



# LAW PRACTICE START UP KIT

  
**Bizibody**  
Bizibody Technology Pte Ltd

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# INTRODUCTION

Small Practices in Singapore abound. Statistics compiled by the Law Society shows that the number of solo startups continues to increase every year despite the absolute decrease in the number of lawyers holding practicing certificates.

Solo and small practice owners everywhere tell us their primary motivation is to “*be their own masters*”. In addition to a deeper sense of ownership and purpose, they also testify how running their own practice is more rewarding and more fun!

After cutting your teeth in a large law firm, you may similarly experience the call to hang out your shingle; either by venturing out on your own or joining former colleagues in a venture which will enable you to do things *your way*. Unfortunately, while the initial years of practice experience may have honed your lawyering skills, practicing in a large law firm does not equip you to with the practical skills and experience of running a law practice.

This guide is aimed at helping lawyers navigate the practical issues of setting up and running their own practice. We call it THE LAW PRACTICE START-UP KIT as in it, we have provided action plans, checklists, resources, articles and sample templates – we hope it contains everything you need in order to start up, build and operate a successful, dynamic and progressive law practice.

Over the last seven years, we have enjoyed the privilege of helping our clients realise their dream of setting up and running their practices. We take this opportunity to thank them for their support and especially for sharing with us their experiences and valuable insights.

If there is ONE THING we can be sure of - it's that nothing ever stands still. As regulations and technology change with the times, we will be updating this Start-Up Kit so that it remains accurate and relevant. We warmly welcome feedback so that we can provide better service to you. Write to [info@bizibody.biz](mailto:info@bizibody.biz) or call Sylvia or Serena at 6236 2848

Good Luck!

The image shows two handwritten signatures in black ink. The signature on the left is 'Serena Lim' and the signature on the right is 'Sylvia Low'. Both are written in a cursive, flowing style.

Serena Lim & Sylvia Low  
Bizibody Technology  
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## CHAPTER 1      **Should I Be Starting a Law Practice?**

The difference between an employee and a business owner becomes apparent as soon as you embark on your own practice - the additional burdens of generating revenue, maintaining cash flow and actually running the business becomes as important as doing the legal work itself. Before you take the plunge, you need to decide whether you want to expend energy and time necessary to running a business and practice law at the same time or whether you'd be happier just practicing law.

Many lawyers have successfully made the transition from employee to business owner and are now enjoying the many benefits of successful business ownership. There is no reason why you should not join their ranks and carve out your own valuable niche in the ever growing legal services market.

Just be sure you truly understand what is required from a business owner; and you are prepared to devote time and energy to building it. The solo lawyer needs all the traits of an entrepreneur: motivation, perseverance, commitment and not adverse to risk-taking.

A good approach to finding out if you have what it takes is to do a SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) on yourself. Any such analysis will, to some extent, be subjective. Nevertheless it will help you decide what you want to be, what you want to do and how you want to do it.



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### Thinking Cap:

1. **Examine your motivations and aspirations** - will they be served by starting your own practice or do you simply want a change of employer? Better working hours? More interesting work?
2. **Do you have what it takes to be a business owner?** Conduct a SWOT Analysis on yourself. Read Bizilaw Article: Do You Have What It takes to be a Business Owner?
3. **Examine your financial position** - Do you have money in the bank? At least enough to tide you through the initial six to eight months of your startup.
4. **Do you have clients who will come with you?**



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### Action Plan:

1. Consult your professional network; speak to friends who are running their own practice; consider your immediate family and their needs - are they supportive?
2. Consider your finances. Most startups have money in the bank for for the initial four to six months without any income. Prepare a realistic budget, and secure a line of credit from your bank while you are still employed. Anticipate working longer hours for less money, at least in the initial years.

3. Read this Guide which highlights some of the responsibilities you will be taking on and decisions that need to be made as a business owner - such as finding office space; deciding on the type of business entity and complying with registration procedures; setting up your office and the technology infrastructure; engaging legal support staff.
4. Make a list of all your prospective clients and divide them into those who will come with you, those who are unlikely to and those in the middle who will require persuasion. Have realistic expectations of clients on your list that you think will come with you. Will you have enough clients to keep your business operating? If not, you will need a marketing plan and sufficient commitment to carrying it out.



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### Resources:

Bizilaw Article: Do You Have What It Takes to be a Business Owner?

<http://www.myshingle.com/>

Blog of noted small practice and solo expert Carol Elefant includes articles on virtually every aspect of starting and running a solo or small firm practice

<http://www.expertlaw.com/library/practicemanagement/startingpractice.html>

Article listing issues lawyers must confront when considering starting their own practice

<http://www.msba.org/departments/commpubl/publications/barbult/2003/april03/solo.htm>

Ten questions to ask when starting a law firm, from the Maryland State Bar

<http://wiselaw.blogspot.com/2007/02/starting-law-firm.html>

In-depth blog post about starting a practice, including aspects related to planning, choosing practice area, initial expenses, technology issues, administrative issues.

<http://startingalawfirm.blogspot.com/>

Blog by Jim McLovin on Starting a Solo Practice

### Books

“Flying Solo: A Survival Guide for the Solo and Small Firm Lawyer” by Gary A. Munneke

“Solo by Choice” by Carolyn Elefant

## CHAPTER 2      **Generalist v Specialist: Selecting a Practice Area**

One of the first things a solo practitioner must address is whether to specialize in a particular field of law. Historically, and especially in Singapore, solos have felt the need to engage in the "bread and butter" stuff of legal practice in order to keep the cash flow going. For many solos, the mix and diversity of their client base requires them to be able to turn their hand with ease to such diverse areas including litigation, divorce, commercial law and conveyancing.

The advantage of being a specialised lawyer is that you can become recognized as an expert in your field. Your skills in your selected area will be more highly valued by the market place. However, moving out of your specialised area can be difficult and; for solos, providing advice on legal issues if the matter moves in a different direction may be problematic.

The advantage of being a generalist is that you will be able to handle work for a varied client base and you have less opportunity to get bored as each new case will bring new challenges. A generalist will develop excellent all-round legal skills and be able to handle most matters from start to finish - no matter what direction the matter takes. However, a generalist may find it hard to compete against a specialist either as an opponent or in marketing your services.

In today's business environment, a number of factors make general practice economically less appealing than a specialist practice. Read Bizibody Article "Generalists V Specialists" to find out why.



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### **Thinking Cap:**

Choosing a practice area is an exercise in finding the place where your talent, passion and market demand intersect. This is much easier contemplated than realized. In a world that is less than ideal, there may be several other factors to consider, such as -

- 1. What Is Your Passion? Where Do Your Strengths lie?** A specialist may earn more while the specialism lasts, a generalist may have a more interesting time although you shouldn't underestimate the attraction and satisfaction in knowing one subject really well.
- 2. Is there a specialist niche that is big enough to support your desired income?** There is no point specialising if the market is not large enough, or will not value those particular skills sufficiently to pay the fees you command.
- 3. Do you have a ready Clientele to support your practice? Is your Clientele ready to engage a Solo?** If your client is a corporation, they may not be prepared to engage a solo even if you are competent to meet their legal needs as well as any large full-service practice.
- 4. Do you have the resources to meet your clients needs?** If you have a specialty in process oriented practice where a large team of legal support staff participate in servicing the client, you may have the legal competence but not the resources to deliver the legal service with the same degree of efficiency and profitability.

5. **Can you reach prospective customers with credibility?** Consider the size of your potential client base when you start a practice with limited resources for marketing. Unlike a firm with a large marketing budget to support glossy marketing brochures and an entertainment budget, you may have to scale back expectations for generating new business until you can bring some resources to your marketing efforts.
  
6. **Are the market conditions ripe for this specialisation?** Many areas of specialist practice are impacted by cyclical market conditions, and sensitive to regulatory environment and other factors beyond your control. If you leap out on your own during a down cycle, you have to be prepared to face lean times ahead.



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**Action Plan:**

1. **Self Examination** - Find the intersection between what your passion, your strengths and the market demand.
  
2. **Conduct Market Research** - Find out if there is a demand for the specialist practice in the market place.



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**Resources:**

<http://www.lawcrossing.com/article/index.php?id=76>  
Article from Law Crossing on how to select a practice area

<http://www.abanet.org/lpm/lpt/articles/bkr01091.shtml>  
An excerpt from Flying Solo: A Survival Guide for the Solo and Small Firm Lawyer by Gary Munneke, former chair of the ABA's Law Practice Management Section

[http://www.abanet.org/genpractice/magazine/2009/apr\\_may/pickens.html](http://www.abanet.org/genpractice/magazine/2009/apr_may/pickens.html)  
Jamie Campbell Pickens, a sole practitioner in Ohio explains why he decided to forgo general practice to specialise in probate and trust work.

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## **CHAPTER 3      Do I Need A Business Plan?**

A business plan is a road map for your new practice. The milestones to a successful and profitable law practice should be planned on paper well before you open your doors (and for those who are already in practice – there is no time like the present for a makeover). It precisely defines your business, identifies your goals, and serves as your firm's resume.

### **What is a Law Practice Business Plan and What Does It Contain?**

It is a concise and organized summary of how you intend to start and remain in business. It is composed of four main areas: a general description of your business, your financial plan, your management plan, and your marketing plan.

### **Why Do You Need a Business Plan?**

It is an old adage that what gets measured gets done: If you have set out straightforward goals and expectations to be met within a reasonable timeline, you will be able to judge for yourself if you are meeting, exceeding or falling behind your goals.

It helps you allocate resources properly and make sound business decisions. A business plan tells your banker, suppliers and other parties that you have done the necessary homework to launch or reinvigorate your practice.

### **Your Budget / Financial Forecast**

Be precise, especially in the finances or budget part of the Business Plan. Managing your cash flow will be a huge part of running your business to stay in business!

Your budget should include all expenses that you know of and/or can anticipate, and when they must be paid. Include an amount for unexpected expenses, since it is Murphy's Law that costs will always be greater than you expect, particularly as the volume of work increases.

Build in marketing time and expenses. Most of all, build in your draw: If you don't look after yourself, no one else will. Compare the total expenses to your anticipated revenue. If you do not have an historical basis to forecast income, make an educated estimate based on your marketing plan.

### **How to Write a Business Plan**

Articles on how to write a business plan abound on the internet. For a solo lawyer, we think that the most important elements of a business plan for your new practice concerns market positioning and cash flow. Make the plan as specific as possible, with discrete implementation steps and sound, rational approaches.

### **In your business plan, address the four key questions –**

- A.** What type of service will your practice provide?
- B.** Who are the potential clients for your service and why will they engage you?
- C.** How will you reach your potential customers?
- D.** Where will you get the financial resources to start your practice?





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### Thinking Cap:

1. Spend Time on Self-Examination: What are your strengths? Who are your existing clients? What access to financial resources do you have?
2. Consider how you can best utilize your strengths to take certain steps and achieve various goals.
3. What are your goals and objectives? Use your business goals as a check as you write and develop your plan
4. Consider timelines and milestones; as well as a way to monitor and measure progress



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### Action Plan:

1. Review free Business Plan templates available on the internet to get you started (see Resources)
2. Read Business Planning articles (see Resources) so you can create a realistic and useful income, expense and profit projection
3. Conduct or purchase relevant research on the market for the services you plan to provide
4. Consult a business strategist on your Business Plan



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### Resources:

<http://www.sba.gov/smallbusinessplanner/index.html>

Resources from the Small Business Administration to help write a business plan

<http://www.whittierlegal.com/archives/issuefebmar03.html>

Whittier Legal Consulting explains what should go into a business plan for lawyers

<http://www.practicepro.ca/practice/financesbookletprecedents.asp>

A detailed outline of what should be included in a business plan.

<http://www.practicepro.ca/practice/financesbookletprecedents.asp>

A sample budget spreadsheet which you can use as a starting template.

[http://www.lawbiz.com/aba\\_bus\\_comp.html](http://www.lawbiz.com/aba_bus_comp.html)

A 30-minute A to Z basics for managing and running a successful law business.

<http://startingalawfirm.blogspot.com/2008/08/starting-law-firm-drafting-business.html>

Advice from the "Starting a Law Firm" Blog on how to write a law firm business plan.

<http://www.abanet.org/lpm/lpt/articles/mtt08041.html>

Advice from the American Bar Association on maintaining positive cash flow in a small practice.

## CHAPTER 4 Start Up Registration & Compliance

To start up and operate a law practice, you will need to comply with the relevant Legal Profession Rules governing legal practice in Singapore. You will also need to register a business entity with ACRA. In Singapore, you may practice as a sole proprietorship or general partnership; a limited liability partnership (LLP) or a limited liability corporation (LLC).

The best place to start finding out about your compliance obligations is the Law Society of Singapore at <http://www.lawsociety.org.sg>

The relevant links on the Law Society websites are –

Starting A Law Practice -

[http://www.lawsociety.org.sg/running\\_practice/starting\\_practice/Default.aspx](http://www.lawsociety.org.sg/running_practice/starting_practice/Default.aspx)

Procedures –

[http://www.lawsociety.org.sg/running\\_practice/starting\\_practice/compliance\\_matter.aspx](http://www.lawsociety.org.sg/running_practice/starting_practice/compliance_matter.aspx)

Legislation & Rules -

[http://www.lawsociety.org.sg/running\\_practice/starting\\_practice/relevant\\_rules.aspx](http://www.lawsociety.org.sg/running_practice/starting_practice/relevant_rules.aspx)

We have also included a “**NEW PRACTICE STARTUP CHECKLIST**” which sets out the action plan from inception to launch; and a “**REGULATIONS & COMPLIANCE**” table which sets out the regulatory requirements for new practices.

You can use action plan as your "project schedule" to ensure that you have **allowed sufficient time** for the Law Society and ACRA to approve your application at various stages of the registration process.

If you run into difficulties, note that Bizibody offers FREE Start-Up Consulting under the **Law Society Practice Consult Assistance Scheme**

[http://www.lawsociety.org.sg/LSS\\_TEST/membership/benefits/support\\_schemes/practice\\_consult.aspx](http://www.lawsociety.org.sg/LSS_TEST/membership/benefits/support_schemes/practice_consult.aspx).

We also undertake new practice start-up services from computers and copiers; to bookkeeping and website design. Our bookkeepers each has more than 15 years experience in law practice bookkeeping and they meet the qualifications of “Law Society Approved” under the SAR.

## NEW PRACTICE START UP CHECKLIST

DATE	TASK DESCRIPTION
<b>6 weeks before launch</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Finalise Name of Practice <input type="checkbox"/> Submit Law Society Application for Partnership, LLP or LLC <input type="checkbox"/> Confirm Premises; Order Renovations, Furniture, Cabling, Carpeting & Partitions
<b>5 weeks before launch</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Receive Approval of Name from Law Society <input type="checkbox"/> File Registration of Business / LLP / LLC with ACRA – this is done online. After the online form for registering the new business entity has been submitted, all other parties who are shareholders, directors or partners must log in using his/her SingPass to “endorse” the application before it becomes final. <input type="checkbox"/> Register Domain Name <input type="checkbox"/> Open Bank Account
<b>4 weeks before launch</b>  <b>(Technical &amp; Operational)</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Order Hardware Equipment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Server and Computers (desktops or notebooks)</li> <li>- Printer, Scanner, Fax, Copier</li> <li>- Telephones and PABX (or PhoneNet) if required</li> </ul> <input type="checkbox"/> Order Software Licenses <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Microsoft Office Suite</li> <li>- Practice Management or Accounting software</li> <li>- Document Management or Case Management software</li> </ul> <input type="checkbox"/> Confirm & Order 3Party services – <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Open Lawnet &amp; EFS accounts</li> <li>- Order Telephone &amp; Internet Services</li> <li>- LEAP Office Suite &amp; Bookkeeping Services</li> <li>- IT Infrastructure Setup Services</li> <li>- IT Maintenance and Support Services</li> <li>- Designer for Logo, Letterheads, Name Cards, Name Plate on Door</li> <li>- Website Development &amp; Other Collaterals</li> </ul> <input type="checkbox"/> If applying for LETAS or SIP Grant, submit Grant now
<b>4 weeks before launch</b>  <b>(Law Society Compliance)</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> If leaving current practice - send your clients notice of departure from current practice and start up of new practice <input type="checkbox"/> Wind-down current practice & handover preparations, including client consent to transfer of on-going matters. <input type="checkbox"/> If not in practice - Apply for Practising Certificate <input type="checkbox"/> If resigning as Partner or Director of current practice - Obtain Accountant’s Report <input type="checkbox"/> Make arrangements for 2 <sup>nd</sup> signatory; Engage Law Society approved bookkeeper <input type="checkbox"/> If not exempt - Register to attend the LPMC (Law Practice Management Course) and written undertaking if the course is not running at this time <input type="checkbox"/> Apply for Professional Indemnity Insurance Coverage

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1	
<b>10 days to 1 week before launch</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Renovations & Cabling completed <input type="checkbox"/> Depending on entity, file Law Society LF Form 2, LLP2 or LLC 2 Form <input type="checkbox"/> Notify Supreme Court of Change of Law Practice <input type="checkbox"/> Set Up Server + Workstations <input type="checkbox"/> Set Up and Test Phone Lines & Internet <input type="checkbox"/> Test Emails to each pop account <input type="checkbox"/> Install Practice Management Software & User Training <input type="checkbox"/> Install EFS software <input type="checkbox"/> Website GO-LIVE <input type="checkbox"/> Send NEW PRACTICE Notices to Clients and Contacts
<b>[ LAUNCH DATE ]</b>	<b>NEW LAW PRACTICE COMMENCES OPERATIONS</b>

## **CHAPTER 5      OFFICE SPACE – A PLACE TO CALL YOUR OWN**

### **Working from Home**

This is a very attractive option for a new law practice - as it will reduce your startup costs substantially. However consider carefully the practical implications. Will you be able to work (realistically) without interference from family members and other domestic interferences? Can your home accommodate the technology needs of a law practice? Where will you meet your clients? What sort of clients do you serve? The perception that you are "house-wife with a lawyering hobby" is one of the hardest obstacles that you will need to overcome. This is especially so in Singapore where the SOHO business culture is still new and relatively undeveloped. Your client might have reservations about the quality of service if they think that your law practice is not a "serious" professional undertaking.

### **Virtual Office**

A possible solution for overcoming prejudice against a SOHO office setup is to have a virtual office at a respectable business address. There are many service offices and corporate secretarial firms that provide this service for a small monthly fee. They will collect your mail for you and offer you meeting room facilities (which you must remember to book before each meeting with your client). Some corporate offices also offer a phone answering service. This minimal level of office services could work for some, but most lawyers will need a step up when their practice grows and they realise the inefficiencies of not having their own office space in which to conduct meetings.

If you are considering the viability of a virtual office - ask if this is actually conducive to the type of practice you want to run. Do you need regular space for meetings? Will you be hiring staff? Can you competently serve your clients if operating remotely?

### **Office Sharing Arrangements**

Another choice is to share office space with an existing firm or group of solo practitioners. The obvious benefit of such arrangement is defraying the cost of office infrastructure and equipment. You can even save staffing cost as certain roles (the receptionist, copy-typist, court clerk etc) can be shared amongst several law practices.

Despite the obvious benefits of a shared office, the fact that so few "sharing" arrangements exist in Singapore is testament to the fact that not all such arrangements work out! Practical considerations to take into the equation include - the willingness to expend time to administer the budget for shared expenses; to negotiate differences between sharers when they arise; even a willingness to defer to the majority in decisions on what brand of equipment; when to buy / upgrade / replace; whom to hire / when to hire... and other decisions.

Foremost, sharing arrangements should be transparent and sharers should agree beforehand on a gamut of issues, including - referrals for "walk-in clients"; how to attribute shared hr resources to each sharer; how to attribute usage of consumables (printer ink? pantry supplies?) amongst sharers. These, and other issues, can cause even the most genial and accommodating sharing arrangements to come apart.

A final note on sharing arrangements: if you are going to share your office premises with non-law firms (ie, other businesses), you need to apply to the Law Society of Singapore for their consent to the sharing arrangement. In particular, you must be able to satisfy the Law Society that your obligations in relation to client confidentiality will not be compromised by the sharing.



### Thinking Cap:

1. Determine which of the above options for office space most fit your needs and budget.
2. Consider the type of practice you wish to operate; who your clients are / whom you wish target; how much time will you spend travelling if you did not have an office space in the CBD; do you need to hire staff?
3. Self-examine: Are you open to sharing arrangements? Ready to give up some autonomy to save start up and operational costs? Do you know anyone you can share with? Can you really work from home?
4. To explore sharing arrangements - consider what can go wrong and how to pre-empt them



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### Action Plan:

1. Draw up a Budget
2. Conduct market research or call on property agents for a good idea of prevailing office rents
3. Call on your network for sharing opportunities. Advertise in the Law Gazette or OpenLaw portal
4. Visit sites



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### Resources:

- <http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mihb5243/is/ain20086403>  
Nuts and bolts of finding and leasing office space from B-net (requires free subscription)
- <http://www.thestartuplawyer.com/startup-issues/leasing-office-space>  
How to lease office space from Ryan Roberts and the Startup Lawyer site
- <http://www.officerelease.com/pubs/2375001.pdf>  
Five things to consider before leasing office space (for lawyers), from the Puget Sound Business Journal
- <http://www.denniskennedy.com/blog/2005/12/keepingpacewhilekeepingyou.html>  
Article from Dennis Kennedy on saving money by leasing technology
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## CHAPTER 6 Practice Financials & Managing Cash Flow

Keeping on top of your practice financials is a fundamental requirement of running a law practice. Cash Flow is, after all, the life blood of any practice, whether you are a new start up or not; and poor cash flow management can make the difference between success and failure.

Unless you plan to employ a full-time accounts executive for your practice (and a solo or small practice setup is not likely to be able to afford this luxury) then you need to equip yourself adequately for "**financial self-management**". By this we mean establishing Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) and processes to enable -

1. Access to timely and accurate financial information for every client and matter
2. Tracking disbursements on matters and expenses of the practice
3. Keeping check of movements in the Client Account
4. Managing cash flow through aging reports and a bills collection policy
5. Converting professional time to revenue through accurate and timely billing
6. Generating accurate financial reports for business decision making
7. Compliance with the Solicitor's Accounts Rules
8. Budgeting & Financial Reporting for measuring productivity and business decision-making

The best way to accomplish this is to use **law office accounting software**. Such software will automate 90% of the processes we have described above, from electronic time recording and collating disbursements to bills generation. As a risk management tool, such software will help you **comply with the SAR requirements** and monitor your unpaid invoices and unbilled disbursements and work in progress (if you are recording time).

A **full-featured law practice accounting software** such as LEAP Accounting will help you to –

- Put Client & Matter information on your desktop
- Reduce paper routines involved in bookkeeping and financial administration
- Track disbursements and expenses incurred on every matter
- Monitor client account balances
- Spend less time preparing bills
- Convert professional time to revenue (electronic time recording)
- Manage cash flow by accurate bills aging and collections
- Make sound business decisions by keeping on top of your practice financials

The strength of a financial management system lies in its ability to generate real-time reports for cash flow analysis and performance benchmarking.

**Standard Financial Reports for Financial Management** include –

Aged Debtors Report | Aged WIP Report | Departmental Income Analysis | Matters Financial Summary | Matters Opened | Matters Archived | Fee Earner Overview | Fee Earner Invoiced Funds | Top Fee Earners | Time Keeping Record | Invoices Record | Client Account Ledger | Client Account Dormant Balances | Client Account Audit Report | Cash Payments Report | Cash Receipts Report | Office Payments Report | Office Receipts Report | Anticipated Disbursements | Outstanding

Disbursements | Outstanding Time Cost Recovery | Pre-Billing Guide | Statement of Account By Client or By Matter

The recommended financial management setup for a small practice is to install a law office accounting software and train your staff to use it well. You will still engage an outsourced bookkeeper to come by once a month to conduct the month-end bank account reconciliations for the Client Account (in compliance with the SAR) and to check that the bookkeeping ledgers for the month are accurate. The outsourced bookkeeper can also run the monthly financial reports and conduct a bills collection exercise for aged bills.

## Compliance & Regulatory

The rules governing the operation of a law practice's client account are in the Legal Profession (Solicitors' Accounts) Rules ("Solicitors' Accounts Rules").

Briefly, the rules **prohibit** these actions –

1. Issuing cash or bearer cheques from the client account (except with the leave of Court)
2. Withdrawal of monies from the client account using ATM, telephone banking or online banking services
3. Withdrawal of monies from client account exceeding \$5,000 unless a. the practice has engaged an approved bookkeeper; or b. the cheque is signed by two solicitors
4. Withdrawal of monies from client account exceeding \$30,000 unless the cheque is signed by two solicitors (even if the Law Practice has engaged an approved bookkeeper).

In addition, withdrawal of monies from the Client account in relation to a **conveyancing transaction** requires 2 signatories; regardless of the amount of the cheque and even if the law practice has engaged an approved book-keeper.

For more information on these rules, the FAQs on the Law Society Website is instructive [http://www.lawsociety.org.sg/running\\_practice/starting\\_practice/app2sign\\_clientAccBook/faq.aspx](http://www.lawsociety.org.sg/running_practice/starting_practice/app2sign_clientAccBook/faq.aspx)

**To engage an “approved” bookkeeper**, visit the Law Society website for eligibility and forms. The bookkeeper (or the director of the bookkeeping services company) must also swear a Statutory Declaration undertaking to report any irregularities and inability to reconcile the ledgers with the client bank account statements to the Council of the Law Society.





### Thinking Cap:

Use the **Financial Management Checklist** to find out if you are keeping on top of your Practice Financials.  
Download the checklist at -



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### Action Plan:

1. Research law practice accounting software or speak to practice consultants like Bizibody
2. Refer to Checklists and Templates in the Primelaw Office Manual for SOPs
3. Consider the Financial Reports you need - see samples in this manual
4. Engage an administrative assistant with law office bookkeeping experience OR engage an outsourced finance professional approved by the Law Society under the SAR
5. AND / OR make the necessary arrangement for a second signatory



### Resources:

#### Articles by Bizibody

- # Client Account Management - your obligations under the Solicitors Accounts Rules
- # Choosing A Bookkeeper - an examination of the role and responsibilities of a law practice bookkeeper

#### Other Online Articles

1. Financial checklist for starting a solo practice from the American Bar Association  
<http://www.abanet.org/lpm/magazine/articles/v33/is1/an18.shtml>
2. Basic Tips on Law Firm Budgeting & Financial Management on <http://www.lawyerbillingtips.com>
3. Financial Management Articles on [www.leap.com.au](http://www.leap.com.au)

#### Books & Publications

1. Game Plan for a More Profitable and Productive Law Firm by Deborah L Avaro
2. Law Firm Accounting and Financial Management (Law Office Management) by John P. Quinn, Joseph A. Bailey, David E. Gaulin (Author) and Stanley Kolodziejczak

## CHAPTER 7      TECHNOLOGY FOR A LAW PRACTICE

### PART A - INFRASTRUCTURE

We have described in summary the basic technology infrastructure for a law practice.

We do not detail nor recommend desktops, notebooks, phones, printers or other office equipment in this kit as there are dedicated websites and forums that will serve you better. In any case, manufacturers come up with newer and cheaper models all the time, and it would be impossible to keep this kit up to date with the latest models. However, we will be happy to offer our feedback on your technology questions, so please feel free to contact Bizibody at 65 6236 2848 or email [info@bizibody.biz](mailto:info@bizibody.biz) with your burning questions.

#### 1. LAN or Local Area Network

Networked computers drive virtually all businesses today. Even if you start with only one administrative assistant, your computers should be "networked" for greater ease of collaboration. For example, your assistant may open all your files, record disbursements and prepare invoices on your matters; as well as fix your appointments. Unless you share "matter" folders and give her access to your calendar, she will not be as effective.

Similarly, without a network, **office automation and practice management tools are severely limited** as the strength of such software is to facilitate sharing of data for greater efficiency in collaborative outputs.

Another reason to set up a network is to **share printers, copiers, scanners and fax machines**. Without network capabilities your practice will require a printer dedicated to every computer in the office. The money you spend on a network and on single shared high-end printer with fax, scan and copy functions will far outpace the cost of adding dedicated machines to each new workstation as you grow.

The good news is that it is relatively inexpensive and easy to interconnect existing computers to form a small **Local Area Network (LAN)**. Windows XP Pro can connect several computers in a configuration referred to as a **peer-to-peer network**; storing shared documents on a mapped hard drive, accessible to all connected users. The only additional piece of hardware you will need is a hub or a switch to connect all computers, printers and other components together. In addition, you also need a routing gateway and modem to access internet through your Internet Service Provider. The router will queue and process all incoming and outgoing traffic to the internet.

If **wireless LAN** is preferred, you also need to have a wireless access point (AP), which is used to communicate with laptops that installed with a wireless card. Setting up a wireless network will give you greater mobility to work from anywhere within the range of your wireless modem. However, wireless networks can be less stable than hardwired networks and is not recommended for internet applications such as Justice Online and EFS filing. We do not recommend a wireless network as your only source of networking for that reason.

For more intensive connectivity you may also need a server. This is a computer whose sole function is to coordinate and connect the others computers in the network. Read paragraph below on servers.

## 2. Client – Server Network

A server is a computer that plays the function of connecting and managing information flows between all of the other computers in the network. As your solo or small practice grows in size and more computers are added to your LAN, you will have outgrown your peer-to-peer network and will need to invest in a server.

There are also several good reasons to invest in a server. A peer-to-peer network has significant disadvantages compared to an actual network operating system; these are -

- a. slow and inconsistent performance when more computers are added to the network; and
- b. lack of a central back-up system with the result that critical data (such as matter and financial data) may be lost during a black-out or hardware failure.

It is good practice to require all documents to be saved in the server so that you schedule the automated creation of backup copies of the entire law practice's data in the server. The server may also host and run your practice management, email and calendaring and other collaborative software.

An entry-level network server, equipped with Microsoft's 2008 Small Business Edition can be purchased for as little as \$2,000 for a five-person practice.

## 3. Hardware for Backup and Storage

Procedures for backup, storage, disaster recovery, and restoration of practice data are critical measures for risk management. If you do not wish to lose any content – an attendance note, a contract that took hours to draft, your research – then backing up data should be high on your list of "must-haves" for your practice.

Backup methods and strategies will vary from large firms using a client/server model to smaller peer-to-peer networks to non-networked environments. You may choose to do only an incremental backup daily, capturing the new files that have been created, rather than backing up the entire system.

Storage media includes -

**# Tape** – Tapes are predominately used to backup at the server level. They have tremendous storage capacity, and employ magnetic tape, similar to a cassette tape. Like a cassette tape, they will wear out. Swap out tapes so that one is not over used, and retire them every couple of years.

**# CDs and External Drives** – Backups can be made to CD, DVD or external hard disks and other USB enabled external drives have the capacity to store file and system backups. Note that while external hard disks today offer huge storage space, the data you store is also growing exponentially over months, so be careful that you allow enough space to backup entire databases.

**Backup Software** - For the most effective back up, choose a software package to make the process easier. Consumer Forums and Websites such as C|Net, PCMagazine, or PCWorld will provide product listings, comparisons, articles, and prices. The software you purchase will guide you through the process of determining whether to back up the full system or files, how to create automatic, timed backups, and other useful features. If you are using an external drive as backup, many of the more reliable brands such as Seagate and Cisco come with backup software included.

**Online Backup and Storage** - There are significant advantages of using online data storage.

First, the burden of managing space and machines is shifted from you to the service provider. When you fill up your allocated space, they automatically scale up their service to meet your needs. As a service provider for thousands of accounts, they have invested in storage and back-up facilities that are robust, secure and more technologically advanced than you can afford on your own.

Secondly, when your data is "in the cloud," you are not tied down to a solitary computer. This means that you can access your files from any computer that is connected to the Internet. This can be immensely useful for a solo lawyer who needs ready access his files when he is on the road.

Finally, contrary to perception, online storage facilities are actually more secure than the files that are left sitting on your local desktop. Because many of us simply store files on our computer without protecting them, anyone can sit down at the computer and access those files. For data stored online, a password is always required for access.

Online backup providers offer storage and restoration from the system level to the file level via the Internet. A high speed, always on Internet connection is advisable, but laptops and notebooks can be synchronized with the system after they have been offline. The pricing schemes differ, but increased storage space drives price increases. Online backup providers offer an automated, hands-free process that supports the needed offsite storage and multiple restore points. Online providers, or application service providers, have significantly improved, offering better encryption, replicated storage centers, and a better understanding of lawyer's concerns for the confidentiality of their data.

### **Types of Online Data Storage**

On one end of the spectrum, you have massive data centers from LexisNexis and Thomson that offer full-service outsourced technology services, including storage, backup and workflow (eg, litigation support) solutions. Some vendors offer sophisticated, specialized virtual data rooms (example, CCH Workflow Solutions and Merrill's DataSite).

On the other end of the spectrum are services targeted more to individual practitioners or small firms, such as Box.net, iDrive and Dropbox. These services can merely be used as a holding place for files that you might want to access from other computers, or they can act as essential online backup platforms.

### **Final Note on Selecting a Provider**

Vendors can, and do, close up shop. When evaluating an online data storage vendor - inquire about user access, regulatory compliance, recovery drills and what they would do with your data should they go out of business.

## **PART B - COMPUTING FOR THE MOBILE LAWYER**

The demands on a lawyer in this exacting business environment means that he is often required to answer email, review documentation and deliver his advice while "on the road". With the proliferation of handheld devices and the decreasing cost of technology, lawyers will find it easier to work remotely using a range of highly portable and affordable devices.

### **# Access to Internet Broadband**

There are two ways to obtain internet access while on the move - the first way is to find a "wireless hot spot". While you can always sit at the nearest Starbucks or other coffee joint that offers free "wifi" connection, you may find that internet access is not always available (or the connection unreliable) when you need it. All of these "hot spots" are also unsecured, which means that it is possible for your data to be viewed by the customer at the next.

The alternative is to subscribe to a mobile broadband data-plan from an ISP. While the service is not free, you have the comfort of knowing that you will have internet access as soon as you plug in. You will need a "mobile broadband device" (also called an "air-card") to connect your notebook to the wireless networks of your ISP - this is a small USB device often issued by the ISP as part of your "mobile data plan package" without charge. This form of access to a wireless broadband internet network provides fully encrypted sessions.

### **# Access to Email**

There are several ways to send and receive email from any computer using a browser. You can use -

1. Free internet email (gmail, yahoo mail and hotmail)
2. A Webmail Service facility provided by your email hosting provider; or alternatively, subscribe to a webmail service which provides secure and anonymous access to your POP or IMAP email accounts from any browser or hand-held device. One such service is mail2web (<http://www.mail2web.com>)
3. A handheld device such as a Palm, Blackberry or iPhone or other Smartphone with an internet data plan will push email, contacts and calendars directly to your handheld device in real-time, as they arrive.

### **# Access to documents in your office server / computer**

You need to work from home but you have forgotten to make a copy of the relevant client file from your office server or computer to your notebook

Larger practices will enable specified remote computers to have access to their server or central storage system through a virtual private network (also called a "VPN") or Microsoft Terminal Server environment, where multiple users connect to virtual machines. You connect and login just like you would while you're in the office. You would then have access to all your data just as if you were sitting in your desk chair.

Smaller practices typically use services such as "GoToMyPC" or "LogMeIn" which allows subscribers to take control of a remote machine and pass keystroke, mouse movement and screen updates across the connection. This does require that the remote machine (located in your office) to be powered on. This is not very useful if you have not planned beforehand to work remotely on files that are stored in your office computer and omitted to leave your office computer switched on. However, these remote control solutions are cost effective (LogMeIn has a FREE version) and all communications are over a secure encrypted connection.

## # Internet Telephony

Law practices can take advantage of a broad range of free and/or inexpensive online services for phonecalls and faxes, including:

**Internet Phone Services:** These companies offer an internet data service for making telephone calls using VoIP (Voice over IP) technology. Providers such as skype.com (<http://www.skype.com>) offer subscribers free computer-to-computer phone calls. Calling from your computer to a mobile number using internet telephony costs only a fraction of traditional IDD charges for international calls.

**Internet Faxing:** MyFax.com, eFax, MaxEmail and RapidFax eliminate the consumables cost and electricity needed for traditional hardware fax machines. Faxes arrive as PDF attachments to e-mails.

**Video conferencing:** When you need to not only hear participants, but see them, another option is Web-based conferencing systems. Justice Online offers web video-conferencing services that you can use, not only for your court hearings, but also to communicate with overseas parties whether co-counsel, your client or a witness. Justice online offers audio and video connection as well as real-time document sharing. Your clients may appreciate that Web conferences reduce travel costs -- which also helps the environment.

**Sending Large Files:** Providers such as YouSendIt (<http://www.yousendit.com>) allows subscribers to securely deliver documents that are too large to be sent as an e-mail attachment. These services are cheaper, faster and greener than using overnight express carriers.



### Resources:

General Resources on Technology for Small Businesses

<http://www.smartbiz.com/>

<http://www.smallbusinesscomputing.com>

Articles & Resources on the Technology for a Law Practice

<http://www.abanet.org/tech/ltrc/home.html>

<http://futurelawyer.typepad.com/>

<http://www.denniskennedy.com/blog/>

Advice on Mobile Computing

<http://www.abanet.org/tech/ltrc/mobicomm.html>

## CHAPTER 8 Practice Management Software: Do I Need One?

Before we help you answer this question, it is best to explore, in today's terms, **What a Practice Management Software (PMS) can do.**

There is a proliferation of Practice Management systems in the market today with as many definitions of what they can do as there are variations of software in the market. However they all start from a fundamental premise: Lawyers operate more efficiently if they keep on top of their financials and of their deadlines and case load. We also know that computers can do the job of managing financial data and keeping track of cases, case deadlines and delegated tasks better than hand written memos or record books.

A Practice Management Software captures the following information into a "core database" accessible to all members of the practice (in line with pre-set security access policies) -

1. Client Details and Client Contact information
2. File / Matter Information including when the file was opened, archived, destroyed; client correspondence, documents and time entries
3. Financial Information related to the File / Matter including monies paid into or withdrawn from the client account, disbursements incurred, invoiced rendered and paid; and Financial Information related to the practice such as practice overheads, income and expenditure.

General definitions of law office automation systems comprised in the over-arching term "Practice Management Systems" include –

**Financial Management / Law Office Accounting systems** - comprising client and office account ledgers; electronic time recording; invoicing; disbursements; controlled monies (monies in fixed deposits); and statement of accounts. The strength of a financial management system lies in its ability to generate real-time reports for cash flow analysis and performance benchmarking.

A full-featured law practice accounting software such as LEAP Accounting will help you to –

- Put Client & Matter information on your desktop
- Reduce paper routines involved in bookkeeping and financial administration
- Track disbursements and expenses incurred on every matter
- Monitor client account balances
- Spend less time preparing bills
- Convert professional time to revenue (electronic time recording)
- Manage cash flow by accurate bills aging and collections
- Make sound business decisions by keeping on top of your practice financials

**Case / Matter Management or Workflow Systems** - such software tracks matter progress and monitors deadlines; automates standard workflows. Such systems are strong in collaborative calendaring, resource allocation and task scheduling. Some case management systems also have automated document assembly functions that will automatically pull relevant client and matter information into precedent templates to generate standard letters and forms.

Generally most solo and small practices start with a simple **file opening and bookkeeping software to manage their practice financials.**

Much more than an accounting system that handles your office and client accounts, Practice Management Software ("PMS") adds on an entire suite of other functionality to your accounting system - eg, case / matter management which involves tracking matter information and status from the opening of the file until it is closed and archive; automated workflow integrates with diary functions to provide group calendaring and task allocation; even generating documents and key performance indicators.

Most competing PMS products in the market today will be able to perform the functions described above to differing levels of competence. The proliferation of lower-cost PMS software means that such systems are now readily accessible to even solo and small practices. By implementing a robust and scalable PMS, a start-up law firm is putting in place a sound infrastructure to support its future growth and expansion.

Your practice management system forms the lynchpin of the Firm's data structure, from which all other applications must be integrated whether document management, document assembly, or disbursement recovery systems. Getting the right practice management system in place is the key.



### **Resources:**

The Lawyer's Guide to Practice Management Systems Software by Andrew Adkins, Second Edition

Bizibody Articles

Selecting a Practice Management System

<http://www.bizibody.biz/images/CurrentArticles/choosingpms.pdf>

Technology for Knowledge Management (Parts 1 and 2)

<http://www.bizibody.biz/images/CurrentArticles/kmintro.pdf>

<http://www.bizibody.biz/images/CurrentArticles/technologyforkm.pdf>

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## CHAPTER 9      The Office Manual

To run efficiently, every law practice should formalize its office policies and standard operating procedures.

The purpose of recording your practice policies is to establish, in a easily accessible form, an appropriate organizational structure for your practice to operate effectively and efficiently. By recording information about the different roles and responsibilities in the practice and the practice's responsibilities to its clients and its staff, your practice manual will serve as a useful guide for induction of new lawyer and staff to the practice.

In short, consider it a step-by-step guide for building and maintaining a thoroughly professional practice.

In drawing up your Office Manual, have these goals in mind -

- To present a clear and accurate statement of your practice's purpose, goals, and credentials
- To prescribe practice standards set expectations for employee conduct and performance
- To set out standards for client confidentiality and ethical conduct of employees
- To establish procedures for the financial management of the practice, including its billing and collections policies
- To specify practice standards for all client correspondence, file management and record keeping
- To establish clear communication and feedback channels that will address hr issues
- To set out client care policies that ensure that clients are treated with courtesy and respect at all times.
- To establish policies for client intake and engagements; including standard letters of engagement

The best source document we can recommend is the **PRIME LAW OFFICE MANUAL**. This manual was commissioned by the Law Society Primelaw Committee and created by Bizibody Technology in 2003 to provide a template for law practices who aspire to the Primelaw Standards for practice excellence.

It contains standard forms, precedent templates and checklists covering all aspects of practice management from engaging and managing staff; keeping proper financial records in compliance with the Solicitors Accounts Rules; operational procedures for case management; to client care and communication policies.

The **PRIME LAW OFFICE MANUAL** is freely available on the Law Society website. Download the Manual in MSWord format so that you can be easily adapt it to suit specific practice needs.



### Thinking Cap:

1. Consider Your Practice Goals and the Attributes of a professional and dynamic Law Practice
2. Consider Your HR needs; and the roles and responsibilities of each staff you will engage



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### Action Plan:

1. Read the Primelaw Standards and Sample Office Manual
2. Read the Legal Profession Act, especially the Client Care provisions
3. Conduct research and source for law practice manuals, checklists and templates (see Resources)
4. Consult a HR professional to help you review your standard engagement letters and hr policies
5. Consult your bookkeeper or accountant for input on the types of financial statements and reports that will most effectively keep you on top of your practice financials and cashflow



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### Resources:

Download the Law Society's Primelaw Standards & Sample Office Manual - [http://www.lawsociety.org.sg/prime\\_law/pdf/Primelaw%20Office%20Manual%20\(Original\).pdf](http://www.lawsociety.org.sg/prime_law/pdf/Primelaw%20Office%20Manual%20(Original).pdf)

#### Books

American Bar Association Publication: "Law Office Procedures Manual for Solos and Small Firms" by Demetrios Dimitriou, 3rd Edition

"Managing the Modern Law Firm: New Challenges, New Perspectives" by Laura Empson

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## CHAPTER 10 YOUR LAW FIRM WEBSITE

We believe that no matter how established a law practice is, an omission (your prospective client not finding your practice on the internet) is likely to leave an adverse impression – that you are a not a serious business undertaking with a sterling professional reputation and a credible client list.

The internet is likely to be the first place a prospective client will turn to learn more about you - haven't you done the same thing when you are referred to a doctor or an interior decorator or a tutor for your child?

As a supplier of legal services, your corporate website in this internet age shows pride and professionalism in your craft.

Your law firm web site can be much more than simply a placeholder with basic information about the practice. Modern law practices make use of the reach of the internet to establish their professionalism and create awareness of their skills and expertise. Despite the competitive nature of "bidding" for a first page listing on google adwords, the internet is still one of the cheapest forms of advertising available. Internet savvy lawyers not only have a website, they are also likely to publish a blog, contribute on forums and use social media (facebook, linkedin and twitter) to market their legal services.

### What You Need

#### 1. Hire a Web Programmer

You will require a web programmer with a range of skills. He/She not only "designs" the site which is consistent with your practice look and feel (eg, your corporate colours and logo), the programmer will also propose the site structure (menus and sub-menus) and page layouts.

The web programmer you choose should have experience with designing websites for Professional Services Firms; and not just product or retail sites. Your designer should structure your website with these cardinal rules of website design firmly in mind - Easy To Use (respect your visitor's time); Quick to Load and Search Engine Friendly

#### Can you do it yourself?

YES - If you have the time and inclination. You can use Word Press and other free html editors available on the internet to build your own site without knowledge of html programming. There are online tutorials and guides to help you use these tools.

However even with the html editors, laying out the pages will require time and commitment; and unless you have an abiding interest in web design and website development, hiring an expert will save you time and serve you better.

#### 2. Register your Domain Name and Open a Web Hosting Account

There are several online domain registers that you can use to register your .com or .com.sg domain name. We like IP Mirror ([www.ipmirror.com](http://www.ipmirror.com)) as their registration interface is easy to use and their helpdesk service is commendable.

## **In selecting your Web Hosting service provider, consider these factors -**

- a. How much space? Your needs will vary depending on how deep your site is (number of pages), how many graphic files or PDF documents you wish to upload
- b. FTP Access - this is the ability to securely upload content to your hosting server using a browser
- c. File Type and Size - some hosting providers impose restrictions on size and file type you can upload
- d. Reliability, Access Speeds and Quality of Technical Helpdesk Support - to find out how this provider fares in terms of reliability, conduct your own due diligence exercise, read the reviews on forums, test the helpdesk for responsiveness; open a "temporary" account to try out speed of access
- e. Email - You would probably want to have email addresses at your own domain, like enquiries@yourdomain.com, etc. Does the host provide this with the package? Does it allow you to have a catch-all email account that causes any email address at your domain to be routed to you? Can you set an email address to automatically reply to the sender with a preset message (called an autoresponder)? Can you retrieve your email from the web? Can mail be automatically forwarded to your current email address?
- f. Server Environment - does it support php and perl? These are programming language widely used for browser based applications such as online surveys, calendars, mailing lists, polls and forums. If you wish to add such functionality to your website in future, your hosting provider must support these languages
- g. Bandwidth - bandwidth allocation has impact on the speed at which data is transferred from your website to the visitor's computer when they are visiting your site. If your site has very heavy traffic you may be charged by your hosting provider for having exceeded your bandwidth allocation.
- h. Are you contracting with the Hosting Provider or a Reseller? Not all hosting companies own or lease their own web servers; some are actually third party resellers. The disadvantage of using a reseller is that it might take a longer time to receive a response from the hosting provider as your requests goes through an intermediary; and also product knowledge of a reseller might not be as thorough or comprehensive.
- i. Local or International? The advantage of using a local company is their accessibility (no time difference, you can visit them if necessary). However, local companies may not necessarily provide better service; and they are, in fact, are more expensive than larger, better positioned hosting providers located in the United States.
- j. Price - While price is a factor, I would caution that you generally get what you pay for, although it's not necessarily true that the most expensive hosts are the best. Stay away from free website hosting providers as most will impose advertising on your website to cover their costs. Such ads take the form of a pop-up or displays an advertising frame or banner on your site. They are irritating to your visitor and will leave a bad impression.

### 3. Consider Website Functionality and Write your Website Copy

You can launch a simple "informational" site to begin with; and add on the bells and whistles (more pages with deeper content and additional functionality such as Client-Only areas, RSS feeds and Forums etc) later.

Start thinking about what you want to say about yourself on your website. Start writing website copy. You can hire a copywriter to write your website copy for you, but he/she is still going to need your CV and practice profile. As a guide, use this LAW FIRM QUESTIONNAIRE to help you get started. Tips on "How To Write Website Copy" can also be found here.

### 4. Continuing Maintenance of Your Website

A paramount requirement of running an effective website is to keep your content up to date. Even if your website contains only information about the practice, it should reflect CURRENT achievements and appointments. If you can't afford to pay a web programmer to maintain your website - you can do it yourself! Even without knowledge of html programming, your website can have a built-in content management engine (or html editor) that allows you to edit text yourself as easily as a Word document.



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#### Thinking Cap:

##### 1. Read the foregoing paragraphs and consider

- a. what functionality you want your site to have;
- b. what your site should say about you;
- c. how to bring out your differentiation and special skills; and
- d. how best to address your target market through your website.

##### 2. View other law firm websites for ideas and inspiration. Some websites we like are -

Small Niche Practices (local)

[www.nlclaw.com.sg](http://www.nlclaw.com.sg) | [www.winstonqueklaw.com](http://www.winstonqueklaw.com) |  
[www.cliffordlaw.com.sg](http://www.cliffordlaw.com.sg) | [www.ccnalaw.com](http://www.ccnalaw.com)

International Practices with a Difference

[www.wilsonharle.com](http://www.wilsonharle.com) | [www.clydeco.com](http://www.clydeco.com) | [www.ilflaw.com](http://www.ilflaw.com)

Boutique Law Practices - [www.actuateip.com.au](http://www.actuateip.com.au) (ip law) |  
[www.westminsterlaw.com.au](http://www.westminsterlaw.com.au) (family) |

##### 3. Prepare a Website Budget (don't forget the maintenance cost)

Sample Website Budget (small) will include these items

- Web Design & Programming Development - \$2,000 to \$5,000 depending on scope and complexity
- Domain Name Registration - \$28 pa for .com and \$72 pa for .com.sg
- Website Hosting - from \$12 per month
- Website Maintenance - from \$300 pa for up to 5 hours; or

- \$120 per hour ad-hoc services
  - Professional Photography - from \$900 for studio portraits and "make-over" services
  - Purchase of Stock Photographs - free (try wikicommons); stock catalogues rates from \$8.50, royalty-free
- 



#### **Action Plan:**

1. Register Your Domain Name & Hosting Provider (note: your web designer can help you with this)
  2. Engage a Web Programmer / Designer
  3. Write your Website Copy - you may use the Law Firm Questionnaire as a starting point
  4. Engage a Professional Photographer
- 



#### **Resources:**

<http://www.law.com/jsp/law/sfb/lawArticleSFB.jsp?id=1094073195735>  
Advice from lawyers and IT professionals about setting up a law firm website from Law.com

<http://www.law.com/jsp/article.jsp?id=1048518257102>  
Planning a law firm website with "punch" from the National Law Journal

<http://www.lexisone.com/balancing/articles/lw090003e.html>  
Tracking websites to improve marketing, from Lexis

<http://www.whitehatfirm.com/seo-marketing-resources/naming-law-firm-websites.html>  
How to name your law firm Website from White Hot Marketing

<http://www.attorneysonlineinc.com/sem.html>  
How to set up a law firm from the Attorneys Online website

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## CHAPTER 11     HIRING STAFF?

Solo practitioners, for the most part, are computer literate and quite capable of managing most of their administrative and secretarial tasks without having to hire a full-time employee. Like the lone ranger – you may feel that if the job is to be done right, it must be done by you alone; or maybe you are still in “start-up” mode and very careful about incurring unnecessary costs?

### **Is It Time to Hire?**

However it may be a good time to take an honest and objective look at your rate of productivity. Ask yourself: Are you “full up” and cannot take any new engagements? Do you have time to pay a social visit to a long-time client? Read up on an area of law of interest to you? Review your unpaid bills and implement a debt collection policy?

Hiring an employee is a positive step toward managing an effective practice. Skilled support staff and effective production management creates a solid foundation for practice growth and success.

### **Before You Hire**

Before hiring, think about what is needed to increase your productivity as well as enhance the level of service to your clients. Take time to consider - a) the number and type of administrative, so called “back-room” tasks such as file opening, billing, e-filing, managing the office supplies etc, if done by someone else, would give you enough time to do more “lawyering” and; b) tasks that would enhance client services and enable you to build client relationships, which are currently not provided by your practice.

### **How to Recruit the Perfect Candidate?**

1. Be very clear in your Job Description – Clearly define the role and responsibilities the new hire must fulfill. Refrain from using general phrases. For example, instead of “Law Firm seeks Litigation Staff” use this instead - “Law Firm seeking litigation support staff in debt recovery practice to assist in drafting pleadings, EFS filing, preparing bundle of documents and client interviews.
2. Get the most out of the Candidate Interview – Don’t take the candidates employment history at face value, instead ask questions for the purpose of eliciting a response that shows the candidates abilities and experience. For example, “Please tell me how you would handle . . .” or “Describe the debt recovery litigation process in your experience.”
3. Check References – Take time to verify the candidate’s prior work history by calling on the references provided.
4. Be Realistic – Find out what the prevailing market rates are for hires with relevant experience and certifications. Its not only money that speaks - be prepared to offer staff benefits such as flexi-hours, a 4-day work week, sponsored staff-development program that offers certification courses and training.

## Where to Recruit a Suitable Candidate?

If you do not wish to use a recruitment agency, you can use the classifieds at the avenues listed here; or adopt the time tested and well-worn “word of mouth” method which we find much more effective than advertising.

Recruitment Classifieds for Legal Support Staff

Law Society *E-Juz News* Circular & Law Society Website

[www.lawsociety.org.sg/classified/pdf/Guidelines\\_for\\_Placing\\_of\\_Advertisements\\_in\\_the\\_Law\\_Society\\_\(080717\).pdf](http://www.lawsociety.org.sg/classified/pdf/Guidelines_for_Placing_of_Advertisements_in_the_Law_Society_(080717).pdf)

Temasek Polytechnic Law & Management Course Career Site

<http://www.facebook.com/p.php?i=683346043&k=4WF64XW6VTVG3FCIWK5VPVTZUABVT&oid=4595590341>

## Regulatory & Compliance Matters

If you are a first time employer, here is a quick round up of regulatory and compliance matters that you must comply with –

1. **CPF Board** – Register as an employer with the CPF Board. As an employer, your obligation is to pay the “Employer’s Contribution” (currently fixed at <>% of the salary) into the CPF Account of your staff every month. Note that the penalty for failing to submit the employer’s contribution on time is severe. For your convenience, use the CPF e-submission feature and set up a GIRO account with your bank so that the submission is automated every month.
2. **IRAS** – As an employer, you are obliged to prepare Form IR8A, Appendix 8A, Appendix 8B, and Form IR8AS (where applicable) for each employee by the first day of March each year.
3. **Hiring a Non-Singaporean** – Depending on the eligibility of your new hire, you must apply to the Ministry of Manpower (<http://www.mom.gov.sg>) for one of three types of work passes –

# **Work Permit** – for lesser skilled workers paid a monthly salary less than \$1,800;

# **S-Pass** – for mid-level skilled workers such as IT technicians or bookkeepers with a monthly salary of at least \$1,800

# **Employment Pass** – Foreign Professionals with acceptable degrees and professional qualifications; and paid a monthly salary of at least \$2,500

Applications can be made online at Ministry of Manpower (<http://www.mom.gov.sg>). Applications are processed very quickly (generally, one to two weeks) if your paperwork is in order. As a condition to the Work Permit or S Pass, the employer is required to take up medical insurance coverage of at least \$5,000 a year for each work permit or S-pass holder employed by your practice.

## Keeping Your Staff

The moment you employ a new team member is the time to ensure that they are properly introduced to the law practice, given the necessary induction, allocated the resources to undertake their role effectively and given a clear description of their role and KPIs. Following that, employees need to feel valued. Formal and informal performance reviews should be carried out and from that process, relevant training opportunities should be on offer to help staff maximize their potential and develop their careers.





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### Thinking Cap:

1. **Examine what tasks you spend your day on** – Can they be undertaken by somebody else? Which tasks can you delegate?
  2. **Consider your financial position** – what is the market rate for hiring a paralegal or legal support staff? Can you afford to add the additional hire to your overheads?
  3. **Consider the role, responsibilities and KPI for the new hire**
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### Action Plan:

1. Draw up a Job Description + Proposed Salary
  2. Send it to your support network so that word of your opening filters through the legal secretaries' network
  3. Post your opening on the Law Society Website, the Temasek Polytechnic Law & Management Careers site and other relevant avenues or seek the assistance of a recruiter.
  4. Draw up a draft employment contract
  5. Draft your Induction & Training Guidelines – The Primelaw Office Manual offers a sample induction checklist and guidelines for training new staff.
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### Resources:

<http://www.smoothtransitionslawblog.com/articles/hr-issues/>

Smooth Transitions deals with legal issues relating to employee departures and business breakups

<http://www.gerryriskin.com>

Blog by Gerry Riskin “Amazing Firms, Amazing Practices”

<http://www.lawfirmstaff.com/articles/50026/76/Articles-and-analysis>

Tips from Legal Recruitment Site

### Books

“Managing People in Today's Law Firm: The Human Resources Approach to Surviving Change” by Ellen Weisbord

“Managing the Modern Law Firm: New Challenges, New Perspectives” by Laura Empson