

# Access to Justice: Orange County Superior Court's Self-Help Portal

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In its continuing commitment to improve court access, the Orange County California Superior Court has recently introduced enhanced on-line services via a new Self-Help Portal and My Court Card. Through this portal, self-represented litigants are offered a full array of services, including educational programs, court forms and pre-filing document

reviews through a single access point.

Serving a population of 3 million residents in Southern California, the Orange County Superior Court assists an estimated 10,000 to 12,000 self-represented litigants per month. Court officials observe that litigants have difficulty navigating the judicial system, often repeating steps in the litigation process over and over again. As Sal Reynoso, senior Self-Help Center attorney, noted, "That is not customer service. How can the court best expedite services, while still showing compassion for the litigants?"

This need led to Orange County's new Self-Help Portal, a system designed to provide personalized on-line services from the time of case filing through final disposition. The system is currently deployed for all family court dissolution cases. Planning is underway to expand the Self-Help Portal to other case types.

Self-represented litigants seeking assistance register on the Internet and are then issued a Litigant ID card in hard copy and/or virtual format. Once they are registered, litigants are guided on-line by real-time case updates and individualized, case-specific services, including:

- Procedural information, including Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ's)
- Access to case information

- Free pre-filing document reviews by court staff
- Educational tutorials
- Registration for educational workshops
- Court forms and instructions
- Reminders about case proceedings via "My Message Center" and personal e-mail

The Self-Help portal is being designed by the Orange County Court administration and technology staff. A number of readily available software applications and support tools are being leveraged to provide users easy navigation and rich content in the form of case data, on-line documents, video and supporting graphics. Specifically, the court is using Microsoft SharePoint and Dynamics, Adobe Hotdocs, and case and document management systems.

The Orange County Courts are working on a number of far reaching enhancements, including "true mobile apps" for mobile phones and tablets (e.g., inclusion of the litigant ID card in Apple Passport wallet and Google Wallet), additional video training modules, "Guide and File" smart forms (akin to the Turbo Tax application), full integration of the court's case management system and mobile device geo-location ser-



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vices to help litigants find their way around the court facilities serving the county, e.g., courtrooms, conference rooms, training rooms and the Self-Help Center.

Reflecting on the benefits of the Self-Help Portal, Alan Carlson, the Court's Chief Executive Officer, stated, "Offering self-help services is good case management. If litigant's court forms are complete, cases can move to disposition. A one hour investment in litigant assistance can save countless hours and workload on the part of the parties, judges and court staff."

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