# 6 Reasons Why Courts Should Expand Their Technology Horizons

Court technologists need to evolve their models to support the efforts of law firms and prosecutors to digitize legal services.

*BY DAVID JACKSON, CASELINES*

The technology systems used by courts today were built in the late '90s and early '00s, but are these systems fit for purpose today? The cloud revolution has triggered a global paradigm shift, enabling new ways of working. Six key drivers for changes include:

**1. Evolving courts:** Once defined by their imposing physical presence, now online hearings increasingly act as a vehicle for dispute resolution. Tomorrow's courts will evolve to become more virtual.

**2. Home and remote working:** Judges today are just as keen on remote working as the rest of us. Many have worked in private practice and are familiar with modern office tools and are frustrated at the slow pace of technological innovation.

**3. End-to-end thinking:** A series of justice scandals around the world have emphasized the need for joined-up communications from law enforcement, prosecutors, courts through to probation. Current systems are fragmented with piecemeal connectivity, when the real need is for common platforms sharing data end-to-end.

**4. The tsunami of digital evidence:** Multimedia evidence

is beginning to dominate. Courts are demanding access to evidence from body-worn-cameras (BWC), CCTV and social media platforms but do not have the tools to cope.

**5. Freedom of Information and public records access:** Public access is mandatory, but few courts have software that simplifies record redaction. Tools are needed to automate this process and deliver the result seamlessly, without hours spent scanning and sorting documents.

**6. Cloud applications and storage:** Today we live our digital lives in the cloud, but few courts have made the transition. The UK already manages its entire criminal justice system in the cloud; are courts in America and other countries being too conservative?

**The Court Component Model Must Evolve**

The best framework for describing how court technologists think about their role and scope is captured by the **Court Component Model (CCM)**. Established in 2017, the CCM from America's Joint Technology Committee (JTC) offers court technologists a valuable framework for planning their IT requirements.

We believe that court technologists need to evolve the CCM and explore opportunities to improve our courts and justice systems by using insights from world class leaders on delivering functionalities.

The **existing CCM framework** limits thinking about possibilities, especially when it comes to procurement. If an RFI asks about how suppliers deliver against the CCM, then that is what the suppliers will respond against. The framework also reduces insight into innovations in other areas. In England, judges hearing juvenile dependency cases can read and review applications from home before a hearing. The police can

load interview evidence to the dossier, hyperlink to other documents within it and share the whole file with prosecutors. All of this can be managed from a single application.

Updating the CCM is a mounting priority for justice in the 21st century. A model is needed that reflects current technologies and builds upon the practical experiences of courts in other countries. In our view, an evolved model for the CCM should introduce four new functional components:

**1. Evidence review:** Judges and lawyers need tools that work in and out of court to help them review vast amounts of documentary and media evidence, search the documents, make comments and share their notes.

**2. Courtroom presentation:** Evidence presentation solutions have also advanced; platforms that require no specialist setup or courtroom support are now available. Lawyers can walk into court simply with an iPad or laptop. Presenter modes allows them to present documents, media and recordings automatically to judges, witnesses and other lawyers. Courts in British Columbia today hear cases with tens of thousands of pages of evidence, with lawyers using nothing more than a tablet in court.

**3. Multimedia evidence:** BWC, CCTV, first responder recordings and social media are becoming the new norm. Yet courts still depend on thumb drives and DVDs, overburdening their evidence and record systems. Now that tools exist that allow courts to pull in multimedia from multiple sources to a single application, such as police officers logging in remotely to an evidence system from the courtroom, it is time for courts to consider this as a separate application component.

**4. Publication and redaction:** Courts are primarily responsible for making records public; usually relying on labor-intensive redaction of scanned copies. This process is slow, costly and inefficient. The best evidence review tools can deliver integrated redaction capabilities, target specific groups and store publication-ready copies of court files. This is another area for courts to consider as an investment priority.

All this amounts to a new layer for the Court Component Model, bringing evidence review and courtroom presentation into the model, evolving the CCM to the level that has been achieved in many court systems today.

Courts are often the leaders in technology thinking. Every participant in the litigation process, civil or criminal, gains from their fresh thinking. Courts need to better understand new capabilities, explore what is on offer from technology and analyze the cost benefit. By shifting away from court-centered, on-premise IT delivery, courts can gain a huge number of collaboration efficiencies. Moreover, by optimizing via cloud solutions they can introduce change without major capital projects, tap into a fast-flowing stream of innovation and deliver operating savings within months.

It is time for the court technologists of America to boldly evolve the current CCM to the modern frontier. The digital evidence revolution is already benefiting the courts of Canada and England, and this innovation is within easy reach for the USA.

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