Resource Guide: How to Start Your Own Law Practice in North Carolina

Introduction

Starting your own law practice after you graduate can be a worthwhile endeavor; however, there is a lot to consider before diving in. A starting sole practitioner needs to not only understand the law, but also how to run a small business. Issues can range from how to choose office space, to how to manage client trusts, and even how to market your practice. Below are listed resources you may find helpful in starting your own law firm.

Books

NORTH CAROLINA SMALL LAW OFFICE RESOURCE MANUAL, (S. Neal Camak & George W. Lennon eds., 5th ed 2011).
KFN7477 .N678 2011
This is a resource aimed at both new and established practices, but is especially valuable because it specifically deals with practicing in North Carolina. It covers topics such as management, accounting, fee setting, office systems, etc., and has extensive resources specific to North Carolina such as websites, organizations and forms. Table of Contents available for preview.

JAY FOONBERG, HOW TO START AND BUILD A LAW PRACTICE (5th ed. 2004).
KF300 .F66 2004
Published by the ABA, this is probably the most-used, most-well-known book on this subject. The book provides practical advice on all aspects of starting your own law practice from how to find start up cash to how to choose office space. A full table of contents is available here, and a sample chapter is available here.

KF300 .G64 2009
Readers will learn the concepts and skills necessary to become an accomplished lawyer: how to communicate with clients – and with opponents; how to develop winning marketing and promotional materials; how to quote and collect fees; and how to succeed in any size firm – whether solo, small practice, or huge corporate firm. Table of Contents available to preview.

KF300.F58 2001
Published by the ABA, this book first walks you through a step-by-step analysis of the decision to start a solo practice, including choosing a practice focus. It then provides tools to help you with financial issues including banking and billing; operations issues such as staffing and office
location and design decisions; technology for the small law office; and marketing and client relations. What's more, the final section on quality of life issues puts it all into perspective. 

Table of Contents available for preview.

CAROLYN ELEFANT, SOLO BY CHOICE: HOW TO BE THE LAWYER YOU ALWAYS WANTED TO BE (2008).
KF300.E47 2008
A practical guide on starting your own law practice that covers: getting started, setting up the office, selecting practice areas, handling clients, billing and fees, generating revenue, outsourcing, marketing, FAQs and part-time options for parents.

KF316.5 .G74 2011
This book aims to help small- and mid-sized firms improve their bottom line with step-by-step descriptions of how to analyze and evaluate a firm's revenue performance. It includes a CD and appendices with forms and examples.

EDWARD POLL, ATTORNEY AND LAW FIRM GUIDE TO THE BUSINESS OF LAW: PLANNING AND OPERATING FOR SURVIVAL AND GROWTH (2002).
Reserve KF315.Z9 P64 2002
Discusses everything from business planning, to handling clients, to technology and marketing, all with a focus of running a law firm as a profitable business. Includes a chapter specifically aimed at solo practitioners and small firms.

Websites with Resources for New/Small Firms

ABA Section of Law Practice Management
LPM supplies lawyers and legal professionals with information and resources in the core areas of marketing, management, technology and finance. Provides articles on a variety of topics, and publishes Law Practice, Law Practice Today, and LawPractice.news (see more information under “Journals” below).

NC Bar Center for Practice Management
The services of CPM are a free, confidential benefit to North Carolina Bar Association members, and include: One-on-one consulting services provided in person at the Bar Center, over the telephone or via email; Advice and guidance on law office technology issues and trends; Referrals to information technology and legal technology service providers.

GP, Small Firm & Solo Division
The GP, Small Firm & Solo Division serves the needs of small and solo firms and general practitioners. The division publishes the General Practice Deskbook and the Small Law Office Resource Manual; sponsors CLE programs and services; provides members with a substantive newsletter; and helps mold the association's legislative agenda for presentation to the N.C.
General Assembly. The newsletter, General Practice, offers an index of its articles and CLE topics.

**NC State Bar Ethics Hotline**
Any member of the North Carolina State Bar may request a ruling from the Bar on the actual or contemplated professional conduct of a member of the Bar.

**Findlaw How to Start a Law Firm**—Findlaw, owned by West, is a free database that provides a mix of cases, statutes, legal news, a lawyer directory, an online career center, and community-oriented tools such as mailing lists and message boards. They provide a page that deals specifically with how to start your own law firm with links articles, checklists, and other resources.

**MyShingle.com**
Written by Caroline Elefant, the author of the book *Solo By Choice* (see above), this website provides resources for solo practitioners both starting out and established. There are articles ranging from choosing a firm name to best tech-tools for tracking business receipts.

**Lawyerist.com**
A legal practice blog about marketing, practice management, and career development. It also has LawyeristLab, a forum for members to ask questions on the practice of law. Membership is free.

**The U.S. Small Business Administration**
A federal agency, while not specific to law, provides helpful materials, such as articles and templates for drafting business plans.

**North Carolina Branch**

**SCORE.org**
SCORE is a nonprofit association dedicated to educating entrepreneurs and helping small businesses start, grow, and succeed nationwide. SCORE is a resource partner with the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA), and has been mentoring small business owners for more than forty years. They provide confidential business counseling services at no charge, local and online workshops and events, templates, and links to articles.

**Journals & Newsletters for Solo Practitioners**

**Law Practice**
A bimonthly magazine published by the ABA’s section of Law Practice Management, it is dedicated to helping legal professionals master all aspects of the business of practicing law.

**Law Practice Today**
Published by the ABA’s Section of Law Practice Management, this monthly webzine brings you the most current information and trends in the legal industry by delivering anecdotes from professionals in the field of law.
LawPractice.News
Published by the ABA’s Section of Law Practice Management, this bimonthly newsletter for members of Law Practice Management section, gives you the latest news in LPM, the ABA, and the legal profession.

North Carolina Lawyer’s Weekly
It reports on legal decisions issued by all of the state and federal courts in North Carolina, as well as on changes to court rules, verdict & settlement reports, bar discipline and all other news vital to attorneys in the state. Available in print and online for a subscription fee.

GPSolo
GPSolo magazine is published eight times a year by the ABA General Practice, Solo and Small Firm Division. It includes a bi-annual Technology and Practice Guide, which reviews new technology to suit the particular needs of general, solo, and small firm practitioners. And to keep you up to date, two issues each year spotlight the Best of ABA Sections, reprinting the top articles published by other ABA entities that will be of the greatest interest to you.

GPSolo eReport

General Practice
Published by the North Carolina State Bar Associate Division on General Practice, Solo & Small Firms, this newsletter covers topics relevant to general and small practice. Many of the articles are available online, though some may be password protected. They also have a webpage specifically concerning starting and running a law firm.

Blawgs
Below are some blogs relevant to solo and small firm practice, marketing, and law practice management. Check the ABA Blawg Directory under the topic “Law Practice Management” for more. RSS feeders (such as Google Reader) are free and will push new posts of your favorite blogs to one webpage for your convenience.

The Inspired Solo
Authored by Sheryl Sisk, a consultant who helps lawyers develop their Web presence in cost-effective ways and guides lawyers through the blawgging process, from installing to publicizing. She is based in Myrtle Beach, S.C.

Virtual Law Practice
Solo practitioner Stephanie Kimbro has operated a virtual law firm for five years. She uses her experience to write about the ethics, technology and practical aspects involved in virtual lawyering. This is particularly helpful as she practices in North Carolina.
The [Non]Billable Hour
Deals with law firm management and technology issues. It says it is "changing professional practice one idea at a time."

LawBiz
LawBiz Blog bills itself as "your practical guide to profit." Topics include running a law firm as well as profitably exiting by selling a law practice. It contains advice on law practice management and technology, linking to relevant articles and podcasts.

Legal Practice Pro
Posts from a solo practitioner about how solo and small-firm lawyers can best market their law firms and manage their firm's finances.

Marketing Strategy and the Law
Posts cover the use of social media for business-generation purposes, law practice management issues, and the author’s takes on work/life balance. The blog also hosts a "Weekly Voir Dire: Conference Call" at noon ET every Friday for those who register.

The Rainmaker Blog
A blog discussing law firm marketing and business development strategies, written by Stephen Fairley, the CEO of The Rainmaker Institute, a Phoenix-based law firm marketing company specializing in small law firms. He is also the author of nine books, including Practice Made Perfect for Lawyers, Becoming a Rainmaker: Business Building Strategies for Lawyers, and Getting Started in Personal and Executive Coaching.

Advocate's Studio
Posts focus on the intersection of emerging technologies, social media and marketing and their impact on the practice of law, research and writing. Authored by Martha Sperry, a solo practitioner in Canton, Mass.

The Busy Lawyer's Guide to Success
"This is the companion blog to our ABA book, The Busy Lawyer's Guide to Success: Essential Tips to Power Your Practice. In the book, we’ve endeavored to assemble the absolute best-ever collection of practical tips, ideas, and techniques to help you survive, thrive, and find success in the practice of law. This blawg allows us to continue to share practice management tips and ideas as well as success stories from our readers."

Attorney at Work
Posts give advice on productivity, networking, marketing and rainmaking and discuss technology for the legal workplace.

Are you Reading These Posts?
The author aggregates the posts that he thinks will best help you market your practice, plan for the future, stay ahead of trends, increase your value to clients, and more.
Amy Campbell’s Web Log
This blawg focuses on law firm marketing, including new media and online publishing.

Law Practice Matters
It provides information on law firm technology, marketing, management and finance for the small firm in a practical, thought-provoking, and hopefully occasionally entertaining way.

SoloLawyer
Strategies and support for solo attorneys.

Other

Solosez Listserv
The ABA Solosez email discussion list is sponsored by the ABA General Practice, Solo and Small Firm Division. Anyone can join, even those who aren't ABA members. As the ABA's most active email listserv, SoloSez™ features approximately 3,000 solo and small firm e-mail subscribers discussing everything from tech tips and legal opinions to what to wear to court. You can see links to their most popular threads here.

Related Topics

Law Firm Accounting

STEVE C. BRADFORD, BASIC ACCOUNTING PRINCIPLES FOR LAWYERS (2008).
HF5686 .L35 B72 2008

Trust Fund Management
Lawyers often handle large amounts of client money, and mishandling of client funds can easily result in disbarment and even jail. It is important that all practicing attorneys are familiar with the ethical and statutory guidelines for managing client funds.

KF320.A2 F66 1996

Marketing
One challenge for a new attorney is to get his first clients in the door. Here are some resources that can help you plan a marketing strategy.

KF316.5 .S37 2006

KF316.5 .F58 2007
Getting Paid
A lot of new attorneys have no problem finding work—the challenge is actually getting their clients to pay for it. Here are some resources on how to get paid.

J. Harris Morgan, How to Draft Bills Clients Rush to Pay (2003)
KF316 .M67 2003

KF316 .P65 2003

KF316 .W52 2008