information. These eNotifications prioritize efforts with the Michigan State Police crime lab, which highlights pressing deadlines to get prosecutors and officers critical information in a timely manner. This fast turnaround adds vital time back into the lifecycle of every criminal case.

Remember the sticky notes that never made into their files? Phoned-in and support staff notes, second expert opinions, pictures, and audio are now all saved directly on corresponding files. This is especially meaningful to prosecutors who no longer have to endure cold calls with victims or family members. Prosecutors especially felt the shed weight of paper files while walking into court with just one, small laptop. If the prosecutor needs a document in court, he can simply key a search and up will pop the file he needed, plus a queue of related files. This mobility liberates prosecutors from their desks without slowing the case flow. With a virtual desktop interface (VDI), the prosecutor can remotely check or work on live files, authorize warrants, and manage cases. For the on-call prosecutor who receives the 2 a.m. phone call, remote access means opening their laptops and being instantly updated on the real-time status of a case.

With thousands of dollars in savings, momentous time added back into cases, stronger relationships with law enforcement and crime labs, and confidentiality that can't be breached, St. Clair County reached a verdict: ImageSoft's Paperless Prosecutor Solution is a life sentence with every chance of paroling their office from the inefficiencies of paper.

St. Clair County, MI

The Challenges

- Lost files, and/or waiting on others to finish with a file before being able to access it
- Un-filed case notes
- Intermittent communication between prosecutor offices, law enforcement, and crime labs
- Heavy stacks of paper being lugged to and from court and home
- Man-made errors possible at every step

The Results

- Digitized workflow that allows real-time and simultaneous access to case files
- Secure, electronic storage of documents to protect sensitive information
- Automated document management reduces the risk for human error
- Electronic docket management, discovery and subpoena
- Streamlined communication with law enforcement agencies and crime labs
- Attorneys prosecute cases using notebook
- Strengthened accountability and transparency