



BRINGING COURTS ONLINE: HOW DIGITAL EVIDENCE MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS ARE POWERING REMOTE HEARINGS

Courtrooms across the country are undergoing a digital transformation. One of the most significant shifts? The rise of remote hearings. Once a stopgap during the pandemic, virtual court proceedings are now becoming a standard practice in many jurisdictions—offering convenience, safety, and greater accessibility. But making remote hearings work efficiently and securely requires more than just a video call. At the heart of this transformation lies the digital evidence management system.

WHY REMOTE HEARINGS ARE GAINING MOMENTUM

Remote hearings are no longer just a COVID-era workaround—they're a practical evolution of the justice system. From civil disputes to family law cases, courts are recognizing the long-term benefits of virtual proceedings. The shift is driven by a desire to reduce scheduling conflicts, eliminate unnecessary travel, and expand access to justice for people who may struggle to attend court in person due to distance, disability, or work obligations.

This isn't a localized trend. According to the National Center for State Courts, courts in all 50 states are now using remote and hybrid hearings across a wide variety of case types. In Washington State, a 2023 survey found that 94% of Superior Courts and approximately 35% of Courts of Limited Jurisdiction had conducted hybrid civil proceedings with witnesses—demonstrating how deeply virtual options are being woven into everyday judicial processes. Increasingly, courts are institutionalizing virtual options as a way to serve the public better—without compromising the integrity of the judicial process.

For courts operating under tight budgets and rising caseloads, remote hearings also offer operational efficiency. Cases can be scheduled more flexibly, and backlogs can be reduced without sacrificing fairness or due process.

SERVING THE PEOPLE: CONVENIENCE AND ACCESSIBILITY

Digital evidence management systems play a critical role in leveling the playing field for litigants and witnesses participating in remote hearings. In a traditional courtroom setting, presenting evidence might involve bulky physical exhibits, stacks of paper, or complex file transfers, but in a remote environment, where participants may be joining from a home office or a legal aid center, simplicity and reliability are essential.

With a secure digital evidence platform in place, plaintiffs, defendants, attorneys, and witnesses can submit evidence electronically in advance or in real time. Photos, videos, text messages, and audio recordings can be uploaded, reviewed, and displayed in court with just a few clicks—ensuring that the facts of the case are presented clearly and consistently, regardless of location.

Digital systems offer a smarter, more reliable way forward. By automating retention schedules, providing audit-ready documentation, and simplifying the disposal process, these tools help courts stay organized, compliant, and accountable. It's not just about digitizing records—it's about building confidence in the integrity of the judicial process.

MAKING IT WORK FOR THE COURTS

For courts, the benefits go beyond convenience. A digital evidence system helps maintain the integrity of proceedings by preserving the chain of custody, supporting judicial review, and enabling easy access to exhibits before, during, and after the hearing. Judges can view evidence simultaneously with participants, annotate exhibits digitally, and make more informed rulings—all without the logistical hurdles of handling physical files.

Clerks and court staff benefit too. With everything stored securely in a centralized system, there's no need to scan, print, or manually track exhibits. Instead, evidence is organized by case, accessible by role, and protected by role-based permissions—ensuring transparency and accountability while reducing administrative burden.

A FOUNDATION FOR THE FUTURE

As courts continue to explore hybrid models and expand digital services, the adoption of a robust digital evidence management system is no longer optional—it's foundational. It ensures that remote hearings are not only possible, but also effective, equitable, and secure.

The justice system may always require human judgment—but with the right digital tools, it no longer requires everyone to be in the same room.

