

By Michael K. Jeanes, Clerk of the Superior Court

There's no escape from the courts – but why would you want to?

Wherever you are and whatever you may be doing, a judge or court administrator can probably reach you. Using iPads, laptops, mobile phones, and remote connections, court decisions and notices can be drafted, filed and distributed practically from anywhere at any time. Technology allows the Clerk's office and the courts to do more and to do it more efficiently.

Social media and websites are channels for the Clerk's office and the courts to reach a worldwide audience and educate those who need our services. In 2015, the Clerk's office produced a "day in the life" video to accompany the job posting for courtroom clerks and posted a video for how to apply for a marriage license. The superior court in Maricopa County hosts a YouTube channel with approximately 60 videos, many of which are three minutes or less for concise overviews of what people most want to know. The most-watched videos discuss jury service. In an encouraging sign of public engagement, one of the top five videos covers merit selection and how judges are appointed. The court's Twitter account, @courtpio, live-tweets high-profile case information from courtrooms to nearly 10,000 followers each business day.

Technology and social media varies within Arizona and around the country. While the Clerk's office and the superior court in Maricopa County are on the leading edge of using technology to share factual, objective information with the public, many courts and jurisdictions still prohibit the public from bringing cell phones into court buildings, or require they be turned off and kept off while in the courthouse. The Maricopa County Justice Courts do not list social media for the courts as one entity, but at least one Justice of the Peace is active on the social media networking site LinkedIn, where he shares court news and information for navigating the court system. The Justice Courts website (<http://justicecourts.maricopa.gov/>) provides online services such as paying traffic violations.

The Arizona Supreme Court hosts AZTurboCourt for electronic filing in the Superior Court in Maricopa and Pima counties and for filing in the Court of Appeals, Division One and directly with the Supreme Court. AZTurboCourt also allows parties to fill out forms online and print them for filing in numerous limited jurisdiction courts around the state. The Supreme Court's Twitter account, @AZCourts, provides its own interesting and wide-ranging information. It also retweets information from other courts. Judicial appointments, committee applications and volunteer opportunities are posted here as well.

Electronic access to information continues to expand. Currently, minute entries are the only documents the Clerk's office publishes online for the general public's access (<http://courminutes.maricopa.gov/>) and court rule restricts some of that access. Using the Clerk's ECR Online web page (<https://ecr.clerkofcourt.maricopa.gov/login.aspx>) parties can view documents in their own cases and attorneys can view documents in up to 100 cases at a time where they are the attorney of record. For many courts across the state, basic case information such as party names, case numbers, and the docket list of items filed in a case can be viewed through the Arizona Judicial Branch's Public Access to Court Information web page at <https://apps.supremecourt.az.gov/publicaccess>.

The tradeoff for relatively easy access to court information seems to be oversimplifications or misunderstanding of the information. It is easy for employers, people doing background checks, the media and others to read a case disposition or docket entry and end their research at that point. Reviewing the actual documents of a case is often required to determine the context and status of a court case or court decision. For superior court cases in Maricopa County, records can be viewed at public access terminals at six locations around the Valley. Copies of records are also available by mail and fax. In the future, internet access to more case records is expected to be available from all levels of Arizona's courts.

The courts are no exception to using technology as a means of improving access and service. Courts are generally slower at implementing technology when compared to other industries and the private sector, but Arizona and Maricopa County are farther ahead than many and continue making gains. For more information on what is available from the Clerk's office, follow the Clerk's Twitter feed at @MaricopaClerk and visit <http://www.clerkofcourt.maricopa.gov>.