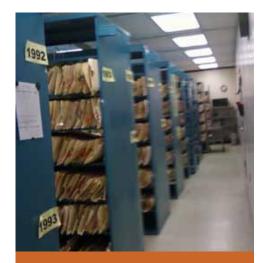# Order in the Court!
Genesee County Employs ECM to Do More, With Less

by Beverly Lyons, ImageSoft, Inc.

The technology solution provided by ImageSoft, Inc., has made a marked difference in the Genesee County court system, in Genesee County, Michigan, eliminating paper shuffling throughout the courts by replacing paper files with digital files, automating and expediting processes in multiple departments and increasing operational efficiencies and employee productivity.

The Genesee County Board of Commissioners, in Michigan, had long recognized the need for a comprehensive document management solution in all county-wide departments. Board Chairperson Ted Henry said, "In challenging budgetary times, the need is evident for a county that can work smarter, not harder. We saw the need to provide a technological solution. Despite our budgetary constraints, we committed the funds to implement the new solution." Prior proposals for a paperless system were simply too costly.

Many departments, including the Genesee County Friend of the Court (FOC), were operating in a time warp without the inherent efficiencies of a paperless system. Departments comprising the criminal justice system were mired in mountains of paper documents—each maintaining redundant individual files—and were further bogged down by outdated work processes and outmoded manual systems. The county experienced lagging productivity and increasing costs as individual departments struggled to maintain services to constituents. "We were stuck somewhere in the 1960s," said John Battles, of Genesee County FOC. "We had two massive file rooms overflowing with approximately 60,000 active files and no efficient way to manage the daily flow of paperwork."

In 2008, the County Board entered into an agreement with ImageSoft Inc., of Southfield, Mich., to begin implementing a customized OnBase solution in the FOC, the Family Support Division of the Prosecutor's Office, the County Clerk's office and the Probate Court. This spring, following an infusion of technology to automate their processes, the four court divisions began the process of vastly streamlining and improving their operations. The result was increased productivity, reduced costs and, at the same time, enhanced services to constituents.

Their successes have left other departments within the Genesee County court system—which serves 23 communities in Southeast Michigan—clamoring to get on board the same technological bandwagon. The County Board is currently reviewing plans for additional department implementations.

The bandwagon was rolled out in February by ImageSoft, which partnered with individual departments to study their existing processes and workflows and then carefully devised a tailored OnBase software solution to meet their document management needs. No newcomer to streamlining and accelerating government processes, ImageSoft provides the most widely

deployed content management solutions in counties throughout Michigan. Twelve Michigan counties currently employ its technology solutions.

"We faced a great number of challenges that prompted us to investigate an electronic document management solution," said Katrina Fellenbaum, the county's document management system administrator. Chief among them was the physical movement, flow and processing of documents.

Like many counties, Genesee County courts were housed in two physical locations, which made sharing documents and information even more challenging. Its system for doing so was manual and time-consuming. Three times a week, a runner would load a file cart full of documents and trek from building to building to distribute information to judges, clerks, caseworkers and others.

With its new OnBase system in place, Genesee County's FOC was quickly transformed from a paper intensive workplace to a nearly paperless environment. Paper documents were scanned and digitized to allow them to be shared electronically, quickly and efficiently, by all relevant parties. Moreover, the busy FOC runner and the bulging file cart is now a relic of the past.

The use of a runner to shuttle documents from place to place also came to play in the court's bench warrant process, which Fellenbaum characterized as "the most impressive hurdle for us to overcome." Prior to its OnBase solution, Genesee County's laborious bench warrant process typically took two weeks and included:

- The judge ordering a bench warrant in court

- A caseworker returning from court to the FOC to draft the paperwork

- The runner returning the warrant for the judge's signature

- The runner retuning three times a week to retrieve the signed paperwork for delivery to the clerk

- The warrant being returned to the FOC to be entered onto MiCSES and placed on LEIN

Not only was the process painfully slow, but often times, somewhere during the trips to and from the courthouse, the paperwork would go missing. "We would be sure that we had sent the documents over, but we had no proof and no way to track missing documents, which would sometimes mysteriously turn up months later," said Fellenbaum. "It was very frustrating and made the bench warrant process long and drawn out."

Today, with OnBase, Genesee County's bench warrant process has been drastically reduced from two weeks to just one day. This was achieved, according to Fellenbaum, in only three weeks time. "Now, all the parties involved are able to instantly access the files at their computer and can easily track the status of a bench warrant. It has greatly enhanced our ability to expedite the bench warrant process and ensure the accuracy of the warrants obtained," said Fellenbaum.

Another formerly long and involved process that's been substantially curtailed via On-Base technology is the county's show cause process. A once two-day process can now be accomplished with a single mouse click. With OnBase, the court can order a show cause hearing and an electronic query is created for all applicable employees to instantly view and track details of the request and the status of the hearing.

"It works splendidly and eliminates any possibility of confusion between departments," said Fellenbaum. Now, FOC caseworkers and referees conduct show cause hearings completely electronically, eliminating the burdensome paperwork once involved.

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The technology solution provided by ImageSoft, Inc. has made a marked difference in the Genesee County court system, eliminating paper shuffling throughout the courts by replacing paper files with digital files, automating and expediting processes in multiple departments and increasing operational efficiencies and employee productivity. With the state-of-the-art document management technology, every function at the FOC has been enhanced and many archaic, redundant functions have even been eliminated.

"I really can't say enough about ImageSoft and the benefits of technology in the workplace," said Fellenbaum. "We expected there to be glitches when we went live, but we have been pleasantly surprised with the smooth transition to a paperless environment. ImageSoft has surpassed our expectations as a partner, and the implementation has been fabulous. The workflow is great, and we are truly pleased with our system. We are also pleased that the County Board understood the need and was willing to commit funding to make a new document management system a reality for Genesee County." ∎

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