

Executive Summary:

Nebraska JUSTICE Online Trial Court Information System

The Nebraska JUSTICE system is a robust, online court case search system developed by the State of Nebraska in collaboration with Nebraska Interactive LLC. Unveiled in March 2004, the system allows users to utilize a web-based application interface to query the Nebraska State Trial Court database for case information and court records. The JUSTICE system facilitates searches of over 4 million case records from all of Nebraska's 93 county courts and 92 of the 93 State's district courts.

The JUSTICE system provides access to all available public information about a court case. This information includes, but is not limited to:

- Case Detail, such as the date and outcome of the trial, the case type, and presiding judge;
- Party Listing, including the plaintiff and defendant, and in most cases, their associated attorneys;
- Court Cost Information, including all fees associated with the case;
- Payments by and to the Court;
- Register of Actions, so users can follow with the proceedings of the case up to, during, and after the case.

From law firms involved in representing clients to companies checking the backgrounds of prospective employees, businesses across the State of Nebraska and beyond now have a key source of public information at their fingertips. User convenience is paramount, as the system is accessible, twenty-four hours a day, 365 days each year. Furthermore, the interface works on any web browser, does not require the user to install any software, and eliminates any complicated setup.

The JUSTICE system also creates a true, "win-win" situation for state government by providing a self-funded solution that not only saves agencies money, but also generates revenue. Based on current usage levels, the system is on target to pay for itself in less than two years. Thereafter, annual revenue should exceed maintenance, upgrade, and support costs and the additional revenue will be made available to finance other eGovernment initiatives throughout Nebraska.

A true appreciation of the significance of the project can be gained by realizing the scope of the collaboration that produced the JUSTICE system. Developed by Nebrask@ Online with oversight provided by the Nebraska State Records Board, the State Court Administrator and Nebraska Supreme Court, the JUSTICE system is a primary example of a successful, multi-agency, public/private partnership.

Application:

Nebraska JUSTICE Online Trial Court Information System

a) Description of project, including length of time in operation.

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System access requires a Nebraska.gov subscription (\$50.00 annually), which includes assignment of usernames and passwords for authentication. Authorized users may search by name or by case number and may narrow their name search by several criteria including county or case type. The name search returns a results page listing all possible matches, including party name, case number, case title, case type, and judge/attorneys names. Selecting a particular case will retrieve complete case details as they exist in the JUSTICE database. Case number searches immediately display complete case details (or a message that a particular case number cannot be located).

The technical aspects of the system are the product of a collaboration among technicians from Nebraska Interactive, the Court, Department of Administrative Services, Information Management Services and Division of Communications. The back-end system allows court staff throughout Nebraska to input court records through their local system into the legacy database. Each night, the system electronically transmits the locally-entered case summary information and compiles it to a master index. The JUSTICE master index forms the basis for the information that is directly queried via the web-based user interface.

When a user selects a case from the query results (or enters a case number directly), the JUSTICE systems passes the request through an interface application developed by Court technical staff to retrieve case details from the legacy database. Results are formatted for web-based presentation by the JUSTICE application and returned to the user's internet browser within a matter of seconds

b) Significance to the improvement of the operation of government.

The JUSTICE system allows realization of a considerable amount of operational improvement for government by streamlining the delivery of court and court case information to users. For example, the staff of Nebraska's 93 county courts have realized a significant reduction in the volume of over-the-counter requests for information. This savings can be directly attributed to the introduction of the "self-service," online JUSTICE system. This has allowed employees to focus on other value-added activities and agencies to streamline costs in tight budget times.

Authorized government users are provided access to the JUSTICE system at no cost. This ensures access to the critical, public safety related information often required by law enforcement, county attorneys, and public defenders. In addition, no-cost access is provided to all court employees and state agencies acting in the normal course of business. This ensures that government bodies that require information are able to obtain it quickly and without incurring additional cost.

A true appreciation of the significance of the project to State Government can be gained by realizing the scope of the collaboration that produced the JUSTICE system. Developed by Nebrask@ Online with oversight provided by the Nebraska State Records Board, the State Court Administrator and Nebraska Supreme Court, the JUSTICE system is a primary example of a successful, multi-agency, public/private partnership. Conceptualization and development took place over a period of several years and was provided at no up-front cost to the State of Nebraska. All costs will be recovered in less than two years through transactional revenue.

c) Benefits realized by service recipients, taxpayers, agency or state.

From law firms involved in representing clients to companies checking the backgrounds of prospective employees, businesses across the State of Nebraska and beyond now have a key source of public information at their fingertips. User convenience is paramount, as the system is accessible, twenty-four hours a day, 365 days each year. Furthermore, the interface works on any web browser, does not require the user to install any software, and eliminates any complicated setup.

Prior to the introduction of the JUSTICE system, users were required to physically visit each county courthouse in order to obtain case information for that county only. Court data was accessed via self-service terminals or provided by court staff. Independent of the method through which records were obtained, search results often utilized confusing codes and notations that presented yet another obstacle for users who were unfamiliar with the system nomenclature. Deciphering and understanding the output usually required a court official who was familiar with the system and its codes. The JUSTICE system simplifies this process by fully decoding case information prior to presenting it to the end user. In addition, online access means that users no longer need to physically visit the each county courthouse in order to obtain case information.

During the first fourteen months of operation, the JUSTICE system processed more than 900,000 record requests. Monthly query volume has risen from about 50,000 initially to more than 80,000 in April, 2005. Court staff conservatively estimate that it would take the equivalent of 167 employee-days per month to manually process an equivalent number of records. In the

fourteen month period since introduction of the system, the JUSTICE system has contributed to a savings of over 2,300 employee-days.

As of June 1, 2005 there were nearly 450 JUSTICE system users, a level which greatly exceeds first year adoption projections. Additionally, monthly volume statistics for the JUSTICE system continue to increase steadily and indicate a latent demand for automated access to court case information. State Court staff and Nebraska Interactive maintain ongoing efforts to further drive service adoption and increase the viability and benefits associated with the system.

**d) Return on investment, short-term/long-term payback (include summary calculations).
Projects must exhibit measurable operational benefit.**

The Nebraska JUSTICE system was developed exclusively under the self-funded model. Project development costs are conservatively estimated at approximately \$300,000. Annual maintenance, upgrades, and support for the initial two year period are estimated at an additional \$42,000.

Users access the system at a per-record cost of 60 cents. An optional flat rate plan offers qualified users unlimited access for \$300 per account. With current monthly revenue of approximately \$18,500, the JUSTICE system is on target to pay for itself in less than two years. Thereafter, annual revenue should exceed maintenance, upgrade, and support costs and the additional revenue will be made available to finance other eGovernment initiatives throughout Nebraska. Under this revenue-sharing arrangement, approximately \$45,000 annually will be made available for State use toward enhancing court services. This creates a truly "win-win" situation for State government.