



# EMPOWERING ACCESS TO JUSTICE: HOW DIGITAL EVIDENCE SYSTEMS HELP COURTS BETTER SERVE THE PUBLIC

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As American courts face growing caseloads and shrinking budgets, digital transformation is proving to be one of the most effective strategies to modernize services, reduce administrative burden, and improve access to justice—especially for those without legal representation.

One of the most profound shifts has been the implementation of digital evidence management systems, which allow parties in a legal case to submit, organize, and present exhibits electronically. For courts striving to serve the public equitably, these systems are proving to be more than a convenience—they're becoming a cornerstone of fairness and accessibility.

## THE RISE OF THE SELF-REPRESENTED LITIGANT

Over the past decade, the number of people representing themselves in court—known as pro se or self-represented litigants—has surged. According to the Self-Represented Litigation Network, in some jurisdictions, more than 70% of family law cases involve at least one self-represented party. Yet the judicial process remains dauntingly complex, with procedural rules and evidence requirements that can be overwhelming for non-lawyers to navigate.

Courts are responding with innovation. By embracing digital evidence systems, they're not only streamlining internal processes but also making the court system more accessible to everyday people—regardless of legal training, technical ability, or income.

## DIGITAL SUBMISSIONS: A SIMPLER, SMARTER STARTING POINT

Traditional evidence submission often involves confusing formats, in-person drop-offs, and multiple copies of documents. For those without printers, transportation, or legal know-how, these requirements create significant barriers to access.

Digital evidence platforms eliminate these barriers. Through secure online portals, self-represented litigants can upload photos, documents, videos, and audio recordings at any time, from anywhere. Courts across the country, like those in Orange County, California, are enhancing usability even further by providing step-by-step guides and instructional videos alongside the submission process.

This ease of access doesn't just benefit the public. Court clerks and staff spend less time correcting submission errors, searching for lost materials, and managing physical storage. That translates to faster case processing and fewer delays.

## **PRESENTATION TOOLS THAT LEVEL THE PLAYING FIELD**

For litigants unfamiliar with courtroom procedures, presenting evidence persuasively can be just as intimidating as submitting it. Digital trial presentation tools—many of which are integrated into the same systems used for submission—allow litigants to simply organize files in the order they intend to speak about them. With drag-and-drop simplicity, even novice users can present their cases clearly and professionally.

These tools aren't just helpful—they're transformative. They boost confidence, reduce stress, and help ensure that individuals are judged on the merits of their case, not their ability to navigate complicated technology or courtroom customs.

## **REACHING THE UNDERSERVED THROUGH MOBILE TECHNOLOGY**

For many Americans, especially in rural or underserved communities, smartphones are the primary or only internet access point. Recognizing this, some courts have launched mobile-friendly apps that allow users to scan documents, track case status, and submit evidence using only a phone.

This mobile-first approach expands access dramatically—especially for individuals without computers or those juggling multiple jobs and caregiving responsibilities.

## **SECURING DATA WHILE BUILDING TRUST**

Concerns around privacy and data protection are valid—especially when sensitive personal information is involved. Modern digital evidence systems use encrypted cloud storage, secure access controls, and audit trails to ensure that evidence is stored and accessed only by authorized parties.

This level of security also allows for greater transparency and collaboration, especially in cases where documents need to be reviewed by multiple parties—judges, opposing counsel, or outside advisors.

## **BUILDING A MORE EQUITABLE SYSTEM, ONE STEP AT A TIME**

The adoption of digital evidence systems represents a pivotal moment in the modernization of our judicial system. It's not just about efficiency—it's about inclusion. These systems give people the tools they need to participate fully in the legal process, regardless of their background or resources.

As one judge recently noted, "We're no longer asking whether courts should use technology. We're asking how quickly we can get there—because people need this now."

With continued investment in digital tools and infrastructure, courts can do more than just keep up with change—they can lead it, delivering justice that is not only swift and secure, but truly accessible to all.

