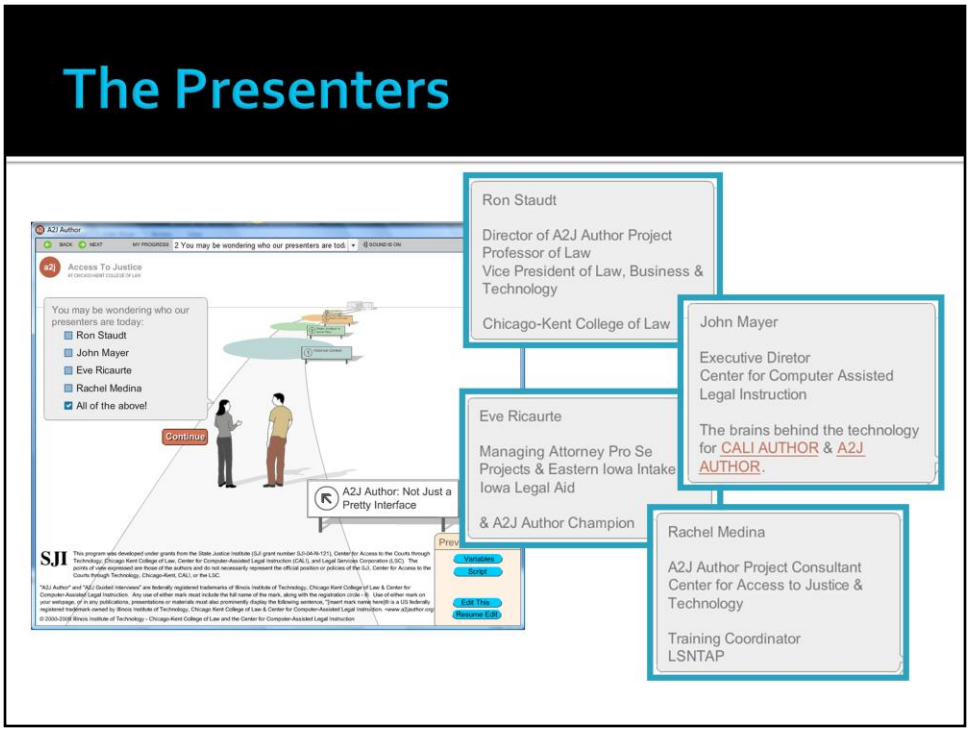
Not Just A Pretty Interface: A2J Author® Is Changing How We Achieve Justice Through Technology

Ronald W. Staudt
John Mayer
Eve Ricaurte
Rachel R. Medina

EQUAL JUSTICE CONFERENCE – MAY 14-16, 2009

A2J Author®

Most of the presentation during the session held at EJC was facilitated using an A2J Guided Interviews® interface designed in A2J Author®.

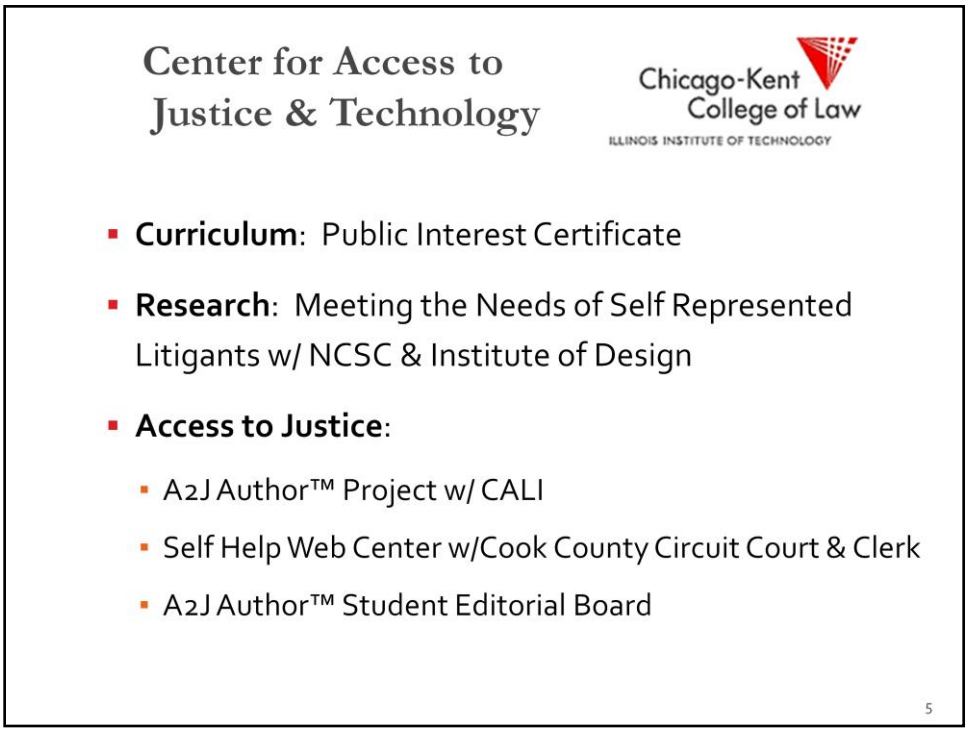


The presenters included Ron Staudt, Professor of Law and Vice President of Law, Business & Technology at Chicago-Kent College of Law, John Mayer, Executive Director of CALI (the developers of A2J Author), Eve Ricaurte, Managing Attorney of Pro Se Projects & Eastern Iowa Intake of Iowa Legal Aid, and Rachel Medina, A2J Author Project Consultant for Chicago-Kent and Training Coordinator for the Legal Services National Technology Assistance Project.

A2J Author:
Not just a pretty face!

Equal Justice Conference-2009

Ronald W. Staudt
Professor and Director,
Center for Access to Justice & Technology
Chicago-Kent College of Law



*Find innovative ways to help solve these problems

- Use student involvement and student-created output to "make a difference"

*Growing convergence of law and technology, however, we sit on a more narrow path that intersect public interest as well

Technology & Predicting Transformative Change

A2J Author- A Surprising Success

Ronald W. Staudt
Professor and Director,
Center for Access to Justice & Technology
Chicago-Kent College of Law

Activity Nationwide:
Partners & Statistics

States with A2J Guided Interviews
(according to NPADO server statistics thru 7/1/08)

21 States, U.S. Virgin Islands & Ontario (Canada)

Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, California, Idaho, Illinois, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Mississippi, Montana, Nebraska, New York, Ohio, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Texas, U.S. Virgin Islands, Vermont, Washington, Ontario (Canada)

Registered Users of A2J Author 2.0
(per registration statistics thru 10/1/08)

33 States, D.C., Guam, Ontario (Canada), N.S.W. (Australia)

Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, California, Connecticut, Washington, D.C., Florida, Georgia, Guam, Iowa, Idaho, Illinois, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Maine, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, New York, North Carolina, New Hampshire, New Mexico, N.S.W. (Australia), Ohio, Oklahoma, Ontario (Canada), Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Virginia, Vermont, Washington

1201 active A2J templates
75,906 A2J Interviews completed in 2008

Chicago-Kent College of Law / Student Editorial Board Projects

Ventura County, California
(various interviews in process)
Illinois Legal Aid Online
(multiple interviews, either live or in development)

E-Filing System Projects

U.S. District Courts, Eastern Missouri
Manatee County Clerk of the Circuit Court, Florida
(pilot project for the state of Florida)
Clerk of Kane County, Illinois

Case Management System Integration Projects

Iowa Legal Aid
Legal Aid of Western Ohio

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Predicting Transformative Change

- Death of the Paper Casebook
  - Ron Staudt, 1994
- Death of the Bricks and Mortar Law School
  - Michael Froomkin, 1995
- Future of Law
  - Richard Susskind, 1996

Distance Learning Will Make Law Schools Obsolete

- Thirty years from now the big university campuses will be relics. Universities won't survive. It's as large a change as when we got the printed book!

Michael Froomkin, quoting Peter Drucker

http://personal.law.miami.edu/~froomkin/articles/aals/sld039.htm

Technology and The End of Lawyers?

"To cap it all, a number of disruptive legal technologies are emerging… which will directly challenge and sometimes even replace the traditional work of lawyers. For many lawyers, therefore, it looks as if the party may soon be over."

The End of Lawyers?
Rethinking the Nature of Legal Services
By Richard Susskind 2008

We were usually wrong!

- The End of Lawyers?
  - Richard Susskind, 2008
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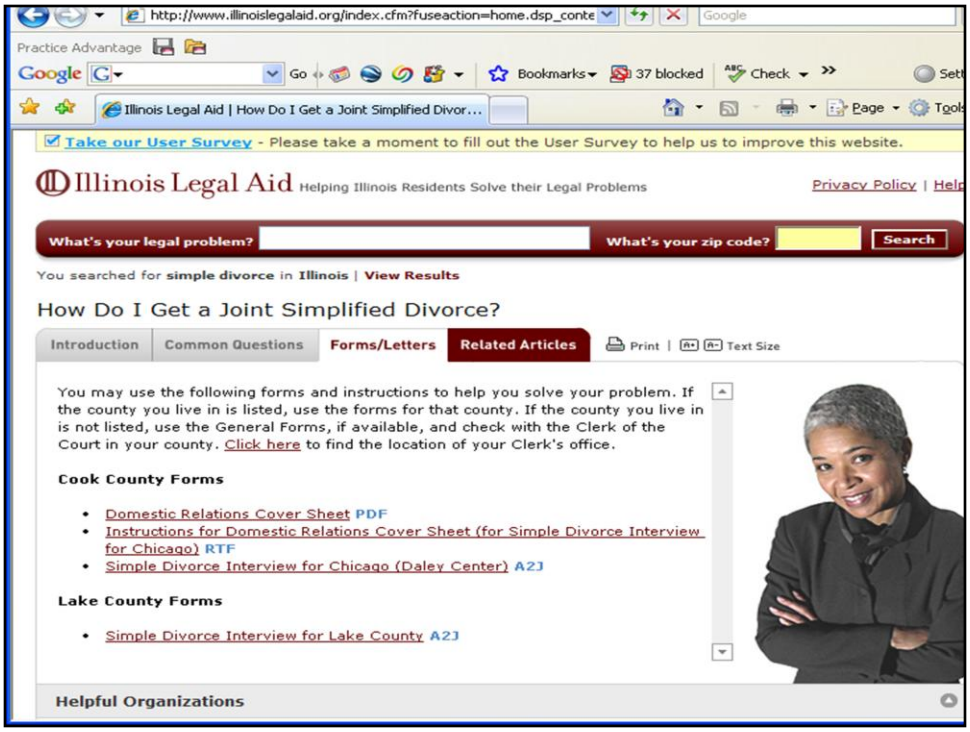
  - Michael Froomkin, 1995

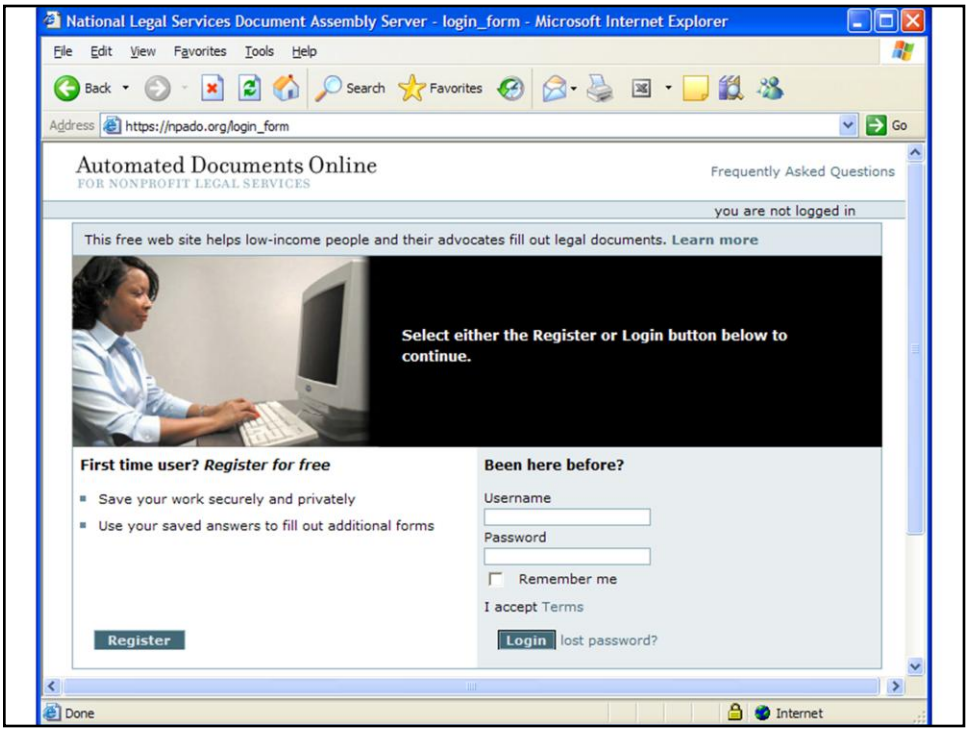
LSC- Technology Innovation Grants

- Statewide Web Sites
  - Internet Platforms for Transformation
- National Public Automated Document Server
  - Building a technical community of transformation agents
- A2J Author
  - A Surprising Success

The Statewide Websites, NPADO server, and A2J Author represent recent successes.



Here is a typical screen from the Illinois public facing statewide website.



This is the opening screed that a user/customer sees when clicking on a HotDocs or A2J Author link on one of the statewide legal aid websites. This screen is generated by the National Public Automated Documents Online server operated by ProBono.net.

Technology & Predicting Transformative Change

A2J Author- A Surprising Success

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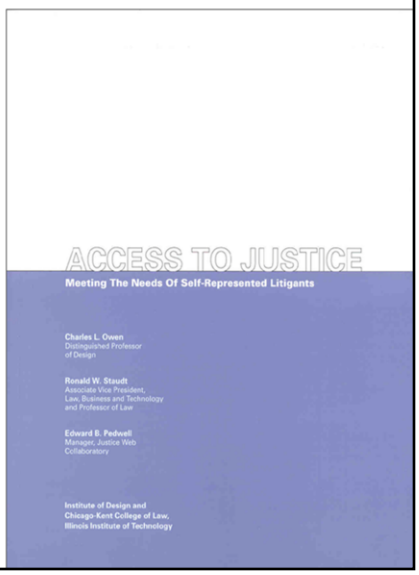
Extensive collaboration with key partners was a factor in the initial success of A2J Author®.

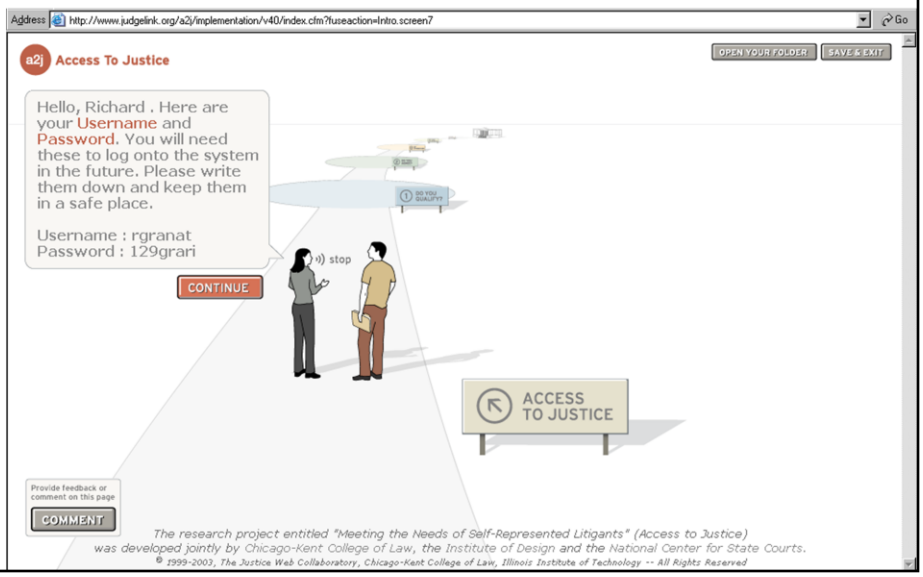
Meeting the Needs of Self Represented Litigants: A Consumer Based Approach

- **Identify the major barriers to access to justice by litigants without lawyers**
  - Ethnographic research in 5 courts, California, Delaware, Colorado & Illinois
- **Employ the latest in system design methodology to redesign the process**
  - Design Factors, Function Structure, Information Structure, Solution Elements, System Structure



Another factor of success was the intense study of self-represented litigants and study results upon which the design of the A2J Author® interface was based.

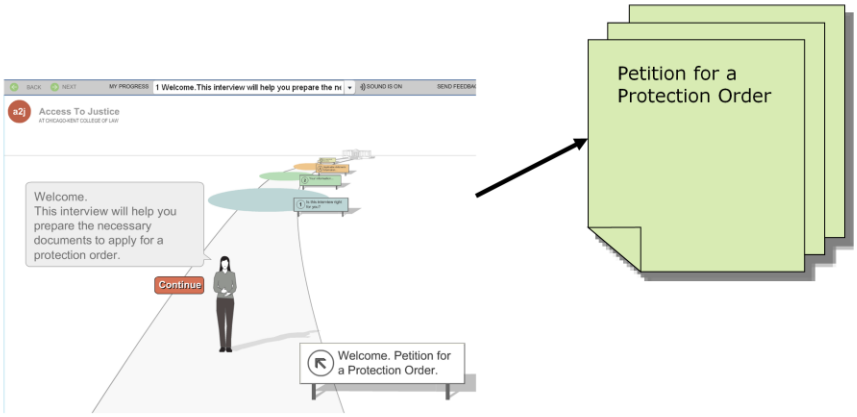
The Prototype:
Joint Simplified Dissolution of Marriage



The study results lead the project team to an initial prototype of a web interface to be used by self-represented litigants in connection with HotDocs document assembly.

The prototype taught the team that a system would have to be designed to make it easy for non-technical folks to design these specialized interfaces for document assembly. The result? An authoring system – A2J Author®.

A2J Author®: Document assembly front-end



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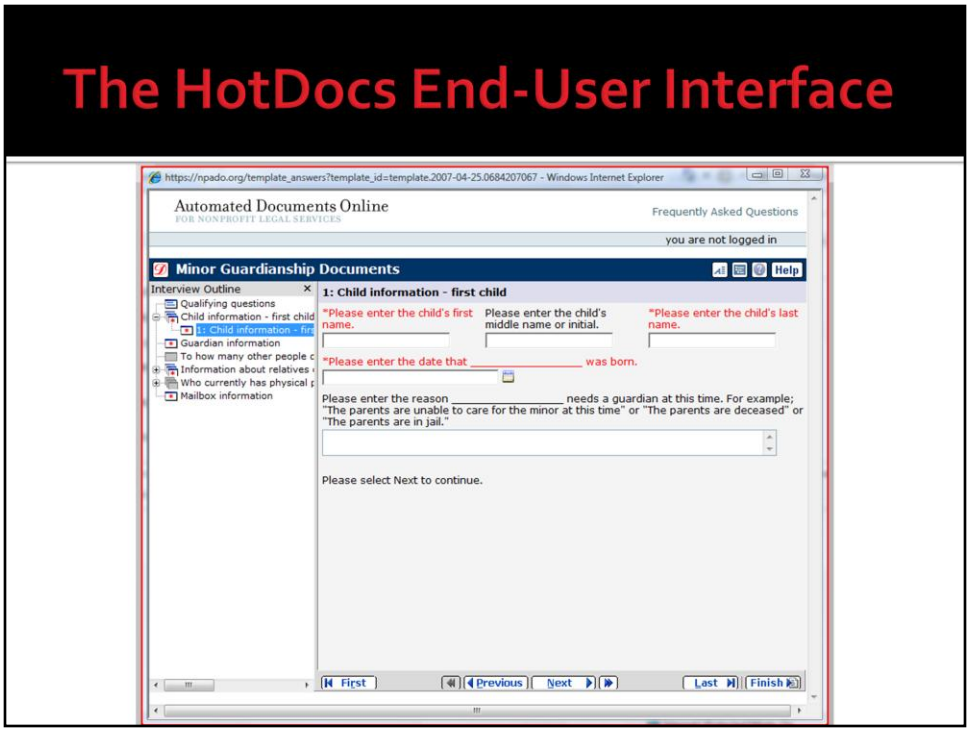
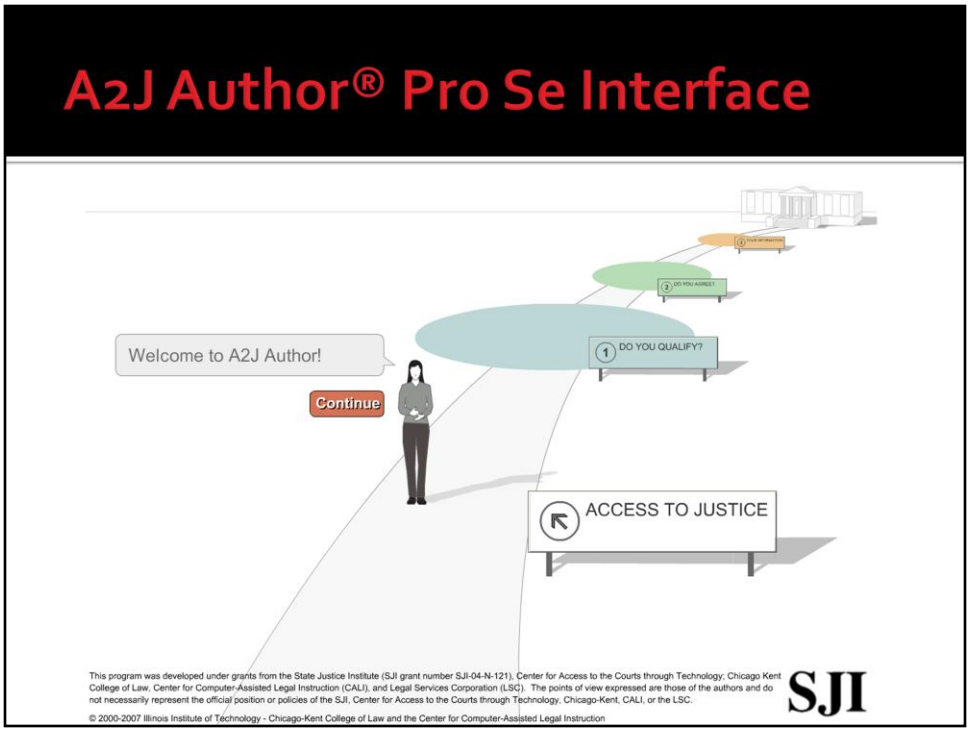
The initial target of A2J Author was to build Guided Interviews that serve as a substitute for the interviews automatically generated by HotDocs.

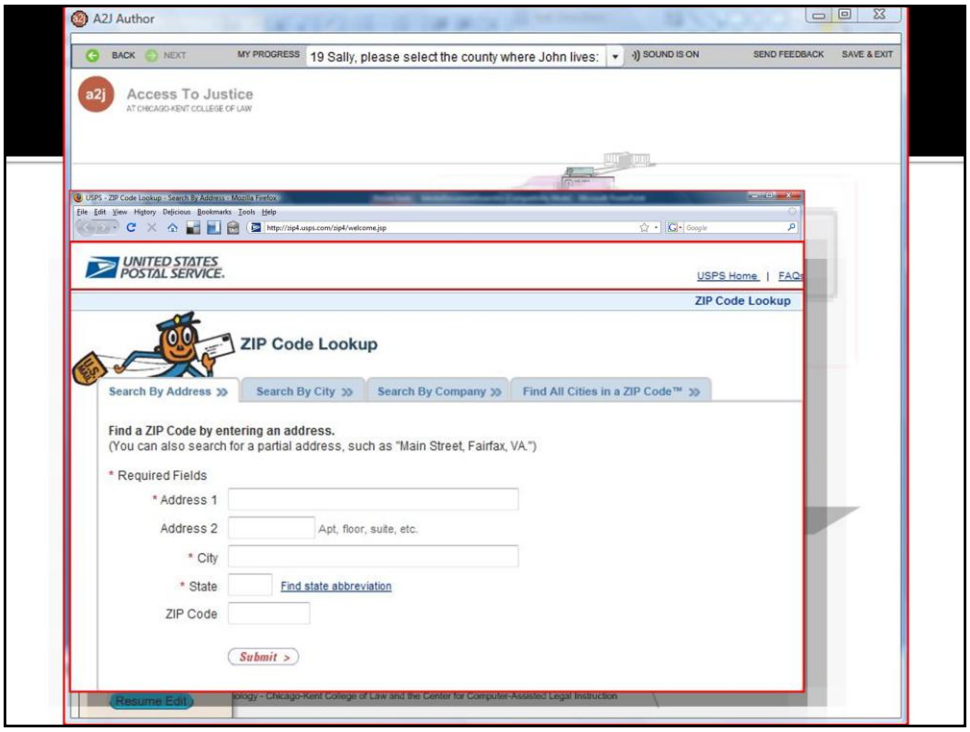
The HotDocs End-User Interface



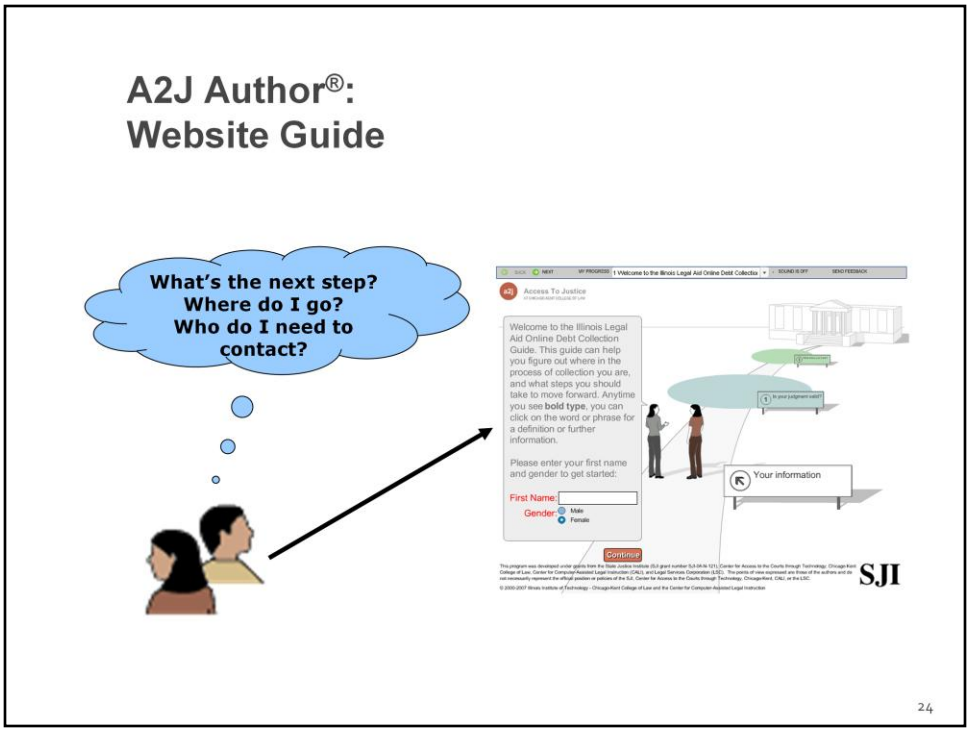
HotDocs end-user interface. Plain and form-looking interface is characterized by an index of questions on the left and related questions and text boxes where information can be entered on the right. Perhaps not the most intuitive interface for non-tech savvy members of the public that may be needing the assistance of such forms. But it does the job and is fairly straightforward for advocates to use, who are comfortable with just filling in blanks with little to no additional instruction.



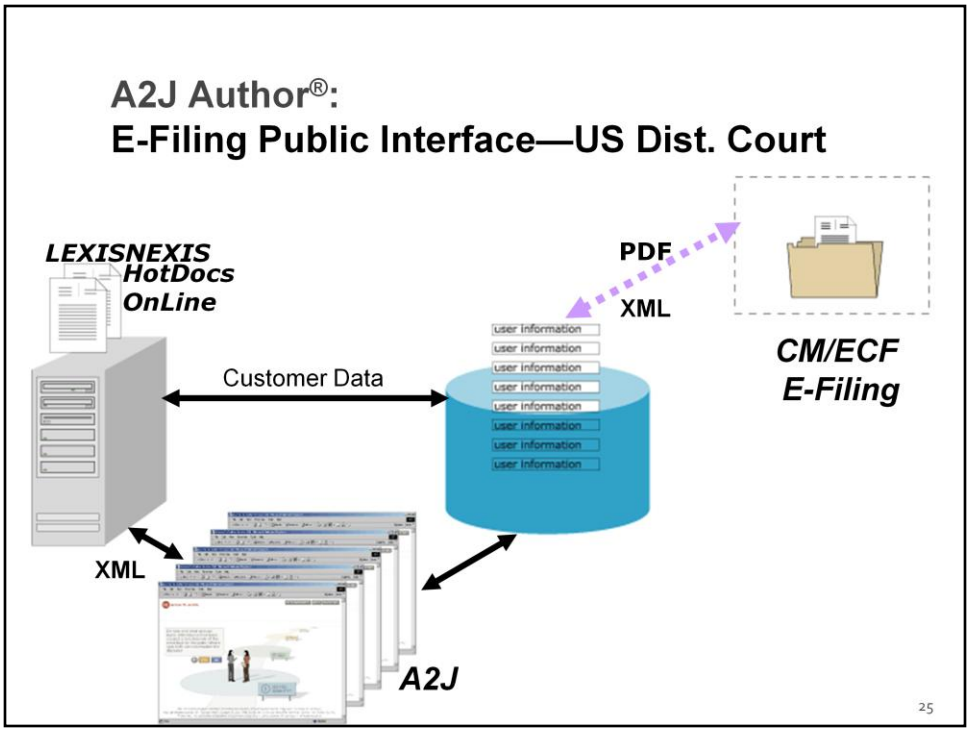
A2J Author® on the other hand has a very friendly interface which was developed with usability testing for the specific purpose of addressing the needs of self-represented litigants.



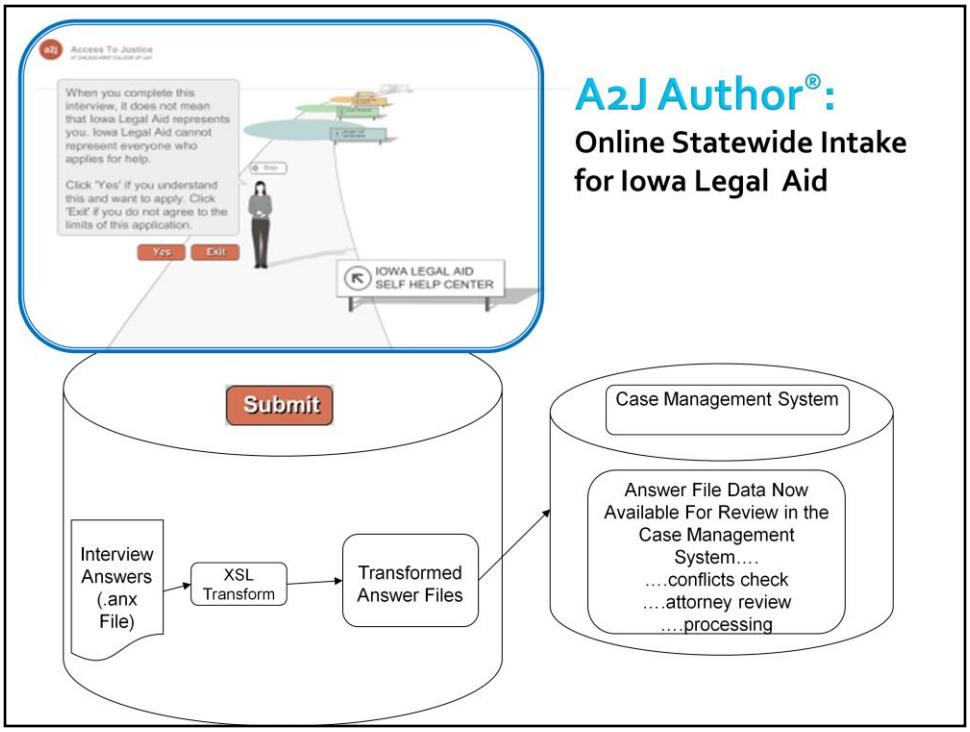
A2J Author also has the ability to create hyperlinks to external URLs so that SRLs can be re-directed, albeit temporarily, to resources that will aid them in completing the interview questions or provide further explanation on the relevant topic.



The uses of A2J Guided Interviews® has grown. The unique features of the software make it appropriate for use in other scenarios where a document is not the object of the process, e.g., a website guide which directs someone to the "next step" in a process such as debt collection.



A2J Author® may also be used in an e-filing scenario. The U.S. District Courts have explored this idea. While it has not yet been implemented among the federal courts, state courts are now exploring e-filing as well. State courts in Florida and Vermont are launching e-filing projects in the near future.

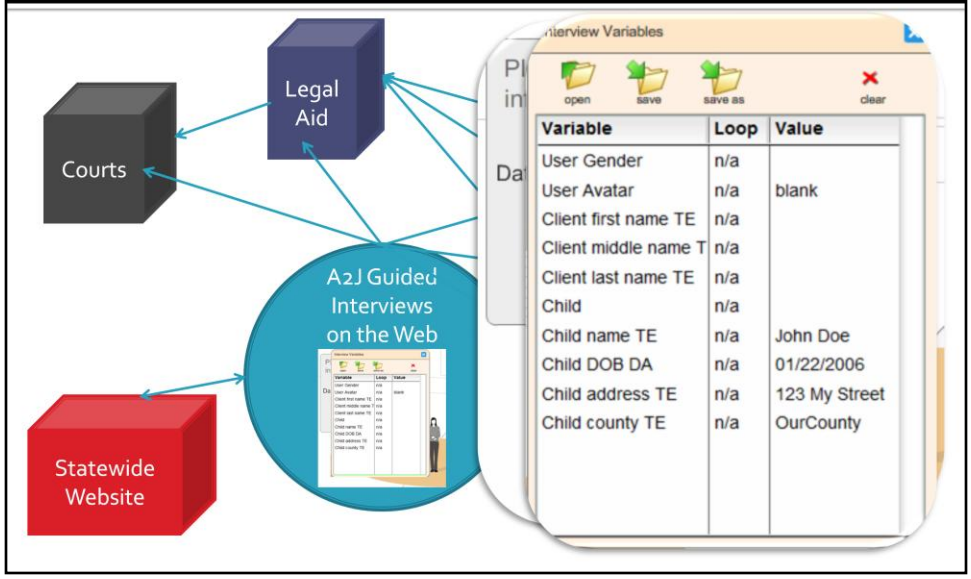


The friendly interface can also be used as an online intake device to facilitate remote intake. Legal aid programs in Iowa and Ohio are currently working on projects to implement A2J Guided Interviews® for this purpose.

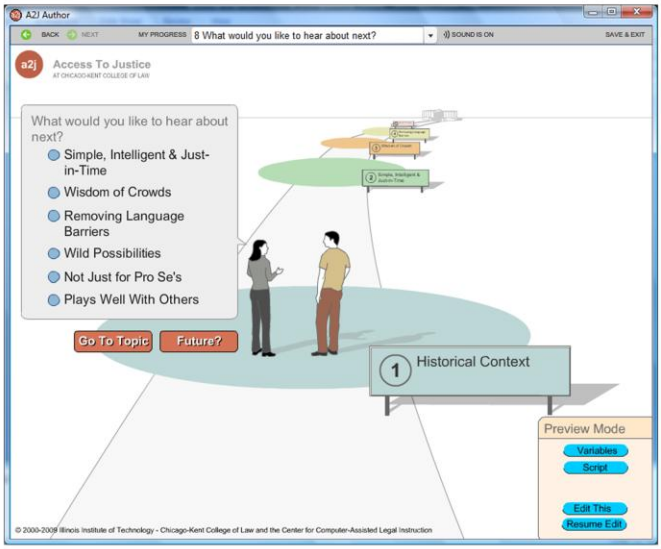
A2J Author Data Sharing: Pointing to Transformation?

- Linking interviews could facilitate customer based coordination across systems of justice
  - Legal Aid Agencies
  - Courts
  - Criminal Defense- public defender
  - Administrative Agencies
    - The new frontier!

A2J Author: A Web Portal for Justice

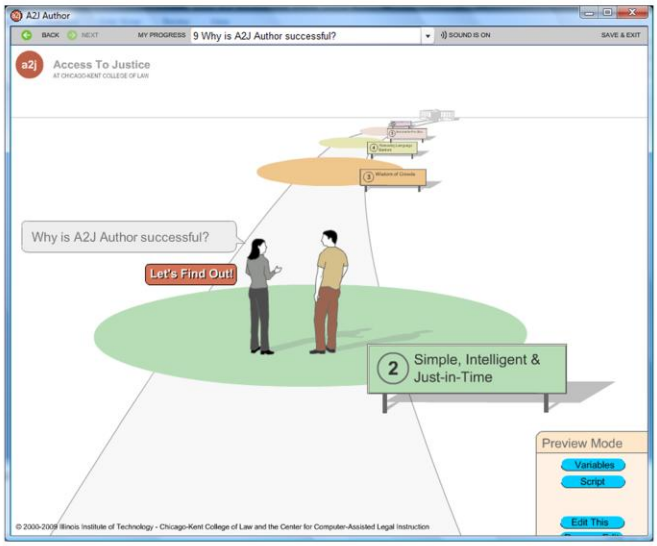


The Success Factors

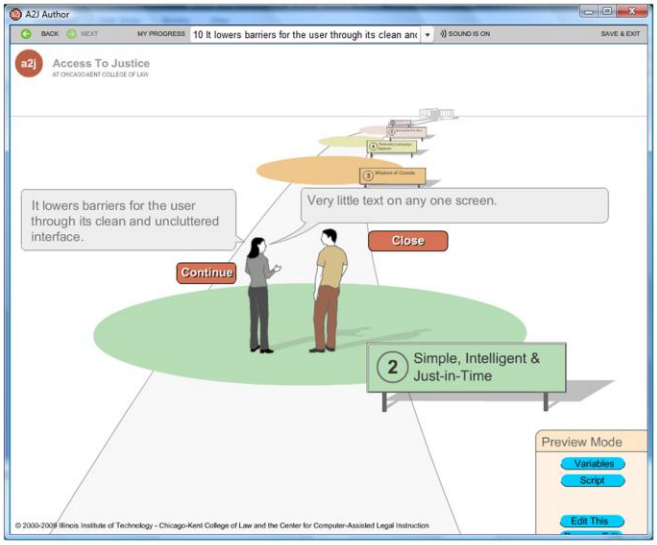


A number of other success factors were discussed with the attendees at the conference and demonstrated through A2J Author®.

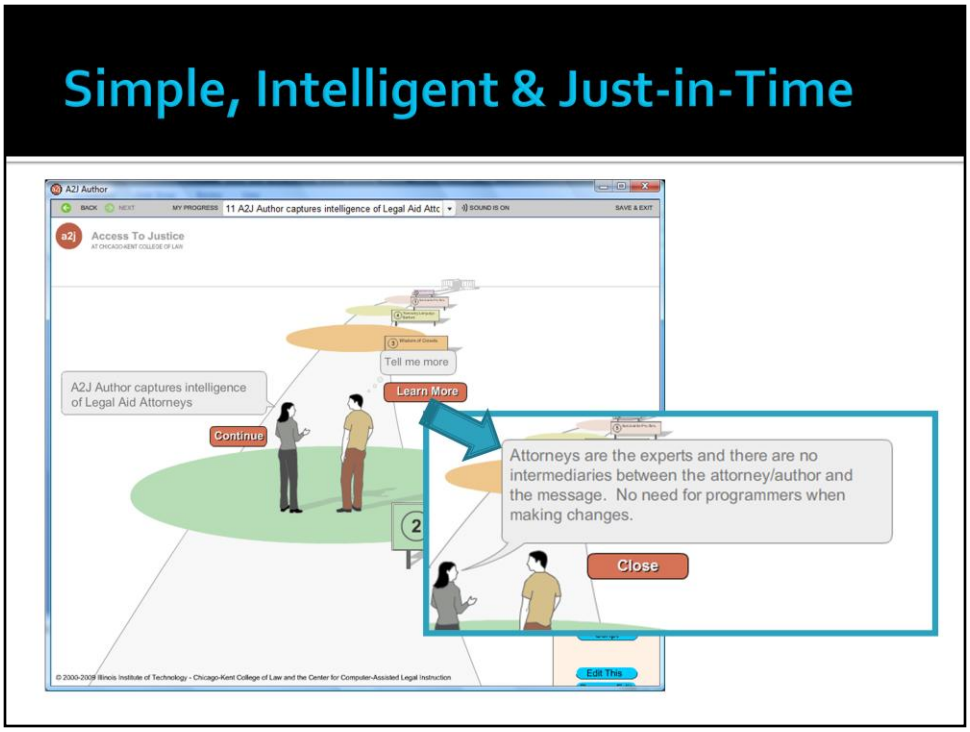
Simple, Intelligent & Just-in-Time



Simple, Intelligent & Just-in-Time

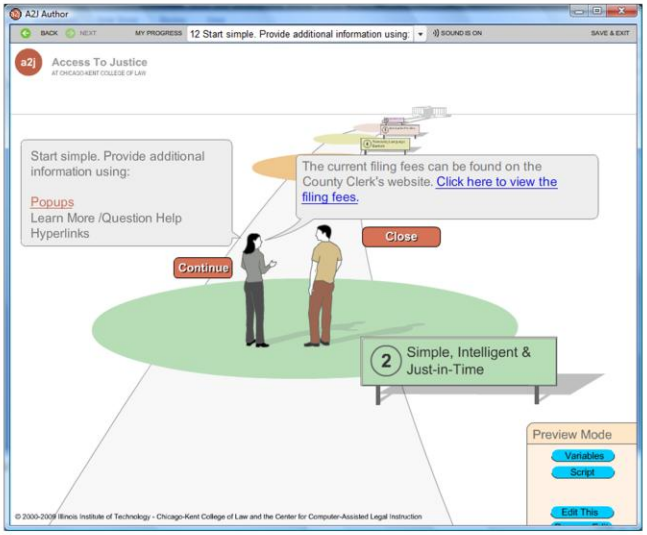


It is entirely appropriate that A2J Author was birthed at the Illinois Institute of Technology where Ludwig Mies van der Rohe taught. He is credited with the "less is more" theme of architecture which entirely applies to the design of A2J Author. Web pages and court forms are too busy, cluttered and confusing. A2J Author breaks down complex processes into simple steps.



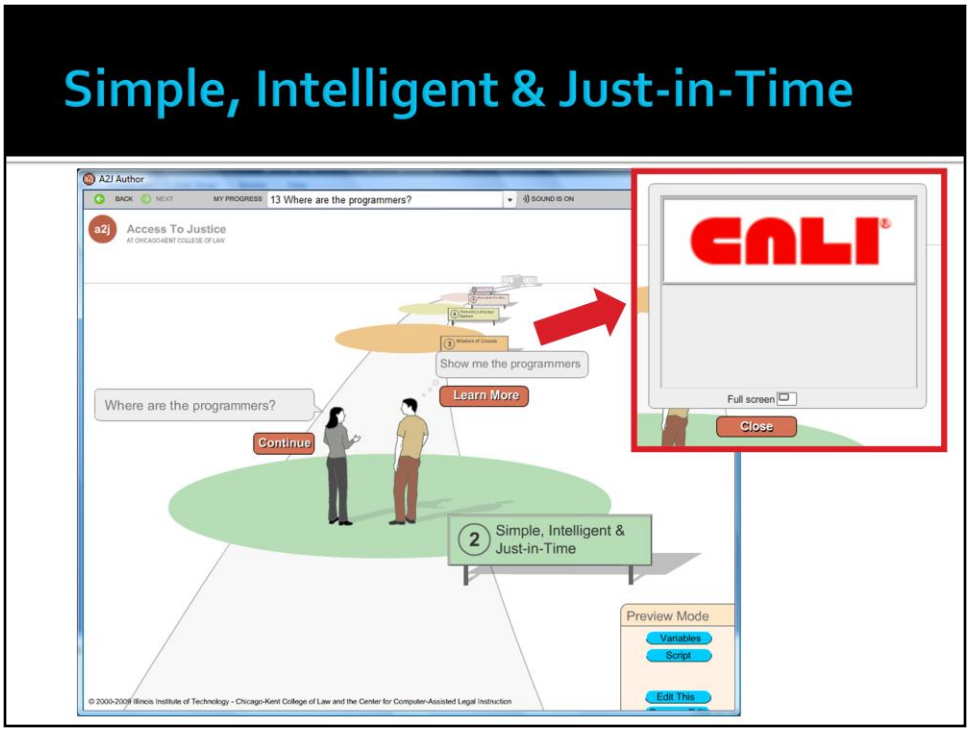
There are ways to go get more information within A2J Author – “Learn More” is for very small amounts of additional information. Larger amounts of information are assumed to be external to A2J Author Guided Interviews. The idea is that authors should not recreate everything inside A2J Author, but should link to what exists on the web already. .

Simple, Intelligent & Just-in-Time



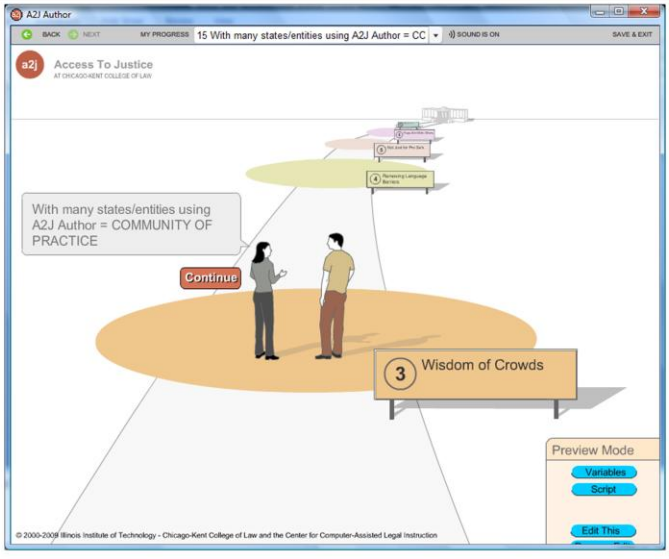
A2J Author 2.0 has 3 just-in-time learning features: popups, question help, and hyperlinks.

Version 3.0, due to be released in 2009, will improve upon these features by enabling question help (which appears first as a question bubble and then a speech bubble above the avatar's head on the right) with graphics and video.



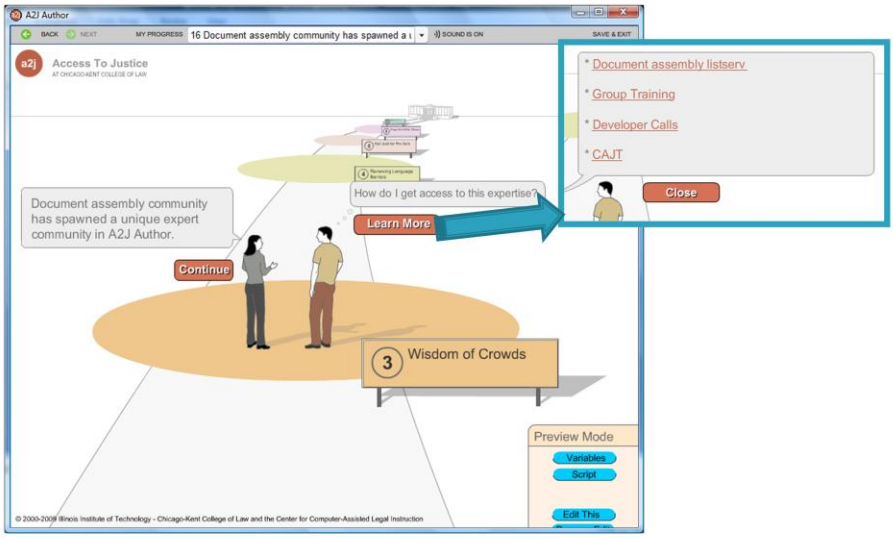
The Center for Computer-Assisted Legal Instruction aka CALI is a nonprofit consortium of 210 US law schools. CALI does research and development in legal education and technology. CALI staff designed and programmed A2J Author and continues to support the software. Contact CALI via it's Executive Director, John Mayer at jmayer@cali.org.

Wisdom of Crowds



The community of people who author A2J Author are a valuable resource of information and ideas about how to best use A2J Author. They hang out on the document assembly discussion list and at a2jauthor.org.

Wisdom of Crowds



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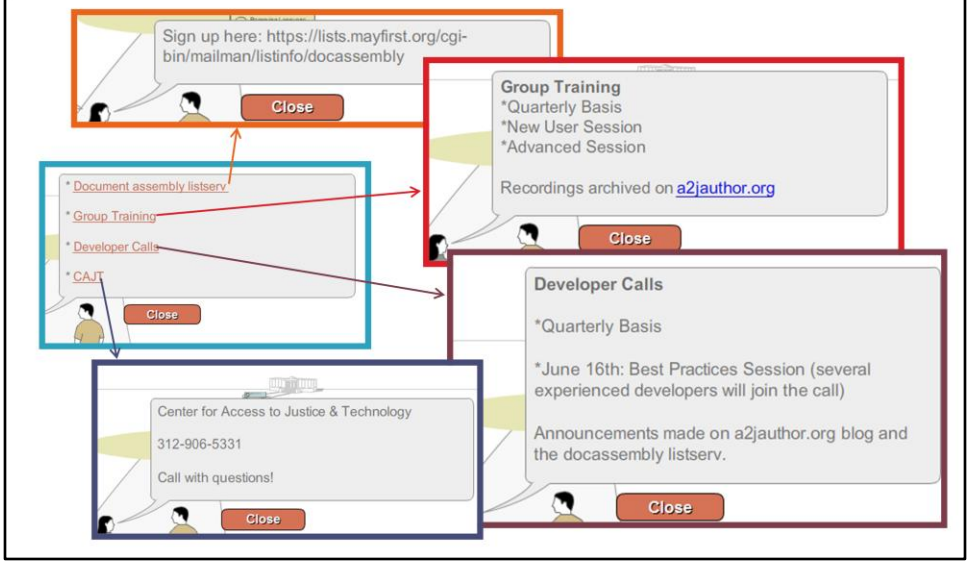
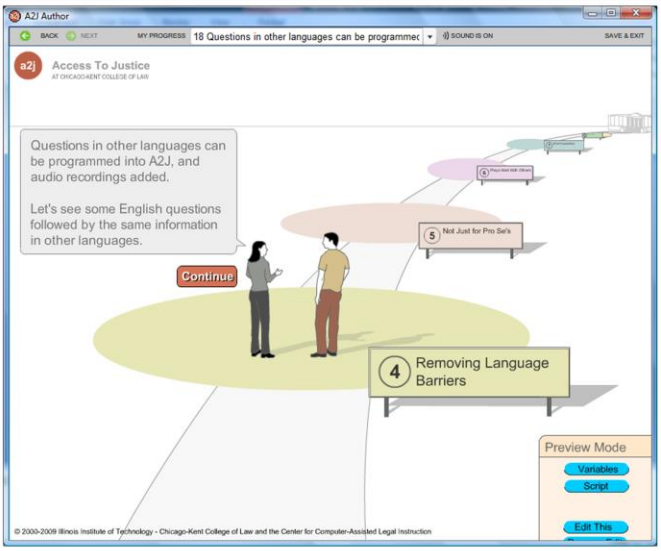


Removing Language Barriers



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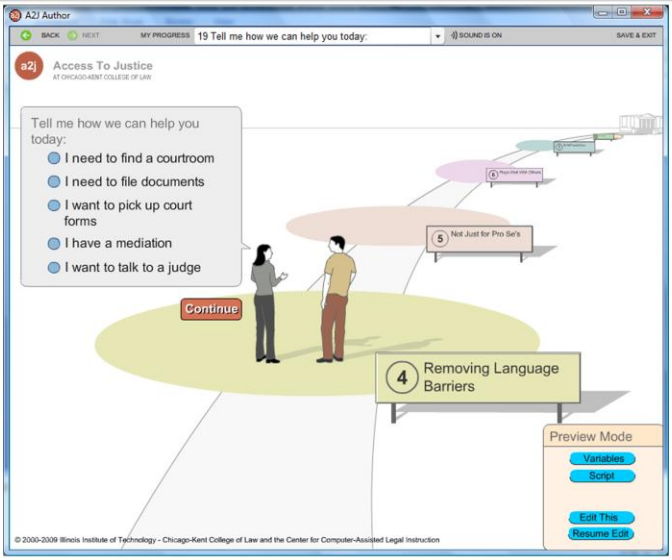

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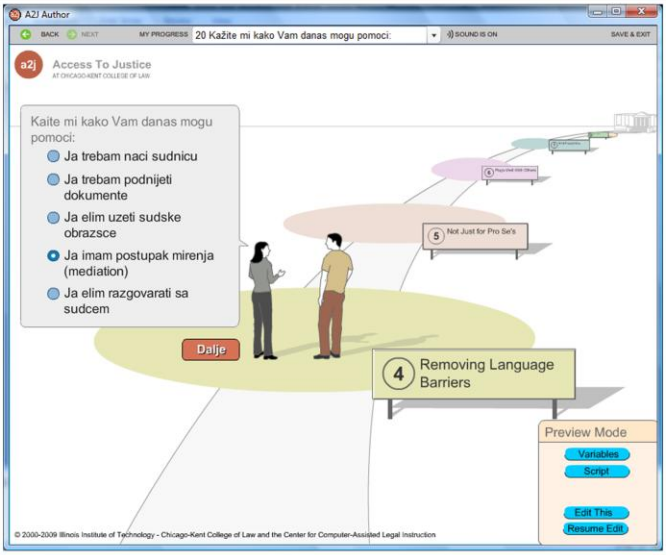

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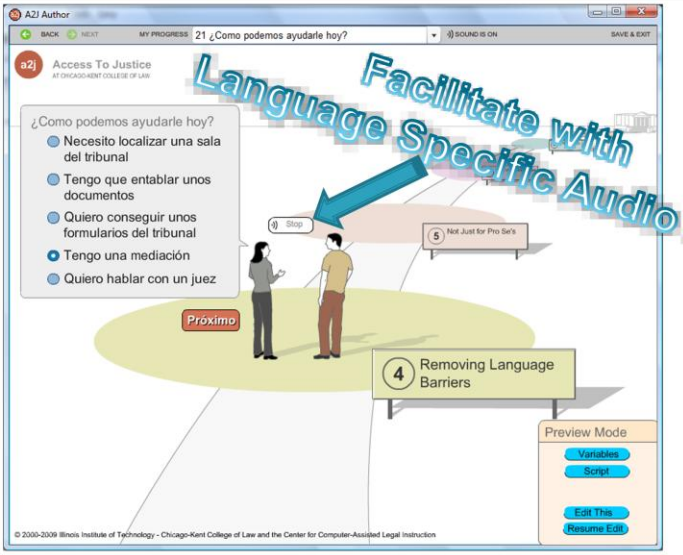

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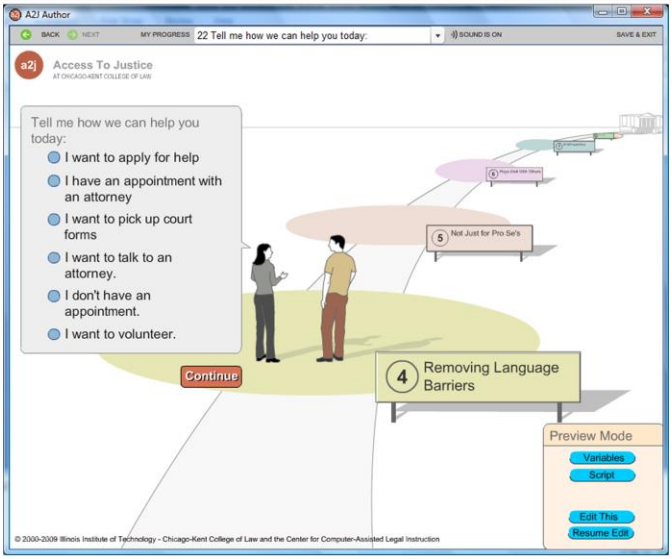

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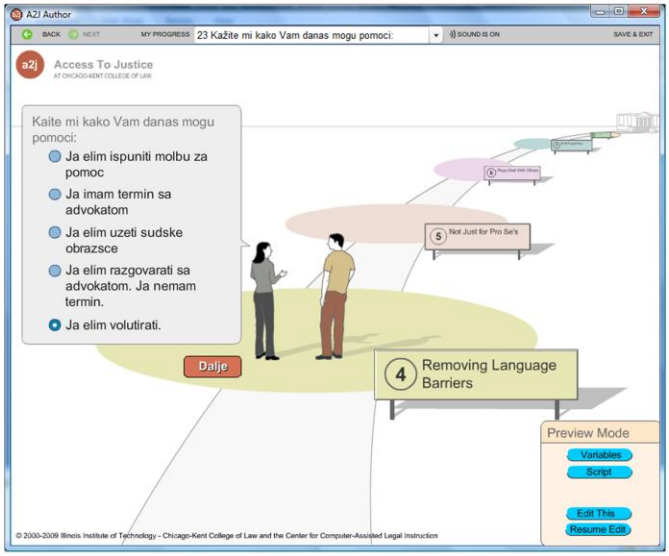
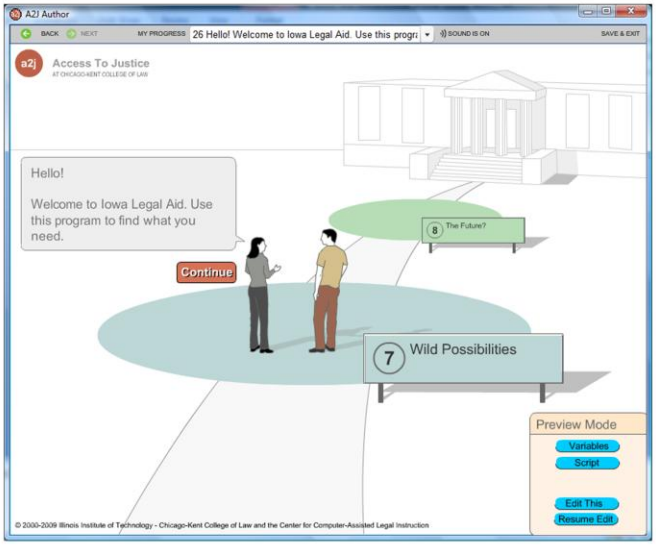


Wild Possibilities

- Other possibilities exist for A2J Author®
- Any data gathering process facing the public has potential for being made more efficient through A2J Guided Interviews®
- We'll expore two possibilities:
  - Legal Aid Reception Kiosk
  - Court Lobby Kiosk

Wild Possibilities: Legal Aid Reception Kiosk



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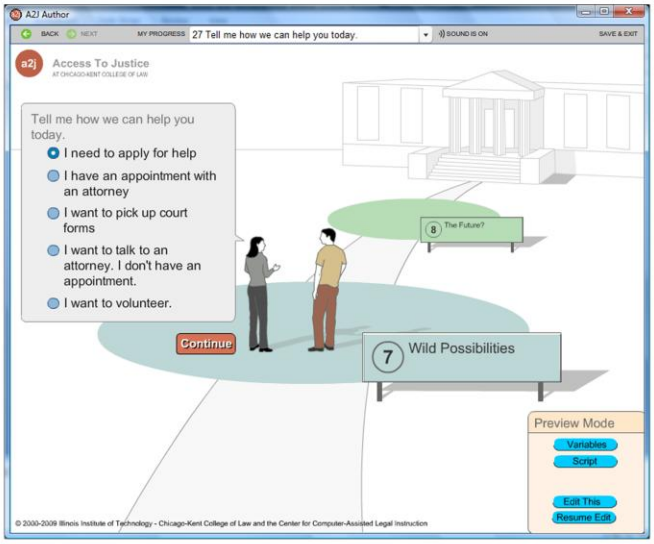
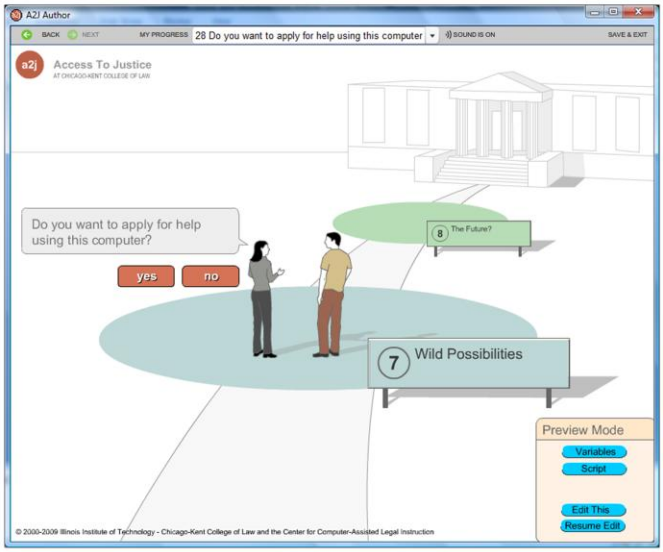


Wild Possibilities:
Legal Aid Reception Kiosk



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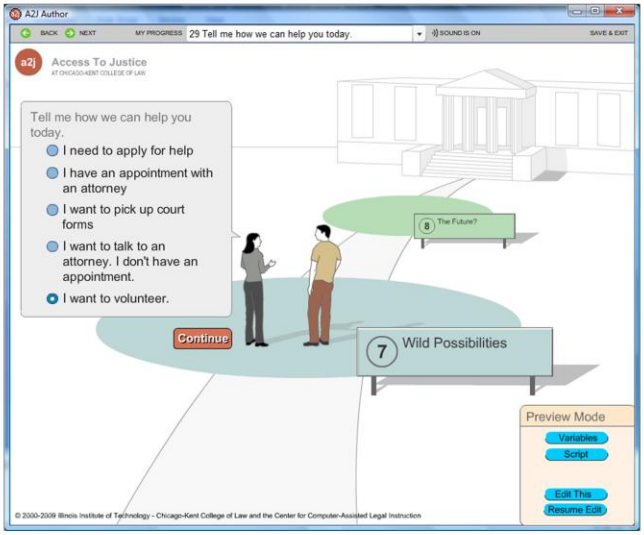

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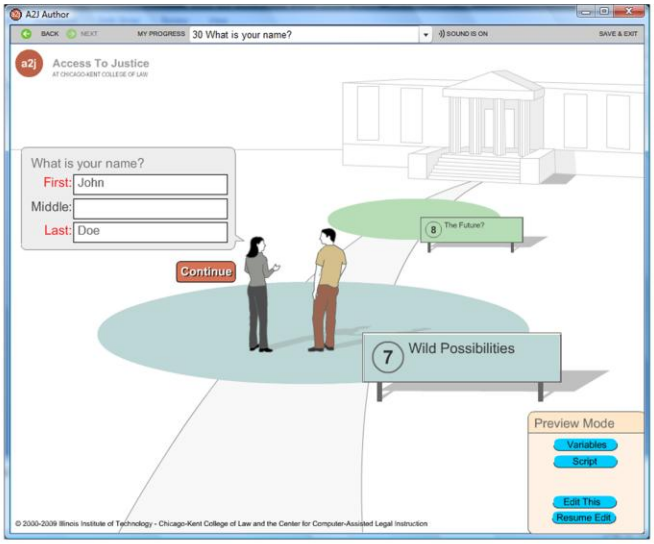

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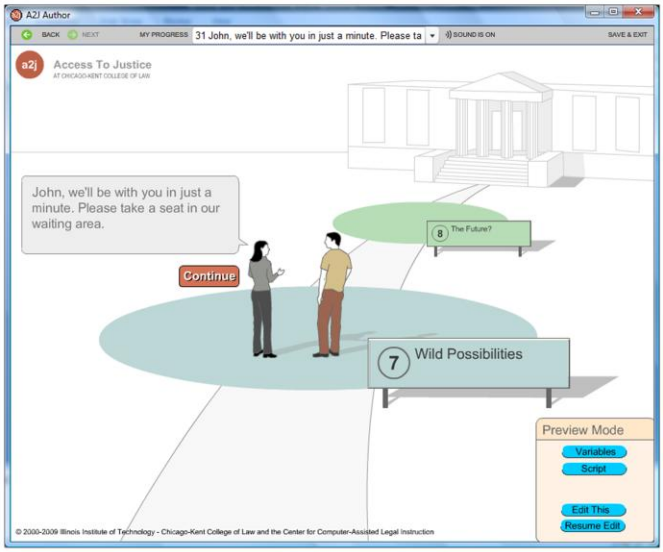
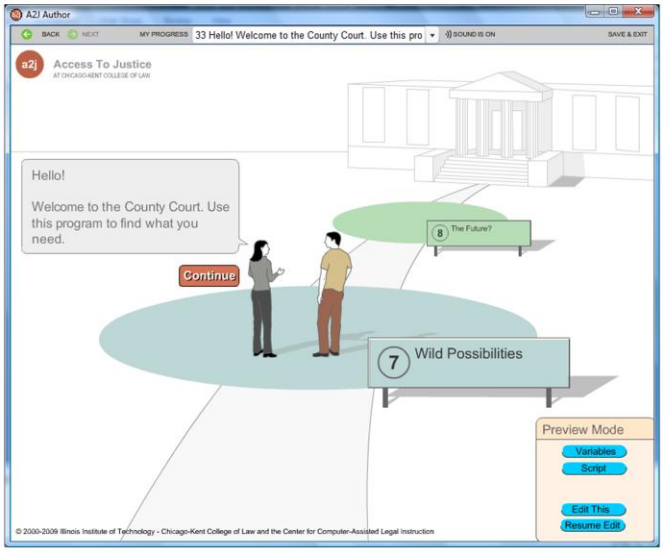


Wild Possibilities: Court Lobby Kiosk



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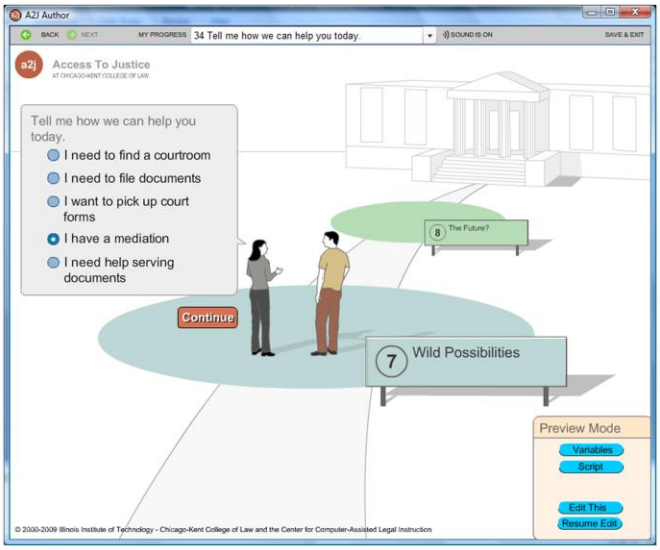

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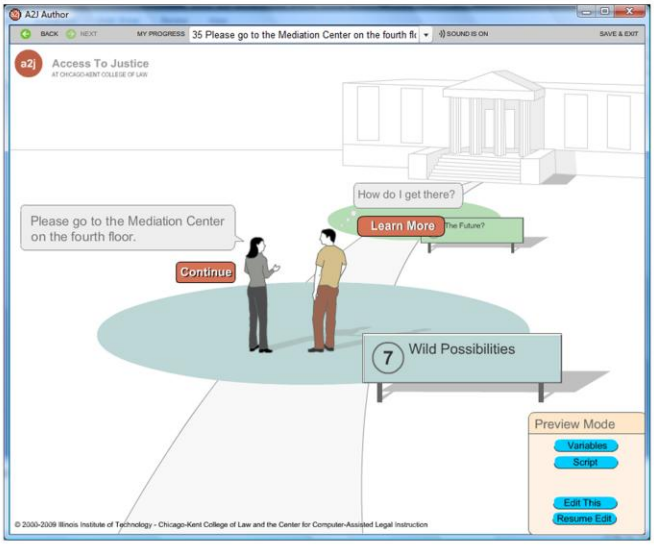
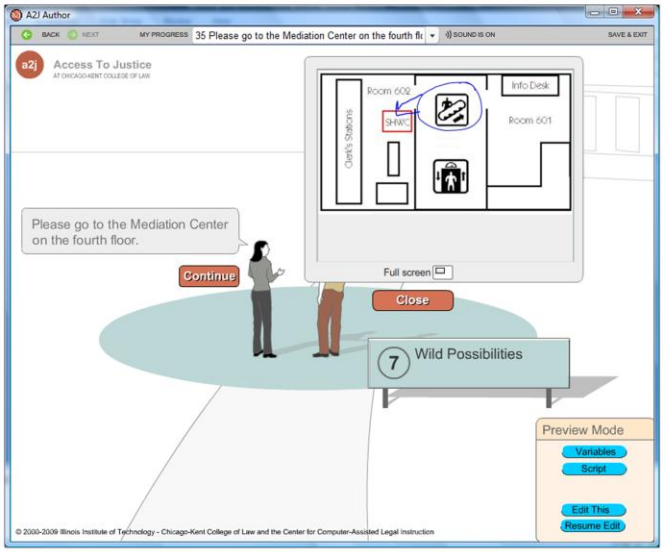
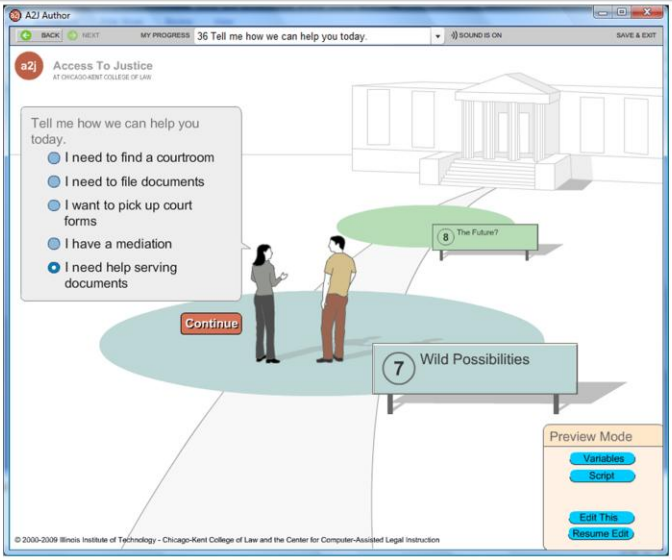


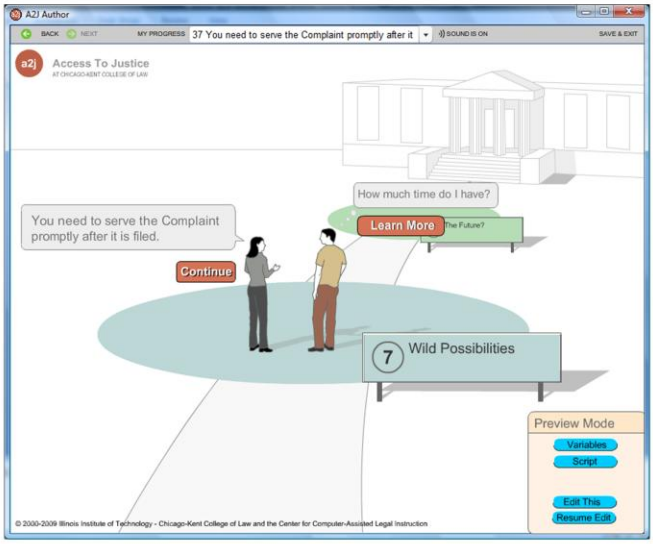
Wild Possibilities: Court Lobby Kiosk



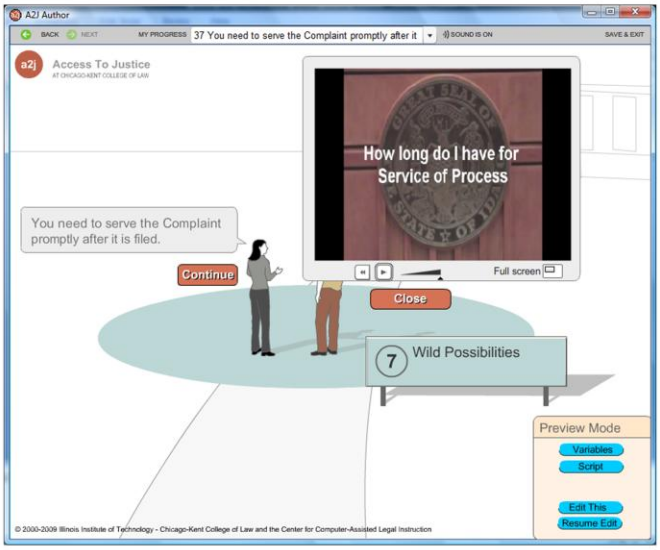
Wild Possibilities: Court Lobby Kiosk



Wild Possibilities: Court Lobby Kiosk

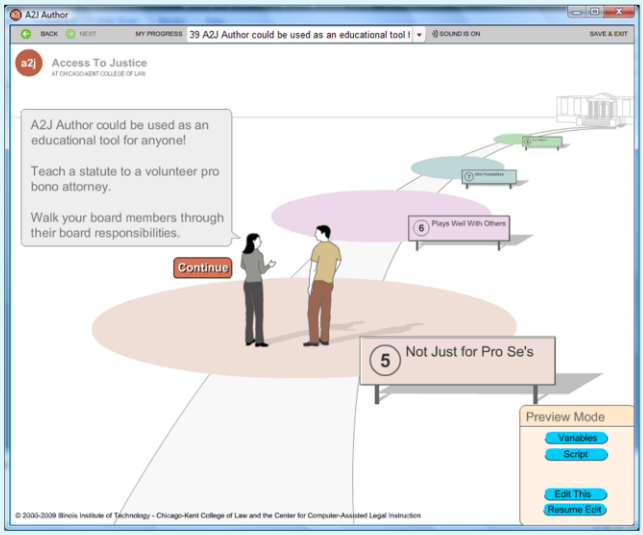


Wild Possibilities: Court Lobby Kiosk



Not Just For Pro Se's

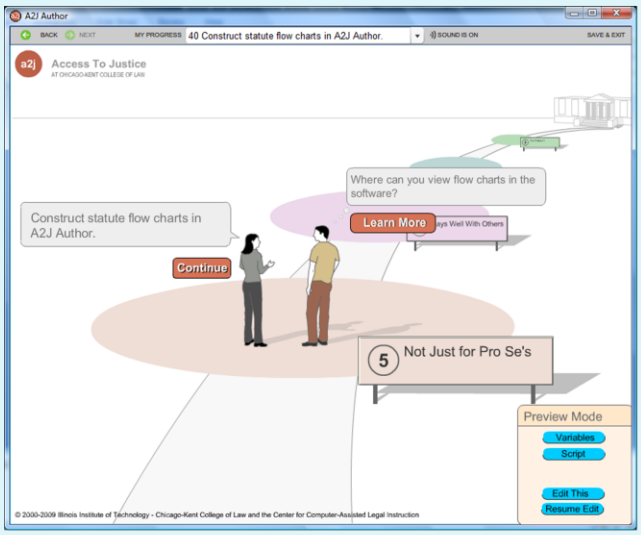
A2J Author can be used for a variety of training or tutorial needs.



Not Just For Pro Se's

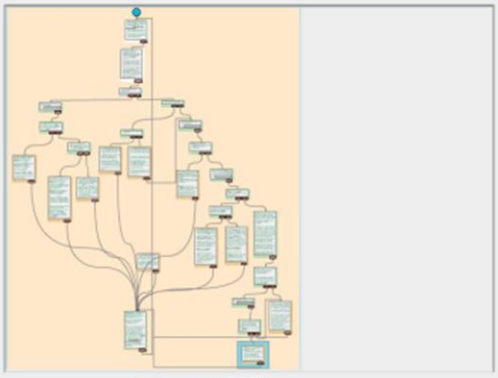
One unique feature of A2J Author is the ability to create flowcharts on the back-end.

These flow charts typically used to simply provide the author with a visual "map" of what they have programmed, may also be printed up and used for reference.



Not Just For Pro Se's

Example Flowchart.

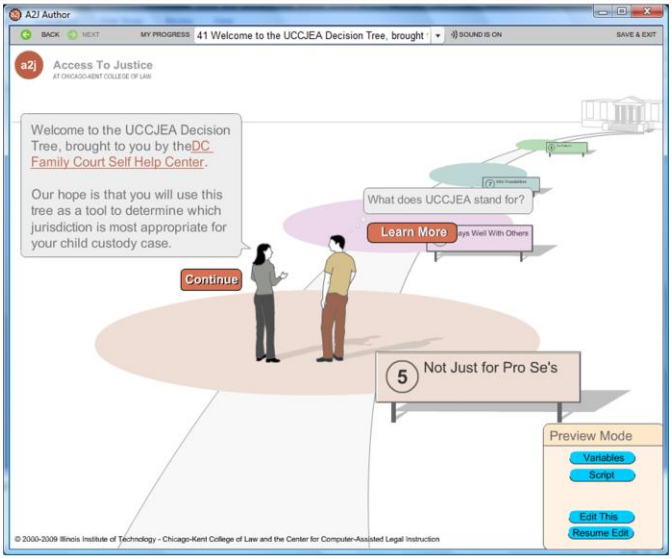


Full screen

A2J Guided Interview for UCCJEA

All interviews have a flowchart view which can be viewed by authors and printed out.

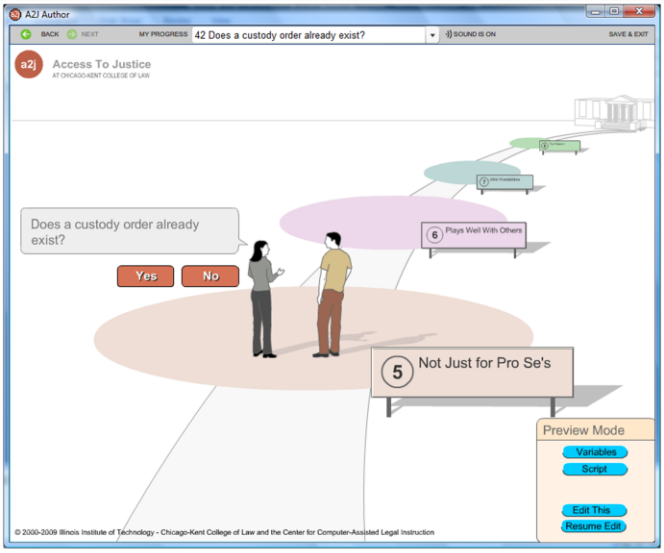
Not Just For Pro Se's: Example Statute Tutorial



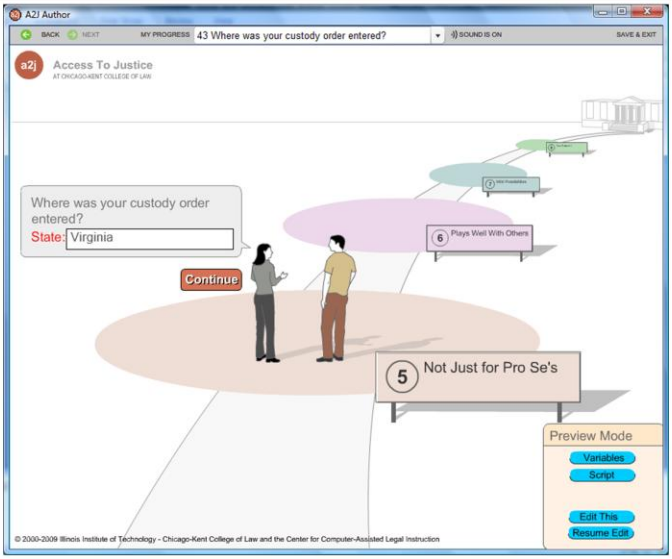
The screenshots shown for the "UCCJEA Decision Tree" statute tutorial are merely an example of what can be done to construct a tutorial and do not represent the entire tutorial.

(Please note that this is not a complete statute tutorial. It is only an example of how you might construct questions in A2J Author to create a tutorial to walk someone through a statute.)

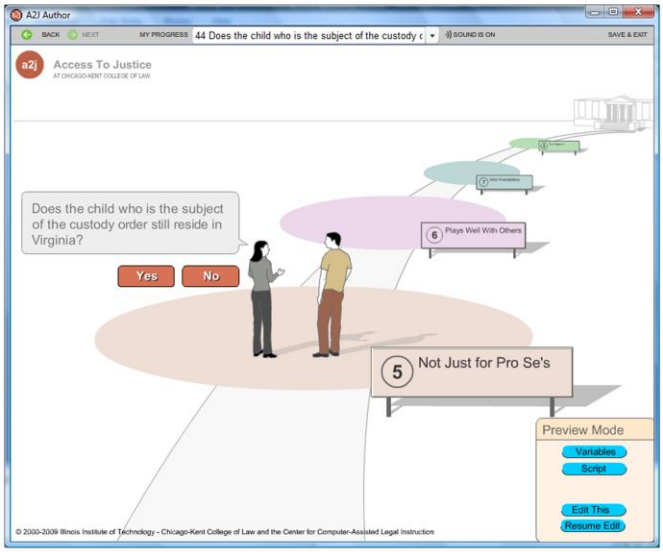
Not Just For Pro Se's: Example Statute Tutorial



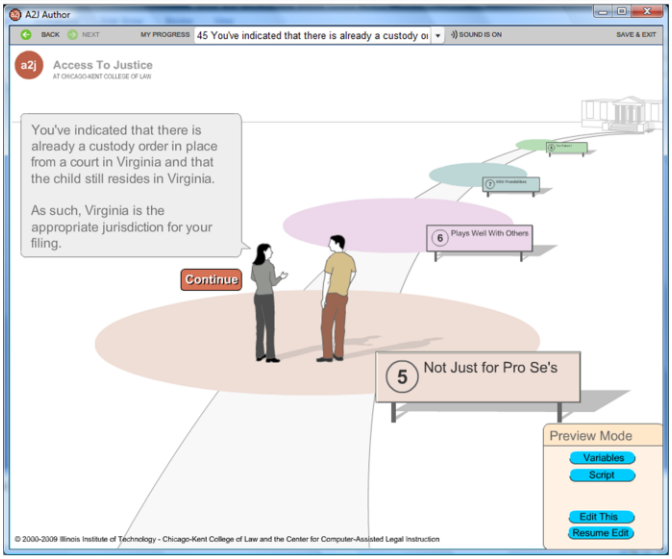
Not Just For Pro Se's: Example Statute Tutorial



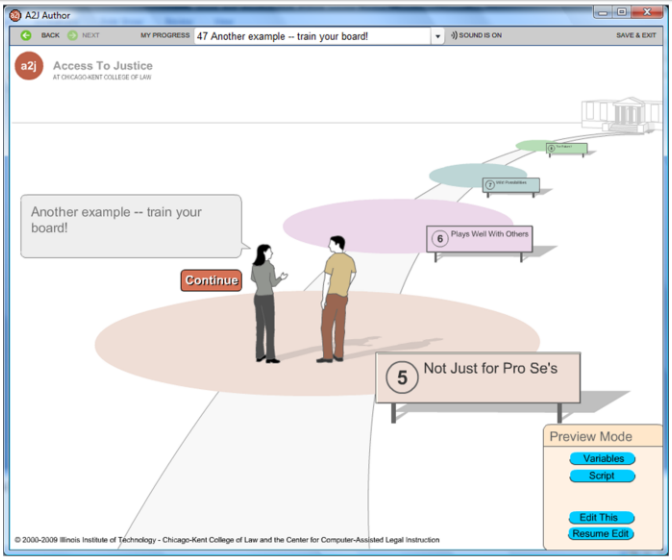
Not Just For Pro Se's: Example Statute Tutorial



Not Just For Pro Se's: Example Statute Tutorial

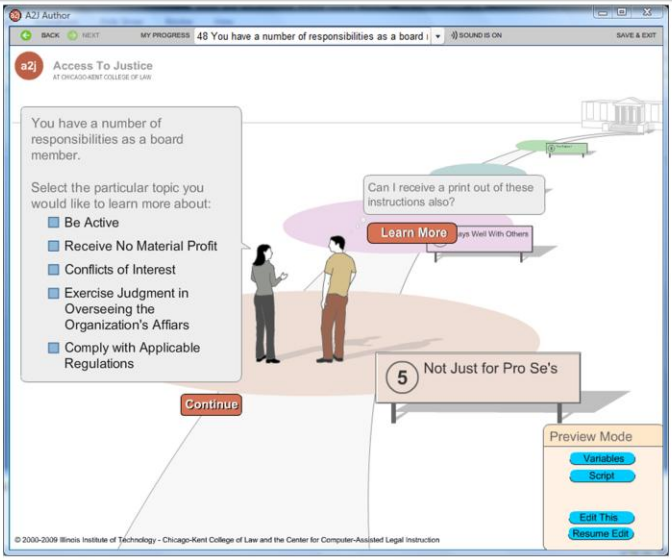


Not Just For Pro Se's: Example Board FAQs

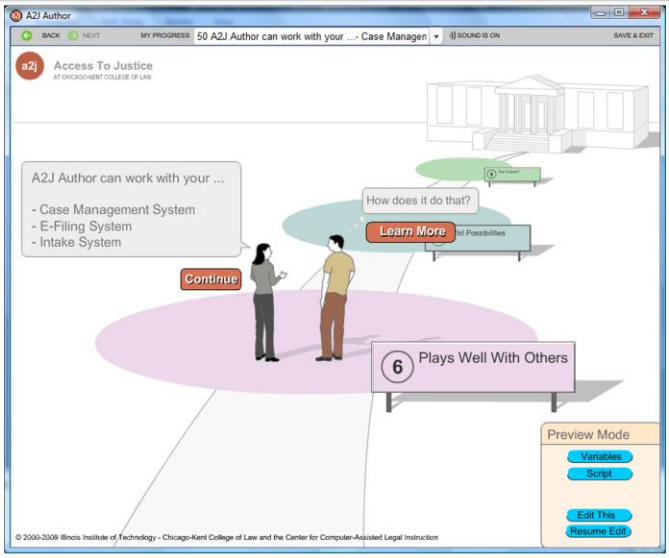


You can teach an old dog new tricks. Use A2J Author to construct a series of Frequently Asked Questions for your board so that they can refresh their memory as to their board duties.

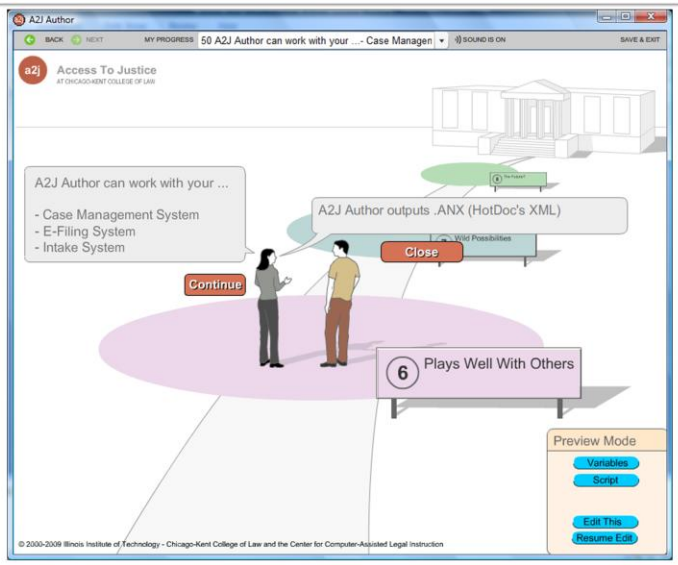
Not Just For Pro Se's: Example Board FAQs



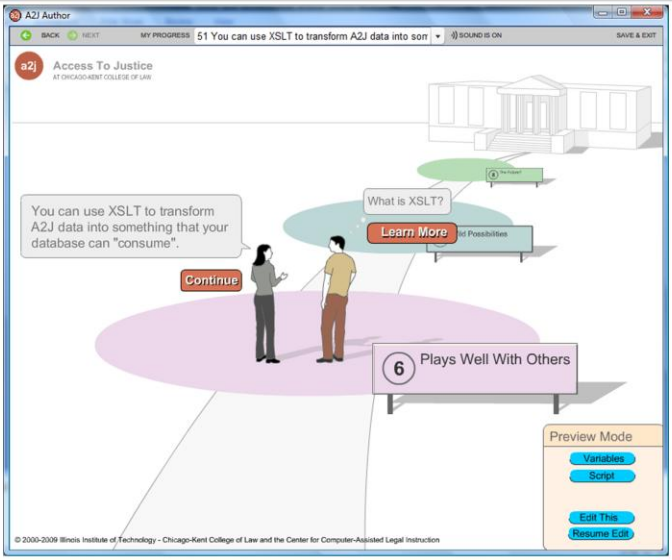
Plays Well With Others



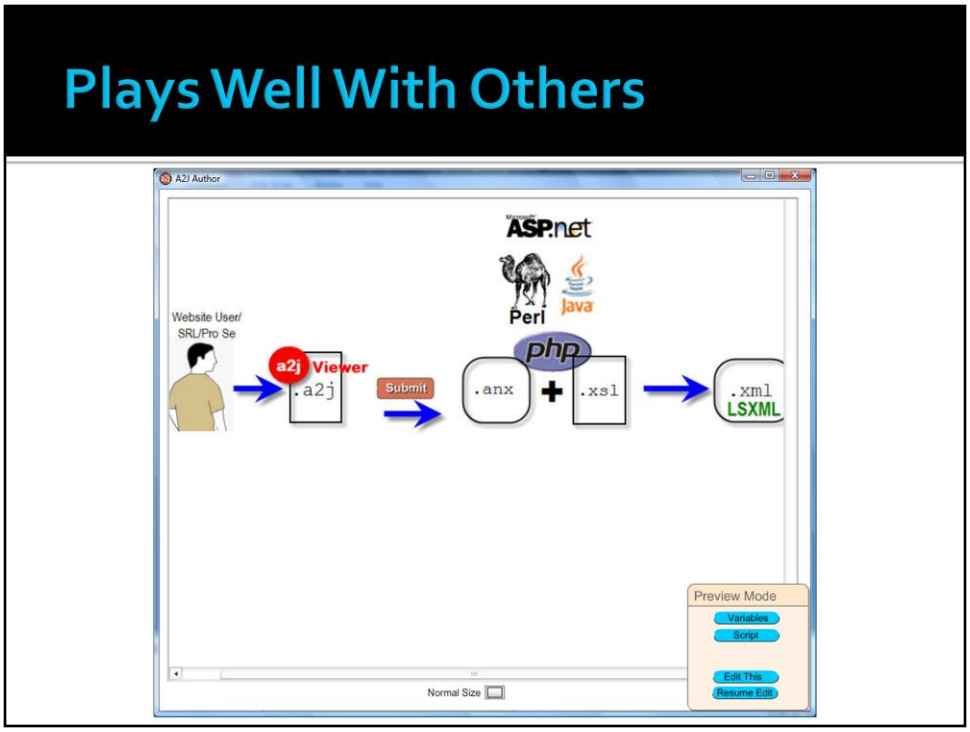
Plays Well With Others



Plays Well With Others

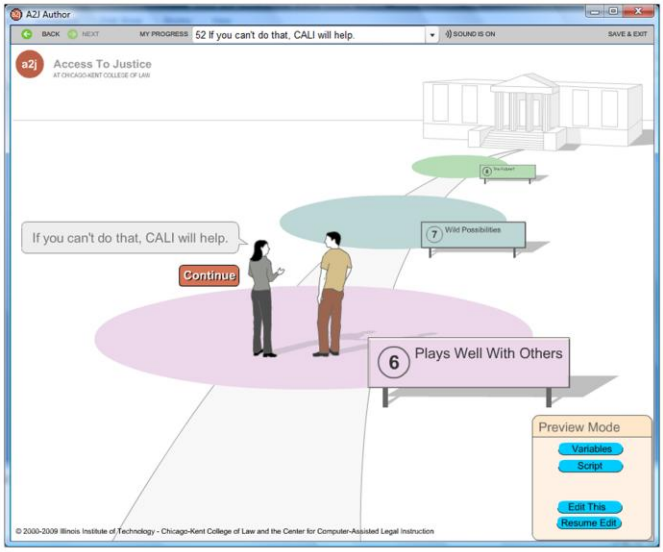


John Mayer at CALI (jmayer@cali.org) is willing to work with qualified organizations to help them integrate A2J Author into their case management, efiling or web-based systems.

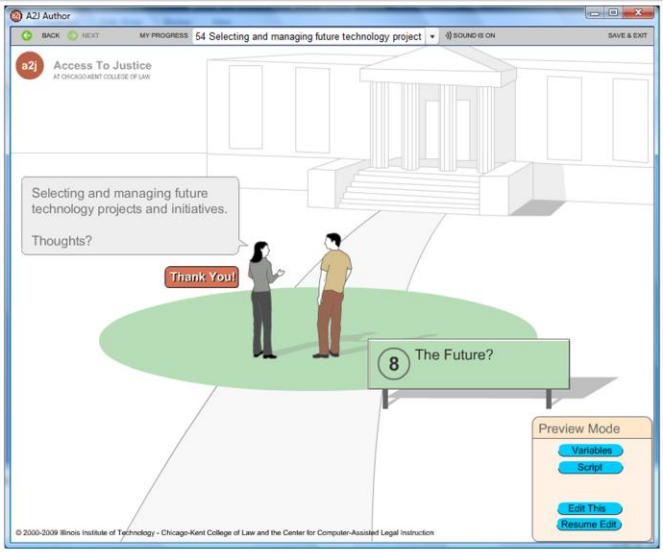


The output if A2J Author is XML which can be transformed into other XML, CSV or other text-based formats that can be imported into many database systems using XSL Transforms. Sample transforms can be found at a2jauthor.org.

Plays Well With Others



How Can You Achieve Justice Through A2J Author®?



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Rachel R. Medina rachel@lsntap.org

Download A2J Author & the A2J Author Starter-Kit from www.a2jauthor.org Select "Getting Started"

Not Just a Pretty Interface: A2J Author® Is Changing The Way We Achieve Justice Through Technology

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