Franklin County Clerk of Courts

Origins of the Foreclosure Cost Bill Module

The Franklin County Clerk of Courts Office of Fiscal Services (OFS) is responsible for managing all fees relating to the sale of foreclosed homes in Franklin County. In the late 1990s, a Windows-based financials application was built that included a component to create a billing estimate, so that the plaintiff in foreclosure situations (typically the lending institution) could assess the appropriate fees associated to the sale of the home. At this time, the database connectivity from Windows applications to mid-range servers had yet to reach an acceptable level of maturity. For this billing function to be successful, it needed to be able to pull case information from the Franklin County Justice System (FCJS), as well as post information back to the FCJS case management system (CMS).

In lieu of a direct database connection, information sharing was to be accomplished by deploying a screen scraping application. When the cost module application was created, screen scraping was a common practice, but it did have some issues. As the screen scraping process read data from a screen, the Deputy Clerk was prevented from using that machine to perform other duties simultaneously during a batch download. Since the downloading of case information executed for several hours, this occupied the machine for a long period of time, thus affecting user productivity. The process, furthermore, would freeze midstream on occasion, which forced the Deputy Clerk to halt progress on other tasks in order to research where the download had ended as a result of the freeze. Once it was determined, the clerk would have to restart the batch download from that point forward. These factors resulted in a lengthy, time-consuming process. Desktop licensing and profile maintenance also provided challenges for the IT personnel responsible for upkeep of the system.

Ultimately, under the former system the billing processing was onerous and time-consuming, resulting in the Clerk of Courts needing a more effective application.

Foreclosure Cost Bill Module

The Challenges:
- Lengthy batch download process
- System downtime
- Limitations on staff's production and computer access

The Results:
- Faster retrieval of case information
- Direct communication with the CMS
- Increased efficiency and faster processing

Creating a More Efficient System

The Data Center made several critical improvements to the foreclosure cost bill process. The batch download process was replaced by an online application, which allows the clerk to enter a case number from a single data entry page in order to immediately retrieve the party information and the current fee records from the case management system. The Deputy Clerk then adjusts the bill and subsequently prints it, pre-addressed, for a windowed envelope. The new billing information is posted back to the FCJS case management system as well. Eliminating the screen scraping process resolved the issue of lengthy batch downloads, process freezes, and other inconveniences. The proven technology behind the new application and the cohesive means of processing the transactions have streamlined the foreclosure cost bill process, thus saving time for the account clerks and allowing them greater convenience in foreclosure billing.

Time Saving Efforts

As a direct result of the Data Center's efforts, the updated billing process now allows the Clerk of Courts OFS to manage foreclosure transactions quickly from a single screen. This is extremely helpful not only to the Clerk's staff, but also to the plaintiffs in foreclosure situations who benefit from a quick turnaround time in foreclosure billing. Ultimately, the new system has resulted in a time savings of almost 192 hours per year for the OFS Deputy Clerks. This substantial reduction in time spent, furthermore, allows the Clerk's fiscal employees more opportunities to focus their attention on other tasks that directly benefit their customers. This contributes greatly to the high level of customer service that the Clerk of Courts strives to provide to the citizens of Franklin County. Ultimately, the Data Center's work to enhance the foreclosure cost billing process has positively affected both the Clerk of Courts' OFS staff and their customers.

"The enhanced efficiencies to the Foreclosure Cost Billing process provide our Deputy Clerks direct access to billing accounts, reduced downtime in production, and immediate billing generation. These efficiencies align with Clerk O'Shaughnessy's goals to provide timely and accurate service for our customers."

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