



Harris County Jury Management No Longer a Trial with Catapult Solution



Serving the Houston metropolitan area, the Harris County District Clerk's Office has jurisdiction over the selection of prospective jurors for the County's 98 courts. The District Clerk's Office has long been committed to using technology to help save taxpayers money and streamline operations.

This commitment to practical, results-based technology was a main driver behind a recent decision to upgrade the Office's jury management system.

The old system was based on paper summonses. When prospective jurors arrived in the morning, the summonses - up to 2,000 a day - had to be collected, checked for completeness, assembled and sorted by hand. Each one had to be painstakingly photocopied in order, three per page. Up to eight copies could be required for each juror. The photocopies were then stapled into booklets and passed out to bailiffs and court clerks.

The whole process was time-consuming, labor-intensive and prone to error. Photocopying thousands of summonses daily was a major expense. Courts had to wait while the summonses were processed and jurors assembled into panels. The courts could not know how many jurors were available, so judges sometimes overestimated the number of jurors they might need, just to make sure they had enough. Ironically, this often led to postponed trials in other courts because of a lack of available jurors.

Finally, the office used a mainframe-based jury management system that lacked a number of features that they urgently needed, such as electronic document management and better reporting. The system also incurred significant operational and maintenance costs.

Paul Billingsley, director of Technical Services Bureau, and his staff, evaluated a number of proprietary systems, but found they could not be easily integrated with Microsoft .NET, the architecture recently adopted by Harris County. Billingsley turned to Catapult Systems to develop a customized application to meet their unique needs.

How Catapult Systems Helped

Catapult had already completed several successful application development projects for Harris County, and so was a natural choice for this project. Working with Billingsley and his team, Catapult consultants developed and implemented a customized solution that was fully integrated with the Harris County IT architecture and interface design.

Integration was built into the new application from the ground up. "The District Clerk's Office already had their .NET architecture in place and the look and feel they wanted," explained Jimmy Sauer, senior consultant, Catapult. "So we leveraged their architecture and designed interfaces to their specifications. We weren't there to reinvent any wheels but to do things their way and improve what they had."

Completed on time and on budget, the new application has helped streamline the entire jury management procedure. Now when jurors report for duty, their summonses are fully digitized,

Executive Summary

Solution

Microsoft .NET Application Development

Client Profile

Representing the largest County in the United States, the Harris County District Clerk's Office is responsible for the selection of prospective jurors for the 98 courts in the Houston-metro area.

Business Challenge

The District Clerk's Office needed an upgrade to its jury management system. The old system, which was based on paper summonses, was mainframe-based and lacked required features. Further, it was time-consuming, labor-intensive and prone to error, and made efficient juror management difficult.

How Catapult Helped

Catapult developed and implemented a customized jury management solution that was fully integrated with the existing .NET architecture and interface design. The application streamlined jury management. Summonses are digitized and sorting is electronic. Information on juror availability is fully accessible by the courts. The completed application can be controlled and easily managed by the Technical Services staff.

Results

- Streamlined and accelerated juror processing
- Significant cost reduction
- More efficient use of available jurors
- Reduced errors in jury management and payment
- Full integration with Harris County IT systems

"Catapult Systems gave us the customized, integrated solution we needed - on time and on budget."

- Paul Billingsley, Technical Services Bureau Director, Harris County District Clerk's Office

eliminating the need for photocopies. Sorting is done electronically. Information on current juror availability is now fully accessible by the courts.

The Catapult Systems solution was also designed for easy management and control by the Technical Services staff. Cost efficiencies have improved significantly. Paperwork has been virtually eliminated, including almost all photocopies of summonses. Staff productivity has improved, with a reduction in processing errors. Mainframe data has been cleaned, normalized and transferred to a more cost-effective Microsoft SQL Server database. Since information on current juror availability is now accessible by the courts, jurors are assigned to panels more efficiently, with less waiting time for assignments. Jury panels are not over-assigned and trials no longer have to be postponed because of a lack of available jurors.

With a fully integrated system and interfaces designed to reflect their own specifications, the Technical Services staff can now

control and easily manage the system themselves, helping to further reduce operational costs and accelerate their return on investment (ROI).

Results

- Juror processing streamlined and accelerated
- Costs decreased through reduced paperwork and photocopying, improved productivity by office staff, all juror data transferred from mainframe to SQL Server and in-house maintenance and control
- More efficient use of available jurors
- Reduced errors in jury management and payment
- Full integration with Harris County information technology systems

The new jury management system saved Harris County over an hour per person in juror processing, a significant savings when 98 courts are waiting for juries. According to Billingsley, the courts are happy with the savings and so are the jurors since they now spend less time waiting for assignments.

"Catapult gave us exactly what we needed technically. More importantly, we can now serve the public and support the judicial system more efficiently and effectively."

-Paul Billingsley, Technical Services Bureau Director, Harris County District Clerk's Office

How Can We Help You?

Let us know at 800.528.6248 or info@CatapultSystems.com