Turning the Technology Page

The future looks likely to produce a lot less paper for the San Diego Superior Court

No longer do most attorneys use traditional books for research or typewritten letters for communication. These and other aspects of a law office have been sped up by e-mail, fax, voicemail, smart-phone communications, chat capabilities, text messaging and related technology.

"There has been a revolution in the impact of technology on the legal profession," says San Diego Superior Court Judge Jeffrey Barton of Department 69. "Communication is much more instantaneous than in the old days of handwritten telephone messages and letters in the mail. Things move faster and more efficiently now. The downside is that there is sometimes less deliberation in the process."

Judge Barton, chair of the San Diego Court Technology Committee, has long been an advocate of technology and its integration into the workplace. Under the leadership of Presiding Judge Enright, the San Diego Superior Court has implemented a conversion to a "green" paperless program, including e-filing and imaging components. (See "The Case for E-Filing" in the September/October issue.) For the latter, documents are filed with the court, scanned by court personnel, and the image becomes available electronically to judicial officers, court staff and the public as provided by law. As of November 1, the court has implemented imaging in all 15 Central Division Civil Independent calendar departments. Four additional Central Division departments will implement imaging in December. Plans are also being made to roll out imaging in the remaining departments downtown, and in the East County and Probate Divisions early next year. The court plans to implement the first phase of a simultaneous e-filing project in mid-2012.

The e-filing and imaging conversion mark an important advancement in technology and productivity for the local court. However, not all paper will disappear from the court. Legal research by clerks and judges will still be partially carried out using traditional books.

"I will still use paper, primarily with secondary materials such as the three-ring-binder series like *Civil Procedure Before Trial*," says Judge Barton. "There are times when flipping the pages in an area you are interested in, or going through a detailed table of contents, leads to things that are helpful and also helps the thought process in a way unlike online research results. On short, isolated issues, I can find things faster in *Jefferson's* than I can online."

While books remain a useful resource, Judge Barton says technology has greatly improved overall productivity within and outside of his department. "I have an online research capability app on my iPad, so I can do research from home or on the road. I also work on e-mails and draft rulings remotely." However, he says lightheartedly, "My Boolean search skills (or lack thereof) occasionally give me results with more hits than I would care to share and do little to advance progress on the problem I am looking into. Plain language, on occasion, is only slightly better."

Technology provides tremendous advantages, but as Judge Barton advises everyone: "Knowing how to not send 'heat of the moment' e-mails is an equally important skill."

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E-Filing Elsewhere

Besides California, 20 other states have adopted some form of electronic filing and paper-reducing procedures (23-APR CBAR 50, "The Move Towards Electronic Filing"). One of the first efforts nationwide to achieve a paperless courthouse occurred August 1990 in a probate department of the Orange County Superior Court, which purchased a $1.3 million computerized document-processing system (articles.latimes.com/1990-08-02/-business/fi-1596_1_superior-court).

IMAGING DEPARTMENTS

Departments participating in the Imaging Project as of November 1:

- Department 60 Judge Lisa Foster
- Department 61 Judge John Meyer
- Department 62 Judge Ronald Styn (non–e-file cases)
- Department 63 Judge Luis Vargas (non–construction defect cases only)
- Department 64 Judge William Nevitt Jr.
- Department 65 Judge Joan Lewis
- Department 66 Judge Joel Pressman
- Department 67 Judge William Dato
- Department 68 Judge Judith Hayes
- Department 69 Judge Jeffrey Barton
- Department 70 Judge Randa Trapp
- Department 71 Judge Ronald Prager (non–e-file cases)
- Department 72 Judge Timothy Taylor
- Department 73 Judge Steven Denton
- Department 75 Judge Richard Strauss

See www.sdcourt.ca.gov for updates.