

2008 NASCIO Recognition Awards

Category: Digital Government

Government to Government (G to G)

Judicial Case Management System - Payment System

State of South Carolina



Executive Summary

In South Carolina, as in other areas throughout the country, dramatic changes in technology are taking place on a seemingly daily basis. These advances have had the effect of ushering in a new age of governmental services in which many activities are now conducted electronically through the World Wide Web. These services, commonly referred to as eGovernment services, have become an integral part of citizen-to-government interaction and have led to increased efficiency for agencies, businesses and individuals alike.

The South Carolina Judicial Department's Case Management System is one such eGovernment service, providing a cost effective solution for case management technology while streamlining the payment process for everyone involved.

This Case Management System allows for a payment processing interface for over-the-counter payments while offering value added convenience to citizens by increasing payment acceptance availability. Court employees also benefit from the simplified over-the-counter system as payment interfaces are integrated while offering the same reporting functionality.

The S.C. Judicial Department partnered with SC.gov, the official Web site of the State of South Carolina, to provide over-the-counter payment processing for court fees and fines as well as an interface offering the ability for citizens to pay online at their convenience.

Prior to this partnership, customers were required to send payments via U.S. mail or to pay in person by cash or certified check. Now customers have the option of paying by debit or credit card in person or via the Internet. Thanks to the new system, court employees also spend less time handling customer transactions.

The new system began implementation in February 2007 and has enjoyed much success since this time. As of June 2007; Horry County, Georgetown County and the City of Myrtle Beach were processing court fees and fine payments through the system. As of May 15, 2008, over 114 courts in 6 municipalities and 21 counties have implemented the SC.gov payment engine in conjunction with the Case Management System. The implementation will continue on a county-by-county basis over the next 2-3 years until all counties are operating the system.

The S.C. Judicial Department, court employees, local treasurers and SC.gov have worked together to create a seamless payment process to be used on a statewide basis. As the case management implementation progresses statewide, more and more counties and courts will use the SC.gov Payment Engine to process payments showing that technology can be shared across jurisdictions.

C. Description of Business Problem and Solution

Business Problem

The State of South Carolina Judicial Department was implementing a new case management system across the state. The new case management system is made available to all counties and municipalities which provides the ability to obtain court documents and pay fines online. The system has the ability to interface to a vendor payment processor but the Judicial Department decided against that alternative in favor of partnering with SC.gov.

Description of Solution

The solution was sponsored by the South Carolina Judicial Department and is offered to all courts in each of the state's 46 counties. SC.gov, the official Web site of the State of South Carolina, built and manages an interface for the Judicial Department's Case Management System to accept and process payments via the Internet.

Each year there are hundreds of thousands of cases that require fees and/or fines to be paid to the court system. It is estimated that there are 1,000,000 traffic citations issued annually in South Carolina. This solution provides additional payment channels to citizens and value added service to judicial courts in terms of reducing time spent processing payments manually and reporting capabilities for payments processed. Reports are available as daily transactions, custom date ranges, and merchant disbursement reports to name but a few.

The partnership with SC.gov results in cost savings by using state-negotiated rates to offer the most competitive fee structure for payment processing to the Judicial Department. The interface application was developed and is managed at no cost to the state. SC.gov also provides 1st level customer support and weekend emergency support to the Judicial Department.

In February of 2007, two counties began taking their first online court payments. As the Judicial Department continues to implement its case management system across the state, more and more county courts will be able to take over-the-counter and internet based payments for court fees and fines. SC.gov has a fully dedicated resource for local business services to assist with the adoption of the service, to work with county employees regarding application set-up, testing and training.

Communication to the public with the goal of increasing adoption of the additional payment channels is handled at the county-level once the service is implemented. SC.gov assists the county in marketing efforts by providing business cards with the web site address for online payments of fees and fines that can be distributed.

D. Significance to the improvement of the operation of government

The SC.gov Payment Engine is a quick, easy and secure method for accepting online debit and credit card payments and is available to all governmental entities in South Carolina. These payments are received through online e-commerce applications via the Internet or over-the-counter. The Payment Engine authorizes payments, disburses funds to the appropriate bank accounts and provides reporting capabilities. Customers have the option of using any credit or debit card with the Visa™, Discover™ or MasterCard™ logo. In addition, South Carolina Interactive handles 1st level customer support and coordinates the chargeback process. The Judicial Department is able to take advantage of the SC.gov Payment Engine at no cost under the self-funded model and SC.gov's partnership with the State of South Carolina.

The SC.gov Payment Engine interfaces to the new case management system implemented across the state by the SC Judicial Department.

The full Payment Engine implementation process can be completed in as little as one week. The process includes the following:

- Document Process - Questionnaire, contact and banking forms are completed.
- System Modifications – SC.gov has built the interface to the Judicial Department case management system and the interface for internet payments so there are no system modifications needed to implement the application when a new county is ready.
- Payment Engine Setup - Customers and services are set up in the Payment Engine
- Training – Partner is trained on Payment Engine access and reporting
- Testing – Partner performs testing of application interface to the Payment Engine and reporting.
- Letter of Acceptance – Partner signs formal acceptance of the Payment Engine
- Implementation – Production URL and User IDs are provided to partner and Payment Engine is implemented into production

Financial Process

SC.gov has been able to take advantage of state-negotiated rates to offer the most competitive fee structures to the Judicial Department. Funds collected through the Payment Engine are deposited into the partner's bank account within three to five business days of the payment being authorized and fulfilled. Reporting is provided for research, auditing and reconciliation purposes.

Benefits to Citizens

- Customers have an additional payment channel and improved access for making payments now that payments can be taken via the internet 24/7. Customers previously had to pay using guaranteed funds (cash, cashier's check, money order, etc.)
- Customers have the option of using any credit or debit card with the Visa™, Discover™ or MasterCard™ logo.
- Customer service is improved as SC.gov handles 1st level customer support and has a fully dedicated resource for customer support.

Benefits to County Courts

- The payment processing system is simplified and the same for all courts within the county using the Judicial Department's case management system.
- Increased operational effectiveness from process improvements reducing the manual effort of processing payments received by mail or over the counter.
- Courts improve financial records management as a result of the reports available through the SC.gov Payment Engine. All courts have uniform reporting.
- The service can be set-up in as little as one week. Speed adds value.
- SC.gov handles 1st level customer support which allows county court staff to concentrate on their primary job responsibilities.
- Funds are disbursed directly to the specific court bank account.

Benefits to the SC Judicial Department

- Cost savings in merchant fees by using state negotiated rates.
- SC.gov handles 1st level customer service and chargebacks.
- Payment Engine extensive reporting capabilities surpass previous capabilities.
- The Judicial Department was able to offer an over-the-counter and internet payment channel with the implementation of the case management system.
- The application helped to accomplish a SC Judicial Department IT initiative.

E. Benefits realized by Service Recipients, Taxpayers, Agency or State

The SC.gov Payment Engine interface to the SC Judicial Department has provided an additional payment channel to constituents, a single payment processor for all courts implementing the Judicial Department Case Management System and sophisticated reporting capabilities for county courts. The payment interfaces were built under the self-funded model of South Carolina Interactive and did not require any appropriated funds. The solution delivered by the SC

Judicial Department and SC.gov increases efficiency, has a positive financial impact by cost savings and improves management of court fees and fines.

The intangible benefits of the SC.gov Payment Engine interface to the SC Judicial Department Case Management System include:

- a. Interagency collaboration for IT initiatives - County courts collaborate with the SC Judicial Department and current counties using the application.
- b. Interactive application to benefit citizens to provide additional payment channel and help government entities increase efficiencies.
- c. Improved system availability and customer service support.
- d. Validation of credit card payments processed through the over-the-counter and internet application.
- e. Time efficiencies due to reduced manual effort of processing payments mailed to each of the courts.
- f. Operational effectiveness - allowing courts to receive funds in their account quicker and providing reporting capabilities necessary to manage financial records.

Results:

- a. As of June 2007, SC.gov was processing court fees/fine payments for Horry County, Georgetown County and the City of Myrtle Beach.
- b. As of May 15, 2008, there are 114 courts in 6 municipalities and 21 counties using the SC.gov Payment Engine interface in conjunction with the case management system.
- c. To date, 16,604 transactions valued at \$2,493,328.37 have been processed through the over-the-counter case management system interface.
- d. To date, 2,037 transactions for court fees and fines valued at \$231,377.29 have been process through the internet payment channel.
- e. The Case Management System will be implemented in all counties in the next 2-3 years resulting in 100% adoption of the service.
- f. Once all South Carolina counties have implemented the Case Management System, municipalities will have the opportunity to implement the software if they have not already done so.
- g. South Carolina has multiple courts within its counties and municipalities, which translates into a large potential for growth.