

# Chicago Daily Law Bulletin®

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## Building the foundation for a successful solo practice

Whether you are a recent graduate or experienced counsel seeking new challenges, starting your own litigation firm can be a rewarding career choice. The prospect of hanging out your shingle may seem daunting at first, but do not despair. Now more than ever, the sole practitioner plays a vital role in the legal landscape. Smart choices can help you build a thriving practice with long-term success. So take a deep breath and dig in.

Office space and stationery — economize, but don't skimp. Virtual offices have their place, but choosing appropriate office space remains a crucial core decision for the sole practitioner. Make your office a place where you are proud to meet and plan case strategies with clients, take depositions and confer with colleagues.

Office sharing arrangements can fit the bill, but with the expansion of office-use condominiums, a reasonably priced space can meet your needs, make you the sole attraction and build equity in the process. And though e-mails are daily fare for routine communications, formal correspondence with clients, counsel and others sets the tone for your practice.

Put some thought into choosing your letterhead. Pick a strong font and a decent quality paper and remember to keep it simple. Fancy, vertical lettering is difficult to read, while logos and colored

backgrounds turn into toner-wasting blobs when copied or scanned. With online printing services, professional letterhead is easily attainable.

Master effective legal writing. Writing persuasively is the lifeblood of any litigation firm, small or large. Motions are increasingly decided on the papers, without oral argument, and the courts are handling a growing number of cases. Judges have no time to speculate on your arguments, bridge gaps in logic or research cases on your behalf.

Become a fluent, confident and disciplined draftsman. Learn to write simple, well-constructed sentences that form tight paragraphs, which in turn present organized arguments. Make your legal citations accurate and concise and eliminate unnecessary facts.

A brief should "pull" the reader through, in logical progression, and make inescapable the conclusions reached. Keep copies (actual or virtual) of "The Elements of

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Style" and "The Bluebook" nearby and check out some U.S. Supreme Court briefs on the American Bar Association website. Become a compelling legal writer by forming good habits and enjoy your success for years to come.

Make technology work for you.

### SOLE SPEAK



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Recent advancements make the sole practitioner more competitive in the litigation arena than ever. Having access to an online legal database is a must.

Although there are less expensive alternatives, Westlaw and Lexis offer robust packages to sole practitioners at reasonable cost and are well worth the investment.

Choose accounting, billing and calendar/conflicts software packages that are integrated and offer single-user licenses, and make sure your billing program includes the e-bill formats now required by some clients, such as Legal Electronic Data Exchange Standard, or LEDES.

Better yet, consider fully integrated packages, offered by companies such as MyCase, billed on per-attorney basis. Lastly, check out the free Google Voice service

for your phone. Your clients will be able to reach you anywhere, and voice mails can be transcribed and e-mailed or texted to your cellphone. Make good software choices now and reap the rewards going forward.

Market to your strengths. Effective marketing is crucial to your new practice. Make yourself visible through your own website and blog. Most Internet service providers' play well with free Wordpress software, which will allow you to prepare a state-of-the-art online presence. Visibility also is achieved through pro bono work, membership in legal organizations and volunteer service on public and private boards.

Groups are always looking for speakers. Research a topic of interest and give a lecture. Meet new colleagues and gain experience by serving as an arbitrator for mandatory court arbitration, as soon as you are eligible. And instead of scarfing a sandwich at your desk, keep in touch with colleagues and friends over lunch. There is no single path to successful marketing, but if you put in the effort, you will see the results.

Alternative fee arrangements are becoming more popular with clients, and the sole practitioner is particularly suited to take advantage of this trend. Make prospective clients aware you will consider alternative billing proposals. Be creative and adaptable with your fees. With a flexible fee structure, you will encounter more opportunities.

Good luck with your new and exciting endeavor. It should be a fun ride.