



Post-pandemic lessons

The journey towards a more productive court administration

COVID-19 forced courts across the nation to rapidly adopt new practices and technologies. Here, we explore solutions that can continue to help court administrators in any court setting: hybrid, virtual, or in-person.

A great jolt forward

The judicial branch is not one quick to embrace modern technology. However, the COVID-19 pandemic exposed many of the outdated and inefficient evidentiary processes.

Thus, the need for courts to implement innovative technology to correct existing inefficiencies was paramount for the judiciary.

The initial lockdowns and quarantine periods — where courts were scrambling to supply laptops and enable socially distanced trials — now seem like ancient history. We have learned a great deal in the intervening two years — lessons that we can take forward post-pandemic.

In this guide, we explore the challenges court administrators still experience and how some courts are solving them with modern digital evidence management techniques.

If you find this guide useful, you can find more information and arrange a demo of our software at the **Case Center** homepage.



David Jackson
Senior Director, Case Center,
Thomson Reuters

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What is digital evidence management?

"Thomson Reuters Case 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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What is digital evidence management? (cont)

The word “solution” is overused in technology, but it accurately conveys the story behind Thomson Reuters® Case Center. Case Center is a single solution to the court’s unique host of problems experienced when handling evidence in a digital era.

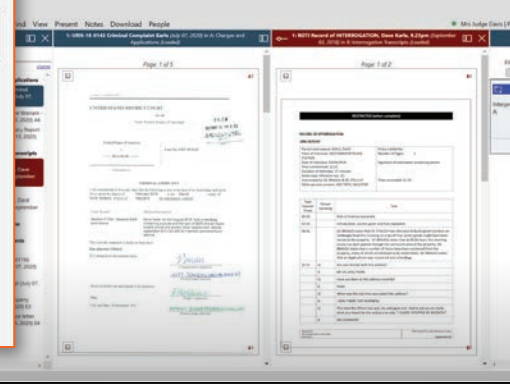
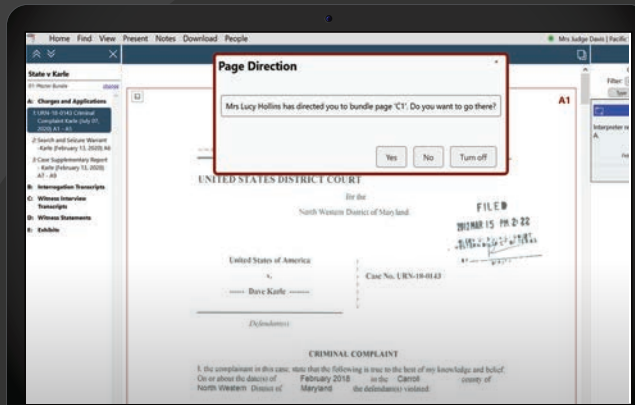
- 1. A single source of evidence for all.** Parties submit evidence into one court-managed repository to which courts can grant access to relevant parties as required. This eliminates discrepancies and ensures equitable access to a consistent evidence base.
- 2. Better evidence management.** Rather than email evidence between parties or share large files on cloud services, good evidence management tools streamline, secure, and simplify how parties manage evidence.

- 3. Everyone on the same page.** During a trial or hearing, presenters can refer to evidence and instantly maneuver to exhibits or cue points in multimedia. Other parties’ systems will automatically follow, meaning everyone in the courtroom is looking at the same material. This is especially useful for inexperienced or nervous court users.

On the following pages, we examine some specific challenges for court administrators and see how digital evidence management can help.

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

An automatically hyperlinked index helps all parties navigate to exhibits.



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Confidence in an efficient court system

“The delays we were dealing with affect people’s lives and jobs. If someone has a misdemeanor like a DUI, but the case isn’t resolved for two years, that person and the victims are stuck without a resolution.”

Cesia Y. Rodriguez

Court Administrator,
Webb County Court at Law II, Texas

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Confidence in an efficient court system *(cont)*

Conversations about the public perception of courts are negative. After all, we would not be talking about the issue if litigants were universally positive about the justice system.

People who work for and in courts acknowledge some truth behind this perception. In a 2021 members' survey by the National Association of Court Management (NACM), public confidence in the courts was the number one cause that members wanted NACM to advocate for on their behalf — a spot it has occupied for the past several years.

But where does this distrust come from? For one thing, many if not most court users must be there. Even for those who are there of their own volition seeking justice, several factors combine to erode confidence in the system. Backlogs in many jurisdictions that stretch back years mean that people wait in limbo for legal issues to be resolved. We know from working with our clients that this can go on for months — years in many cases.

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Confidence in an efficient court system (cont)

Fixing backlogs requires a substantial amount of hands-on work. The more efficiently courts can resolve backlogs, the quicker they can process cases, and the more people can pass through the system.

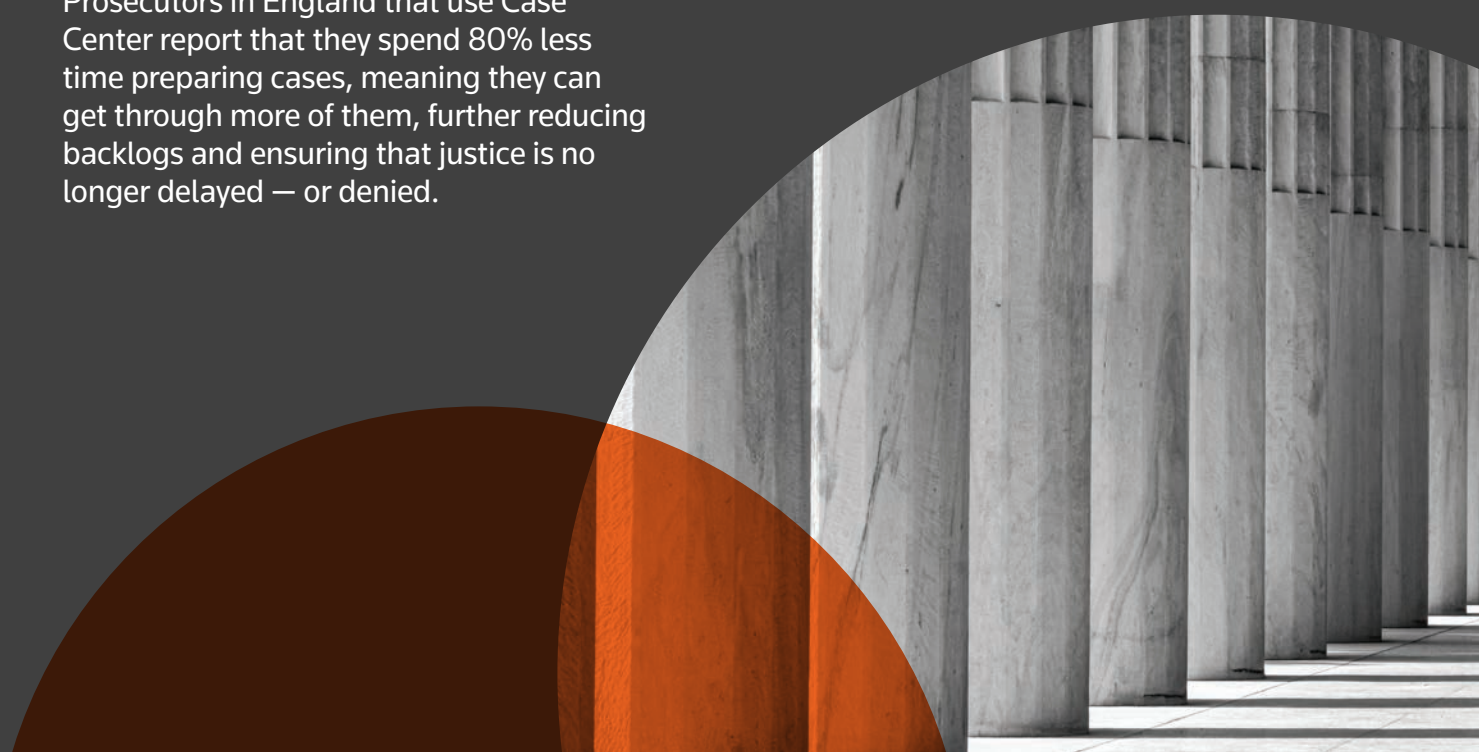
Implementation of Thomson Reuters Case Center has consistently proven reductions in the numbers of hearings required for cases and in the amount of time it takes to prepare for cases. For example, a scheme in the Crown Courts in England and Wales saw a decrease of close to 50% in the number of hearings required to resolve a guilty plea.

Prosecutors in England that use Case Center report that they spend 80% less time preparing cases, meaning they can get through more of them, further reducing backlogs and ensuring that justice is no longer delayed — or denied.

Lawyers are less able to waste court time by requesting continuations or extensions, too. Case Center has an audit trail showing who has had access to a particular piece of evidence. It can even show when parties accessed each document. Excuses that parties have not received all evidence no longer work.

Confidence in courts rests on the assumption that the courts are doing the bare minimum that citizens expect, such as delivering timely justice. Good evidence management makes this more achievable.

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Ready for any and all data

“Around 70% of cases involve multimedia evidence in my experience. With Thomson Reuters Case 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 Case Center

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Ready for any and all data (cont)

With so much of our lives spent online, especially over the past two years, many of our relationships — personal, professional, legal — can be summarized as a series of data exchanges.

While that may be a stretch, it is fair to say that the ability to handle current and new types of data is necessary for any organization that deals with people. In a courtroom context, this means electronic documentation, for example. E-filing and electronic caseflow management are already commonplace. These systems exist to make it easy to submit and share documentation smoothly through the legal process.

But when it comes to more complex files, courts often struggle. Video evidence, for example, is growing massively in volume as body-worn cameras become the norm among law enforcement. Add to this the growing prevalence of CCTV (the U.S. and China are estimated to have **one camera for every four people**) and the ability of any passer-by to film an incident on their mobile phone, it is clear that courts are facing a barrage of digital evidence.

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Ready for any and all data (cont)

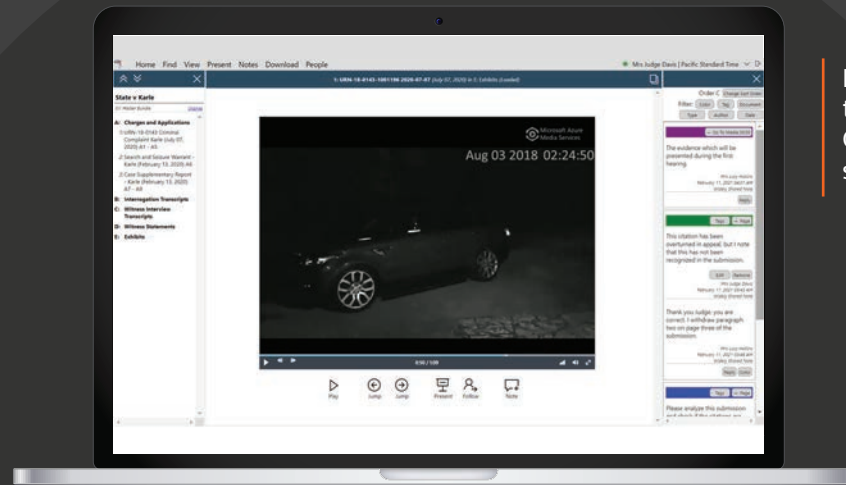
Submitting multimedia evidence in court can be a clunky process. It usually means burning the video or audio onto a CD or USB thumb drive, then hoping that the courtroom has the necessary technology to allow that file to be played back during a trial.

Thomson Reuters Case Center allows for almost any multimedia type, including files that previously required a proprietary player for playback. Since Case Center provides a single secure repository, courts do not need to use less secure cloud-based file sharing

services that are not specifically designed for court use. Parties can present video evidence just as they can with text documents or images. They can skip to points in a video so that everyone in the courtroom can follow along, and annotate video evidence before, during, and after a trial. The solution works just as well in virtual scenarios as it does in a courtroom.

With this all happening in-browser, it obviates the need for courts to find dedicated technology to handle, store, and display multimedia evidence.

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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.

Accessible court services

“What we’re hearing is people like it [Case Center], they enjoy it. They understand it. They’re wondering why we had not 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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Accessible court services (cont)

Linked to the area of public confidence in courts, and just as pressing for court administrators, is the problem of equitable access to services. This is a broad topic — and not one that can be solved with one solution.

However, modern digital evidence management techniques can make it easier for juries, witnesses, and parties to both attend hearings and participate in cases on a level playing field.

Surveys suggest that virtual trials are popular with professional and occasional court users. The benefits in terms of accessibility are clear: people who do not have to travel are more likely to appear. One county in Arizona recorded a drop in “failure to appear” rates from 40% down to 14%.

People who could otherwise not afford to travel to court can now access justice remotely. The contentious nature of some cases (for example, domestic violence cases) may mean that people would not want to be in the same room as the opposing parties — virtual hearings give them the privacy and peace of mind that they do not have to be. And people who only need to appear briefly in a trial can do so without having to take a day off work.

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Accessible court services (cont)

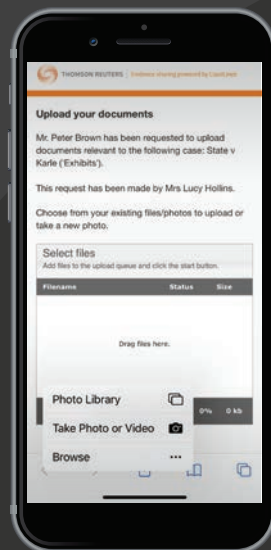
Enabling digital evidence management across hearings brings the digital and physical worlds closer, meaning courts can assure accessibility for all.

Self-represented litigants, for example, can use Case Center to upload evidence from a phone or computer. From here, evidence can be shared with other attorneys or parties and annotated just like evidence used by professional attorneys. Courts can allow self-represented litigants full access to the system or restrict their use depending on their security policies.

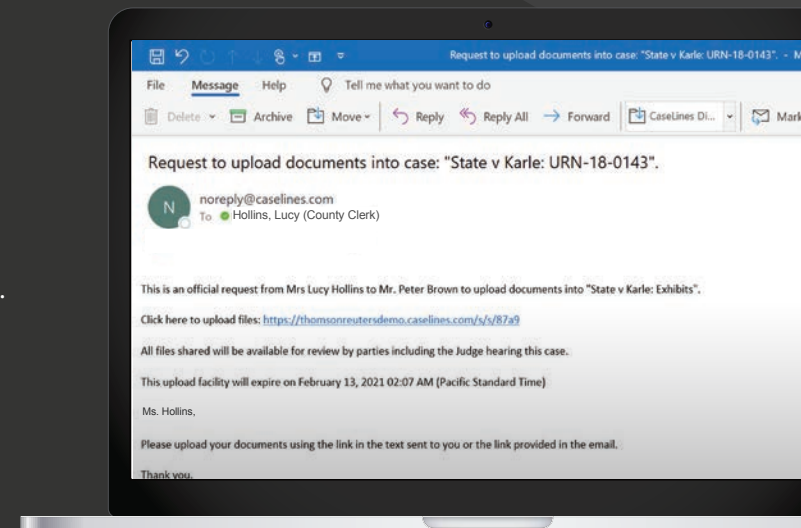
Jury trials continued to proceed virtually in some jurisdictions during the pandemic. But many counties were not able to do so due to the difficulty of sharing and presenting evidence while physically distanced. Case Center digitizes the entire evidence lifecycle — from submission through to post-hearing reconciliation — meaning that it becomes an integral part of virtual hearings. Witnesses can take part virtually too, as they are also able to access evidence through Case Center.

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.

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Self-represented litigants can upload their exhibits using their phone's camera.



The court as a technology leader?

“COVID prompted a lot of immediate action. We had gone to a fully electronic court in December 2019 but didn’t have capacity to implement electronic evidence filing at the time. Then COVID forced the issue.”

Karen Gorham

Superior Court Administrator,
New Hampshire Judicial Branch

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The court as a technology leader? (cont)

Courts are not typically known for being forward-thinking in their use of technology. Administrators will be familiar with some of the cumbersome and paper-heavy processes that remain in place to this day, leaving court users wondering why they cannot just do it all online.

The opportunity now is for courts to solidify the gains they have made over the past two years. This is another key goal for NACM members, 89% of whom agree or strongly agree that the body should be advocating for this on their behalf.

But anyone who has implemented a new IT system in a court (such as e-filing, document sharing, or case management systems) knows that smooth rollouts are not guaranteed and driving adoption among the court's diverse user groups can be a challenge.

In this context, Case Center can be seen as an enhancement to — rather than a replacement for — existing IT systems. It is quick to implement, runs on web browsers,

and stores all evidence securely in the cloud. There is no customization necessary and no expensive, lengthy roll-out. Thomson Reuters will work with the court to review and advise on adapting processes and court directives. We have developed change management practices based on many deployments for courts across the globe. Our systems now hold more than 500,000 cases with over 250 million pages of evidence.

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The court as a technology leader? (cont)

The thought of storing legally sensitive evidence in the cloud may raise the suspicions of IT leaders in some courts — but it shouldn't.

Case Center is hosted on the mission-critical Microsoft® Azure cloud platform, with each jurisdiction maintaining data sovereignty through local data centers. In the U.S. for example, its hosted on the Microsoft Azure Government cloud platform — the trusted cloud for United States government agencies and their partners. Not only does this provide a world-class security foundation thanks to the expertise and resources a global cloud provider can dedicate to security, but it is also more cost effective for courts, thanks to the scale

at which Microsoft can implement these measures. Case Center itself is also highly secure, with regular external penetration tests, ISO 27001 certification, and independently assessed CJIS compliance.

Taken together, Case Center is trusted by state and national governments across the United States and worldwide. Courts will find that their cloud-based digital evidence system is one of the most secure and cost-effective systems in their technology stack.

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What's next?

Our experience tells us that court administrators are not IT experts, but they are under pressure to find cost-effective solutions to the many problems they face every day.

We can demonstrate the real-world value of Case Center in:

- Making trials run more smoothly, improving caseflow through courts.
- Helping increase public confidence in courts.
- Improving virtual hearing capabilities, rendering court services more accessible to a wide range of users.
- Allowing courts to seamlessly integrate multimedia evidence into virtual and physical hearings.
- Offering unparalleled ease of implementation and security at a cost that courts struggle to match on-premises.

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, which is a business that has been an integral part of the US legal system for more than a century.

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

As we hopefully move past the worst of the pandemic, courts must not fall back into bad habits. By pushing ahead with digital initiatives, they will be able to better serve citizens with justice that is not tied to one physical location.

In a decade's time, we might look back and wonder why we ever thought that a court was just a building.

Find out more about Case Center and **request your free demo now** >

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About Thomson Reuters Case Center

Case Center is evidence sharing at its best — the award-winning global leader for preparation of trial files and electronic presentation of documentary and video evidence in the courtroom. Our systems hold over 500,000 cases, with over 250 million pages of evidence held securely in the cloud.

Case Center reduces the time and effort required to prepare trial files, eliminates the direct and indirect costs of paper, PDFs, and multimedia submissions. In court, Case Center allows presentation of exhibits in physical and virtual hearings with personalized views for judges, attorneys, witnesses, and even the jury.