Florida Middle Bankruptcy Implements the Next Generation of Case Management/Electronic Case Filing

BACKGROUND

By now, you all have used the NextGen (CM/ECF) system. To those of us who have been around a while, so many changes have come our way that it's mind boggling. Think about this: over the past three decades, we have gone from paper and notebooks to fancy typewriters and large filing rooms to Word processing of court documents to scanning and archiving documents and then migrating them all over to CM/ECF. Now almost everything is done and stored electronically, from filing to reviewing, downloading, and uploading documents and exhibits to FTR courtroom recording to Zoom video court hearings. NextGen (CM/ECF) has combined this and more into one system, and it is becoming the standard in all federal courts.

THE FLMB EXPERIENCE

The race to NextGen was a marathon—not a sprint. FLMB staff planned and prepared for almost a full year. Ten IT members, along with administration, case management, and chambers staff, helped map the route and test the new applications. Beyond the FLMB team working together regularly for almost a year, more than a dozen helpers from the Administrative Office (AO), not to mention members of our mentor court (the U.S. Bankruptcy Court for the Southern District of Indiana) were part of the NextGen CM/ECF team that helped us get to the finish line.

The FLMB team met weekly for the last six months to ensure we were ready to implement NextGen, while the AO project team checked in on us monthly the last four months to help with lessons learned and strategies from other courts already using NextGen (CM/ECF).

In the Spring of 2021, we upgraded Test to NextGen. In doing so, we revealed some friction points that would need to be fixed as we prepared to upgrade to Live. Our

Live date was set for November 22, 2021. Of course, it would not be as simple as loading the NextGen code provided by the AO and running it.

FLMB would need to modify. We needed to apply our local applications to the system (e.g., CHAP, ADI, OneClick, Aqua, and other programs). The local modifications would allow things to run more efficiently and save significant time completing our tasks. These local modifications needed to be altered to work with the new NextGen. It took well over a month of programming to ready the system for testing.

Once ready, the testers put the system through its paces to find potential issues. As issues were found, the programming team resolved them. By September, the team was feeling confident that all the issues were resolved.

After Testing Phase One was completed, the next hurdle was to prepare for the upgrade to the Live environment. The Live environment is always a little tricky—there are usually some unexpected turns and new routes—but FLMB was prepared.

Our window for closing process of the Live environment was Friday, November 19th at noon so that we could hit the ground running and finish the race by Monday, November 22nd. This was our Go time: two and a half days to move, maneuver, and migrate terabytes of data! Time to put the updates in place. Time to put the practice, testing, and lessons learned to the final test. FLMB felt confident in our successful completion of this race.

FLMB started on time, and the race was on. The teams ran through the checklists and ticked off the items and checkpoints completed. The upgrade was not without issue—there were a few unexpected turns—but the AO's National Support Desk and our two ace software programmers worked until the early morning hours on November 19 and 20 to get through them. The system was up and ready to test as scheduled.

By the morning of the 21st, the Live testers were diligently running through test cases in NextGen. The system was available to users on the 22nd, as promised. The diligence of the FLMB team and the support of the AO team carried the project to a successful completion.

FLMB is meeting weekly to go over any outstanding issues left for Live NextGen and is resolving issues and reporting results quickly. Through the dedication, commitment, and ongoing hard work of our IT team, we anticipate another few weeks of transition and modifications to local programs before we cross the finish line on implementing NextGen (CM/ECF) for FLMB.