

# ***Managing in a Paperless Environment: Moving Technology to the Stars and Beyond***

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

In an effort to better support its business processes, maximize staff resources and improve the delivery of services to internal and external customers, the Alameda County Social Services Agency is working on moving forward with technology by pursuing the creation of the most efficient paperless environment. As a result, Alameda County proactively explores and learns from neighboring counties, such as Contra Costa County, who have found innovative ways of utilizing technology while continuing to enhance their paperless environments, and feasibly incorporate best practices into their departments. In the past year, Contra Costa County has successfully implemented Event Based Imaging for some of the

assistance programs it administers; and, within the last six months finished phasing in Dual Monitors in each workstation of its agency. These are innovations that Alameda County could implement and benefit from.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the internship with EHDS, the recommendations for Alameda County include the following:

- Implement Event Based Imaging for Assistance Programs in the Departments of Economic Benefits and Employment Services, and,
- Phase-in Dual Monitors instead of Wide Screen Monitors for agency staff.

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## **Introduction**

Over the years, Federal Welfare Reform Legislation has led to extensive changes in Alameda County Social Services Agency's (SSA) programs and policies as in all other counties in the State of California, including Contra Costa. During this time period, Alameda County has recognized the importance of moving forward with technology and has made a substantial organizational change from a traditional welfare agency to an employment and social services organization with greatly expanded responsibilities. As a result, Alameda County implemented a paperless environment and currently has an electronic case record storage and retrieval system. This system is known as WEBfiles, and houses SSA case records. Alameda County is constantly seeking new innovations to keep the business processes for its staff as simplified as possible, while ensuring that customers are serviced efficiently, and that state and federal mandates are being met. Therefore, internship in Contra Costa County's "Managing in a Paperless Environment" allowed me to observe and learn about Contra Costa County Employment and Human Services Department's (EHSD) continuing efforts to move beyond an electronic case record storage and retrieval system, known as **CaseSTAR**, while keeping up with the fast pace of technology.

## **Background**

In 1999, the Employment and Human Services Department (EHSD) of Contra Costa County recognized the need to move forward with technology and created an ideal work environment for its staff.

EHSD created a paperless environment in which workers could access policy, case records, forms, and staff directories without having to leave their workstations. The county was faced with the challenge of finding a low-cost, easy-to-manage information system that could quickly be implemented and which could use its current Microsoft applications. That same year, Contra Costa County's Information Technology (IT) division created STARS: the Shared Text Automated Retrieval System. "**STARS**" is a very large on-line document catalog with links back to a file server that is accessible by all EHSD employees. It is an Intranet-based system for the issuance, filing, and accessing of primary notices, department manual sections, policy changes, and other important bulletins. These changes not only significantly shifted the long-standing culture of hard-copy case/file record management for workers, but also created a new management environment, and on-line access of instructions in a relatively paperless environment.

The STARS Web Application has six integrated elements: An on-line storage and retrieval of programs and policy; an updated distribution codes set-up and based on EHSD bureaus, locations, classifications, unit, and/or function; an automated EHSD Directory (**TelSTAR**); an automated and electronic distribution of forms (**FormSTAR**); an automated distribution process; and on-line case records (**CaseSTAR**). The STARS project surpassed Contra Costa County's expectations, and as a result the staff now have access to timely, accurate, up-to-date policies and program information without having to leave their desk.

**TABLE 1**  
**Current CaseSTAR Structure Used by EHDS for Electronic Medi-Cal Cases**

Document Type	Category	Scanned/Indexed	Comments
MC Intake	MC Denied	By Each Single Event Only	Document Date (at indexing) is data entered using Event Date ( <b>CalWIN Application Date</b> )
MC Intake	MC Approved	By Each Single Event Only	Document Date (at indexing) is data entered using Event Date ( <b>CalWIN Application Date</b> )
MCSC RV> 2005 MCSC RV> 2006 MCSC RV> 2007 MCSC RV> 2008	MCSC RV Packet	Multiple Single Events Into Annual Segments (2005, 2006, 2007, etc.)	Document Date (at indexing) is <i>System Default Date</i> —Set up a Place Sheet
Appeals/Hearings Documentation	Appeals/Hearings Packet	By Each Single Event Only	Document date (at indexing) data entered using Event Date (Appeals Date)—Set up a Place Sheet A Universal Document

## Findings

With the success of STARS, Contra Costa County has continued to seek new ways to expand as a paperless organization. In order to stay up to date with the goals of providing rich, efficient, and timely resources to the workers, EHSD is moving to a more defined process of imaging documents into CaseSTAR and has invested in dual monitors for all staff.

### EVENT BASED IMAGING

When Contra Costa County implemented CaseSTAR in 2005, documents were imaged and indexed by category, document type, and document title. Contra Costa county soon learned that this was not the most efficient method of storing on-line case files and a new process had to be created. Contra Costa County consulted with its vendor, Ikon, about the possibilities of setting up events as categories. An “Event” can be described as a notable program occurrence such as when a case is denied or approved, a re-investigation is performed, or an appeal is made, etc. After the county consulted with its vendor Ikon, it was decided that event based imaging would be piloted in the Medi-Cal program. EHSD began extensive planning and workgroup meetings were set up with the Medi-Cal program staff to determine the logistics of event based imaging. Finally, in October 2007, EHSD began implementation of event based imaging with the Medi-Cal program. To date, programs, such as General Assistance and Food Stamps,

**TABLE 2**  
**An Electronic Case File Could Have Several Events Over Time**

CalWIN Case Number	Document Type	Category
12345S6	MC Intake	MC Denied
12345S6	MC Intake	MC Approved
12345S6	MC Intake	MC Denied
12345S6	MCSC RV> 2006	MC Continuing
12345S6	MCSC RV> 2007	MC Continuing

have also moved to event based imaging. EHSD’s goal is to eventually move all of its assistance programs to this new process of indexing and imaging.

The benefits of implementing Event Based Imaging in Alameda County include the following:

- Staff are able to navigate and retrieve necessary information with more ease;
- Staff are able to review cases quicker and more efficiently; and
- Staff have a clear and uniform definition of events and what documents need to be included when imaging across departments is published, based on CaseSTAR System Handbooks for Medical, General Assistance, and Food Stamp assistance programs.

### DUAL MONITORS

After conducting a fair amount of product research and analyzing the results of a published study by the

University of Utah, Contra Costa County decided that dual-monitor configurations would be the best way to increase the productivity, while eliminating the printing of hardcopies from CaseSTAR in order to re-input data into CalWIN. In an article from the Business Journal of Jacksonville (October 2003) by Ryan Geddes, entitled "Double Vision: *Multi-Monitor Setups a Plus*," looked at a variety of factors in an overall effort to measure productivity increases with dual-monitor configurations across various computer competency levels. The number of errors made, speed of recovery from mistakes, number of edits completed, task completion time, and task focus were all measured using single-monitor and multiple-monitor setups. Multi-screens scored higher on every measure, many significantly.

The study documented the following benefits of using multi-monitors among participants:

- 10 percent increased productivity;
- 18 percent faster in errorless production;
- 33 percent fewer errors were made;
- 45 percent found it easier to keep track of tasks; and
- 38 percent found it easier to move between computer application, such as CalWIN and On-line Case Records.

Researchers recommended dual monitors as cost effective. According to James Anderson, a principal investigator of the study and director of graduate studies in the Department of Communications at the University of Utah, an approximate cost of \$1000 is needed to add an additional screen to a workstation, which ultimately pays off in productivity gains within three to four months in a normal work environment.

Through the course of my internship, Alameda County began to pilot the use of dual monitors and wide screen monitors in an effort to increase productivity, minimize errors, and decrease the amount of hardcopies printed from WEBfiles. In its pilot program, Alameda County is trying to determine what would be the most valuable investment, dual monitors or wide screen monitors. This led me to ask Contra Costa County the following question: "Why

did you as a county choose dual monitors over wide screen monitors?" Roni Itagaki, EHSD IT supervisor for Contra Costa County, replied with the following reasons:

- Major business applications and systems were designed for non-wide screen monitors;
- Manufacturing of monitors is being driven by the television and entertainment markets and not Information Technology;
- Application windows can "remember" which monitor you last used so the next time you log in, they will know which monitor to open. If you only use one monitor, you will have to constantly reposition windows every time you start up the program; and
- The one dual monitor is cheaper to purchase than one wide screen monitor.

Contra Costa County's, Employment & Human Services Department of Contra Costa has successfully begun to move technology to the STARS and Beyond through the county's technological innovations.

### Next Steps and Recommendations

Based on my internship with Contra Costa County, my recommendations for Alameda County Social Services Agency include the following:

- **Move to Event Based Imaging**—Alameda County currently has the same type of online case record storage and retrieval system as Contra Costa County, which will facilitate the transition to event based imaging. In order for Alameda County to seamlessly implement event based imaging over the next twelve months, the county would need to: make contact with its vendor Ikon and review the terms of their contract to see if events can be added as a form of indexing with no or minimal cost. Then, if applicable, it would discuss with the finance staff the availability of funds, and lastly, begin to form planning workgroups with program staff and ISD staff.
- **Include Dual Monitors at every workstation**—Alameda County should continue to pilot the use

of dual monitors. The county should establish a timeline for phasing-in of the dual monitors. Further, to reduce costs, the county should look for combined features like built-in speakers, so that desk clutter and the support of ancillary accessories can be eliminated. The county should also explore the possibility of a built-in USB hub to ensure that the different users are identified to determine the priority list for deployment. Further, including training and support resources will ensure that the staff properly use the new configuration of monitors to reap the benefits stated earlier in the case study. Once the phase-in process is complete, the county can plan for periodic publications of “care and usage” memoranda so users know how to keep them clean and reduce inadvertent damage from the wrong types of cleaning solutions.

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## References

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