

A Court Transformed: Winnebago County Makes the Leap to Web-Based Case Management

The Back Story

The 17th Judicial Circuit Court in Winnebago County, Illinois, was long overdue for an overhaul of its case management system. In 2004, the court was still relying on a nondocumented database using 1970s-style programming and database management to process roughly 110,000 cases per year.

After a gap study revealed the system wasn't sufficient to meet 21st century demands, the newly established court and case management committee—comprised of the court's circuit clerk, chief judge, prosecutor, defender, probation officer, and others—went to work designing a request for proposal (RFP) for the powerful web-based case management system they wanted.

The Challenge

Committee members, along with the court's CIO and other personnel, had concerns about transitioning away from manual, paper-based processes. Converting 1.89 million cases from a nondocumented database would be a huge undertaking, and employees accustomed to an old green-screen system—clerks and judges alike—would need to be trained anew. In addition, dozens of other entities that rely on case data (police forces, state's attorneys, public defenders, etc.) would have to adjust to the change.

Many stakeholders feared the project (the most pervasive in Winnebago County's history) would be disruptive, painful, and tough to pull off.

The Choice

The court selected **Justice Systems (JSI)** and its case-management software platform, **FullCourt**

Enterprise™, for several reasons. Having grown to serve 500+ unique courts and judiciary offices since its inception in 1982, JSI not only kept pace with evolving technologies, but also offered insights into what other court systems were doing to streamline their operations. With the **FullCourt Enterprise** case-management system, the court would have a customizable solution with web-enabled technologies that would be easier and less expensive to manage than competing solutions.

The Project

Right from the start, JSI and the committee worked closely together to tweak system design and functionality to ensure a smooth implementation. Employees were introduced to a new web-based system with an intuitive user interface that made navigation easy. Case data from different court divisions could be accessed and viewed simultaneously. Users could now search for parties rather than cases, and docket entries were more informative. Redundant data entry was a thing of the past, as was much of the paper shuffling to which employees were accustomed.

The switch to the **FullCourt Enterprise** cloud-based platform was completed on time and on budget. Since the implementation, the circuit clerk's office is now more efficient and less stressful than it had been with a larger workforce. The court is handling cases with greater speed and accuracy, which enables it to serve the public better. The court is also configuring many updates to the **FullCourt Enterprise** product on its own, with ongoing advice and support from JSI.

Ushering in a New Era of Efficiency and Transparency

The **FullCourt Enterprise™** case-management solution changed the 17th Judicial Circuit Court's entire operation, radically improving how it collaborates with and serves internal and community stakeholders. Here are some of the ways the court and its constituents continue to benefit from cloud-based case management.

Court Function	Before FullCourt Enterprise™	After FullCourt Enterprise™
Document Filing	Clerks at 10 different windows received physical documents from hundreds of people a day. The filing process was entirely manual, normally taking 4-5 days to allow for data entry as well as document scanning in a separate department.	Now that court personnel can scan their own documents, use electronic stamps, and upload documents to the web-based system, the filing process has been shortened from days to hours. The clerk's office sees much less foot traffic and has cut its service area in half.
Compliance	Without the benefit of real-time account tracking and reporting capabilities, Winnebago struggled to prioritize and collect outstanding fines and fees.	In a matter of days after implementing the FullCourt Enterprise solution, the court harvested information on all outstanding accounts and delivered the data to a collections agency, which normally sees court systems take years to compile the same type of data. In the last seven years, Winnebago has collected \$14 million in outstanding fines and fees.
Data Sharing	A nondocumented database made it tough to access required data. Judges, prosecutors, probation officers, law enforcement officials, and others operated in silos. Court clerks made thousands of trips copying and hand delivering important case-related documents.	Data are easy to locate and accessible to all functional organizations of the court, which now work in concert with each other and with law enforcement and other external agencies. Timely, accurate reports can be compiled and disseminated in minutes.
Public Service	Drivers who received traffic citations were required to appear in person to resolve their case—a frustrating experience involving parking hassles, passing through security, and waiting in long lines to pay.	Traffic citations are entered into the system as soon as they're written. Drivers can log in, enter a plea, pay the citation, and sign up for a traffic safety program, all from the comfort and convenience of home.

"A system that works efficiently is best. Justice Systems gave us that from day one, and that's what has made us successful in where we are today."

Tom Lawson,
Chief Deputy Circuit Clerk

"We can do more with less. We have a better product. We're more accurate, and we're more precise."

Tom Klein,
Circuit Clerk