

San Diego County District Attorney

Beyond moving paper

San Diego County District Attorney's Office accelerates Juvenile Court proceedings using Adobe® Acrobat® Pro in Microsoft SharePoint environment



San Diego County District Attorney
San Diego, California



San Diego County Juvenile
Justice Partners

County Technology Office
Probation Department
Office of the Public Defender
www.sdcourty.ca.gov/cto

The San Diego County District Attorney's Office is one of the busiest DA offices in the nation. Things are a bit easier for the office since implementing a digital system for managing case files in the Juvenile Court division. The digital collaboration environment—the Justice Electronic Library System—is based on Adobe Acrobat Pro, integrated with Microsoft SharePoint. The award-winning system is streamlining case file management for attorneys and staff members, while empowering county attorneys in the courtroom and accelerating court proceedings.

The San Diego County District Attorney's Office serves approximately three million people, and its jurisdiction covers 4,200 square miles in Southern California. With approximately 300 deputy district attorneys, 125 district attorney investigators, and a support staff of about 500, the office is the second largest District Attorney's Office in the state of California and the sixth largest in the nation.

For the office that files approximately 45,000 cases and conducts about 800 trials each year while maintaining a felony conviction rate of 94%, caseload management is an ongoing challenge.

Case file management presents ample opportunity for the office to leverage technology to improve efficiencies, minimize costs, and support its mission of the pursuit of truth, justice, and community protection. One such opportunity arose within the Juvenile Division of the District Attorney's Office, which prosecutes all juvenile felonies and misdemeanors for the County of San Diego, including City of San Diego cases.

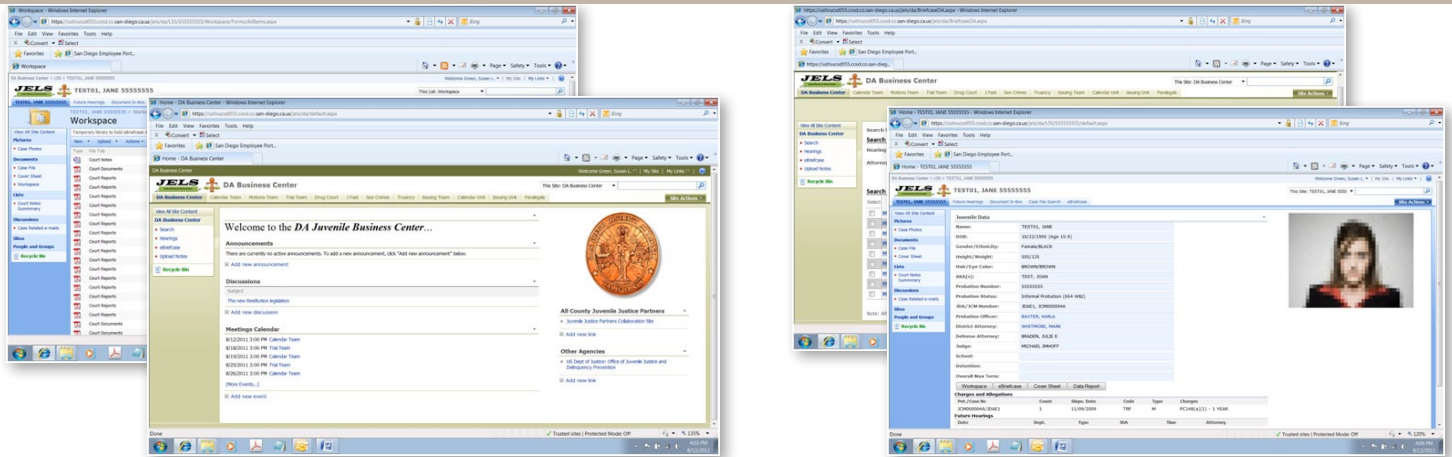
The Juvenile Division wanted to improve case file workflows within the DA's office, enhance communication between its staff and the courts, and significantly reduce the output of paper files. The division especially wanted to streamline in-court case file management to accelerate daily court schedules and improve its service to citizens.

The organization, together with its partners—the Probation Department and County Defense Agencies—implemented an integrated workflow, leveraging advanced PDF capabilities available through Adobe Acrobat Pro and Microsoft SharePoint document management. The digital environment, known as the Justice Electronic Library System or JELS, was developed and implemented by the County Technology Office and serves all the county juvenile justice stakeholders, DAs, Probation, and the County Defense Agencies. "The integrated solution allows our teams to work seamlessly with PDF files in SharePoint," says Susan Green, assistant chief information officer, San Diego County. "The integration of Adobe Acrobat Pro and SharePoint is greatly improving how the Juvenile Justice Partners manage, share, and publish juvenile case information."

Freeing up administrative resources

Prior to deploying Adobe Acrobat Pro and integrating it with Microsoft SharePoint staff across all partner agencies, a number of staff worked full time managing case files—which mainly involved preparing and disseminating materials for Juvenile Court hearings. The lifecycle of a juvenile's case can include ten or more hearings that span many months. With 11,000 juveniles in the case load and 25,000 Juvenile Court hearings annually, previous case file management required managing and moving millions of hard-copy pages.

With Adobe Acrobat and PDF technology integrated with Microsoft SharePoint, the San Diego District Attorney's Office created an advanced digital environment and paperless workflows that enable attorneys, support staff, and court professionals to work more efficiently.



Challenge

- Streamline Juvenile Court case file management
- Equip deputy DAs and other juvenile justice stakeholders with better access to case file information during court proceedings
- Improve collaboration for hearing preparation and among stakeholders in court

Solution

- Use Adobe Acrobat Pro, integrated with Microsoft SharePoint, to deliver an integrated electronic system for improved juvenile case file management

Benefits

- Accelerated case completion by as much as 25%
- Improved productivity by 14% system wide
- Achieved annual cost avoidance of approximately \$400,000 across three agencies
- Enhanced collaboration in the office and in the courtroom
- Empowered attorneys in the courtroom with quick access to case information
- Accelerated Juvenile Court proceedings

Toolkit

Adobe Acrobat Pro

Today, the District Attorney's Juvenile Division employs a far more streamlined process for managing and disseminating caseload information. By using Acrobat to incorporate PDF documents into its Microsoft SharePoint environment, the division saves the administrative staff from having to sort, collate, file, retrieve, and photocopy countless sizeable files.

The Juvenile Division creates SharePoint document libraries for each new juvenile that enters the system. Division staff members collect relevant information in a variety of formats such as hard copies for scanning, Microsoft Word and ASCII text files, and photos—from sources including the Police Department, Narcotics Division, Probation Department, Bureau of Investigation, mental health professionals, school districts, and many others.

Prior to each Juvenile Court hearing, JELS automatically converts all pertinent case files for that minor to PDF—if they were not already in PDF—then, with a prompt from the user, JELS automatically creates an electronic briefcase specific to the minor and court date and stores it in the JELS system. Deputy DAs and other participants with access to the system can review critical documents prior to each hearing. JELS system users within each department can engage in digital collaboration, viewing and marking up the PDF Portfolios hosted on the SharePoint portal directly from Adobe Acrobat Pro using a check-out/check-in feature.

The advanced collaboration offered by the system was recently recognized by the official organization of the county information technology directors and CIOs in California's 58 counties. The California County Information Services Directors Association (CCISDA) awarded San Diego County a first place Innovation Award in the collaboration category for the paperless JELS system based on Adobe Acrobat Pro and SharePoint integration.

Using the JELS system, the Juvenile Division can better prepare for daily Juvenile Court hearings. "With Acrobat, our DAs can prepare for their cases much faster and more effectively than before," says Mark Whitmore, deputy district attorney, San Diego County. "Our attorneys highlight and markup key passages and can pull highlighted content to create succinct court notes for review prior to the hearing—streamlining our preparation process and helping attorneys to work more effectively and efficiently during proceedings." Staff members also now have the ability to electronically submit documents back to the court and to opposing council after hearings are complete, removing several previous paper-based and time-consuming processes.

Delivering flexibility in the courtroom

The JELS system and inherent Adobe Acrobat Pro capabilities offer San Diego County deputy DAs a new degree of flexibility during Juvenile Court hearings. "When a deputy DA is faced with 25 Juvenile Court hearings before noon, we need the agility to be proactive as well as reactive in the courtroom," says Whitmore. "Having the flexibility to strategically create electronic briefcases using the Acrobat and SharePoint integration empowers legal professionals with the most relevant information at their fingertips."

"Adobe has created a top-notch solution that will help our offices run at optimum efficiency, help our staff do their jobs more effectively, and enable us to deliver even greater value to the community."

Mark Whitmore
Deputy District Attorney,
San Diego County

Previously, Juvenile Court attorneys contended with paper-only files during court proceedings, some with hundreds of pages and all files organized with sticky notes. Finding information on the spot during Juvenile Court hearings posed significant problems for the deputy DAs, who must regularly locate specific information in these massive case files.

"Adobe Acrobat enables us to quickly search through large documents on the fly during Juvenile Court hearings, which is exponentially more efficient for us than using paper-only files, littered with sticky notes, that are sometimes two inches thick," says Whitmore. "When defense attorneys refer to a study on a particular date or the judge wants more information about a juvenile's criminal history, for example, we can immediately pull up that information using the Adobe software's document search capabilities."

With Acrobat and SharePoint, Juvenile Court deputy DAs can collaborate and easily share information in the courtroom with other stakeholders using the JELS system, which currently includes its probation department, county juvenile justice partners, and county defense attorneys. The improved in-court collaboration and quicker access to case file information enables Juvenile Court to move through its caseload up to 25% faster per case and boost overall productivity by as much as 14% system wide. In fact, the agency estimates that the paperless processes in JELS replace as much work as would be done by six full-time employees, resulting in more than \$400,000 in annual cost avoidance across three agencies. Though Juvenile Court on the whole still uses a combination of digital and hard-copy materials in the courtroom, the division, the Probation Department, and the County Defense Agencies plan to go entirely paperless in the near future.

"We're actively training our deputy DAs and others on the JELS system to continue streamlining processes across offices with Acrobat," notes Whitmore. "Adobe has created a top-notch solution that will help our offices run at optimum efficiency, help our staff do their jobs more effectively, and enable us to deliver even greater value to the community."

For more information

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