

Background

Beginning in the mid-1980s, the Office of the Jury Commissioner (OJC) for the State of Massachusetts experienced a mail overload so severe that even the Commissioner himself was pitching in to open incoming jury summons responses.

"Everyone, and I mean everyone, in the office was involved," Gregory Fulchino, Systems Analyst for the OJC, remembers. "We had a staff of 20 during the day, and a nightshift of two to four temporary workers, and it still wasn't enough."

During peak times, the night shift swelled to five or six, but even then, Fulchino and his co-workers regularly took mail home to open and sort during their off-hours. "It was a nightmare," he confesses.

Challenge

The mail increase was a direct result of the success of an innovative program called "One Day/One Trial," in which each citizen was eligible to serve as a member of the jury pool. Instituted in one county in 1979 to raise participation levels, the program was soon expanded to all 14 counties in the state. "It's a great program, a model that has been studied by other countries, but our jury summons mailings jumped from 100,000 to more than a million once the whole state was included," Fulchino notes.

Each jury summons response needed to be identified, logged and entered into the system. This work was in addition to answering the juror inquiries that came in to the office. "The situation was getting unbearable. We were getting a lot of burnout cases on the staff," Fulchino recalls.

Solution

When Paul Carr took over as Commissioner, he launched an investigation to see if technology could ease the burden. By late 1985, the OJC had settled on a hardware-based scanning system. The system was huge by today's standards, filling a 10-foot-by-10-foot room.

"The system cut a week off our turn-around time, and was a Godsend at the time," enthuses Fulchino. "Sure, it was a primitive system by today's standards, but at that time, remember, we were using a Xerox for word processing and that was 'cutting edge.'"

Still More Progress

But cutting edge can lose its sharpness over time in some environments. The OJC found that locating replacement parts proved increasingly challenging and expensive. Maintenance costs ballooned to \$10,000 a year. Another drawback was the system's inability to deal with any changes in forms design without extremely high program costs.

By 1992, Frank Davis was in office as Commissioner. Davis had a strong interest in the power of the PC. The OJC launched an extensive review that compared software-based and hardware-based systems. Eventually, a decision was reached that software-based systems would better meet the

OJC's performance standards and offered more flexibility than available hardware systems.

A Sudbury, MA-based reseller, Intelligent Document Processing, Inc. (IDP), was selected to assist in that search. IDP recommended incorporating Microsystems Technology's OCR for Forms™ technology into the solution. IDP then began the task of writing code to perform the specific exception and handling issues processing tasks required by the OJC began. After installation of OCR for Forms, the number of juror responses processed each day doubled or better. From 1,500 forms, the OJC was now processing between 3,000 and 4,000 a day.

"We're still not testing this system's limits," admits Fulchino, explaining that there are many valid reasons for which people can be disqualified, obtain postponements, or have their court locations transferred. These situations slow down process-

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CASE STUDIES

ing time, because official acceptance of the prospective juror's reason for not participating is required.

Even so, Fulchino estimates that the remaining juror response cards (about 65% of the total) are processed with no operator intervention at all, something he admits to being "thrilled" about. He's also pleased about OCR for Form's flexibility. In the event that the OJC requires the redesign of the juror forms, the system can be easily adapted to accommodate the new forms with minimal effort.

Results

OCR for Forms processes the 3,000-4,000 summons reply cards each day, supervised by only one verification operator. Because of the efficiency of the system, several staff members were redirected to other tasks that urgently needed attention. The nightshift workers are now a thing of the past.

"Thanks to OCR for Forms, we've cut costs, improved accuracy, and we're better able to arrange jury schedules. It's wonderful," Fulchino explains. And the best part? "No one has to take mail home at night anymore," he jokingly concludes.



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