



OFFICE IN A FLASH

Presented by the Texas Young Lawyers Association

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CHAPTER 3: TECHNOLOGY

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FREE LEGAL RESEARCH AND RESOURCES

As a member of the State Bar of Texas and the Texas Young Lawyers Association, you have access to many resources that will help start your own firm, build your practice, and minimize costs.

State Bar of Texas Resources

The State Bar of Texas website, www.texasbar.com, offers free online research. Members have access to Texas cases, statutes, session laws, court rules, attorney general opinions, administrative codes, and even the municipal codes for the largest cities in Texas (Austin, Dallas, Fort Worth, Houston, and San Antonio). Attorneys can also search for federal cases and certain federal statutes, regulations, court rules, and public laws. In addition, attorneys can search for cases and statutes in other states.

The website also offers a central location for materials and resources that will help attorneys manage their law practice. The Law Practice Management Program, <http://www.texasbarcle.com/CLE/LMHome.asp>, includes a free database of peer-reviewed material to assist you in starting your own practice. Other available resources include many “how to” brochures on topics ranging from setting your billing rates and establishing client trust accounts to implementing a law office business plan. In addition, the State Bar periodically offers free online CLE courses and articles from the TexasBarCLE library and free access to online classes and materials for TexasBarCLE courses that a member previously attended.

TYLA Resources

The TYLA website, www.tyla.org contains many free resources for young lawyers who are looking to start their own practice including *Ten Minute Mentor*, *Survival Guide*, and *Justice 101: The Client’s Guide to Litigation*. *Ten Minute Mentor* is an online collection of video presentations from some of the top lawyers in the State in their respective areas of expertise. Each presentation is 10 minutes or less and is free. The videos can also be accessed at www.tenminutementor.com. The TYLA *Survival Guide* provides fundamental information to new lawyers including information about establishing your own practice. *Justice 101* is a 20 minute DVD providing an overview of the civil litigation process for clients unsophisticated in

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the litigation process. *Justice 101* is an excellent resource for solo and small firm practitioners to gain advice on managing client expectations.

CELL PHONE VS. LAND LINE

A busy lawyer on the go who has no staff to answer phones will want to have a cell phone. It may also be cost efficient to use a cell phone as your primary business phone. Having only a cell phone for your business phone, however, can create the temptation to answer the phone after hours or on the weekends. To avoid being on-call 24 hours a day, set your own boundaries for when you will answer the phone, even when you are away from the office. If you do have a land line, look into an answering service or answering machine. You may also want to consider call forwarding. Ideally, you should always maintain a business cell phone separate and apart from your personal cell phone.

E-MAIL ACCOUNTS

Choosing a good e-mail service provider is extremely important when starting your law firm. E-mail is a critical service that will likely be the medium through which you conduct the majority of your business. Selecting a bad e-mail service provider could result in missed emails and down time, which will make your business look less than credible to prospective clients and business associates.

When evaluating e-mail service providers, be sure to considering the following:

- What is the cost per user?
- What are the inbox storage limits?
- Does the service support push e-mail and syncing to mobile devices such as an iPhone?
- How many users can you add to the service?
- Are there attachment file size limitations?
- Does the e-mail service package share calendars for you and your partners or staff?
- Does the service allow you to use your own domain name?
- Does the service include spam/virus monitoring?
- Does the service provide up-time guarantees?
- Does the service archive and how?



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The first decision you need to make is whether you want your email address to be something like attorney.dave@yahoo.com or dave@davidsmith.net. Obtaining a personalized domain is essential to your presence on the internet. The biggest problem you may face is finding a domain that is not already in use. To obtain a domain name, visit a provider such as GoDaddy.com or Hover.com to search and register a domain.

One common mistake often made by small businesses is when they attempt to run and operate their own e-mail servers. This is an expensive and time intensive undertaking, which is discouraged given the wide availability of inexpensive hosted e-mail solutions.

One of the best e-mail providers at this time is Google. Through Google Apps, you can have Google host your e-mail at your personal domain. Depending on the version you select, the service is either free or charges a nominal yearly fee. Google Apps leverages the familiar GMail interface. Paid users get 25 gigabytes of online e-mail storage and the ability to send e-mail with up to 25 megabytes in attachments. Google Apps also features a calendar and to do lists which can be shared with other firm users. Both the calendar and to do lists are very feature rich and should accommodate even the most demanding of users.

Even if your e-mail is hosted by GMail, you do not have to use the website to read e-mail. For those of you who like to read and compose e-mail on a desktop application, Google Apps offers very tight integration with Microsoft Outlook and Mac Mail.

Additionally, through Google Sync, GMail/Google Apps includes the ability to push email, contacts and calendar to a wide variety of mobile devices such as Apple's iPhone, Google Android, and Rim's Blackberry. There are very detailed set up instructions on how to accomplish this set up on your mobile device at www.google.com/mobile/sync/.

ON-LINE FAXING

A fax machine is one of the most important items of equipment for your office. You will need a machine that can not only fax, but that will also copy and scan. Although most new lawyers will want to rely on e-mail, the reality is that most communication between attorneys and courts still occur by facsimile.

An alternative solution to a traditional fax machine in your office is an E-fax service. This is a service that replaces the need to purchase a fax machine or pay for an additional phone line. When a fax is sent to you, you will receive it by e-mail. Similarly, in order to send a fax, you will e-mail it to the company. However, many documents that need to be faxed are file stamped



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copies of motions or petitions. Thus, using E-fax may require you to purchase a scanner and will take additional time to scan and e-mail the document to an E-fax company. A new attorney must weigh the option of whether an E-Fax service will save you time or money or whether you should purchase an all-in-one fax, scan, and copy machine.

One additional concern with using E-fax is client confidentiality. While the companies promise privacy, by using the service you may be sending personal client information on the internet and trusting that the company sends it to the correct recipient. If you are interested in E-fax services, there are numerous companies you can look into including Efax, Metro, MyFax, Ring Central Fax, and Rapid Fax.

SCANNERS

A scanner can be invaluable in a new law office. It is one way to cut down on paper in your office by storing documents electronically. You should give consideration to going paperless for your file preservation system. However, the day-to-day work involved in preparing a criminal, family law or civil litigation case will require hard copies on hand. In addition, a scanner will be helpful when responding to lengthy discovery requests. A useful software item to have with your scanner is OCR ("Optical Character Recognition"). This software allows you to scan a discovery request, convert it to Word, and then respond without the need to re-type the entire document.

Scanners can range from \$60 to \$250. Because you will be purchasing several items for your office, you will want to keep costs down. As an alternative to adding yet another item on your credit card, some companies will allow you to finance the equipment. You may also want to look into purchasing everything at one time and taking advantage of first-time purchase discounts. Some examples of companies that will offer financing or good discounts include: Hewlett Packard and Quill. If you are willing to spend a bit more money, you should consider Fujitsu sheet fed desktop scanners, which scan double-sided pages in more than 30 pages a minute.

FILE SYNCING

An important consideration for any law firm is management of documents and digital information. Smaller firms often find that investing in a full featured document management system is outside the budget. Small firms should consider using the built-in tools of Microsoft Windows and/or Mac OS X for file management. Both operating systems allow the user to



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easily find documents via the integrated indexed search options. This allows the user to quickly find the desired information.

The next issue confronting new attorneys will be how to share documents with coworkers and staff. For firms that are not willing to invest in servers and file storage systems, a simple way to share documents is to set up shared folders. An added benefit of setting up shared folders is that the data is actually stored in two locations. If a work computer is stolen or destroyed, you have an up to date backup of your shared documents on another computer. Microsoft has a free service called Windows Live Sync that will allow you to set up shared folders between your computers. The shared folders are synced over the Internet and are kept up to date in real time.
