



OFFICE IN A FLASH

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CHAPTER 2: OFFICE LOGISTICS

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The look and feel of your office and office materials will set the tone for your business. It is important to take some time at the beginning to think about location, furniture, signage, and print and office materials.

Location, Location, Location

Office location for solo practitioners is crucial. This decision of where to office is based on affordability as well as visibility. If you are lucky, you can get an office at an affordable rate that not only lets you walk over to the courthouse and file, but lets prospective clients walk out of the courthouse and into your office. However, a downtown office will not always be in the budget. In that event, look for an office that has good parking, is easy for clients to locate, and can be seen from the road. Easy to locate offices can make a difference between getting a paying client and remaining at the mercy of court appointments.

Office Feng Shui

Whether you have a one room office or several rooms that allow for a secretary and reception area, furniture placement is more important than you think. If you want someone to hand over their hard earned money for your services, make your office comfortable and inviting. Spend the time to purchase or lease comfortable chairs and a couch or loveseat for overflow. Your desk should be large enough that you are not peering over your computer during a consultation, but not so imposing that the client feels a world away from you. Everything you need should be arm's length from your desk chair. The phone should be located on your left and a notepad on your right.

Filing cabinets and shelving are a must. Large stacks of files on your desk will not appear professional. Filing cabinets are key to keeping your files organized and easy to find. And, if you haven't sold back all your textbooks, keep a few on your shelves for the occasional reference. They will add a professional look to your office and will remind you how much time and effort you put into being a lawyer.

Put Your Name In Lights

Your signage and print materials are critical to sending a cohesive message about what you are offering to the public. Think about how you want your business card and other print materials to look. Paper should be the best quality you can afford. If you know someone in the marketing/graphic artist industry, consider a barter arrangement. A few hours of their time will make your brand much more cohesive and creative. Regardless, you need a professional looking



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business card and letterhead. You will find that your business card will frequently become a conversation starter – you want it to look good. Although you must print business cards, you do not necessarily have to print letterhead. You can print your header on good bond paper and create your own letterhead on your office computer and printer.

When considering signage, your name needs to be very visible to the occasional observer. Always include your phone number on the sign. Advertising doesn't just come from the phone book or Google, but also your neighboring business owners, friends, and family. So in designing your sign, bigger is always better. Remember, there are specific rules governing advertising and print materials. *See* http://texasbar.com/AM/Template.cfm?Section=Advertising_Review (visited on August 31, 2010). Be sure to consult those rules and obtain any necessary approval from the State Bar prior to spending valuable resources.

Mailbox Rules

Communication through regular mail is not only required by statute in many instances, but is important in keeping your clients fully informed. If you are in a new town or just not familiar with the postman in your area, take the time to introduce yourself. If you treat them with courtesy and respect, they will do the same. With respect to mail delivery and pick up, most postmen are on a tight schedule, so put your mail in one place so that they can come in and out without interrupting an important client conference. Lastly, for an attorney on the go, invest in a mail slot for your door.

Instead of running to the post office each time you need a certified mail/return receipt, keep the materials on hand so you can put the tracking number on the letter when you print it out. In addition, take the time to investigate services such as a re-loadable postage printing machine or stamps.com where you can print postage directly from your computer and save costly and time consuming trips to the post office.

Office Supply Basics

Starting an office requires trips to the office supply store for the most basic items. The list below is not all inclusive, but a new attorney on a budget can function adequately with the items below:

- Blue pens in order to identify your original easily;
- notepads, paper, file folders;
- bond paper and draft paper;
- colored labels to color code files, calculator, card holders, stapler, staple remover, staples;
- large and small post-it notes, large and small envelopes, stamps, paperclips and clips;
- two-hole punch, brackets, envelope labels, and a receipt book.



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And, if you still have the timer you used during the Bar, keep it on hand to get an idea of where your time is going during calls, meetings, and consultations. Finally, no matter what kind of law you practice, clients will bring their kids with them; so, keep a supply of crayons or colored pencils handy.

Ten Tips for Working from Home

1. Dress appropriately, at least during your regular office hours, and have your staff dress "for the office." You never know who will drop in so don't get caught answering the door in pajamas.
2. Keep regular office hours. Having a regular schedule will be useful to both you and your clients. Having an office at home doesn't mean that you're on call 24 hours a day. Make sure that whoever answers your phone at home does so professionally every time.
3. Keep household noises to a minimum. Background noise from the laundry room, kitchen, lawnmower, dog barking, or television may suggest that you may not be serious about your work or commitment to your clients. If background noise is unavoidable, invest in a sound machine or music that will mask the noise.
4. Keep your home life separate from your office life. Keep the TV out of your office. Only use your office area at home for work. It is important that your loved ones understand the importance of maintaining a regular schedule, work hours, and proper boundaries. Make special plans for children and child care to prevent those types of interruptions.
5. Meet your clients outside of your home. If necessary, use another lawyer's conference room, meet at the client's office, or find another more public meeting space.
6. If possible, have a separate entrance from the outside to your home office. If you cannot have a separate entrance, keep the pathway from your front door to the home office as direct as possible.
7. When you're not working, stay out of the office. Do not enter your office unless you have a legitimate purpose in being there; otherwise, you may never mentally leave the office.
8. Come out for air occasionally. If you have an "office practice," it's easy to get nearly everything done without ever leaving. Make an effort to get out -- even if it's for coffee with other lawyers. Don't become a hermit. Be sure to schedule



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regular breaks for mental and physical health and take time to connect regularly with colleagues and clients and professional development.

9. Read about others' home offices – "self-employed professional" and "home office computing" magazines are great resources. In addition, speak to others who have home offices. What works in another field can certainly work the same for lawyers. Also, consider signing up for a mailing list such as the American Bar Association's "ABA's Solosez" for solo lawyers at <http://new.abanet.org/divisions/genpractice/solosez/Pages/default.aspx>.
10. Identify a place to receive payment. Clients may be more likely to pay you at the "office" than at another meeting place. Also, make sure you have a space and plan for receiving client payments (*i.e.*, receipt book, appropriate change, etc).