

MDEC Q&A Featuring:

Greg Hilton, Clerk of the Court of Special Appeals



Like many of the people featured in prior weeks of MDEC News, Clerk of the Court of Special Appeals Greg Hilton has been involved with the MDEC project for years. Recently he sat down to answer some questions about how MDEC and the pilot implementation process will affect the Court of Special Appeals.

1. How are you getting ready for the pilot? Give us an idea of your to-do lists.

I have been working with the MDEC advisory committee for about four years, so that was when we started getting ready. As the implementation has become more and more involved, we've been meeting with JIS and the vendor to make sure that their product works for us, but also making sure that we are getting ready for the implementation. As the implementation progresses, we have added more and more of our staff into the implementation. The biggest item on our to-do list is working on a training and implementation plan while we continue to operate.

2. Can you explain a typical MDEC Advisory Committee Meeting?

The MDEC Advisory Committee is made up of stakeholders from across the enterprise, including clerks from the courts, court administrators, JIS, Court Business Office and others. During the general meetings, depending on the agenda, we review past actions. As we've progressed from exploration of the process for developing MDEC to actually implementing it, we've had to deal with some difficult issues about how we're going to do business as an enterprise with a single database. In the past, we've had multiple databases, but now we're going to have a single database, while dealing with the complexities of multiple jurisdictions.

The meetings have been very interesting. When we grappled with difficult issues, the discussions were intense, but we all had the focus on getting the system we wanted for implementation.

3. What do you think are the benefits of implementing MDEC in the Court of Special Appeals? For example, by the time a case has reached the appellate level, the paperwork seems to have grown exponentially.

MDEC speeds up our processes because there are no more physical records to move up to this court and work flows virtually.

MDEC allows us to work collaboratively. In the past, we had to physically move paper from here to there as our business processes were working; now, those processes flow easily in an electronic medium with enhanced security and accountability. It really reduces the amount of storage we have to maintain for briefs, records and record extracts.

4. Are there going to be any challenges with MDEC's implementation in the Court of Special Appeals?

Absolutely. Any time you go from a paper to a virtual world there are challenges. Many people have grown up physically touching paper and now they're not going to get as much of that. So, one of the challenges we see is adapting to viewing documents on the screen and not being able to touch them.

5. How is your office training for this new system?

We are moving from a 1970s vintage database where people are used to seeing the screen look a particular way: now, it's going to look different. First, we familiarized the staff with what the new database would look like and its general functionality. Now we are working on a schedule for intensive one-on-one or small group training on how to use MDEC to do the same job we do today.

6. What has surprised you the most, so far, about this process?

I was actually surprised that, while we have had challenges, they were much smaller than were expected. We knew we are going to have problems, but they don't seem to be as insurmountable as they did three years ago.

7. Why do you think MDEC is so important to Maryland and its citizens?

The world is changing around us. The legal system generally tends to lag behind the industry standards so getting us from where we are today to the future is critical. The world is moving much faster so we have to be able to be more agile. MDEC will help us keep up with the times and be more efficient, cost effective and responsive.

8. Is there anything else that you would like to add about this project?

We're all very, very excited about MDEC. We've been working in a 1970s world for a long time and to be able to work more collaboratively, to be more efficient, to be more secure in what we do will be very helpful. Everyone is a little nervous because this is all new, but we know we are going to rise above it and be successful.