

# e-FILING

*virtually reality*

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# BEGINNINGS

- **April 1998 – staged strategy proposed**
  - Infrastructure and systems supporting online
  - Repository for forms and information
  - External access to view own case information
  - THEN future interface to CMS
  - Ultimately staged ‘jurisdictional focus’ for development
- **Around 2000 – subtle change to emphasis**
  - Scope enlarged beyond original intent
  - e-Lodgement became e-Filing
  - Focus not only on lodgement but also on court operations
  - e-Filing is a natural progression BUT
  - Complicates the simplicity of an e-Lodgement concept

# ANTICIPATED BENEFITS

- **Courts**

- **Efficiencies (counter, keying, expanded hours)**
- **Archival costs reduced**
- **Staff processing time**
- **Future-proofing**

- **Law Firms**

- **Access to information**
- **Reduced costs / increased efficiencies (e.g. Rounds role)**
- **Operational flexibility (365x24x7)**
- **Future-proofing**

# CULTURAL CHANGE

- **Law Firms**
  - Rounds, Administration, Support Staff, Lawyers
- **Courts**
  - System Administrator, Contract Manager, Finance, IT Security
  - Judges, Judicial Support, Registry Operational Staff
- **Quantum change – not for faint hearted**
  - Need ‘new’ bold visionaries
  - Costs can be significant – hence risks can be too – but
  - Significant and growing body of experience to draw upon
- **e-Filing = Commitment**

# REFERENCE GROUP

- **Lower Court used as base strategy**
- **EOI issued to legal profession**
  - 29 responses received
  - 15 selected, 6 being involved in intensive user testing
- **Reference Group**
  - Lawyers (hindsight - no firm administrative staff)
  - Courts Project Team members
- **Membership Issue**
  - Mostly little or no communication between Lawyers and Admin staff
  - Courts required members to bring Admin / IT person to meetings  
*OR*
  - Courts held separate meetings with Admin / IT person

# LAW FIRM SYSTEMS

- **Identified Issues with Practice Management Systems**
  - e-Filing data not held in PMS
  - PMS primarily for billing / accounting
  - Most data contained in MS-Word court documents
  - Unable to extract data from proprietary (MS) format
- **Courts System**
  - Manual entry for some data + ability to attach existing documents
  - Engaged in critical process review
  - Concept of electronic statements of fact
- **Bulk Filing**
  - Most Firms need to change / upgrade systems – for full benefit
  - Interested firms indicated willing to modify – costs not significant
  - Initial benefit to Debt Collection companies (data is on their systems)

# MYTHOLOGY

- Dealt with the usual issues:

*“All Word documents have viruses”*

*“The Internet is not secure”*

*“How do I know my email will get to the right person”*

*“But someone could change the text”*

# LAW FIRM REQUIREMENTS

- **Reference Group Meetings**
  - Specific subject focus
  - Discussion paper provided 1 week in advance
  - Included Court developed options / solutions
  - Discussed these and other options as identified by law firms
  - Concluded meetings with a finalised preferred option
- **Approach worked well in general, *but***
- **Acceptance Testing sometimes identified problems**
  - Agreed design enabled data entry staff to commit Firm's lodgements
  - Changes made creating another class of user – 'D' Coders
- **Consolidated requirements into full Requirements Specification – Law Firms signed off on prior to commencing programming work**

# **SYSTEM TESTING**

- **Firms happily involved in testing developed product**
- **Many refinements as result of feedback**
- **Important for closure and buy-in**
  
- **Process of 'Getting it right' is an opportunity to look at the forest instead of the trees**

# **FUTURE**

- **e-Filing potential – not just e-Lodgement**
- **True e-Court ready system when Courts IT equipped**
- **Entry Level to ‘cut users teeth on’ – e.g. appeals**
- **Endorsement re Magistrates Court System**
  - **Competitive advantage with clients**
  - **16% of 2003/04 Minor Civil lodgments (5340 claims)**
- **Expect similar gains with Higher Courts System**
- **Next Logical Stage - Bulk Filing (major ROI gains)**

# FIGHTING THE NAYSAYERS

- **e-Filing**
  - is a battle, not a war
  - is a further incremental step in Court evolution
- **Naysayers**
  - often within Courts, not our clients
  - economic rationalism the weapon of choice
  - believe that this is something to do *tomorrow* not today
- **Rules**
  1. *Tomorrow* was actually the day before yesterday
  2. Develop systems, don't computerise old ones
  3. Don't be afraid - be brave, be very brave - and smart