

# Ventura County, CA

Granicus strengthens citizen training services on legal representation



## Problem

The Ventura County Superior Court of California staff was overwhelmed with the number of people seeking support and assistance with legal self-representation. Staff could not accommodate the amount of visitors and were forced to turn away dozens of people each day.

## Solution

Using Granicus streaming solutions, the court created a library of instructional, public videos with corresponding documentation and improved the overall quality of services offered to their constituents.

## Benefits

The Ventura County Superior Court standardized statewide material and decreased congestion in the office by creating a more flexible environment for instructional videos and supporting material, available any time over the internet.

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- John Wilson  
Multimedia Communications Coordinator

## Fast Facts

**Agency Type:** County  
**Population:** 700,000  
**Solution:** Granicus Platform  
**Active Since:** 2006

Ventura County is located on the Pacific Coast of southern California with a population of over 700,000 residents. The Superior Court of California has jurisdiction over all civil cases including family law, probate, juvenile and general civil matter. Ventura County Superior Court is the 14th largest court system in California.

## Ventura County Superior Court struggled to meet a growing public demand with limited resources

The Ventura County Superior Court provides assistance to citizens who cannot afford traditional legal counsel. Staff members in the Family Law self-help office were inundated with an inordinate amount of people waiting to use these free resources. Staff could only accommodate 40 people a day yet they averaged 70 to 80 people waiting for assistance. “We were overwhelmed in our self-help court room. We needed a way for constituents teaching themselves their rights to access tutorials and required documents on their own,” continued John Wilson, Multimedia Communication Coordinator. There were not sufficient resources to provide alternatives to members of the community seeking support with legal proceedings. Staff members were forced to turn away nearly half of the people who showed up.

In addition to in-person assistance, the court held weekly workshops in three separate locations to educate people on completing forms, calculating deadlines, and providing options regarding divorce law. The demand for legal services on items such as divorce impacted the attendance of the weekly Family-Law

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- Jim Jensen  
Court Network Engineer

workshops. While it was important that people have the legal information needed to represent themselves, it became increasingly more difficult to manage workshops and the recourse center.

To compensate for the growing demand, Jenson estimated that increasing the frequency of workshops would be too expensive. “Once you start talking about multiple workshops, multiple sites and multiple days of the week, it doesn’t take long before a free service provided to the public starts to get expensive,” he explained.

The Superior Court needed a more flexible platform to provide self-help training; weekly workshops did not fulfill the public demand. Jenson thought that “playing recordings over the Internet would allow us to provide services to people in their homes so they would no longer be constricted by their schedules.” Recording workshops and broadcasting them online seemed the most cost-effective and efficient alternative.

## Granicus provided citizen video training to free up staff time

Through his work with the City of Ventura (a Granicus client since 2001) Jenson was familiar with Granicus and saw the benefits of integrating video with official forms and documents. Linking streaming video with legal materials significantly expanded the level of services offered by the court. Individuals who were limited by a lack of transportation, full-time jobs, or family obligations could access the same information online. “We consider the Internet to be a necessary part of people’s lives and we were trying to reach our audiences effectively” recalled Jenson.

Integrating the Granicus solution allowed Family Law services to provide video instruction, official forms, and other materials over the Web. Additionally, indexing the video made it easier for individuals to search for particular forms or topics. “The jump points built with Granicus really fit our needs. The public can find and review the information they need as many times as they want without having to come to the court in person or wade through video,” said Jenson.

Self-represented litigants have been able to review instructional material at their own pace, anytime, over the internet, selecting segments of specific interest without viewing the entire lecture. They have gained access to a comprehensive list of public videos that give them a better understanding of the laws and procedures.

## Court maintains library of instructional videos using new media

With basic audio/video and lighting equipment, the court built educational content for its online, self-help services. They were able to use the Granicus system to stream, encode, and index the content by topic as well

as upload forms and additional materials, accessible while viewing videos. The end result was a library of video “tutorials for constituents who wish to complete their own legal actions without the aid of an attorney,” said Wilson.

Because people were so accustomed to visiting the self-help center in person, the court installed two public computers, allowing citizens to access the online library onsite. This has given “staff the ability to offer options to those who are not able to attend the onsite class,” Wilson noted. It has been helpful for staff members to direct self-represented litigants to a website where they can access critical information and all forms required for specific proceedings.

Since implementing Granicus, the Ventura County Superior Court has seen a steady increase in viewership on their website. “When we first offered this service there were only a few hits per week; today we see up 20 hits a day” noted Wilson. The court extended their reach beyond in-person educational training and provided a more flexible, informative environment for constituents while alleviating the work-load of self-help staff and the attorneys who teach workshops.

