

**Managing Court Calendars and Scheduling Hearings and Trials** being a paper presented - by **Ibrahim D. Gold**, former Director, (Legal, Archives & Processes) and Head, Litigation Department Supreme Court of Nigeria - at the **National Judicial Institute (NJI) Hybrid Workshop on Court Process and Management** with the theme **Building a Stronger Judiciary through Effectiveness**

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## **Introduction**

Today's focus is on a vital part of our court system's efficiency: the **management of court calendars and the scheduling of hearings and trials**. As court clerks, registry and administrative staff, you play a central role in ensuring that proceedings move forward smoothly, parties are properly notified, and judicial resources are used effectively.

Effective scheduling is essential — without it, cases may be delayed or overlooked, appearances missed, and judges double-booked. That's why calendar coordination is not just administrative—it's foundational to fairness and order in the justice system.

Typically, **clerks or calendar coordinators** handle this responsibility: selecting dates, coordinating with all parties, confirming judge availability, and issuing notices. In many instances, they must also adjust schedules in response to legal or logistical needs.

This presentation will explore **best practices**, highlight **common challenges**, and offer **practical strategies** to enhance scheduling processes—supporting the timely, transparent, and just resolution of cases.

**Trial Courts vs. Appellate Courts: Scheduling & Calendars – A Practical Guide for Court Administrators**

## Key Differences Between Trial and Appellate Court Scheduling

Aspect	Trial Courts	Appellate Courts
<b>Case Type</b>	Original hearings, trials, and motions with witnesses and evidence	Review of lower court decisions; no new evidence
<b>Calendar Management</b>	Managed by court clerks or assistants	Managed by appellate clerks or administrators
<b>Proceedings</b>	Frequent, varied (motions, bail, jury trials)	Focused: oral arguments and deliberations
<b>Scheduling Factors</b>	Availability of judges, parties, witnesses, courtroom	Judges' panel availability, deadlines, case complexity
<b>Involvement</b>	Judges, attorneys, sometimes parties	Primarily internal (judges/staff), less attorney input
<b>Urgency</b>	High – strict timelines, fast-paced	Moderate – set deadlines, less daily pressure
<b>Calendar Style</b>	Daily dockets, multiple short events	Weekly/monthly, fewer but longer events
<b>Notices</b>	Frequently updated/rescheduled	Sent early, changes rare
<b>Format</b>	In-person, hybrid, or virtual	Mostly oral arguments, remote allowed

## Best Practices in Designing and Managing Court Calendars

### 1. Define the Purpose and Scope

- A **court calendar** ensures orderly case flow and effective use of resources.
- Must cover all case types and be accessible to all stakeholders.

## 2. Build a Comprehensive Calendar

- **Record case details** thoroughly: type, judge, duration, logistical needs.
- **Categorize and prioritize**: by urgency, deadlines, and complexity.
- Allocate **realistic time blocks** and include **buffer periods**.
- Establish **clear, written scheduling policies** to reduce disruption.

## 3. Implement Efficient Scheduling Systems

- Use modern **Court Management Systems (CMS)** for updates, alerts, and conflict checks.
- Set procedures for **resolving conflicts** through communication and consensus.
- Promote **clear communication** via automated reminders and digital tools.
- **Review calendars regularly** to detect bottlenecks and improve workflow.

## 4. Prevent Scheduling Conflicts

- Assign a **centralized scheduling team** for consistency and accountability.
- Integrate with **external calendars** of judges and attorneys.
- Use **staggered scheduling** to ease congestion.
- Manage **continuances** with protocols and update calendars promptly.

## 5. Ensure a Seamless Court Line-Up

- Optimize **resource allocation** (judges, courtrooms, support services).
- Hold **pre-trial coordination** and **case management meetings** to address readiness and obstacles.
- Provide **ongoing training** for staff to stay current and improve problem-solving skills.

Effective scheduling in both trial and appellate courts is crucial to delivering timely justice. By adopting structured planning, leveraging technology, and fostering strong coordination, court administrators can prevent delays, minimize conflicts, and maintain judicial efficiency. Training and communication further ensure a responsive and well-managed court calendar system.

## Understanding Court Calendars in Nigeria: Types, Benefits & Legal Foundations

Effective court calendars are essential tools for managing hearings and trials, ensuring fair and timely justice. In Nigeria, courts use both **manual** and **electronic calendars**, each with specific advantages.

### Manual vs. Electronic Calendars

Type	Benefits	Nigerian Example	Legal Authority
<b>Manual</b> (paper-based)	Simple to use, visible to all	FCT High Court daily cause lists	<i>Order 29, FCT CPC Rules 2025</i>
<b>Electronic</b> (digital systems)	Real-time updates, remote access, conflict alerts	Supreme Court, Court of Appeal, Federal High Court	<i>Orders 19 &amp; 22 of SC &amp; CoA Rules</i>

### Types of Calendars & Their Judicial Importance

#### 1. Daily Cause List

- **Purpose:** Lists all matters for each court day.
- **Benefits:** Ensures clarity, readiness, and prevents scheduling overlaps.
- **Example:** FCT High Court displays daily cause lists.
- **Legal Basis:** *Order 29, FCT CPC Rules 2025*

## 2. Weekly Cause List

- **Purpose:** Helps short-term planning.
- **Benefits:** Facilitates preparation for all court actors.
- **Example:** Federal High Court publishes weekly lists.
- **Legal Basis:** *Order 47, FHC Rules 2009*

## 3. Monthly Court Calendar

- **Purpose:** Schedules grouped or long trials.
- **Benefits:** Supports resource planning and complex case management.
- **Example:** NICN monthly grouped hearings.
- **Legal Basis:** Practice Directions for complex cases.

## 4. Annual Judicial Calendar

- **Purpose:** Guides long-term planning of sittings and vacations.
- **Benefits:** Provides predictability for the legal community.
- **Example:** Supreme Court & Court of Appeal annual calendars.
- **Legal Basis:** *Orders 19 & 22, SC & CoA Rules*

## 5. Case-Specific Calendars

- **Purpose:** Tailored timelines for complex or high-priority cases.
- **Benefits:** Ensures strict deadline adherence and smooth coordination.
- **Example:** Election tribunals, commercial fast-track in Lagos.
- **Legal Basis:** Federal High Court Practice Directions.

## 6. Motion/Application Calendars

- **Purpose:** Dedicated days for interlocutory matters.
- **Benefits:** Improves early resolution and trial efficiency.
- **Example:** Federal High Court and Magistrate Courts allocate motion days.
- **Legal Basis:** *Order 30, FCT CPC Rules 2025.*

## 7. Specialized Calendars

- **Purpose:** For specific case types (family, ADR, juvenile).
- **Benefits:** Leverages specialized resources for timely handling.
- **Example:** FCT Family Division, LMDC for ADR sessions.
- **Legal Basis:** FCT Practice Directions

By integrating structured daily, weekly, monthly, and specialized calendars—supported by legal rules—court administrators can better manage case flow, avoid scheduling conflicts, and enhance service delivery. Embracing electronic calendars where feasible can further streamline operations, support remote access, and improve transparency across the judiciary.

### Effective Procedures for Dating Hearings and Trials Using the Court Calendar

#### *With References and Practical Examples from Nigerian Courts*

Efficient scheduling of hearings and trials is critical to the timely delivery of justice. The court calendar serves not only as an administrative tool but also as a legal framework guiding judicial activities. This presentation outlines structured, rule-based procedures for assigning hearing and trial dates—emphasizing best practices, legal backing, and practical examples from Nigerian courts.

#### 1. Use the Court Calendar as the Primary Guide

The court calendar should be the first point of reference when fixing hearing or trial dates. It shows the availability of judges, courtrooms, and resources, and helps avoid scheduling conflicts.

- **Best Practice:** Always consult the daily, weekly, or monthly cause list before setting any date.
- **Example:** At the FCT High Court, daily cause lists are physically posted and followed by court staff.
- **Legal Authority:**
  - *Order 29, FCT High Court Civil Procedure Rules 2025* mandates the Registrar to prepare and display daily cause lists.
- **Outcome:** Promotes structured scheduling and transparency.

## 2. Prevent Overlapping Hearings and Conflicts

Avoid scheduling multiple hearings in the same courtroom or with the same judge or counsel. Double-booking causes avoidable delays and adjournments.

- **Best Practice:**
  - Check for the judge's and courtroom's availability.
  - Confirm that counsel and parties are free for the proposed date.
- **Example:** The Federal High Court uses a **weekly cause list** to avoid conflicting assignments.
- **Legal Authority:**
  - *Order 47, Federal High Court Rules 2009* requires registrars to prepare cause lists and prevent scheduling conflicts.
- **Outcome:** Reduces adjournments and enhances court efficiency.

## 3. Prioritize Urgent Cases and Allow Adequate Time

Certain cases—like those involving detained persons or pre-election matters—require urgent attention. Others may require more time due to complexity.

- **Best Practice:**
  - Prioritize time-sensitive cases.
  - Allocate realistic time slots for each matter.
  - Build in buffer periods for delays and administrative breaks.
- **Example:** The National Industrial Court of Nigeria (NICN) spaces complex trials across multiple days to ensure proper handling.
- **Legal Authority:**
  - NICN Practice Directions on complex case management.
- **Outcome:** Avoids congestion and ensures focused adjudication.

#### 4. Communicate Scheduling Decisions Promptly and Clearly

Scheduling is only effective when all stakeholders are properly notified. Prompt communication ensures adequate preparation and reduces non-appearances.

- **Best Practice:**
  - Use a combination of notices, phone calls, emails, and CMS alerts.
  - Immediately update the calendar when changes occur.
- **Example:** The Supreme Court utilizes an **electronic case management system** that sends automatic notifications.
- **Legal Authority:**
  - *Order 19, Supreme Court Rules 2024* mandates electronic communication and scheduling systems.
- **Outcome:** Enhances coordination and minimizes scheduling surprises.



## 5. Coordinate with Other Court Staff

Effective scheduling is a team effort involving multiple administrative units.

- **Best Practice:**
  - Liaise with registrars, bailiffs, IT staff, and interpreters.
  - Confirm resource availability before finalizing any date.
- **Example:** The FCT High Court Family Division works closely with court interpreters and registrars to ensure readiness for sensitive cases.
- **Legal Authority:**
  - FCT High Court Practice Directions on specialized courts.
- **Outcome:** Ensures readiness and avoids logistical breakdowns.

## 6. Maintain Accurate Records

Every scheduled hearing or trial must be recorded accurately, both manually and electronically, to maintain accountability.

- **Best Practice:**
  - Log all dates in docket books and CMS platforms.
  - Retain notices, correspondence, and proof of service.
- **Example:** The Court of Appeal monitors hearing dates through its electronic case management system.
- **Legal Authority:**
  - *Order 22, Court of Appeal Rules 2021* supports electronic tracking and documentation.
- **Outcome:** Improves tracking, reduces disputes, and enhances transparency.

## Summary of Best Practices

Practice	Purpose	Benefit
<b>Consult the court calendar</b>	Guide all scheduling decisions	Ensures alignment with availability
<b>Avoid scheduling conflicts</b>	Prevent double-booking	Reduces adjournments
<b>Prioritize and allocate time</b>	Match scheduling to urgency and complexity	Enhances efficiency
<b>Communicate clearly</b>	Notify all stakeholders early	Promotes preparedness
<b>Coordinate with staff</b>	Ensure courtroom readiness	Prevents disruption
<b>Keep accurate records</b>	Track proceedings reliably	Supports accountability

The court calendar is more than an administrative tool—it is a mechanism that upholds fairness, orderliness, and judicial efficiency. By adhering to formal rules and proven practices, court administrators can ensure that hearing and trial dates are set logically, legally, and in a way that supports timely justice delivery. The Nigerian judiciary's embrace of both manual and electronic systems—anchored in legal provisions—serves as a model for structured scheduling in diverse court environments.

### **Effective Scheduling of Hearings and Trials: A Guide for Court Clerks and Future Court Administrators.**

This guide equips court clerks with the knowledge and skills to schedule court hearings and trials accurately, avoid conflicts, maintain organized calendars, and

contribute to the smooth operation of the judiciary—laying the foundation for a career in court administration.

## **A Step-by-Step Checklist for Scheduling Hearings and Trials**

### **1. Verify Case Information**

- Confirm case number, parties involved, and counsel names.
- Identify the case type (criminal, civil, family, etc.).
- Note any special needs like interpreters or tech equipment.

### **2. Check the Court Calendar**

- Confirm judge and courtroom availability.
- Review existing cases to avoid double-booking.
- Use daily, weekly, or monthly calendars for reference.

### **3. Propose Suitable Date and Time**

- Choose realistic dates based on case type and duration.
- Add buffer time to allow for unexpected delays.

### **4. Confirm with Stakeholders**

- Reach out to lawyers and litigants to ensure availability.
- Adjust as needed to resolve scheduling conflicts.

### **5. Update Records and Calendars**

- Enter details into the official court calendar (manual or electronic).
- Record dates in docket books or case management systems (CMS).

### **6. Notify All Parties**

- Send written or digital notices to judges, lawyers, and litigants.
- Issue reminders as the hearing or trial date approaches.

### **7. Ensure Courtroom Readiness**

- Coordinate with bailiffs, interpreters, and tech staff.
- Check if equipment and support services are ready.

## **8. Handle Changes Promptly**

- If rescheduling is needed, update the calendar immediately.
- Inform all parties without delay.

## **Scheduling Notice Template**

A standard form should capture essential scheduling info—case number, judge, courtroom, duration, parties, and notice recipients. This ensures transparency and uniform communication.

## **Maintaining the Annual Court Calendar: Best Practices**

### **1. Design for Clarity**

- Use simple formats and consistent fonts.
- Color-code by case type (e.g., red for urgent, green for family).
- Clearly mark court terms, holidays, and non-sitting periods.

### **2. Ensure Public Accessibility**

- Publish calendars online and on courthouse notice boards.
- Provide in different formats (PDF, Excel, printed).
- Use email lists, social media, or bulletins for updates.

### **3. Keep Calendars Up to Date**

- Reflect new case filings, date changes, and cancellations immediately.
- Include special scheduling (election petitions, urgent trials).
- Review calendars quarterly or bi-annually for accuracy.

### **4. Gather Feedback**

- Use surveys or forms to get feedback from lawyers, staff, and court users.
- Adjust the calendar system yearly based on feedback.

### **5. Integrate with Technology**

- Link the calendar with case management systems (CMS).
- Allow syncing with external calendars used by law firms or government agencies.

## **6. Promote Transparency and Accountability**

- Make updates visible to all court users.
- Include detailed case information with each listing (case name, judge, time, etc.).

## **Factors to Consider When Scheduling Hearings and Trials**

<b>Factor</b>	<b>Consideration</b>	<b>Practical Tip</b>
<b>Case Backlog</b>	Prioritize urgent matters	Use staggered scheduling
<b>Judge Availability</b>	Judges may serve in multiple courts	Rotate assignments and use scheduling software
<b>Counsel and Litigant Availability</b>	Avoid setting dates when counsel is unavailable	Communicate early and remain flexible
<b>Courtroom Availability</b>	Limited space can delay scheduling	Use shared or off-peak courtroom slots
<b>Technology and Support Staff</b>	Ensure interpreters, bailiffs, and equipment are available	Confirm logistics ahead of hearings
<b>Case Complexity</b>	Complex cases need more time	Schedule longer blocks and include buffer periods
<b>Case Urgency</b>	Injunctions, bail hearings, etc., are time-sensitive	Give them priority in the calendar
<b>Holidays and Vacations</b>	Non-sitting days affect scheduling	Mark these clearly on the annual calendar

<b>Factor</b>	<b>Consideration</b>	<b>Practical Tip</b>
<b>Witness</b>	Availability may be limited	Offer virtual appearances or flexible dates
<b>Travel/Health</b>		
<b>Case Type</b>	Some cases (e.g., elections, family law) need special handling	Set aside time slots for such cases

### **Tips for Managing Scheduling Challenges**

#### **1. Use Technology**

Adopt electronic calendars and CMS to manage updates and detect conflicts.

#### **2. Practice Flexible Scheduling**

Be ready to adjust for unforeseen conflicts or emergencies.

#### **3. Have Backup Resources**

Use alternative courtrooms or times if the usual ones are unavailable.

#### **4. Communicate Effectively**

Keep open lines of communication with judges, staff, and legal teams.

#### **5. Designate a Scheduling Coordinator**

Assign a central official (registrar or senior clerk) to oversee and validate all scheduling.

#### **6. Review Regularly**

Periodically audit court schedules and adjust based on feedback and caseload.

#### **7. Include Buffer Time**

Prevent one case delay from affecting the entire day's proceedings.

#### **8. Monitor Case flow Trends**

Track recurring delays, bottlenecks, or resource shortages and address them proactively.

## Final Word for Aspiring Court Administrators

Mastering scheduling is a key skill for any court clerk aiming to advance to court administration. It requires attention to detail, effective communication, time management, and use of technology. By applying these best practices and understanding the legal and operational framework of Nigerian courts, you contribute directly to the timely and fair administration of justice.

I thank you for your attention and participation.

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***Paper presenter***

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***APPEDIX A***

# Case Scenario: Managing Court Calendars and Scheduling Hearings in Nigeria

## Setting the Scene

It's Monday morning at the **High Court of Lagos State, Ikeja Division**. The courthouse is already buzzing by 8:00 a.m. Lawyers pace the corridors, clerks shuffle stacks of case files, and litigants sit anxiously on wooden benches. With **12 judges, 8 courtrooms, and hundreds of pending cases**, this is one of Nigeria's busiest trial courts — but it's also weighed down by old habits and inefficiencies.

Behind the scenes, **Mrs. Ajayi**, the Chief Registrar, knows things cannot continue like this. Too many cases are being adjourned, files are going missing, and the frustration among lawyers like **Barrister Obi** and **Barrister Musa** is growing louder with each passing week.

## The Problem Everyone Felt

The issues were piling up:

- Hearings often clashed because judges' calendars weren't synchronized.
- Lawyers would wait for hours, only to find their matter adjourned.
- Judges like **Justice Abdullahi** frequently found their civil dockets clogged, not with complexity, but poor scheduling.
- When judges went for judicial training or medical leave, their cases were automatically pushed forward — sometimes without informing the litigants.
- The court's semi-digital systems didn't support real-time scheduling, and courtroom availability remained a guessing game.

## The Breaking Point

Take **Suit No. ID/3462/2023**, for instance — a commercial dispute involving major parties. It was adjourned **four times in just three months**:

1. Once because the judge was away at a training.
2. Then due to a courtroom double-booking (fixure).
3. Next, the bailiff couldn't serve notice on a key defendant.
4. Finally, the file was simply misplaced for two weeks.

Public backlash followed. Social media outcry, angry letters to the judiciary, and frustration from business stakeholders made it clear: justice delayed was eroding trust.

## Steps Toward a Smarter System

Realizing something had to change, the court leadership — led by Mrs. Ajayi and with support from an ICT officer — launched a **reform plan**:



## 1. Calendar Audit & Case Prioritization

Cases were grouped into three tiers:

- **Urgent:** Bail applications, injunctions.
- **Fast-track:** Especially commercial matters.
- **Regular:** Matters without immediate urgency.

This helped clerks and judges assign resources where most needed.

## 2. e-Filing Meets Digital Calendars

The recently introduced **e-Filing System** was upgraded. Judges were trained to input their **available dates** into a **shared dashboard**. When lawyers filed cases, they could now see **tentative hearing dates** — reducing back-and-forth.

## 3. A Dedicated Scheduling Unit

A small but efficient **Courtroom Management Team** was set up. Their job:

- Monitor judge availability.
- Manage courtroom slots.
- Alert lawyers and litigants via SMS or email when dates changed.

## 4. Publishing the Cause List Online

No more early-morning chaos. The **daily cause list** was now uploaded to the Lagos Judiciary website and notice boards **by 5:00 p.m. daily**, giving everyone time to plan.

## 5. Planning for Judge Absences

Judges were now required to **update their schedules** in advance of any official absence. Registrars coordinated with **standby judges** to ensure simple matters weren't unnecessarily postponed.

## 6-Month Outcome

Within six months, tangible progress emerged:

- **Adjournments dropped by 40%** for fast-track matters.

- Lawyers spent **less idle time in court**, and complaints reduced.
- Judges had **better control of their dockets** and fewer surprises.
- The public began to notice improvements in case flow and transparency.

### **But Challenges Persist**

Despite the wins, issues remained:

- Some court staff and judges **struggled with digital tools**.
- **Unreliable power supply and patchy internet** slowed processes.
- A few senior lawyers still preferred manual filing, resisting the transition.

### **Key Takeaways for Other Nigerian Courts**

- Even **basic digital tools**, like shared calendars and SMS alerts, can have a big impact.
- **Case categorization** helps manage pressure on judges.
- **Communication is critical** — between judges, lawyers, and registrars.
- Real reform **requires judicial buy-in**, not just ICT upgrades.

## ***APPENDIX B***

### **Real Life Awareness**

*In 2021, the Ogun State judiciary gave six judges the ability to manage their courtrooms from laptops—radically improving scheduling and reducing delays. Not long after, Oyo’s CoMiS system allowed judges and lawyers to file, track, and schedule cases entirely online. What used to be a frustrating game of adjournments became a more transparent, efficient process. The key lesson? With the right tools, even a century-old court system can evolve—and deliver justice faster.*

## **Case Study: Managing Court Calendars and Hearings in Nigeria**

### **1. Ogun State High Court — A Bold Step into the Digital Era (2021)**

In late 2021, something quietly revolutionary began in **Ogun State’s judiciary**. With support from the **U.S. Embassy** and local reform advocates, the High Court launched **Nigeria’s first full-scale digital case management and scheduling system**.

What started as a modest **pilot involving six judges** quickly gained attention.

These judges, for the first time, could **access case files, hearing schedules, and courtroom allocations directly from their laptops or smartphones**. A task that used to involve wading through piles of paperwork in the registrar’s office could now be completed in seconds with a few taps or clicks.

The system did more than just digitize. It:

- **Automated hearing dates** to avoid overlaps.
- **Managed courtroom bookings** in real time.
- **Tracked dockets**, alerting judges and lawyers to deadlines and upcoming proceedings.

Behind the scenes, the judiciary didn’t stop at software. **Comprehensive training sessions** were held for registrars, support staff, and judges at a development centre. This ensured everyone—from the most tech-savvy clerk to the most senior justice—could participate confidently in the transformation.

Ogun also pushed **parallel reforms**:

- Introduced **virtual hearing protocols**.
- Installed **justice clocks** for public access to timelines.
- Launched **custody monitoring tools** and **citizen information portals**.

#### ☒ **What Changed?**

- **Adjournments reduced significantly**, especially in civil and commercial cases.

- Judges and lawyers reported that **accessing case status became faster and more reliable**.
- The public began to trust the process again, seeing the system move toward **predictability and efficiency**.

## 2. Oyo State Judiciary — CoMiS: From Manual Bottlenecks to Seamless Workflow

Not long after, the **Oyo State Judiciary** followed suit, rolling out a homegrown innovation: the **Court Management Information System (CoMiS)**.

CoMiS wasn't just an e-filing tool — it was an **end-to-end solution** for:

- Filing cases, motions, and affidavits online.
- **Scheduling hearings** with built-in courtroom conflict checks.
- **Digitally preparing cause lists**, affidavits, and registry tasks.
- Allowing judges to **manage their calendars from any location**.

The rollout was paired with focused training for judges, registrars, and even **lawyers and civic-tech partners** like Citizens Gavel. This collaborative spirit helped reduce the friction typically found in adopting new technologies.

### Results?

- No more lost files or delayed affidavits.
- **Significant drop in physical backlogs** and registry queues.
- Judges could review case files and **assign court dates without depending on handwritten notes**.

Perhaps most importantly, **CoMiS ran on the cloud**, enabling secure, remote access and better coordination between judges and support staff.

## Lessons from Both States for the Nigerian Judiciary

These two case studies highlight more than success—they show what's possible when **digital reform meets local reality**.

### What Worked:

- **Start small:** Both states began with pilot phases before scaling.
- **Invest in people:** Training and capacity-building were just as important as the tech.
- **Link systems together:** E-filing, docket tracking, and scheduling worked best as part of an integrated platform.

### **Impact on Scheduling and Calendar Management:**

- Judges avoided **double-booking** and scheduling conflicts.
- Lawyers received **timely notifications** of hearing dates or changes.
- Clerks could view courtroom availability **at a glance**, making rescheduling faster and fairer.

### **Challenges Still Faced:**

- Not all judges and staff were **digitally literate**—especially in rural areas.
- Infrastructure problems like **unstable power and internet** affected real-time use.
- Some lawyers resisted the shift, preferring “the old way” of manual filing and physical appearances.