



CASE STUDY

Industry

Government, Criminal Justice

Partner

OpenText

Challenges

- Cost- and time-intensive evidence filing
- Many files are lost in transit between Crown offices and Docket
- Lack of proof for paper-based disclosure
- File searching

Solutions

OpenText™ Content Suite
OpenText™ Template Workspaces
OpenText™ Directory Services
OpenText™ Content Web Services

Benefits

- Streamlined, automatic e-filing saves police departments time and money
- Reduced time to dispose cases from first appearance to disposition
- Anytime file access through e-disclosure portal enhances prosecutor and defence productivity and case management efficiency

ALBERTA JUSTICE AND SOLICITOR GENERAL

Canadian Provincial Justice System Rehabilitates Criminal Case Management

Alberta Justice and Solicitor General replaces paper-based disclosure system with electronic filing powered by OpenText™ Content Suite

Alberta Justice and Solicitor General works for a fair and safe Alberta. The ministry leveraged flexibility of OpenText enterprise content management technology to successfully launch Criminal e-File in the Edmonton Crown Office, while working with familiar and established systems.

Absence of Proof and Dedicated Content Management

For its western province of close to four million citizens, Alberta Justice and Solicitor General manages legal and correctional systems as well as law enforcement. Supporting an effective and innovative justice organization demands reliable and secure access to information.

Problems persisted around paper, especially when it came to disclosure—sharing evidence with legal teams working on the defence. Defence counsel would sometimes claim they did not receive disclosure of particular files. “In the paper-based system of disclosure, the Crown really couldn’t refute the allegations,” explains Tim Owens, project lead for Alberta Justice and Solicitor General and prior prosecutor. Even with signed acceptance, recipients can claim a page was missing. “You can’t really win the argument because there’s no proof at the end of the day.” As a result, defence counsel applications for disclosure issues were costly; courts were awarding damages against the Crown.

Other challenges related to the redaction process, a procedure to prevent distribution of confidential or sensitive information. Any time lawyers misplaced disclosure materials or were replaced with new counsel, requests arrived for new copies. Over time, disclosure clerks saved electronic copies to avoid repeat effort and trace document delivery. Later, new file systems were introduced.

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Tim Owens, Project Lead, Alberta Justice and Solicitor General

While users recognized the benefit of electronic disclosure for all material, disparate systems were soon overextended. “The decision was made: We need to find a solution with the purpose to manage content,” says Owens. Evidence for court cases ranges from paper-based police reports and witness statements to multimedia material including photos, video, and audio. Opportunity and urgency joined the venture when the Edmonton Police Service requested an alternative to supplying video evidence on DVD, a process that required enormous overhead.

ECM Capture: Criminal e-File

“It was easy to select OpenText as the solution for the project,” Owens relates. In 2009, Alberta Justice and Solicitor General conducted an evaluation on Enterprise Content Management (ECM) options and selected OpenText Content Suite as the ministry system. Content Suite is an ECM system designed to manage the flow of information from capture through archiving and disposition.

The Crown’s Court Case Management (CCM) project team, including OpenText partner, Sierra Systems, led successful proof-of-concept and pilot tests for media and prosecution package material transfer. Content Suite now supports Criminal e-File — launched from the Edmonton Crown Office in March 2015 — for the intake, management, and disclosure of electronic documents to the Alberta Crown Prosecution Service (ACPS), provincial courts, police departments, and defence counsel. Criminal e-File and an electronic disclosure portal move the justice system towards electronic, paperless efficiency.

Implementing a comprehensive solution across several groups requires flexibility and integration, especially for departments tied to strict regulations and reticent to adopt new technology. “We took a different approach of integrating Content Suite with law enforcement,” Owens says. “We learned to work with them as they are and where they are.” The Edmonton Police Service uses its own application to deliver digital disclosure material, an average of up to 300 documents per day. Sierra Systems used OpenText™ Content Web Services and developed utilities to retrieve material, reorganize it into a consumable form, and load the data into Content Suite. “We’ve developed this as a common platform everyone will eventually use across the province,” explains Abe Van Dorp, Vice President with Sierra Systems.

By integrating Content Suite with the tools the Edmonton Police Service is familiar with, Sierra Systems achieved a seamless end-to-end user experience from police to prosecution to defence. This greatly simplifies change management and user adoption. Within the first few months of deployment, the Criminal e-File system holds 68,000 active cases, with each case containing multiple documents and multimedia sources totaling more than 350,000 separate pieces of content. “Once the entire province is on, we will have in the neighborhood of 200,000 active cases and I would say well over a million individual documents and files,” says Van Dorp.

ECM Distribution: E-Disclosure Portal

Criminal case information is now available electronically 24/7, searchable with docket number by close to 650 Crown and 250 defence counsel users in the Edmonton area. Defence lawyers obtain files through a Disclosure Request Page (DRP), an online portal hosted in the Alberta Justice and Solicitor General secure data centre enabled with two-factor authentication for added security. “We really wanted to simplify the user interface and experience for defence counsel,” explains Van Dorp. His team designed a standard .NET web page and used OpenText Content Web Services to retrieve documents from Content Suite. “With a valid and active docket number, you are able to request disclosure,” he says.

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Tim Owens, Project Lead, Alberta Justice and Solicitor General

When a defence lawyer selects the “Request Disclosure” button, it triggers workflow within OpenText to a clerk who reviews and redacts the case file information. Once complete, the employee clicks “Approve,” which completes the workflow and delivers an email notification to the registered defence counsel that the disclosure is ready for pick up. When the lawyer logs into the DRP and enters the docket number, the interface displays “Disclosure Ready.” A simple one-click interface initiates a zip and download feature within Content Suite, sending a copy of the file to the defence lawyer’s computer. Van Dorp notes: “The whole user experience is a couple of drop-down boxes and a few buttons to click. And that’s it. The DRP has been well received from defence.”

Alberta Justice and Solicitor General leverages the ability to template workspaces and processes that organize case information in a standard folder structure in Content Suite, which is organized by docket number and includes sections for documents, media, and more. “The top level of the folder structure is the docket number itself,” explains Van Dorp. “Inside each folder are several standard folders including original documents, working documents, court documents, correspondence, and disclosure documents. These standard folders are set up automatically for them. And then the sixth folder is for media where we bring in photos, video, or whatever electronic media is provided by police.”

ECM Transformation: OpenText Comprehensive Flexibility

Paperless case management is transforming the Alberta justice system. Comprehensive, flexible integration with existing systems is paving the way for real results for all participants.

Crown Office

“Tremendous efficiencies are being gained with Content Suite,” according to Owens. “Filing and assembling files day after day for dockets creates a huge administrative overhead that has been diminished significantly, if not close to eliminated, in the Crown Office already,” he notes.

Legal professionals focus on casework, not paperwork. “I know from experience, one of the most significant improvements is in quality of life for prosecutors,” Owens continues. They don’t have to be at the office to get work done; they can access files during court downtime waiting for the judge or at home waiting for the plumber, he notes. “That can be an enormous advantage and efficiency gainer.”

With workflow and process automation, audit trails, and reliable record retention, Content Suite provides proof of disclosure distribution to avoid costly penalties. More importantly, the ECM Solution improves access to content encouraging collaboration and supporting efficient case management.

Edmonton Police Service

Criminal e-File streamlines the transfer of prosecution packages from law enforcement to the Crown prosecutors. The costs and time required for managing and tracking DVDs and paper is greatly reduced; the Edmonton Police Service is able to shift productivity to other critical tasks. Cases can also move along more quickly as evidence is uploaded at regular intervals.

Defence Counsel

“I was anticipating more resistance from the legal community to going paperless than I’m seeing. I was remarkably impressed with their willingness to sign up,” Owens notes. “In our industry, it’s really an idea whose time has arrived.”

Learn More

To learn more about how Sierra Systems' solutions can assist your organization, contact us:

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With the system powered by Content Suite, defence counsel can skip trips to the prosecutor's office or courier services, eliminating associated delays, courier costs, and paper storage. Instead, they have an increased opportunity to focus on facts and features of the case.

Support and Future Plans

The ECM technology support model evolved over time with a combination of Crown and Sierra System professionals teamed with ERIS Solutions, an Edmonton-based ECM consultant, and OpenText Professional Services. Future ECM plans at Alberta Justice and Solicitor General include extending Criminal e-File to other police departments, including Calgary, and investigating supportive capabilities with OpenText™ Tempo™ Box, a secure file sharing and synchronization tool.

OPENTEXT™

OpenText enables the digital world by simplifying, transforming, and accelerating enterprise information needs, on premises or in the cloud. For more information about OpenText (NASDAQ: OTEX, TSX: OTC) visit opentext.com.