
Technology

The Hawaii Senate's Paperless Initiative

Transforming the Legislative Process
Submitted by the Hawaii Senate Clerk's Office

In December 2007, Hawaii Senate President Colleen Hanabusa launched the Senate's Paperless initiative for the 2008 Regular Session (January 16 to May 1). The Initiative's goals were twofold: reduce our consumption of paper and increase public access to the legislative process through technology. This Initiative was the result of months of discussions amongst Senate leadership and key staff who participated during the 2007 interim in working groups established to chart a course and develop an operational plan for the Initiative.

For our Senators, this initiative transformed chamber floor sessions so that by the end of our 2008 session, over 90 percent of our members were solely using their Senate issued laptops to access our interactive Order of the Day (OD) in their caucus discussions and on the chamber floor. The interactive OD contained links where members could view measure text, status, committee reports, and testimony received on any measure on the OD. Additionally, the Senate Health Committee and the Senate Ways and Means Committee agreed to conduct all their public hearings throughout the 2008 session solely using their tablet personal computers (TPC's). These TPC's allowed the members and staff to review measures and testimony via interactive hearing notices and supported on-screen note-taking. Based upon their success, additional committees are interested in "going paperless" in the 2009 Regular Session.

For the public, participation in the legislative process became more accessible as they could submit testimony via e-mail as well as view all measures, committee reports, and testimony submitted on any measure via the Legislature's website. Public hearing notices posted on our website were also interactive, containing links to the above documents. Free Wi-Fi service provided throughout the State Capitol building allowed constituents to bring their laptops or other electronic devices to follow along in reviewing testimony submitted during the hearings.

At the end of this 2008 session, we compared paper usage statistics from the 2007 regular session and found that we had reduced our paper usage by 60 percent, having used 6,707,084 less sheets of paper, or, saving the equivalent of 725 trees. Additionally, our website statistics indicated that subscribers to RSS (really simple syndication) feeds from the Legislature's website tripled from 714,482 hits to 2,561,907 hits between January to April 2008.

We will again be convening working groups during this 2008 interim to develop a plan for expansion of paperless operations to other committees and to consider how existing and enhanced technology can more effectively support our legislative process. We want to acknowledge the leadership of Senate President Hanabusa and Senator David Ige who worked with our members to encourage their participation, and offer our thanks to Senate leadership staff for their assistance and support. Finally, a generous Mahalo to our Senate Data Systems staff who spent countless hours ensuring that our Initiative would be properly supported with the appropriate hardware, software, and technical assistance.