



## King County District Court

### EMC Centera online archives protect document authenticity and speed access in new court records management system

The King County District Court (KCDC) of Seattle, Washington, provides court services for over a dozen suburban cities from eight locations throughout the county. It serves one of the most populous counties in the U. S., and processes over 240,000 cases a year—from traffic violations and misdemeanors to civil filings under \$50,000.

Up until two years ago, KCDC's paper-based court records were housed within individual courthouses located across the county. Retrieving them required a trip to the specific courthouse where they were stored. To provide faster and more convenient records access throughout the court system, and reduce storage and management costs, KCDC selected Sierra Systems Group, Inc., a leading IT and business consulting firm, to help build a custom electronic court record solution.

Proposal specifications for the solution included an industry-leading EMC® Centera® content-addressed storage platform for use as the online repository. It fully met KCDC's requirements for secure, unalterable records retention, fast retrieval, and compliance.

“Centera has enabled us to centralize all of our documents in one location in a secure manner, and ensures rapid and reliable access from anywhere within the District Court system,” says David Jones, application supervisor. “It has also helped us simplify the management of document retention and deletion cycles mandated by the court and state.”

#### **Reliability, functionality, and flexibility**

The foundation for KCDC's electronic document management system consists of two highly reliable, eight-node EMC Centera Governance Edition systems each located in separate courthouses. The second EMC Centera system, which was recently deployed, supports automatic failover from one system to another to help ensure continuous records access.

EMC Captiva® InputAccel® software, which provides powerful scanning and indexing capabilities, also plays a key role in the solution as does the custom-built application which is used for viewing the documents and managing work flow.

Designed to extend application support to non-integrated enterprise applications by enabling them to work with EMC Centera systems, the EMC Centera Universal Access (CUA)

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networked software appliance greatly simplified integration and facilitated the rapid deployment of KCDC's document management solution. The EMC CUA's flexibility is expected to provide continued advantages as KCDC's document management environment evolves.

"Ours is a proprietary solution, but it's also a fairly open solution because Centera provides a standard API that's accessible through just about any application," says Jones. "That really gives the solution the flexibility to address many types of fixed-content requirements. If we decide to have more custom software created, or buy components from various vendors, it's nice to know that we can easily get the software to talk with our Centera systems."

### **Electronic access yields many advantages**

Today, approximately 500 people use KCDC's centralized EMC Centera archives to quickly retrieve court records from anywhere in the county. In the next few years, KCDC plans to allow the general public to view certain online court documents as well.

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**David Jones, Application Supervisor**

"One of the key benefits of having electronic documents is the ease of distribution," says Jones. "In cities where we have contracts, anyone from the prosecutor's office can now easily view documents without physically coming to a courthouse to access a record."

Another key benefit of EMC Centera technology that makes it well suited for this environment is its ability to ensure the authenticity and integrity of court records throughout their retention periods. When an original document is committed to electronic archives, a unique identifier (content address) is assigned to it. If it is altered in any way, the updated document will not retain the same digital fingerprint as the original document. Therefore, EMC Centera protects the integrity of each court record and makes it easy to trace the workflow history.

"Since these are documents involved in legal proceedings, there are various reasons why someone might want to know where it's been and who's touched it," says Jones. "Centera seems made-to-order for storing and protecting fixed content in this type of environment."

In addition, unlike King County's Supreme Court which must maintain court records indefinitely, the District Court retention cycles are finite. EMC Centera enables KCDC to easily manage retention and deletion cycles as instructed by court rule and state law.

"Every few years, depending on the type of case, we have to eliminate certain documents," explains Jones. "Centera's built-in capabilities, which are activated by code, make that a simple process."

### **Non-stop operations**

Although there is a countywide policy against the use of modems within the U.S. court system, KCDC still benefits from EMC's call-home remote monitoring services through

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the use of e-mail system health alerts and WebEx sessions which enable remote system access. These monitoring services, combined with KCDC's redundant EMC Centera systems and self-healing functionality, have enabled the organization to provide its users with an online archive designed for maximum availability.

"Centera's availability has been very good," says Jones. "The few times that we have encountered issues, even when they were not Centera related, we have been quite satisfied with the response we've received from the EMC support team—and they stick with a problem until it's resolved."

### **Simplicity and scalability set the stage for expanded use**

Future applications for the document management system and EMC Centera archives may include support for KCDC's plan to create and store more documents online, such as a new e-ticket initiative where traffic tickets will be filed electronically instead of in paper format.

"We hope to automate more of the process so that human hands don't have to scan a document or deal with paper records," says Jones. "Since we can use the information from those electronic records to populate forms on other systems, we expect it to eliminate a lot of duplicate work. It is also easier to backup and preserve electronic records."

EMC Centera archives also may be used to store court transcripts generated through the organization's FTR Limited application from Hyland Software, Inc. Another possible consideration for easily scaled EMC Centera archives is for a shared document management system between King County's District and Superior Courts.

"If you have a lot of fixed-content documents like a court has, there isn't a better solution for storing, managing, protecting, and easily retrieving them," says Jones.



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