



Summons Automation

How a Michigan county streamlined its undeliverables.

As far as population goes, Washtenaw County in southeastern Michigan with nearly 350,000 persons is a typical U.S. county. Economically it has fared better than its neighbors. Though it's situated 30 miles west of Detroit, the county has not experienced the shrinking populations plaguing other Michigan counties in large part caused by massive layoffs at U.S. carmakers. In fact Washtenaw is one of the few counties in the state that continues to grow at a moderate rate.

While it may be spared the worst of the recession, Washtenaw Courts still face the typical problems most

courts face—obtaining accurate source data of mailing lists with shrinking budgets. Like most counties, it was getting data from merging two lists—voter registration and motor vehicle records—which gets updated once a year.

Immediately after lists are updated they are most accurate; but as the year progresses, people move or are used up for served juries, and the accuracy and availability of the potential jury pool erodes and the undeliverable mail piles up.

Because Washtenaw sends out a qualification mailing and follows up with the actual summons—known as a two-step court—it has essen-

tially twice the challenge of a court sending out a single mailing. Also contributing to returned mail, the mailings may be separated by up to four or five months, a period in which addresses may again become invalid.

4K pieces returned

Each year the county sends out approximately 30,000 qualifications and 10,000 summonses. To send mailings for six district courts and two circuit courts, a staff of at least 10 employees works a portion of their time creating mailing lists, printing and stuffing envelopes. And when approximately 10% of the

This jury management/ mailing program is reported to have cut undeliverables by 90%



mailings—or 4,000 pieces—are returned as undeliverable—they need to input this data to update the lists.

As the county faced tougher financial times, the Court decided to change their strategy. They hired Courthouse Technologies, Ltd. of British Columbia to handle all the printing, mailing and updating of lists. Using a web-based jury management system, Summons-Direct, the entire process is automated at a bonded off-site printing facility. It allows the Court personnel to concentrate on their own jobs rather than deal with mailings, saving hundreds of man hours.

As a result, for example, Washtenaw County Trial Court has reduced staff. “We have been able to reduce our jury staff by 33%, from one full-time and one part-time to one full-time employee,” says Scot Cannell, information technology

administrator. And that employee also has other duties.

In fact, explains John Arntsen, product specialist with the software vendor, the staff of 10 across all the courts who worked a portion of their time to create the qualification list has been reduced to one person.

The digital system also substantially slashes the number of undeliverables—a main source of waste for the Court. Of the 10% of undeliverables that once were returned, 90% of those are now delivered, reducing undeliverables from 4,000 to 400, says Arntsen.

Across-the-Board Benefit

This benefits entire process. On the back end, it decreases labor, printing materials, and maintenance. It reduces labor to update the bad addresses. And fewer mailings

mean less postage. In fact, because the Summons-Direct system checks Washtenaw’s source lists against the National Change of Address (NCOA) registry 26 times per year, the county qualifies for the best postage rate, saving 10 cents on every piece mailed—or \$4,000 annually on the initial mailing.

Arntsen compares the savings to a driving plan aimed to save fuel. “You can’t just drive less” to save money, he says, but you can use a more fuel-efficient car. “This is the hybrid car of jury management.”

Washtenaw also utilizes the company’s image data capture system known as Courthouse IDS. It can scan both sides of the returned questionnaires through a desktop scanner and automatically upload that information to an individual’s record.

“It can scan and process hundreds of those documents in minutes,” Arntsen says. And it determines automatically if the person is qualified to serve.

“The scanning of questionnaires means we no longer have to do any data entry. It has reduced staff time and increased accuracy in the jury office,” says Cannell, the IT administrator.

The jury system has placed imaged information at the Court’s fingertips, making retrieval instantaneous and thus increasing productivity. While Washtenaw is an average size county, the transformation from a manual to a fully automated jury system makes them anything but typical. **CT**

For more information visit: www.courthouse-technologies.com.