

## Client Case Study

### Travis County Small Claims Court

#### What is Modria?

Modria<sup>®</sup> is the world's leading online dispute resolution (ODR) system that offers a scalable solution designed to save its users both time and money. Designed in 2011 by the team that pioneered online dispute resolution for use at eBay and PayPal, this ODR system helped with the resolution of more than 400 million cases. Ninety percent of those were resolved through automation with no human interaction needed.

The founders of Modria realized that it wasn't just the online retail marketplace that could benefit from ODR. It could also provide solutions in the public sector. For the courts, an ODR system would:

- Reduce time to resolution by 50% or more
- Reduce case backlog and improve operational efficiency for courts
- Increase public satisfaction and engagement by providing people with increased access to justice

Modria is designed to handle all types of cases, from those dealing with simple debt to cases involving complex child custody issues. It is also the only ODR provider anywhere with proven success operating at the vast scale of the internet.

Tyler Technologies understood the enormous, game-changing impact such a system would make for their Courts & Justice clients, prompting Tyler to purchase Modria in 2017.

Deep in the heart of Texas, surrounding the state capitol, is the fifth most populous county in the state – Travis County. Home to the City of Austin, the University of Texas, and major employers like Dell<sup>™</sup>, IBM<sup>®</sup>, and Amazon<sup>®</sup>, the number of residents living there is growing at a rate of around 2.7 percent a year, the equivalent of 150 people each day.

This rapid growth, while good for the local economy and property values, is putting an unprecedented strain on the infrastructure. From roadways to courts, the county government is continually searching for new ways to leverage technology to help shoulder the burden of this growth spurt.

#### The Challenge

In Texas, Justice of the Peace Courts are often referred to as “the people’s court” because they are the legal jurisdiction residents are most likely to interact with. These courts manage everything from civil cases dealing with amounts of \$10,000 or less to class C misdemeanor cases for violations like speeding, hot checks, juvenile matters, and more.

However, with a growing population of 1.2 million and only five JP Courts in Travis County, making the justice system more accessible to all residents is a top priority for elected officials like Judge Randall Slagle, Justice of the Peace for Precinct 2.

To attend a hearing at the courthouse, residents must travel upwards of thirty miles. Because of local mobility issues that have led INRIX to rank the City of Austin as the 14th most congested city in the nation and 84th in the world in its 2018 global traffic scorecard, getting from point A to point B can take significantly longer than anticipated.

“These challenges require innovative solutions and a willingness to take a new approach in an environment in which the same processes have been followed for many years,” Slagle said.

#### The Solution

Perhaps one of the most notable reasons for Travis County's growth is the increase in high-paying tech jobs. From established tech giants to innovative new startups, central Texas is quickly becoming the next Silicon Valley. With this industry boom also comes a shift in perspective that fosters certain expectations about how services should be delivered, according to Slagle.

“Members of the community expect the same level of technological advancements in the courthouse as they receive in a retail environment,” he said.

This fundamental cultural belief made turning to technology to enhance the court's operations an obvious choice for Precinct 2.

“We have shifted our focus toward increasing access to justice by moving more court services out of the courtroom and into the living room,” Slagle said.

To do that, Slagle and his team partnered with Tyler Technologies, key stakeholders from throughout the county, and the Austin Dispute Resolution Center to implement the world's first true online dispute resolution (ODR) system for small claims courts using Modria.

*“All parties worked together to build an innovative tool that had never been offered before. That hard work has paid off and the Travis County community now has a program like no other in Texas.”*

— Judge Randall Slagle  
Justice of the Peace for  
Precinct 2

Transitioning the Modria platform to work for a small claims court, however, took strong partnerships and an open line of communication between everyone involved.

“All parties worked together to build an innovative tool that had never been offered before,” Slagle said. “That hard work has paid off and the Travis County community now has a program like no other in Texas.”

### Results

Since implementing the pilot of Modria in Travis County Justice of the Peace Precinct 2, Slagle said ODR has forever transformed the way the court manages small claims cases.

Through ODR, the same litigants who would have had to take time off work to drive sometimes hours across the county for a traditional hearing were instead able to access the platform from the convenience of their own home and at their own pace. Because of that, a large percentage of the cases were accessed well after court hours.

Furthermore, where it used to take an average of six months to resolve a case in the traditional court process, with Modria, cases are routinely resolved in two weeks and the shortest time to resolution was just two hours, according to Slagle. On top of that, 60 percent of the cases that utilized ODR were resolved directly by the involved parties without intervention from a mediator or the court.

“The impact of Modria on court efficiency and access to justice cannot be overstated,” Slagle said.

### Conclusion

Based on the success of the small claims pilot in Travis County, Precinct 2 will make ODR a mandatory process for all eligible small claims cases. Slagle said he hopes this effort will serve as inspiration for other courts looking to leverage technology to increase efficiency and expand access to justice.

Since going live, Precinct 2 has hosted groups from around the world searching for a successful example of electronic court solutions.

“Our solutions have given many peers a blueprint to go out and implement on their own with confidence,” Slagle said. “Precinct 2 is confident that Modria will bring about swift and efficient resolution to many cases, reducing the need for formal court settings.”



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