

Georgia Court of Appeals

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SUCCESS STORY

The Court makes its case for open source integration in NetWare® 6.5 with significant savings in development and licensing costs.

OVERVIEW

The Georgia Court of Appeals is the intermediate appellate court for the state of Georgia. With 12 judges and nearly 3,000 cases a year, the Georgia Court of Appeals is the third busiest state appellate court in the United States.

CHALLENGE

The Georgia Court of Appeals recently ported its legacy docketing system from a mini-mainframe computer to a LAN in order to modernize its data and move toward electronic filing of appeals. The Court also wanted to leverage Web services to make this docketing information available to the public securely and quickly, alleviating the number of daily calls and inquiries to the clerk's office.

Concerned about being locked into proprietary technology, the Court began exploring open source technologies. The Court could rely on open source to reduce its costs, but also knew that exposing the docketing process to the public via a Web portal would require the most secure and reliable environment possible.

SOLUTION

After evaluating multiple environments, including Microsoft Windows®, the Court selected Novell® NetWare 6.5 with its integrated support for open source technologies such as Apache, MySQL®, PHP and Perl. The Court leveraged Novell exteNd™ and Novell iChain® to build and secure its portal, as well as Novell ZENworks® to manage its desktops.

"We weren't comfortable with the all-or-nothing licensing options from other vendors," said John Ruggeri, IT Project Manager for the Georgia Court of Appeals. "We didn't want to be locked into a proprietary solution for our database, Web design and Web services. Flexibility and portability are key issues for us."

Using Novell exteNd, the Court created Web services to leverage its docketing system for a new Web portal. Now users can access the portal to check the status of 1500-1800 pending cases, view the court calendar, and get information about filing appeals.

The Court hosts its own Web site with Apache Web servers running on NetWare, rather than

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—John Ruggeri,
IT Project Manager,
Georgia Court of Appeals

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relying on the state IT department to manage it. The Court leverages MySQL as the database for Web site content. After buying a few books on PHP, the IT staff began writing simple scripts to make the Web site more accessible and useful.

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The integration of open source technologies with NetWare allowed the Court to build and deploy its portal in house, without having to hire consultants. The IT staff can also leverage the open source community as a source of experience and information.

Novell eDirectory” is the Court’s authoritative directory, providing the central repository for user identity information for all its applications. As the Court moves toward electronic filing of appeals, eDirectory and Novell iChain will provide user authentication for electronic certificates, electronic signatures and secure remote access, based on identity. Electronic filing will significantly reduce the amount of paperwork the Court processes each year.

“The integration of eDirectory with our open source applications is huge for us,” said Ruggeri. “We get security for all our applications right out of the box.”

In addition to NetWare 6.5, the Court also uses Novell ZENworks to simplify desktop management by standardizing workstations throughout the organization. The IT staff can now distribute software from a central location with a consistent 98 percent success rate. The staff can also use remote control capabilities in ZENworks to troubleshoot more than 60 percent of its helpdesk calls without leaving their offices.

“ZENworks paid for itself the minute we bought it,” said Ruggeri. “We considered hiring another person to help with administration, but bought ZENworks instead. It takes other divisions in Georgia weeks to do what we can do with a few clicks.”

RESULTS

The Court leveraged NetWare 6.5 to rapidly implement open source solutions on a secure and stable platform, saving significant development costs and avoiding recurring licensing costs. Creating a secure Web portal for user access to information decreased phone calls to the clerk’s office by 30-40 percent in the first few months, increasing the productivity of the Court’s 10 clerks. By implementing ZENworks, the Court avoided the costs of hiring additional staff with streamlined desktop management and more efficient user support.

“With Novell, our first Web site was a no-brainer,” said Ruggeri. “We made a commitment to solve our problems with software, not people. Novell has made it all possible.”

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