

Seagull Software Helps the Alabama Office of Courts Unite Disparate Applications Through A Standardized Interface



The Administrative Office of Courts is charged with providing the centralized, state-level administrative support necessary for the operation of the state's court system, the development of procedures and systems to enhance the operational capacity of the courts and the collection and dissemination of information necessary for the development of policies to promote the most efficient operation of the courts. A sample of the major programs for which the AOC assumes responsibility are: finance, judicial education, records and space management, jury and case management, child support enforcement and court planning.

Challenge

In the United States, judicial systems are comprised of an intricate web of organizations and individuals such as judges, attorneys, court employees and law enforcement agencies. For the courts to run smoothly, an extensive amount of case-related data—jury information, case records, court schedules, etc.—is typically shared between these entities every day through various judicial administration systems. For the Administrative Office of Courts (AOC) of the Alabama Unified Justice System, their ability to operate efficiently was being hindered by their State Judicial Information System (SJIS), which consisted of multiple disparate applications running on an IBM mainframe.

The SJIS system is used not only by court employees, but by other state law enforcement personnel as well as by state district attorneys to access entire case records, schedule court appointments and enter data relevant to individual cases. The AOC supports more than 1,500 judicial system employees and over 1,000 remote users throughout the state with access to 50 applications that run on the centralized mainframe server. Due to the large number of applications and complexity of the screens, the system was difficult to learn and navigate. In addition, with so many different types of users throughout the state—some on PCs, some on dumb terminals—improving the usability by rewriting all the mainframe applications was not an option. The AOC needed to simplify the applications without touching the existing business logic.

Solution

To convert their SJIS into a more user-friendly system, the AOC selected LegaSuite GUI® and BlueZone™ technologies, which are both components Seagull Software's complete legacy evolution offering, LegaSuite®. LegaSuite GUI provides industry-leading developer tools and infrastructure software for enhanced Web-to-host and Windows-to-host access to mainframe back-office applications. And BlueZone is Seagull Software's state-of-the-art, thin, fast, secure and full-function Web-to-host and PC-to-host terminal emulation solution for IBM mainframe (3270), iSeries (5250), UNIX/DEC (VT) and secure File Transfer Protocol (FTP).



Key benefits:

- Provide a more user friendly, easier to learn interface
- Reduce training time and data entry errors
- Deploy new terminal emulation to effectively support users on both PCs and dumb terminals
- Deliver an intuitive interface that caters to a diverse user group, including new groups of users for self-service
- Launch a new imaging system, which allows a more efficient record viewing process, plus cuts down on the use of paper

"We ultimately selected Seagull Software because it was the provider that allowed us to develop the front-end quickly and easily, but it also allowed us to connect to different types of databases and migrate other applications like the imaging system."

— Jack Doane
IT Manager
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Using LegaSuite GUI, the AOC has improved the usability of the SJIS and integrated access to multiple information sources across the organization's core mainframe application through a dynamic graphical interface. "The AOC is committed to the mainframe platform as the foundation for all applications supporting the State of Alabama judicial system," said Jack Doane, IT manager for the Administrative Office of Courts. "With LegaSuite GUI, we have preserved the integrity, stability and reliability of the mainframe application logic and data, while delivering a comprehensive judicial information system that exploits the value of the mainframe's transactional functionality in an integrated, intuitive PC-based format."

The intuitive interface includes a sophisticated calendaring feature for scheduling court "plain English" drop-down boxes that eliminate errors and time associated with the use of cryptic numeric codes for basic case attributes. District attorneys are now able to access the state's financial applications for a review of outstanding court costs, and to search for case histories related to a specific individual—all via the new user-friendly LegaSuite interface. "The AOC supports a very diverse user community, and LegaSuite GUI allows us to meet their needs with respect to usability and heterogeneous technical environments with a single development effort," said Jack Doane, IT manager for the Administrative Office of Courts. "With our investment in LegaSuite GUI, we are well-positioned to quickly and easily expand our user base for increased coordination across the state's judicial departments, without investing in costly and time-consuming training for new users and without dictating the end-user technical environment."

The AOC is also using LegaSuite GUI to set up imaging capabilities in every courthouse throughout the state. This will allow the court clerks, who retain thousands and thousands of back cases in hard copies, to scan court documents into the system. They can then easily access document images by simply clicking on a link. "We have a case number that is linked to each person that goes through the court system. With LegaSuite GUI, all we will have to do is click on a button that links to our imaging server, which brings up the image of that specific case. This will help us become more efficient and cut down on the use of paper," said Doane.

The AOC is using BlueZone as their default terminal emulator. One reason why they chose BlueZone is because they required a terminal emulation solution that could support PC printing functions. "Our problem was that when a user would get onto our system and fire off a report to print, it would go to a mainframe printer that was assigned to their sign-on. BlueZone supports the PC printing functions, so now when a user sends off a report, it goes to their PC or network printer. Our old emulator did not have that capability," said Doane.

Aside from improving the look and feel of the applications for their PC users, the AOC used BlueZone to replace their old terminal emulation solution for their large installed base still using dumb terminals. "As a state agency, we can't afford to replace all the terminals with PCs. We have a large population that will continue to use them," said Doane.



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“Since we serve as the core of a unified courts system, we run one system for all the courthouses in the state of Alabama—with every courthouse in the state linking into our mainframe. By deploying BlueZone, we were able to effectively and securely support all of our remote users across Alabama.”

Results

By implementing LegaSuite GUI and BlueZone technologies, the AOC has gained several advantages. The enhancements have resulted in a reduction in training time and a decrease in data entry errors, as well as the ability to run more comprehensive statistical reports regarding judicial activity, and the system is now open to new groups of users for self-service. “Seagull Software has met our expectations. For our programmers, the tools have been great. It has been really easy for them learn. And for our PC users, the graphical interface has improved workflows. The users forget that everything ties back to a green screen,” said Doane.

In selecting a vendor, the AOC turned to Gartner, who recommended Seagull Software as one of the leading vendors. One of the primary reasons the AOC selected Seagull Software over other solution providers was because of BlueZone’s and LegaSuite GUI’s integration capabilities. “Integration was a big key in selecting Seagull Software. We had looked at many products, and I did a lot of research; we contacted Gartner; we talked to other State agencies to see what they were looking at. It came down to three different products—Seagull Software, Jacada and IBM’s Host on Demand. We ultimately selected Seagull Software because it was the provider that allowed us to develop the front-end quickly and easily, but it also allowed us to connect to different types of databases and migrate other applications like the imaging system,” said Doane.



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