



# Making courts more productive

Digital strategies for a modern  
judicial process

Courts face the twin challenges of case backlogs  
and holding virtual hearings. Streamlining evidence  
management can help clear these backlogs, increase  
productivity, and make justice more accessible.

## The need for a more productive process

Even before the pandemic, many courts were facing case backlogs. The problem was exacerbated when COVID-19 forced many courts to shut down or drastically limit services.

Many found a way to continue hearings online, embracing video conferencing and electronic file technology. But these methods and tools are often generic—not designed for the courtroom.

Here, we explore six common problems courts face today and outline approaches to overcoming them.

We hope this guide inspires you to build on the role of digital technology in your jurisdiction. For more information or to arrange a demo, please visit the **Digital Evidence Center**.

“Arizona prides itself on being on the cutting edge of innovation within the courts. The engagement with Thomson Reuters will help us manage the backlog of cases in the court system, better manage virtual hearings, and allow us to establish a digital evidence system.”

**Dave Byers**

Director of the Administrative Office of the Arizona Courts

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## Better ways to manage evidence

*“The Digital Evidence Center has completely transformed the ways in which I work. It has undoubtedly made me considerably more efficient and it has meant that I have been able to deal with more cases than I would have done previously.*

*It is a practical, easy-to-use tool, which gives you everything you had before and a very considerable number of additional benefits.”*

### **Lord Justice Fulford**

Vice-President of the Court of Appeal (Criminal Division),  
England and Wales

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## Better ways to manage evidence (cont)

Running a court is expensive, which is why legal bodies work hard to make their processes as efficient as possible. Electronic methods have been widespread in evidence management for years, but these are far from standardized, which is where problems arise.

Going paperless solves some issues, but if that results in multiple digital versions of paper documents, to which not all parties have the same access, there is little benefit.

Most types of exhibits cannot easily be e-filed, and e-filing does not create a shared in-hearing experience for parties or the judge. Forward thinking courts are considering not only the IT side of evidence management, but the experiential side, too. This means paying attention to what happens in a hearing between judges and parties as they present, share, review, discuss, and ultimately rule on the key exhibits that turn the case one way or the other.

Thomson Reuters® Digital Evidence Center steps beyond the simple replication of paper processes in digital form. It presents a single source of evidence for all, to which all parties are invited. Evidence is stored, reviewed, and accessed entirely online through a web browser. Parties do not need to download a local copy or send out evidence to other parties as it is created – practices that lead to multiple distributions of newly updated documents.

Not only does a single repository streamline access to evidence, it also makes things more secure and auditable. Sending evidence via email is inherently insecure, and attempts to protect documents by emailing passwords separately are clunky. There is also a limit on the size of attachments, meaning many files must be stored in the cloud and access granted manually.

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## Better ways to manage evidence (cont)

Parties can securely access the Digital Evidence Center from any location on any device, as long as they have an active internet connection. Once set up, the Digital Evidence Center enables new levels of organization that were not available using PDFs or paper. Jurisdictions can standardize the structures of cases so all parties know where to upload their information and where other parties' uploads can be found. It's also easy to identify which exhibits belong to which party. Having unsubmitted evidence is no longer a reason for adjournment as instead of delaying a court hearing to make copies, files can be uploaded to the Digital Evidence Center and made instantly available to all parties.

Jurisdictions can also specify how evidence is organized within the Digital Evidence Center according to the needs of a case. Courts can bundle all evidence that was admitted into cases, with notes detailing why certain evidence was not admitted. This is useful if cases end up going to appeal and removes the need for lengthy post-hearing evidence reconciliation altogether.

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**State v Karle**

01: Master Bundle [change](#)

**A: Charges and Applications**

- 1: URN-18-0143 Criminal Complaint Karle (July 07, 2020) A1 - A5
- 2: Search and Seizure Warrant - Karle (February 13, 2020) A6
- 3: Case Supplementary Report - Karle (February 13, 2020) A7 - A9

**B: Interrogation Transcripts**

- 1: ROTI Record of INTERROGATION, Dave Karle, 9:23pm (September 03, 2018) B1 - B2
- 2: ROTI Record of INTERROGATION, Dave Karle, 10:00pm (September 03, 2018) B3 - B5

**C: Witness Interview Transcripts**

**D: Witness Statements**

**E: Exhibits**

- 1: URN-18-0143-1001196 2020-07-07 (July 07, 2020) E1
- 2: Incident Road Sign (July 07, 2020) E2
- 3: URN-18-0143 property report (July 07, 2020) E3
- 4: Character reference letter Karle (February 05, 2020) E4 - E5

An automatically hyperlinked index helps all parties navigate to exhibits.

## A single source of evidence for all

*"I think this case would have been totally unmanageable without the Digital Evidence Center. I dread to even think how many three-ring binders there would have been and how much longer it would have taken to guide witnesses to the pages without the page share direction."*

**Phillipa Hildyard**  
Barrister, PSQB Barristers

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## A single source of evidence for all (cont)

In our experience, the number one frustration for judges is delays in ensuring all parties are referring to the same page in a document during a trial.

Whether using paper or digital documents, too much time is wasted finding the correct files, pages, and paragraphs, let alone the start point of key video evidence. This is exacerbated when parties could be dealing with multiple versions of a document and only noticed later that there are discrepancies between new and old file versions.

The essence of Digital Evidence Center is that it provides one repository for all documentation relating to a case. Parties are invited to that repository, rather than receiving the files piecemeal in the run-up to a hearing.

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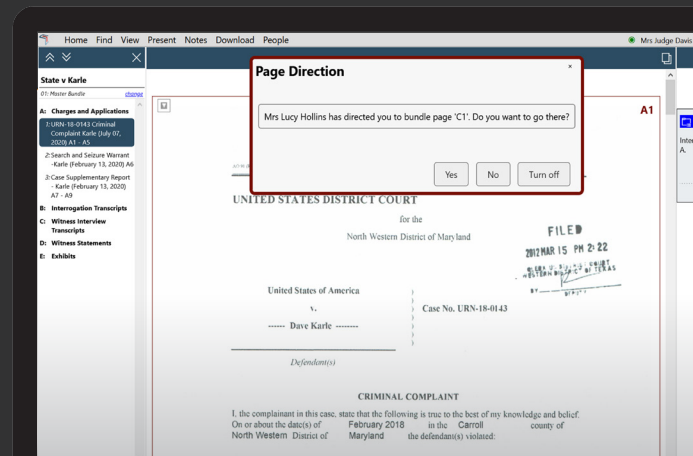


## A single source of evidence for all (cont)

During the hearing, presenters can use Page Direction to guide all parties to precise points within the mass of documentation that cases contain, safe in the knowledge that all other parties will automatically be moved to these points in their shared documentation base. This is one less thing to worry about and is especially valuable for inexperienced court users, such as witnesses, who may already be under stress.

The benefits lie in the accumulation of many small time savings. One Digital Evidence Center customer estimated 20 seconds saved every time an attorney directs someone to a page. With three hearings a week over a six-month trial, this adds up to hours less waste, more hearings, and greater access to justice.

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Parties can direct others to a page of evidence during a hearing with a single click.



## Empowering pro se litigants

*“What we’re hearing is people like it [Digital Evidence Center], they enjoy it. They understand it. They’re wondering why we hadn’t done it before. And they’re wondering how they can use this technology in other jurisdictions...”*

*This program provides continued access to justice for all.”*

**Judge Victor Villarreal**

Webb County Court-at-Law II, Texas

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## Empowering pro se litigants (cont)

Pro se litigants expect justice, but often do not have the knowledge to engage with the legal process. Courts can struggle to accommodate them, which either consumes too many valuable resources or results in poor outcomes for the pro se litigant.

Pro se parties often have the evidence they need to back their case up but struggle to present it clearly in court. If this evidence can be introduced as exhibits, these cases stand a better chance of proceeding, and the pro se has better access to justice.

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## Empowering pro se litigants (cont)

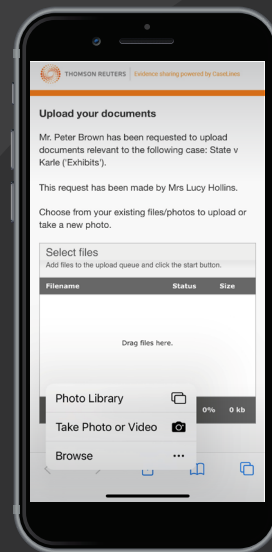
The Digital Evidence Center allows laypeople to present evidence for their case. Pro se litigants can upload evidence from a phone or computer, and courts can set the level of access granted to the Digital Evidence Center, depending on the court's preference:

1. They can register on the platform just like "professional" users and have full access.
2. The court can pre-register the pro se litigant whereby they then click on a link in an email or SMS to view their case and upload documents.
3. The court grants the litigant upload access only, meaning they receive a link via email or text.

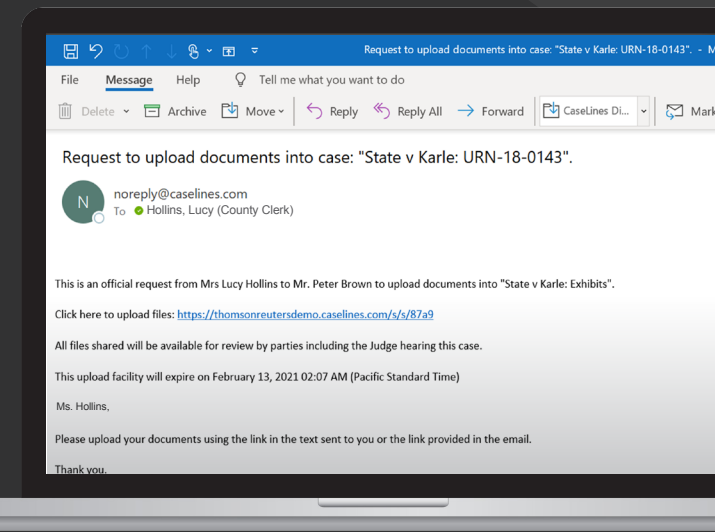
The Digital Evidence Center will take care of the pagination, indexing, and formatting of the documents. Litigants can even upload photographs of paper documents, and the Digital Evidence Center will automatically convert these photos into searchable text documents.

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Clicking on the link contained in the email takes the user to a file upload screen. The user does not need to have registered on the Digital Evidence Center to upload their files.



Pro se litigants can upload their exhibits using their phone's camera.



## Integrating video and audio evidence into trials

*“Around 70% of cases involve multimedia evidence in my experience. With Thomson Reuters Digital Evidence Center, we can now collect, organize, and annotate it like any other type of evidence.”*

**Paul Sachs**

Independent Consultant on the Digital Transformation of Courts, and founder of CaseLines

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## Integrating video and audio evidence into trials (cont)

As video and audio-recording technology have proliferated, the number of cases featuring video and audio evidence has increased as well.

Providing quick, universal access to specific segments during a trial seems simple, but technological glitches often stand in the way of simple evidence presentation.

Firstly, these files can be very large – and are getting larger all the time as image quality increases. Sending images via email is rarely an option – and it's far from secure – so most people choose to host them in the cloud. Burning the video to DVD is a solution, but even before COVID-19 forced hearings to go remote, there was often a lack of DVD players within a court to play the video back.

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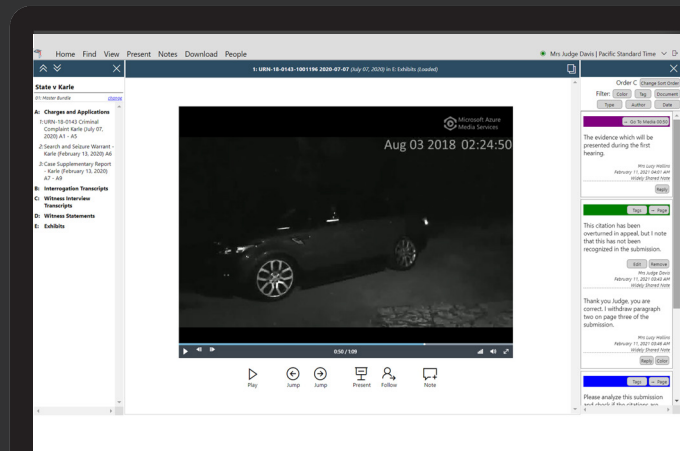
## Integrating video and audio evidence into trials (cont)

Second, there are dozens of file types – all requiring different playback technologies. There’s a good chance that in any trial, there will be one party who lacks the software to play back a crucial piece of video evidence.

No more “File format not recognized”, no more buffering, and no more waiting for files to transfer from a USB stick.

The Digital Evidence Center lets courts collect, store, and securely present video and audio using standard browsers, either in a physical court or during a virtual hearing. Users can time-stamp videos and make annotations, so all users can refer to the same cloud-hosted file and review notes. If a presenter jumps to a particular part of a file, everyone else’s screen follows suit.

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Multimedia is streamed directly within the browser – no additional tech required. Clicking on the note (highlighted in purple) starts the video at the appropriate point.

## Better case preparation

*“The Digital Evidence Center makes the task of collating, reviewing, and annotating evidence so much easier for everyone involved, and crucially helps to speed up the decision-making process.”*

**Sara Jagger**

Director of Legal and Enforcement at The Bar Standards Board of England and Wales

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## Better case preparation (cont)

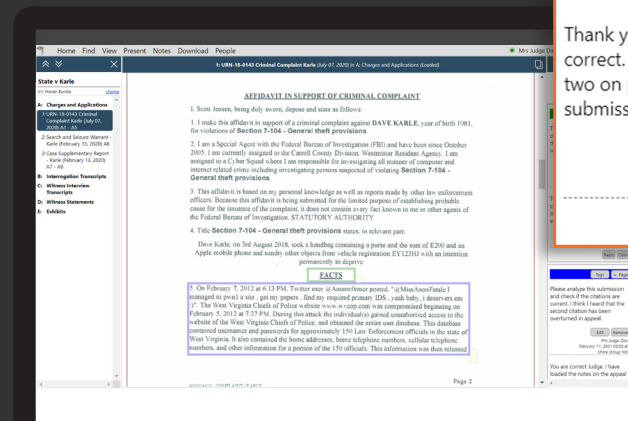
Managing evidence extends far beyond the limited duration of a hearing. Before and after a trial, parties must be able to view, annotate, and query the related documentation.

Being able to efficiently access evidence in advance can help hearings run more smoothly and, in some situations, resolve the matter before the hearing.

Thomson Reuters Digital Evidence Center allows a judge to review filings and evidence before a case, for example. Parties can then be prepared to defend their arguments during hearings or may withdraw their cases altogether.

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Judges can inform attorneys if their filings contain overturned citations, allowing them to amend submissions before hearings.



Tags
Page

This citation has been overturned in appeal, but I note that this has not been recognized in the submission.

Edit Remove

*Mrs Judge Davis*  
 February 11, 2021 03:43 AM  
 Widely Shared Note

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Thank you Judge, you are correct. I withdraw paragraph two on page three of the submission.

Reply Color

*Mrs Lucy Hollins*  
 February 11, 2021 03:46 AM  
 Widely Shared Note

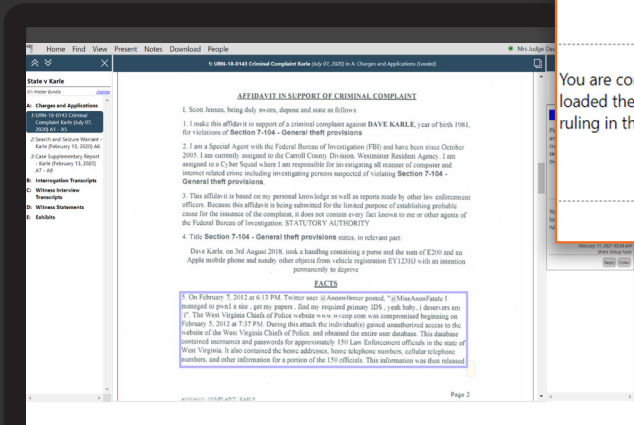


## Better case preparation (cont)

Because the Digital Evidence Center integrates with Westlaw®, judges can seamlessly move between the two systems to check citations when making judgements, too.

In an era where time and resources are limited, this accelerates judges' ability to pass sound and timely judgments and reduces the need of clerks and judicial assistants to make lengthy manual checks for the accuracy and validity of legal citations.

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Tags -- Page

Please analyze this submission and check if the citations are current. I think I heard that the second citation has been overturned in appeal.

*Mrs Judge Davis*  
 February 11, 2021 03:30 AM  
[Share Group Note](#)

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You are correct Judge. I have loaded the notes on the appeal ruling in this section.

*Mrs Clerk Smith*  
 February 11, 2021 03:38 AM  
[Share Group Note](#)

Submissions that are presented in the Digital Evidence Center are enhanced with Westlaw Edge analysis of citations including their current status.

## Proving the concept

*“The remarkable phenomenon is that quite elderly, technologically challenged judges who vowed they would never touch a keyboard in court, are now (in under a year) working entirely digitally with skill and enthusiasm. Already, the paper processes of yesteryear feel quite ridiculous and outmoded.”*

**Lord Justice Fulford**

Vice-President of the Court of Appeal (Criminal Division), England and Wales

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## Proving the concept (cont)

In a profession steeped in tradition, change often comes slowly.

However, bringing in a digital evidence system requires some change, and courts will need to guide users to behave differently regarding the management of evidence.

Incremental change is easier to handle, and because the software is hosted in the cloud and accessed via a web browser, it is easy for courts to test on a small scale to prove the concept. There is no complex installation required either on users' PCs or court servers. Customers simply pay for the capacity they use so there is no commitment, no up-front costs, or hardware procurement required.

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## Proving the concept (cont)

There is no customization necessary and no expensive, lengthy roll-out. Thomson Reuters will work with the court to review and advise on adapting process and court directives. We have developed change management practices based on many deployments for courts across the globe. Our systems now hold more than 400,000 cases with 150 million pages of evidence.

Proof-of-concept deployments allow courts to understand the value of digital evidence management, refine their practices, and plan for a streamlined rollout on a wider scale. Again, the pricing and hosting model of the Digital Evidence Center allows this to happen very quickly.

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Thomson Reuters consultants regularly advise courts on adapting their existing processes.

## What's next?

Judges, attorneys, prosecutors, court staff – in fact anyone who uses a court – is there to see justice delivered fairly and quickly. Justice delayed is justice denied.

Legal professionals should be free to concentrate on the substance of their case, not the software they use. The Digital Evidence Center helps courts to increase productivity for all users by streamlining existing ways of working while fitting seamlessly into legal proceedings.

The software has been refined over a decade to meet the precise needs of courts. It was founded and developed by a team of experts in legal IT systems and is now run by Thomson Reuters, a business that has been an integral part of the U.S. legal system for more than a century.

By deploying the Digital Evidence Center – even on a small scale – courts will notice immediate, tangible benefits that will help them run both physical and virtual hearings.

Many of our experienced customers have found that the Digital Evidence Center – as well as other ways to digitize their processes – are enabling them to reconsider the role of the court. Does it have to be a physical place, or can it be a service accessible more readily to citizens via digital means?

Find out more about the Digital Evidence Center and **request your free demo now >**

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## About Thomson Reuters Digital Evidence Center

The Digital Evidence Center is evidence sharing at its best – the award-winning global leader for preparation of legal bundles and electronic presentation of documentary and video evidence in the court room. Our systems hold more than 400,000 cases, with 150 million pages of evidence held securely in the cloud.

The Digital Evidence Center reduces the time and effort required to prepare case files, eliminates the direct and indirect costs of paper and PDFs, and allows presentation of the case files in a virtual hearing or courtroom without the added cost of an operator. The Digital Evidence Center now also offers on-demand virtual hearings with no software installation.