IBM

Hawaii Judiciary makes a case for Web access to court records.

Application	Web access to circuit and adult family court records
Business Benefits	Improved customer service, increased staff productivity, lower operational costs
Software	IBM WebSphere® Host On-Demand IBM Screen Customizer IBM Communication Server
Servers	IBM S/390® Parallel Enterprise Server™ IBM Netfinity®
Services	IBM Software Lab Services — network and application development consulting

As one of the three separate-but-equal branches of its state government, the Hawaii State Judiciary is entrusted to administer justice in an impartial, efficient and accessible manner, in accordance with the law. But that mandate has become more and more of a challenge, as the state's changing demographics and associated social issues have increased the number and complexity of the cases filed. What's more, in many of these cases, litigants are representing themselves.

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– David Maeshiro, Chief Information Officer, Telecommunications and Information Services Division, Hawaii State Judiciary

From the Hawaii State Judiciary home page, users are just a few clicks away from a vast store of case documents, court appearance records and other important information.

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Web access to case records is particularly important to litigants in Hawaii, whose residents are spread throughout the state.

Consequently, it has become increasingly important to provide the public and the legal community easy access to information on their cases. In fact, Hawaii's Chief Justice Ronald Moon has made access to the courts one of his top priorities.

Until recently, the Judiciary was trying to meet this demand with a limited staff and antiquated technology, a condition which still prevails in many areas of the court. In an effort to remedy the situation, the court administration wanted to provide public access to non-confidential court cases over the Internet. But funding a new IS project such as this wasn't easy, especially in light of economic difficulties facing the state.

When the Judiciary ultimately obtained modest funding for the project, it chose to concentrate its resources where they would have the most noticeable impact. That meant focusing development efforts on the Web-enabled user interface, while keeping as much of its core legacy systems intact as possible. These considerations made IBM WebSphere Host Integration Solution very attractive to the Judiciary. "We evaluated other solutions," says Michael Broderick, administrative director of the courts, "but they were either too costly or lacked the desired functionality."

The Judiciary worked with IBM in 1999, using IBM WebSphere Host On-Demand to create a public access system called Ho'ohiki. Officially in operation since January 2000, Ho'ohiki provides anytime Web access to circuit and family court records to people in Hawaii, on the U.S. mainland and around the world. This has not only improved customer satisfaction but also is significantly reducing the cost of providing this service to the public.

"WebSphere Host On-Demand offered an efficient way to provide secure access to our legacy systems through the Internet," says Marsha Kitagawa, public affairs director of the Hawaii State Judiciary. "And IBM's reputation and longevity in the market helped lend credibility to the project."

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Web self-service eliminates obstacles to access

Prior to the advent of Web access, the court case management system was a closed environment, supporting the Judiciary's internal needs as well as the needs of the various city, state and federal agencies in Hawaii. Public access to this information was limited to a few workstations in the various courthouses throughout the state, which were available on weekdays from 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

In contrast, the new Ho'ohiki system provides 24-hour inquiry access to non-confidential circuit and adult family court records to anyone with a standard Web browser and an Internet connection. WebSphere Host On-Demand, working in conjunction with IBM Screen Customizer, provides a graphical user interface into the legacy records system. Through this Web browser-based interface, users can search for cases by number or name and subsequently select to view case documents, court appearance records, minutes and other summary information.
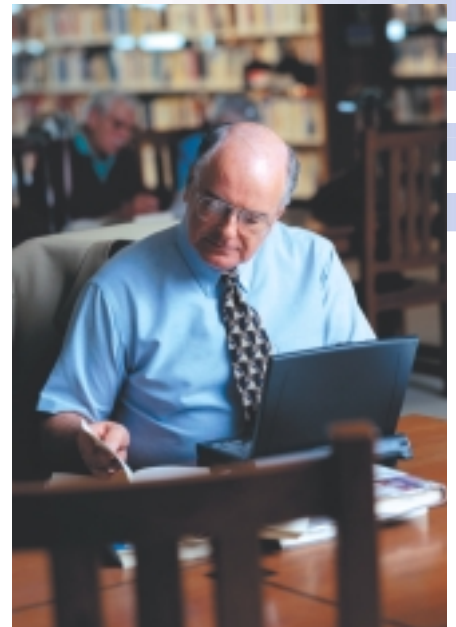
The site receives 300 to 500 visits per day from attorneys, legal researchers, insurance companies and the general public. Before Ho'ohiki, many of these users would be forced to travel to the nearest courthouse or submit a written request for documents if they were out-of-state. Now they can access the information at their convenience without having to go to the courthouse.

The new system offers a number of other benefits as well. According to Kitagawa, the public's perception of the Judiciary's commitment to providing access has improved. "As a result, our user base has expanded to include inquirers from the mainland as well as from other parts of the world," she says.

Despite its growing number of users, the staff at the Hawaii State Judiciary is finding it easier to provide service to the public with the advent of Ho'ohiki. "Requests to the court's file room for copies of documents are now more specific," says Broderick. "People know the exact title of the document they want, or they bring in a screen print from the Ho'ohiki application. This saves the file room staff members time and enables them to devote more of their attention to providing services users cannot access themselves."

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More than 63,500 cases were litigated in Hawaii's family and circuit courts in FY 1999. WebSphere Host Integration Solution is helping to handle the growing load on the courts' administrators.

Rapid implementation

The Ho'ohiki project was a collaboration between the first circuit court and eight IS team members as well as a networking consultant and application developer from IBM's Honolulu office. After the scope of the project was defined, an IBM consultant was able to create the core functionality of the public access system in just five days.

"It then took approximately five to six months to finish the project—including the customization work, setting up the network infrastructure, and testing the application, both internally and with approximately 100 external customers," says David Maeshiro, chief information officer, Telecommunications and Information Services Division, Hawaii State Judiciary. "That was faster than we expected for this type of system." Kitagawa says a contributing factor was the assistance the Judiciary received from IBM Software Lab Services as well as staff in IBM's Honolulu office.

The WebSphere Host Integration solution left the access functionality and rules in place, but enhanced the navigation, appearance and usability of the user interface. The Judiciary's legacy IBM CICS® applications run on an IBM S/390 Parallel Enterprise Server. WebSphere Host On-Demand, residing on an IBM Netfinity server, uses IBM Communication Server to connect to the host and provide the PC clients an emulated CICS session. But users aren't faced with the typical host emulation green screen—IBM Screen Customizer translates the presentation into a more easy-to-use graphical interface.

Since this was the Judiciary's first foray into providing public access to its internal systems, security was a primary concern. IBM implemented security in several stages, which allowed the Judiciary to start with a small investment to test the viability of the public access system before committing more financial and technical staff resources.

More productivity improvements on the way

Satisfied with this initial implementation, the Judiciary's IS team is open to additional enhancements. "We are interested in migrating from the Java™ applet-based solution to a servlet solution using IBM WebSphere Host Publisher to reduce the demands on the client browser environment," says Maeshiro.

Long-term, the Judiciary envisions that many of the services now provided through the file room may be done electronically through the Internet. As a result, more staff time may be redirected to benefit other parts of the organization. "The Ho'ohiki application has already shown employees the positive benefits technology such as this can bring to the office," explains Broderick.

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