



How a document management system is speeding up the wheels of justice.

Streamlining Working Processes - Steria and the Criminal Cases Review Commission

Before the formation of the Criminal Cases Review Commission, possible miscarriages of justice were investigated by the Home Office: a process that was mainly paper-based, using manual systems. Given the amount of paperwork for each case, some form of automation was clearly needed if the newly formed Commission was to speed up the wheels of justice and also be able to fulfil its pro-active role.

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Sir Frederick Crawford, chairman of the Commission, had a clear vision of a paperless office. He wanted to introduce standardised work practices, collaborative working, electronic audit trails and secure data access.

The Commission invited three 'House 2' suppliers to tender for the contract. Criteria included the ability to provide a flexible and secure solution which could be implemented quickly and managed by the supplier on an ongoing basis. Price, the ability to meet the entire requirement, and an understanding of the Commission's business aims were also important.

Bull Information Systems was awarded a five-year contract in March 1997, with a three-year review point. During this period, Bull Information Systems sold its services business known as Integris, to Steria in March 2002. The entire transition occurred seamlessly, with no effect on the contract. Key to this was the fact that the Commission worked with the same people throughout.

"We were impressed by the people involved, their experience in the criminal justice sector and the way they advocated using tried-and-trusted products to enable us to be operational very quickly," said Glenys Stacey, the Commission's then Chief Executive. "We also felt they would manage the contract in a spirit of partnership and would show the commitment to our vision which we were seeking."

Fast access to documents

The chosen solution included integrated applications and systems to be available from every desktop, including a Document Management System, together with secure e-mail, a standard set of office applications, a case management system, and a video conferencing facility that allows Commission Members based at home to liaise with staff at the offices in Birmingham.

Phase one was to install 63 powerful personal computers with secure operating systems, linked in a network to a Bull Escala UNIX server. This server housed the case management system - the only bespoke piece of software in the whole project. An NT server, connected to a RAID array and a high-capacity optical jukebox, housed the Document Management System.

Case documents, sent by the police, the courts and other bodies in response to requests by the Commission, are scanned in and stored on the optical jukebox. This enables Case Review Managers to view the original documents quickly and online. Once the Case Review Manager has completed the work on a particular case, then the final decision about the case is made by Commission Members. The video conferencing link can be used to enable Members and other staff, who are geographically dispersed, to hold 'virtual meetings'. Members can also liaise with other staff by e-mail and download relevant documents using a secure network link which encrypts data transmissions.

"The IT solution had a dramatic effect on my lifestyle," said John Leckey who was then a Commission Member. "I used to have to commute from Belfast to Birmingham for two days each week. Eventually, the travelling became irksome, but now I go only once a month and stay for three days. I am able to perform almost all tasks working remotely from home."

"The system has been a godsend," said Commission Member Professor Leonard Leigh. "On some of the cases we review, there are literally tens of thousands of pieces of paper which are relevant. By putting these all online, we can operate as a relatively paperless office. In addition, a helpdesk ensures any problems are fixed quickly and efficiently."

Sophisticated searches

Phase two of the technology rollout at the Commission involved provision of knowledge retrieval: the ability to search and analyse data.

In addition to documents being stored as images, they are now also stored as text files using Optical Character Recognition.

Once stored, a sophisticated search engine, RetrievalWare, can be used to hunt for particular keywords or phrases through thousands of pages of information. RetrievalWare's 'Fuzzy Matching' allows accurate searches to be conducted against error-prone text from OCR processes, misspelt words and irregular names.

Non-specific searches can also be made. For example, if new evidence in a case reveals that the presence of a blue Ford Focus might be significant, RetrievalWare can search existing case or trial notes to see if the vehicle has been mentioned before. RetrievalWare will also highlight variants of the search, looking for vans as well as cars, or similar colour ranges, or similar marques. This means that the retrieval of facts in a disputed case can be completed faster and more definitively, thus boosting efficiency. The integration means that RetrievalWare can also automatically associate the stored text file with the original document image.

That might be important if a typewritten letter has a hand-written note on it or a photograph attached. In this way, nothing is missed.

Other improvements have included the enhancement of the video conferencing system, the installation of 130 workstations, and the addition of specialist visualisation tools such as Analyst's Notebook. When a suitable off-the-shelf package became available, the bespoke case management system was replaced with a considerably more sophisticated system incorporating elements of workflow.

Since the completion of the second phase, the Commission has also invested in a Managed Service to operate and manage the systems and desktops. This provision includes Systems operations and management, Desktop support and maintenance and an on site service desk with three full time staff.

The Commission has been pleased with the service it has received over the last five years and after a tender exercise Steria were awarded a contract in April 2002 to continue to provide IT services to the Commission for a further five years.

"The backup and support we receive has been excellent, and it is particularly useful having dedicated people on site staffing the helpdesk. In the build-up to the launch of the Commission, the project manager was here morning, noon and night for over three months. Since then we have continued to work with many of the same people to develop and maintain our IT capability which is integral to the Commission's operations. We value Steria knowing our business and our problems and speaking our language," said Geraldine Badham, the Commission's IS Programme Co-ordinator.

The Commission is making a real impact, reviewing an increasing number of cases – more than 1,200 in 2001/2002.



"We were impressed by our chosen IT partner's experience in the criminal justice sector"

Glenys Stacey,
the Commission's then chief executive

The Criminal Cases Review Commission partnership with us has resulted in:

- quicker review of all relevant case documents
- secure transmission of sensitive documents
- a relatively paperless office
- efficient use of time
- better communications.

The Criminal Cases Review Commission was formed in 1997 as an independent body to investigate suspected miscarriages of justice. The Commission started with a blank sheet and no real frame of reference on which to draw - yet had to be fully operational within three months. Teamwork, information-sharing and cutting-edge technology are vital to its success.



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