



THE FEDERAL COURTS PROJECT

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The federal judiciary has been aggressively pursuing the concept of electronic filing and electronic case files for a number of years. Beginning in 1995, technology staff from the Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts began working with the Northern District Court of Ohio to develop a solution for handling a tremendous volume of filings in maritime asbestos cases. The electronic filing front-end system that resulted from this effort became the basis for a more complete electronic filing system prototype. This prototype system was piloted beginning in late 1996 in the Southern District of New York Bankruptcy Court. With more and more case management components being included in the design, the USAOC began referring to its system as the Case Management/Electronic Case File (CM/ECF) System. With continuous improvements and adaptation for new case types, CM/ECF now has been implemented in nine federal courts (four district courts and five bankruptcy courts) as an expanded pilot project. Through the first half of 1999, it is estimated that the system has been used by over 1,000 attorneys and has processed more than 15,000 cases and 175,000 documents. The USAOC anticipates expanding the system to other federal courts.

The federal system employs a Web browser interface, Web forms, and Adobe PDF files for transmitting filing information between law firms and the courts. Attorneys prepare a document using standard word processing software with the addition of Adobe's Acrobat software, which writes the document out as a PDF file, preserving the formatting produced through word processing. After logging on to the court Web site with an authorized ID and password, the law firm uses interactive Web pages to enter the information needed to specify the case and filing details. The PDF file containing the document itself is then uploaded through the Internet connection to the court's computer. The PDF file is stored in the CM/ECF system and linked to a docket entry that is created in the case record to reflect the filing. The docket entry and the document image are both available immediately for viewing by all parties and the general public via the Web site. In addition, the filing attorney receives an immediate electronic acknowledgment. The system also includes electronic noticing for other parties who participate in the CM/ECF system.

JEDDI Technology Vendors

As the interest in JEDDI has grown over recent years, a number of commercial technology vendors have emerged to provide JEDDI products. A few are start-up companies concentrating on electronic filing systems. Others are case management system developers who are now adding e-filing front ends to their existing line of products. A third group are more

