



The Computerworld Honors Program

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Final Copy of Case Study

YEAR:
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STATUS:
Laureate

Organization:
Ninth Judicial Circuit Court, FL

Organization URL:
www.ninthcircuit.org

Project Name:
Ninth Judicial Court Centralized Remote Interpreting (CRI)

What social/humanitarian issue was the project designed to address? What specific metrics did you use to measure the project's success?

The need for court interpreting services across Florida has risen dramatically, and the Ninth Judicial Circuit is no exception. The Ninth Judicial Circuit in Florida serves Orange County (Orlando) and Osceola County (Kissimmee), representing a population of over 1.37 million. From 2009 to 2010, the Ninth Judicial Court provided interpreting services for close to 25,000 court hearings. On average, it holds 91 hearings per day, or 11 hearings per hour, which require the services of a court interpreter. Despite consistently increasing demand for judicial services, the Ninth Circuit faced budget cuts and a hiring freeze, resulting in only eight staff interpreters for its 67 courtrooms spread out over 2,229 square miles. In effect, the Ninth Circuit's interpreter staff was short by 50 percent. With strained staffing resources, the Ninth Circuit was forced to outsource out-of-county contractual interpreters whenever the need arose, for example, when full-time interpreters were booked or if there was a need for exotic language skills. However, contractual interpreters require a minimum two-hour guarantee at approximately US\$55 per hour, resulting in high costs for the Circuit. Compounding these high costs are hearings' inherent scheduling challenges, including last-minute hearing cancellations and process delays. Oftentimes, a contractual interpreter would be paid to travel only to be dismissed following a hearing delay. The state of Florida spends an estimated US\$28 million a year on court interpretation services, a figure that includes a significant amount of staff augmentation through outsourcing. In light of the state's and the court's fiscal challenges, the cost of contractual

interpreters was becoming unmanageable. The Ninth Circuit needed a solution that would successfully reduce costs and improve the efficiency of providing interpretation services during court processes.

Please describe the technologies used and how those technologies were deployed in an innovative way. Also, please include any technical or other challenges that were overcome for the successful implementation of the project.

To address the rising demand for interpreters and create efficiencies in the court process, the Ninth Circuit developed a remote, centralized interpreting system. Centralized Remote Interpreting (CRI) provides on-demand virtual language interpretation services to courts. Courtroom personnel are able to access a pool of certified on-call interpreters, and audio-visually connect with them when hearings require language services. To execute its vision, the Ninth Circuit designed and installed digital court reporting infrastructure to create four remote workstations throughout Orange and Osceola County. Using video captured through courtroom security cameras and an audio platform, remote interpreters are now able to securely view and interact with the Court through Web browsers from any computer attached to the Court's network. CRI functions through a mix of integrated technology. This technology is connected to the court's greater network, which enables courtroom personnel and remote interpreters to connect at will. Each courtroom is equipped with a visual menu configured with menu options that allows the judge to submit interpretation requests. The requests are then routed to the centralized, on-call interpreters. The Ninth Circuit deliberately integrated multipurpose technology, meaning that different technological components can be leveraged for various purposes within the court system. For example, the Ninth Circuit currently utilizes much of the CRI technology to also provide digital court reporting services and is now looking to use the technology for evidence presentation. By integrating those courtroom processes into the existing infrastructure, the Ninth Circuit maximizes its budget. The biggest hurdle in implementing CRI was the traditional legal culture. As noted by Matt Benefiel, Trial Court Administrator, "The legal world is very slow to change." Convincing the Circuit Court that interpretation services could be provided in a new way was a challenge but a challenge that had to be addressed.

Please list the specific humanitarian benefits the project has yielded so far.

By integrating video and audio technology into the court, the Ninth Circuit was able to change the entire system of interpreter service provision, effectively aligning supply and demand in a way that has allowed the Court to eliminate unnecessary expenditures, cover more transactions and improve the quality of interpretation within the judicial system. Quality: Effective language interpretation combines body language and vocal analysis. By leveraging cutting-edge wireless video and audio technologies, acting interpreters can both visualize and vocally communicate with their clients during a hearing and provide crystal-clear translation services. The video solution provides secure and natural collaborative environments that transcend technology and now enable conversations without barriers. Certification: Contract interpreters are not certified. CRI resolves this problem by specifically driving traffic to certified interpreters, resulting in a higher quality of interpretative services during court processes. With a pool of on-call, highly skilled and certified interpreters, the Ninth Circuit has been able to ensure the quality of its interpreting service. In addition, personnel with the correct skill sets can be identified quickly, thereby maximizing time and resources. Specialized Needs: Integrating video technology allows CRI to cater to an underserved population: hearing impaired constituents. On average, 325 hearings a year require ASL translation/interpretation services in the Ninth Circuit. However, 50 percent of the costs the Ninth Circuit accrued for ASL services were never actually provided due to scheduling complications. By having interpreters on demand through the CRI system, ASL-certified interpreters can be contacted to provide services for hearing impaired litigants or litigators at the flip of a switch, saving the Ninth Circuit that 50 percent.

Please provide the best example of how the project has benefited a specific individual, enterprise or organization. Feel free to include personal quotes from individuals who have directly benefited from the work.

While CRI impacts every single case study that requires interpretative service, a strong example of a specific population that has been positively affected by the Ninth Circuit's CRI program is the Hispanic population in the northwest part of the county. Benefiel has directly witnessed the change, noting: "From a client perspective, we're able to address the specific needs of our Hispanic population using CRI by providing Spanish interpreters on call." Benefiel explains that, for example, in the case of a migrant worker being arraigned on a criminal traffic arraignment at eight in the morning, all parties involved are able to move through the judicial process much quicker and more efficiently.