

Cooperative Court Case Management System Development

A case study from Wyoming

by Ann Lavery

WHITE PAPER

Implementing a unified court case management system has resulted in a multitude of benefits, most notably increased access to justice and increased efficiency for the court.



1. INTRODUCTION

Implementing a unified, statewide court case management system is no easy task for any court system and the state of Wyoming is no different. Wyoming has faced some interesting challenges on the road to the successful development and implementation of a statewide unified district court case management system (CMS) and this paper will explore Wyoming's experience.

There are 23 counties, each with a district court and its elected Clerk of Court. Historically, the Clerks of District Court (Clerks) independently chose the CMS for their courts. At the beginning of this project, there were six courts using Tiburon's FACTS system, one court using a Tyler Eagle document management system, and one court had a CMS that was developed by a local vendor, humorously known as IBTB (It's Better than Before). These counties bore the costs of implementation, maintenance, support, and upgrades of their systems. The remaining 15 counties were using FullCourt, a CMS provided and maintained by the Wyoming Supreme Court, and which had key functionality missing and was not a perfect fit. The disparate systems and limited functionality created inconveniences across the entire court system.

2. COURT STRUCTURE

Wyoming's state courts are structured in three tiers: circuit courts, district courts, and the Supreme Court. Circuit courts are courts of limited jurisdiction. Their caseload includes misdemeanors, preliminary hearings in felony cases, civil cases up to \$50,000, small claims, and domestic violence cases. The state funds their entire operating budget. Circuit Court Clerks are appointed by the presiding judges of each court, and are state employees.

Wyoming's district courts are the courts of general jurisdiction with a caseload that includes felony, juvenile, probate, adoption, involuntary hospitalization, domestic relations and civil cases over \$50,000. The administration and funding of district courts is bifurcated. District Court Judges, along with their judicial assistants, law clerks and court reporters are employed and funded by the state under the supervision of the judge, while their facilities are provided by the counties. The Clerks of District Court are elected at the county level, and they are funded and employed by the counties. The 23 counties in the state vary greatly in size, revenue, and court caseload.



The Supreme Court is the appellate court, the final arbiter of cases arising under state law. In addition to the five Justices, the Clerk of the Supreme Court, and the Court's staff members, the Supreme Court has a Court Administrator's Office whose duties include handling budgetary matters for the Supreme Court, the circuit courts and the District Court Judges' offices. The Court Technology Office, which also sits under the Supreme Court, provides technological support and services to the Supreme Court, the circuit courts, the District Court Judges' offices and to the fifteen Clerks of District Court offices that use the state-provided CMS, among its other responsibilities.

3. PREQUEL TO UNIFIED CMS DEVELOPMENT

A few key factors increased the momentum to develop a unified CMS in Wyoming. First of all, in 1998, the Wyoming Judicial Planning Commission was formed to evaluate the state court systems and make recommendations for improvements. The central proposal was to adopt a unified system in which the Clerks would be appointed state employees under the supervision of the Supreme Court with full state funding. The Clerks argued that they are better able to serve their constituents and court customers as elected officials, and they successfully lobbied to defeat this plan.

Second, the Supreme Court implemented the FullCourt case management system in the circuit courts, and later made it available at no cost to the District Courts. FullCourt is strictly a case management system without any e-filing or other document management functionality. It was designed for circuit courts, and is lacking key functionality for district court processes. For these reasons, and because data couldn't be migrated from existing systems, many courts opted out of using FullCourt.

Finally, as technology advanced and became more prevalent, more demands were presented from different constituencies that could not efficiently be addressed without a unified CMS. District Court caseload statistics had to be manually compiled, and a weighted caseload study revealed inconsistencies in designation of case types due to the lack of standardization. There was little public access to court records. Attorneys that had experience with e-filing in the State Supreme Court and federal courts were becoming more vocal in their desire for e-filing in the district and circuit courts, and some of the strongest proponents of e-filing were attorneys serving in the legislature. Most troubling was a threat to public safety due to the inability of law enforcement to access up-to-date information on criminal cases because new charges against a person might not be in the state database for days.

4. ESTABLISHING A RELATIONSHIP WITH LT COURT TECH

In May of 2006, the Supreme Court contracted with LT Court Tech to implement its C-Track® CMS product for the Wyoming Supreme Court. LT Court Tech was chosen because C-Track was configurable to meet the specific needs of the Wyoming Supreme Court, because it allowed unlimited integrations, and because court staff could be involved with every aspect of the design process.

C-Track also offered flexibility in its stand-alone e-filing component, allowing the court to phase in e-filing requirements by case type. Both traditional documents as well as e-filed documents could be processed by C-Track, so the Court could methodically transition from paper to digital filings.

As the Supreme Court CMS design and implementation neared completion, the need for a unified system with e-filing functionality became more obvious because the District Courts were unable to forward digital records for appealed cases. While new appellate pleadings were filed digitally, the record on appeal was still sent in paper form.

5. DISTRICT COURT CMS PROJECT PROPOSAL AND FUNDING

Over time it became apparent that the current situation with district court case management systems was fraught with problems. The courts that used any CMS other than FullCourt had to budget for expensive maintenance, support and upgrade costs. The courts using FullCourt had to settle for a CMS that had been designed for circuit courts and was missing key functionality. In addition, there was no ability for the Supreme Court to migrate any data from other systems to FullCourt or to add e-filing functionality. The situation was not ideal for any of the courts.

The Clerks also knew that e-filing would eventually be mandated, either by court rule or legislation. It was not feasible for most courts to implement e-filing individually because of the prohibitive cost, and it was not practical because of the distinct possibility that users would be encumbered with a number of different e-filing systems. In September 2008, the Clerks of District Court Association unanimously voted to support the creation of a CMS to be used in all district courts and asked the Supreme Court and key members of the legislature to support its funding.

The Clerks of District Court Association formed a committee consisting of six clerks to prepare an initial set of required features of a new system. The committee consisted of two members each from courts that used FACTS and FullCourt, as well as members from the courts that used IBTB and the Tyler Eagle DMS. LT Court Tech worked with the committee to begin

gathering requirements for the new CMS. The committee, along with the Supreme Court Chief Information and Technology Officer, traveled to select district courts to see demonstrations of each system, discuss the strengths and weaknesses of each, and observe different workflows and court processes. This helped define the beginnings of a “must have” list. That list eventually included migration of the data from each existing CMS; migration and integration of scanned documents¹; an index in which entities could exist on a global, local, or case level while still maintaining case and/or party confidentiality; cross-jurisdictional user rights so judges have easy access to assigned cases; inclusion of administrative case types; and an e-filing component.

Funding for the unified CMS was appropriated during the 2009 legislative session. The District Court CMS contract was awarded to LT Court Tech, LLC. The success of the Supreme Court’s C-Track CMS implementation, the ability to configure the system, the input into the design process, and the unlimited integration abilities were among many factors considered in awarding the contract to LT Court Tech.

In February 2009, a CMS Design Team was formed. The Clerks of District Court Association elected the six Clerks from the CMS features committee to serve on the Design Team, which also included Supreme Court staff, a District Court Judge, a judicial assistant as well as LT Court Tech staff. The Clerks on the Design Team represented large, medium and small courts. The Association voted to give the Design Team full authority to make design decisions; any disputed items were to be decided by a majority vote, and only if there was a tie would a design question be brought to the Association for a decision. The Design Team was further charged to make progress reports at each of the three annual Association meetings.

6. DISTRICT COURT CMS DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION

LT Court Tech business analysts and developers worked with the Clerks to translate the courts’ business practices into functional specifications, and began the process of developing a system that was robust and flexible enough to handle the complexities of courts of general jurisdiction. The Design Team members continually challenged themselves to examine their business practices to determine whether a practice was common, driven by court rule or statute, efficient and effective, or if it had become outdated.

The unified CMS was installed in a rolling implementation with the final courts scheduled to transition by September 2013. All courts received training when they went live, including initial training onsite and additional training via Web conferences. Attention has already been turned to e-filing and development for circuit courts.

While it isn’t known exactly what advancements in technology will occur in the future, the virtual infrastructure of C-Track provides a solid foundation for maintaining, updating and adding functionality as needed. With demonstrable proof of benefits and steady progress the legislature has approved supplemental funding requests.

7. BENEFITS OF A UNIFIED SYSTEM

When a court tackles such a large-scale project, it is always helpful to know how the end result will benefit the court. In Wyoming, there have been a multitude of benefits, many more than had been originally envisioned. Most of the benefits fall into one of two categories: 1) increased access to justice, or 2) increased efficiency for the court. Here is the current list and no doubt it will continue growing:

- The unified system provides all courts with a quality CMS regardless of the size of the county, court caseload or the wealth of the county.
- The unified system allows for efficient and centralized system support, maintenance, and upgrades.
- The unified system provide law enforcement with immediate statewide access to criminal data as it is entered into the system.
- Standardized training and the use of standardized docket codes, disposition codes, and case statuses allow for reliable statistics and data retrieval across the various district court jurisdictions.
- The use of a global (statewide) name index that requires at least one personal identifier (DOB, SSN or address) reduces multiple entries for the same entity, allows parties to be tied to cases in other jurisdictions, and improves data retrieval.
- The ability to keep a party confidential while allowing the entity to be entered into the global index without being tied to a case allows data gathering on juvenile cases for federal funding.

¹ The courts in Carbon, Natrona and Laramie Counties have systems that include integrated scanned documents. The court in Uinta County has a free-standing DMS.

- E-filing will not only improve court efficiency, it will also improve public access to court records.
- Court records are transferable between courts.
- Judges are able to access their cases in other jurisdictions.
- Authorized users have view-only access to non-confidential data in other jurisdictions.
- A case master distribution list from which envelopes and labels can be printed saves data entry time.
- Docket search allows for a search for a docketed event by any key word (the search can be court-wide).

8. SUMMARY

All the factors necessary to implement a project of this size came into place at an opportune time. It began with the Clerks' unanimous support of the project, and continued with the Supreme Court's championing of it through the legislative appropriations process. It came to fruition with the commitment of all parties to cooperate and find solutions to outstanding obstacles to its implementation and having a vendor capable of offering a technical solution for all of the needs. The result is an intuitive District Court CMS based on the specific requirements of the District Courts and Supreme Court. All of the involved parties continue to work together to create a synergistic team² and a CMS that is an improvement over all of its predecessors and can grow to accommodate future needs.

² Thanks to the following individuals, as well as the many others involved in the creation of WYUSER. The primary Supreme Court staff involved in this project were Justice Barton R. Voigt, Court Administrators Holly Hansen (retired) and Joann Odendahl, Deputy Court Administrator Ronda Munger, Chief Information & Technology Officer Steven Dreher, Network Manager Sergio Gonzalez, Development Manager Julie Goyen and Enterprise Reporting Analyst Mary Thomas. The Clerks of District Court on the Design Team were: Crook County Clerk of District Court Tina Wood, who also served as the Clerk's team leader; Laramie County Clerks of District Court Gerrie Bishop (retired) and Sandy Landers (joined team January 2011); Sweetwater County Clerk of District Court Ellen Smith (retired); Uinta County Clerks of District Court Ann Lavery (retired); Natrona County Clerk of District Court Gen Tuma; Carbon County Clerk of District Court Lindy Glode (retired); Sheridan County Clerk of District Court Nickie Arney (joined team January 2011); and Albany County Clerk of District Court Janice Sexton (joined team January 2011); Honorable Scott Skavdahl, former Natrona County District Court Judge (now U.S. District Court Judge) and Judicial Assistant Roberta Hartford; and Honorable Michael Davis, Laramie County District Court Judge (joined team January 2011).

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ann Lavery, Clerk of District Court, Uinta County, Wyoming 1999-2012; Senior Business Analyst for LT Court Tech, a Thomson Reuters business 2012-present

Ann earned her bachelor's degree in psychology from Creighton University, and has spent most of her career working in the legal system. Ann has held the roles of office manager for the Uinta County and Prosecuting Attorney's Office, Uinta County Law Librarian, and as a Deputy Clerk of District Court. In 1999 she was elected to four consecutive four-year terms as Clerk of District Court in Uinta County. She retired from the position when her husband was appointed as a Wyoming District Court Judge in another community, necessitating their relocation.

During her tenure as Clerk of District Court, Ann served as President of the Wyoming Clerks of District Court Association and as President of the Wyoming Association of County Officers. She was appointed by the Wyoming Supreme Court to the Permanent Rules Committee for the Wyoming Rules of Criminal Procedure. She was appointed by the Wyoming State Bar Association to the Juror Appreciation Committee and the Pro-Se Pro-Bono Committee. The Clerks of District Court Association appointed her to the CMS Design Team and she also served on the Project Executive Steering Committee.

Ann is currently employed as a Senior Business Analyst for LT Court Tech. She continues to work with the Wyoming courts as the coordinator of the Court Readiness Project. She provides WYUSER training to the courts, as well as offers continuing support services to the pilot courts.

LT Court Tech



LT Court Tech has been a leading provider of court case management solutions since 1999. C-Track, our innovative case management solution, was developed specifically for courts to capture, track, process, and report on their cases. Courts around the country, including the Minnesota Appellate Court, have adopted our solutions because they are configurable, easy-to-use, and save time and money. In April 2012, LT Court Tech joined Thomson Reuters, and together we have the capabilities necessary to meet the challenges of the nation's courts.

The C-Track Case Management System (CMS) manages information about cases, filings, parties, calendars, and opinion processing, allowing courts to track their performance and maximize efficiency.

C-TRACK ADVANTAGES

- **Highly configurable:** C-Track can be configured to meet your court's needs and is easily adaptable to unique rules and processes. C-Track also includes a tool that allows rules changes to be made quickly and easily without technical support.
- **Easy to install and maintain:** No special software is needed to operate C-Track. The system resides on a server, giving you access right from your Web browser.
- **Integration:** C-Track can be integrated with almost any court application, from an existing case management system, to an attorney registration system, to an accounting or document management system.
- **Comprehensive:** C-Track provides comprehensive case processing functions, from case initiation through disposition and archiving. It also allows for extensive searching and real-time interactive reporting.
- **Intuitive:** Prior to installation, the entire system is reviewed and tailored to meet the specific needs of your court. The system intuitively generates documents, sets or updates ticklers, and displays custom alerts as clerks record case-related activities.
- **Reliable:** C-Track has a solid performance record and is backed by the same team of systems engineers and analysts that have been building and improving this product for over a decade.

For more information, please contact LT Court Tech at **1.877.923.7800** or visit **lt-holdings.com**.





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To learn more about C-Track and courts who use it, go to lt-holdings.com or call **1-877-923-7800**.

