

Court Connects Residents to Services Using Collaboration Technology



City of San Antonio uses Cisco Connected Justice solution for residents seeking rapid resolution of court services.

Executive Summary

City of San Antonio

- **Industry:** State and Local Government
- **Location:** San Antonio, Texas

CHALLENGE

- Minimize congestion at municipal court for residents requiring court services
- Increase flexibility of routine judicial services delivery for San Antonio residents
- Create process efficiencies at municipal court by reducing wait time for residents seeking to speak to judge

SOLUTION

- Integrate Cisco Connected Justice technologies to help improve court processes
- Deploy geographically dispersed interactive kiosks with live video feed capabilities to connect San Antonio residents with court employees
- Integrate payment services with virtual court arraignment services on each kiosk

RESULTS

- Deployed three video kiosks throughout San Antonio in high-traffic areas to maximize resident use
- Helped enable rapid processing and resolution of routine municipal court services
- Reduced congestion and wait times at the municipal court, boosting workflow productivity

Challenge

The city of San Antonio, Texas boasts a population of over one million. This volume of residents generates a large number of people who require routine municipal court services, such as parking ticket resolution. In fact, on any given day, San Antonio's municipal court has as many as 1200 people appear for services at its physical location, the majority of whom are "pro se," meaning representing themselves and not necessarily contesting charges. Without the involvement of a lawyer, pro se defendants require direct communication with a judge to resolve their issues. The result is a long wait time, in addition to the time spent driving and parking at the facility. When discussing the numerous challenges facing the courts, Municipal Court Presiding Judge John Bull says, "We have dialogue with these people all day, every day. It's an incredibly high volume of people seeking specific services."

Judicial process innovation is not new to San Antonio. For several years, the city's judicial branch has been integrating advanced technology. For example, San Antonio has used a video search warrant process for six years. The system uses Cisco Jabber™ Video for TelePresence, a personal video collaboration solution for mobile, remote, and extended teams via laptop, which allows remote detectives to connect with judges via webcam to obtain valid warrants anytime, anywhere.

Judge Bull, along with Court Manager Jason Tabor, imagined building on San Antonio's technological momentum to help enable virtual transactions identical to that of the municipal court. The solution would need to be user friendly to maximize use, and high-quality enough to provide cohesive communication between the court and defendants. Additionally, Judge Bull and Tabor envisioned a solution that could integrate both video arraignment and payment services to truly maximize efficiencies.

Judge Bull says, "We were looking to develop a replica of the municipal court process, but bring it to the communities, instead of our constituents having to physically displace themselves to a crowded court."

Solution

The San Antonio Municipal Court wanted to better meet the high demand for everyday judicial services, and also sought to improve flexibility in the delivery of services to San Antonio residents. The ultimate goal was to develop a convenient, user-driven solution that would maximize both the court's and defendants' time and resources.

Bull and Tabor opted for an interactive video kiosk that would help enable residents to resolve every day, routine Municipal Court offenses (everything from deferred adjudication to uncontested tickets or citations to traffic violations) from the comfort of their own neighborhoods. San Antonio started the kiosk pilot program in early 2012, which was funded through the municipal court technology fund. So far, three strategically geographically-dispersed kiosks have been installed: One kiosk is located

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Judge John Bull, Presiding Judge,
San Antonio Municipal Court

in a community link center in the southeast part of San Antonio, and the two others have been placed in the local grocery store chain, H-E-B. Judge Bull says: “H-E-B is based out of San Antonio and has a captive market in the city. By strategically placing service kiosks inside this grocery store, we’re reaching a larger market share of the constituents.”

To develop an effective user-friendly kiosk, Bull and Tabor chose to bring in key private partners, including Vyopta and, encouraged by their past collaboration on virtual search warrants, Cisco, specifically Cisco Connected Justice experts, who specialize in deploying innovative courtroom technologies. Cisco® Connected Justice provides a unified network platform to automate the justice workflow, removing the barriers between systems and facilitating the transfer of information.

Each kiosk was designed and equipped with Cisco TelePresence® EX60, a collaboration technology that provides touch-screen controls and an interactive pad, making virtual communications easy and intuitive. The TelePresence kiosks provide a live video feed whereby municipal court judges, such as Judge Alfredo Tavera and Judge Bull, can speak to residents about their cases and explain their different options. Notably, TelePresence helps enable easy sharing of high-definition (HD) content, which was critical to allowing these sensitive communications to occur smoothly.

On the court side, judges including Judge Tavera use separate video endpoints, Cisco TelePresence System 1000, to link to the kiosks throughout the city. The single, 65-inch, 1080 pixel HD plasma screen endpoints support full, life-size images for meeting participants (the judge and the defendant) and share life-size images with ultra-high-definition video and spatial audio. The clarity of the audio and visual optimizes the virtual conversations between parties.

Finally, kiosks are also equipped with payment (credit or debit) capabilities, allowing residents to quickly resolve outstanding fines post-arraignment, all in one place. The Cisco technologies deployed for the kiosk system were designed to work within the greater technology trends and address San Antonio’s unique court requirements to improve courtroom productivity.

Results

Today, San Antonio is well on its way toward meeting its goal of leveraging advanced technology to deliver judicial resources and services conveniently and flexibly. Although the pilot program is still new, San Antonio residents are now able take care of various routine services from each kiosk location. The user-friendly Cisco Connected Justice TelePresence technology means that anyone even remotely familiar with touch screens or smart phones can use the kiosk and benefit from its services for free.

Residents need only walk up to any kiosk with their ticket information, and a court clerk transfers them to a judge, where the judge oversees the case via video. After the

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Product List

VOICE AND IP COMMUNICATIONS

- Cisco TelePresence EX60
- Cisco TelePresence System 1000

interaction with the court, the kiosk screen takes the constituent to a payment screen for easy handling of ticket fees. When discussing the efficiency of the new system, Judge Bull says, “The HD technology gives us the ability to answer any questions our San Antonio constituents might have, and give clear, concise information from the judges themselves.”

Virtual interaction with dedicated court employees is instantaneous, eliminating time and money wasted on driving, parking, and waiting in line at the prohibitively crowded physical court. Judge Bull says, “The beauty is that this system doesn’t take anything away from what we do here, at the court, all the while saving time and resources.”

By developing an innovative judicial service delivery platform with the help of Cisco Connected Justice, San Antonio has succeeded in creating a process efficiency advantage for its constituents and courts. The kiosks significantly improve flexibility for handling routine court cases, decreasing congestion for the needed services and maximizing resources. It has been a true effort to streamline court processes by improving collaboration with an enhanced and innovative 21st century defendant-courtroom communications strategy. Judge Bull speaks to the bottom line: “Based on the sheer volume of cases we handle on a day to day basis, this system just makes sense.”

Next Steps

San Antonio is currently working on adding additional city services onto the kiosk. The city is also collaborating with neighboring cities to share best practices and encourage system adoption.

For More Information

To learn more about Cisco Connected Justice go to www.cisco.com/go/connectedjustice.

To learn more about Cisco TelePresence, go to www.cisco.com/go/telepresence.

