

JUSTICELINK— ELECTRONIC FILING OF APPLICATIONS, SUBMISSIONS AND PLEADINGS

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The paper industry won't be happy. Lawyers and judges generate a blizzard of paper documents every day, all needing filing, sorting and indexing for later retrieval. But even the legal profession was bound to step into the computer and telecommunications age sooner or later. The growth in internet usage around the world has increased significantly in the last decade which has enabled a number of jurisdictions to allow parties to file documents electronically.

Recently, the NSW Attorney General officially launched JusticeLink, an online judicial network allowing lawyers and judges to engage in some court hearings and proceedings over the internet.

JusticeLink, a \$48 million cutting-edge computer system, will shortly be introduced into the District Court of NSW, allowing lawyers, prosecutors, judges and magistrates to conduct procedural hearings online.

Cutting out court appearances for preliminary procedural arguments and directions will hopefully make the system more efficient, saving time and money, Attorney General John Hatzistergos said.

We are promised that JusticeLink 'once completed will be a significant milestone in the evolution of court case management, dramatically reducing the justice system's reliance on paper copies of documents. This streamlined system will greatly assist in the handling of serious criminal cases in New South Wales, cases that often pass through more than one court before being finalised. It will enable electronic case files to be transferred safely and seamlessly from the Local Court to the higher jurisdictions of the District Court or Supreme Court.

While trials and committal hearings will continue to be held in courtrooms, simple procedural matters to be decided online will cut the need for parties to attend court.

Mr Hatzistergos said:

Traditionally, quite a few court appearances could be required to decide procedural matters before the hearing or trial could begin, ... JusticeLink will allow prosecutors and defence lawyers to log into a bulletin board, where they will type their arguments. The judge will be alerted to their posts by email and be able to log in and make determinations in real time. While the time-honoured traditions of our legal system will remain intact, JusticeLink will streamline the process, saving an enormous amount of time and money.

JusticeLink has been successfully trialled in the Supreme Court of NSW, where it saved 167 court appearances. It is to be rolled out to the District Court shortly and is expected to be operating in every criminal and civil court across NSW by 2009.

Mr Hatzistergos said JusticeLink will also be used by law firms to 'e-file' motions and

evidence, enabling all the parties to proceedings to pull up information at the touch of a button.

Within 12 months, the computer system is expected to be operating in every criminal and civil court in NSW, including 160 local courts.

It is hoped that in future, these filing systems will save courts and more importantly, the client an enormous amount of time and money. If the documents are filed electronically it will be more efficient to maintain electronic case management systems where documents, video and other forms of media can all be stored and viewed as one bundle of documents. This will also make it possible for the court and parties to access certain filed documents and track the progress of the case through one online system.

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