

Courtroom of the Future Available Today

West Virginia Supreme Court Connects Magistrate and Regional Jails with Videoconferencing

Kristin DeProspero

The Supreme Court of Appeals reigns as West Virginia's highest court, hearing appeals from cases decided in circuit courts. Cases include criminal convictions on appeal from magistrate court and administrative agencies. West Virginia is one of only 11 states with a single appellate court, this one encompassing 55 counties and 100 courts. The Supreme Court of Appeals of West Virginia

ranks as the busiest appellate court of its type in the country, scheduling 100,000 to 150,000 first appearance hearings a year.

West Virginia technical staff explored using videoconferencing because the regional jail system was spending millions of dollars transporting inmates for initial courtroom appearances. On average, it took 4 to 9 staff hours to transport a prisoner from the jail to the magistrate court for a first appearance hearing. Within the first year of use, videoconferencing saved the state \$30 million in transportation costs.

"We needed technology that would make the judicial process more efficient," said Deputy Director for Technology for the West Virginia Supreme Court of Appeals Kit Thornton. "Polycom offered a robust solution easy enough to use for courtroom officials and jail staff."



Kristin DeProspero, State and Local Government Market Director, and Grants and Funding Director, Polycom, Inc.
E-mail: Kristin.DeProspero@Polycom.com

BUILDING THE COURTROOM OF TOMORROW

When the court system first integrated Polycom equipment, the state had no videoconferencing operators on staff and few judges/magistrates were trained on the technology. The court needed a teachable interface and a technical team to manage integration.

The technical team consisted of Billy Blake, a Verizon network integrator, Kit Thornton, Esq. (now deputy director for technology for the Supreme Court of West Virginia), and Fletcher Atkins, (manager of support services). Judge Dan O'Hanlon also played a valuable role in the program, adding direction and funding support, vision, and outreach across the state. The team worked together to develop the network, train staff, and troubleshoot installations.

The state readily accepted the Polycom proposal for the Supreme Court because of the quality of Polycom's IP system. End-user training, however, raised concern from attorneys and court officials. The image of a judge or magistrate is held in high regard. If a judge cannot use the technology without interruption or flawless interface every time, he or she will refuse to use it.

"Court systems have to use a proven technology backed by a responsive company that will understand unique needs," said Thornton. "Polycom provides this reliability. The interface is intuitive and service and repairs are performed quickly."

"Polycom's solution has far exceeded our expectations," said Blake. "I only hear praise from end users about how easy the Polycom equipment is to use."

USES FOR VIDEOCONFERENCING

The network supports approximately 100 Polycom units connecting nine regional jails and 55 counties throughout West Virginia. Supreme Court technical staff rolls out equipment weekly and plans to add 60-70 units in the next year.

"Every interaction affected by distance now uses videoconferencing—jails, courts, schools, city hall," said Thornton. These include:

- Initial appearance hearings;
- Civil trials—which may include expert witnesses;
- Family courts—used when one family member is incarcerated;

- State Supreme Court—uses videoconferencing for continuing legal education classes at 30 sites;
- Town meetings—allows community members better interaction with the state's legislative branch;
- Education—parole officers use videoconferencing for interviews; and
- Testimony—allows sexually-abused juveniles to testify under statutorily established rules without coming in contact with the defendant. This option provides emotional security and has proven successful in the circuit courts.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

For anyone considering the creation of similar courtroom interactions, the technical staff of the West Virginia Supreme Court recommends the following:

1. Training. Use a trainer, not a technical person, to teach end-users how to operate the equipment. In court-specific applications, consider using a judicial official or court-experienced attorney as your primary contact/chief trainer.
2. Focus on end-users. Include an end-user in your planning and implementation stages. This helps ensure your training and usage messages are targeted appropriately.
3. Technical support. Technicians have to understand the technology must be available 24/7. Disruption of a court's schedule is an unforgivable sin in the eyes of many judges.
4. Communication. The entire staff needs to understand the political and social environment of the courtroom. Technical staff must be trained, and frequently reminded of the unique culture—political and personal—that surrounds the judicial system. Judges will not tolerate being, in one judge's memorable phrase, "Condescended by a button-pusher."

5. Proven reliability. When selecting a technology, look for leading-edge solutions but not the bleeding edge equipment. Proven reliability is most important, not trendy equipment.
6. Buy-in. Any kind of change, particularly technology, will face resistance. Focus on areas with least resistance and build support. Word-of-mouth will generate support in harder-to-convince areas.
7. Single project lead. Select one person who will be in charge of the entire project. A committee will create confusion. The head of the project must have, and maintain, the trust of the end-users, especially judicial officials.

ABOUT THE WEST VIRGINIA SUPREME COURT OF APPEALS

The Supreme Court of Appeals is West Virginia's highest court and the court of

last resort. West Virginia is one of only 11 states with a single appellate court. The Supreme Court of Appeals of West Virginia is the busiest appellate court of its type in the United States.

The five Supreme Court justices hear appeals of decisions over all matters decided in the circuit courts, including criminal convictions affirmed on appeal from (Circuit) court and appeals from administrative agencies. Workers' compensation appeals are unique, and are appealed directly to the Supreme Court from the administrative agency. The Supreme Court justices also hear appeals of decisions decided in family court if both parties agree that they will not appeal directly to the Circuit court. For more information, see the West Virginia Court System Website: <http://www.state.wv.us/wvsca/>

THE LEADERS IN LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS.



Your meeting is all about

your productivity



**THE
NATIONAL
CONFERENCE
CENTER™**
Lansdowne, VA

Experience one of the world's largest and most technologically sophisticated conference centers. Our meetings get more done, resulting in higher test scores and efficient workers. At The National Conference Center, we produce an amazing transformation. Yours.

 **ARAMARK HARRISON**
Conference Centers

Customer Focus. Innovation. Integrity.

2005~
pinnacle awards
successful meetings

800.640.2684 • www.conferencecenter.com

Celebrating 30 Years of Excellence in Distance Education



NSU

NSU's Fischler Graduate School of Education and Human Services offers 14 education degrees including associate's, master's, educational specialist, doctorates, certification, and recertification in more than 65 specializations to students throughout the world. Most are now available online or through a combination of live and online classes. Live classes in a number of specializations are offered at more than 60 sites throughout the United States and in other countries; online classes are available to students almost anywhere in the world.

Doctor of Education in
Instructional Technology and Distance Education

Fischler Graduate School
of Education and Human Services

Led by some of the nation's most progressive and knowledgeable faculty, NSU's Ed.D. in Instructional Technology and Distance Education develops leaders who can plan, organize, manage, and teach effectively using instructional technology in the classroom, on the job, and online through a variety of electronic delivery systems. Students progress through the three-year program in cohorts, engendering a dynamic camaraderie among cohort members as well as full-time and adjunct faculty.

For information, visit the ITDE Web site at www.fgse.nova.edu/itde or call 800-986-3223, Ext. 8500.

Visit our Web site at www.fgse.nova.edu

AHEAD of
the CURVE



NOVA
SOUTHEASTERN
UNIVERSITY
Beyond the Classroom

Fischler Graduate School of
Education and Human Services

Nova Southeastern University admits students of any race, color, and national or ethnic origin. ■ Nova Southeastern University is accredited by the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (1866 Southern Lane, Decatur, Georgia 30022-4097, telephone number: 404-679-4501) to award associate's, bachelor's, master's, educational specialist, and doctoral degrees.