



Harris County Jury Management No Longer a Trial with Catapult Solution

Custom .NET application eases juror processing and reduces costs

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.

“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*

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 Sauers, Catapult senior consultant. “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, 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.



How can we help you?

1-800-528-6248 info@CatapultSystems.com

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