



Mobile



Laptop



Server



Net



Cloud
Computing

Opening the Law Office Doors on a Shoestring Budget

BY SUSAN KAYLER

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An important question a lawyer asks when considering starting a solo practice is “How much will it cost?” The good news is that in the present economy, you can open a law firm even if you have little to spend. With your phone, your computer and a few technology tools, you can set up your business.

Start With a Business Phone

Google Voice lets you turn your cell phone or home phone into a business line—for free. Simply sign up for a Google account (free) and pick a phone number (free), and calls will forward to your existing phone. You can answer the call, send it to voicemail or even eavesdrop answering-machine style. Google Voice transcribes and sends voicemail messages to your email account and texts transcriptions to your phone.

Clients will see your business number when you call from your Google Voice account or from your phone. You can screen, block and record calls.



SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

When you want to impress clients, Google Voice's wow-factor is a feature that allows you to customize a voicemail greeting for each of them. The free app for iPhone and Android makes it easy to make and receive calls from a smartphone or tablet. A Do-Not-Disturb feature sends calls to voicemail when you are in court, meeting with clients or done working for the day.

Skype and **Line2** are two VoIP (Voice Over Internet Protocol) services with apps for the iPhone and Android phone. Unlimited Skype-to-Skype calls are free, as are Line2 to Line2 calls. For \$60 per year, you can use Skype to call non-Skype phones; for an additional \$60 per year, you can get your own Skype number to use for your business.

Line2 is a tri-modal system in which resources are prioritized. First, Line2 attempts to call using a Wi-Fi connection. Next, it tries to connect via 3G/4G data. And finally it uses your cell-phone connection and minutes to make and receive calls if the first two options are unavailable. Line2 charges \$99.50 per year, or you may choose a pay-as-you-go plan for \$14.95 per month.

Evolve an Office

Although working at home keeps overhead low, it may not offer a professional setting for meeting clients. Post office boxes are fine for receiving client checks and dues notices, with rentals starting as low as \$32 per year. For the face-to-face meeting, take advantage of the executive suite evolution.

As businesses are moving virtual, companies are offering a product that is ideally suited to starting a law practice on a shoestring budget. **Regus** and **Davinci** are two of many companies that offer mail handling, call answering, part-time offices and conference rooms a la carte or in packages. There are a variety of plans and services to fit your needs and budget that grow with your business. Often in the most prestigious office buildings, these hybrids include receptionists to greet your clients and offer coffee, free Internet service on site and use of office space in cities around the world.

Get Discovered on the Web

Internet marketing requires more than **Facebook**, **Twitter** and **LinkedIn**. To make the most of your limited marketing budget, remember these three principles:

1. Your website is the centerpiece of your marketing campaign.
2. Referrals are the best source of business.
3. To take full advantage of referrals you must have a website.

Attorneys who refer business to you first browse your website. Potential clients who are referred to you will view your website. The attorney who represents the other party is going to critique your website. A website is a critical part of an attorney's business and can be an inexpensive yet invaluable source of advertising. Your website sells you to other lawyers as well as to clients. It has become the place where you make your first impression.

A potential client who looks for a firm's website and does not find it might conclude that the firm is out of business and may move on to search for a lawyer on the web.

Until your income grows enough to finance a professional website design, take advantage of free resources to create a site that establishes your presence and gives clients an alternative way to contact you.

In July, **Google** announced free websites for Arizona attorneys as part of its Get Your Business Online program. It offers free hosting for one year, a free domain name, free templates and training.

Weebly offers a free website, and its drag-and-drop interface makes building it easy. You can have a site built on Weebly within an hour or less.

WordPress has hundreds of free templates and tutorials to help you set up your free site. Once you are up and running, you can add statistics and analytics to your pages for free with **Statcounter** and **Google Analytics**.

Schedule Clients

The successful practice of law is related to the value of your time, so scheduling it is your bread and butter. Take advantage of free resources to automate appointments for phone calls and meetings.

By adding **ClickBook.net** or **Tungle.me** schedulers to your site, clients have 24-hour access to make appointments at times you designate. **ClickBook.net** provides a button for your webpage for up to 50 appointments. You set the times and days you are available, and the free subscription texts and emails you when a client schedules an appointment. Clients automatically get email reminders of the appointment. **ClickBook.net** integrates with **Google Calendar** and **Outlook**.

Tungle.me is a free service that syncs your calendar with a profile page where clients can see your availability and schedule an appointment. **Tungle.me** allows you to initiate scheduling and gives you the option to provide alternative meeting times. Identity information is hidden, so private details are kept confidential.

Create Documents

Keep your fees competitive by keeping overhead low. Opt for the free word processing suite called **OpenOffice**. The open source software includes a word processor, spreadsheet software, presentation software, draw-



Resources for Setting Up a Practice on a Shoestring

Resources	Cost	More information
“Office Space” Options		
• Home Office	Free	
• Virtual Office	Free	
• Virtual Office with part-time space	\$49-\$219/mo.	http://virtualoffices.regus.com/default.htm www.tempeazofficesuites.com/
• Address with mail		www.davincivirtual.com/
• Address with mail and phone answering		www.advantageofficesuites.com/
Phone Service		
• Get a business phone number from Google Voice, which includes voicemail transcription, custom voicemail messages for each client/caller, call screening, text messaging, contact integration, free phone number, works on mobile phones, sends voicemail messages to email, can make calls from Internet or phone	Free (calls on a cell phone will incur your carrier’s charge per minute, i.e., use your minutes)	www.google.com/voice/
• VoIP (Voice Over Internet Protocol): Skype-voicemail, text messaging, video, more	Free Skype to Skype; \$60 per year for unlimited calls to phones*	www.skype.com *Check the website for calling plans and pricing details.
• Line2: tri-modal; uses Wi-Fi, 3G/4G, then cell minutes	Free; \$14.95 mo.; \$99.50 annually	www.line2.com
Email		
• Get an email account from Gmail (works well with Google Voice) or Yahoo and many others.	Free	https://accounts.google.com www.yahoo.com/
• If you need a “domain name” email account (which you can also use from Gmail) enomcentral.com or PerfectAddress.com and many others offer the service for a little over \$3 per month. It allows you to have an email address of “YourName@YourLawFirm.com”	\$3 per month	www.enomcentral.com/ https://www.perfectaddress.com/
• Networksolutions.com offers Microsoft Exchange for about \$7 if you use Outlook for calendaring and email.	\$7/mo.	https://www.networksolutions.com/email-account/hosted-exchange/
• If you set up a website, you will get an email address with your domain as part of that package.		
Business Cards		
• Get free business cards from Vistaprint.com , which has great templates for creating the cards that can help you decide on a color scheme or theme.	Free plus shipping/handling; \$9.99 plus shipping/handling	www.vistaprint.com/free-business-cards.aspx Free cards include Vistaprint logo on back; \$9.99 for premium cards without logo
• For a creative look, try us.moo.com for something a bit out of the ordinary that definitely makes a statement. These cards are pricey, but you may find them worth it, depending on your area of practice.	\$20 and up	http://us.moo.com/
Website		
• Search for free websites at gybo.com .	Free	www.gybo.com/arizona
• Weebly free website	Free	http://weebly.com
• WordPress free website	Free	http://wordpress.org
• For website hosting, Hostgator.com offers plans from as low as \$3.96 per month, with 4,500 templates available.	\$3.96/mo.	http://hostgator.com

ing software, database and equation program. OpenOffice is compatible on any computer, easy to use and reads any current document file you have: .doc, .xls, etc. Ten million people have downloaded this popular software since its newest release in May 2012.

Lotus Symphony is a free IBM product based on OpenOffice technology. Symphony does documents, spreadsheets and presentations, all for free. You can convert Symphony documents and spreadsheets to PDFs without an additional license or fee. Symphony is compatible with most word processing documents.

Manage Your Cases

As your practice gets busy, you will need to manage documents, deadlines, email, time and phone calls. If you use Outlook, you can download **Credenza Case Management** software and use it free. It integrates with your Outlook account and keeps everything organized.

There is a variety of case management software for lawyers, including some that are specific to an area of practice such as bankruptcy, personal injury or family law. Software installed on your computer, like **Amicus** or **Time Matters**, has an initial cost plus yearly maintenance fees plus upgrades. Because your budget may be tight at the beginning, consider making a small initial investment of \$39 to \$49 per month for **Clio** or **MyCase**. These two options are cloud-based, not installed on your computer, and accessible from anywhere with an Internet connection. There are no annual contracts, maintenance or upgrade fees. Both include client portals for communication and document review. Each offers a 30-day free trial, so you can find out if either fits your needs.

And as you work on your cases, when the need for legal research arises, remember there is a free option there, too. The State Bar of Arizona provides members a free, unlimited online legal research premium service—**Fastcase** (www.azbar.org/MemberTools/Fastcase).

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Resources for Setting Up a Practice on a Shoestring

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Resources	Cost	More Information
Social Media		
• Twitter	Free	http://twitter.com
• Facebook	Free	http://facebook.com
• GooglePlus	Free	https://plus.google.com/
• LinkedIn	Free	http://linkedin.com
Statistics and Analytics (SEO)		
• Statcounter	Free	http://statcounter.com
• Google Analytics	Free	http://google.com/analytics/
Online Appointments		
• Clickbook.net	Free	www.clickbook.net
• Tungle.me	Free	www.tungle.me/
Payment		
• PayPal—Small fee plus percentage; free to join.	Varies	http://paypal.com
• LawPay—Has the ability to separate moneys received for trust accounts from earned moneys; a merchant account with varying fees dependent on services.	Varies	https://www.lawpay.com/
Accounting		
• Wave Accounting	Free	http://waveaccounting.com
Word Processing		
• OpenOffice—Documents, spreadsheets, presentations, graphics, database; supports Microsoft Office, Excel, PowerPoint files.	Free	www.openoffice.org/
• Lotus Symphony—Documents, spreadsheets and presentations; can convert to PDFs, open and save encrypted files; supports Microsoft Office, Excel, PowerPoint files; can add digital signatures. Free apps for Android and iPhone/iPad.	Varies	www-03.ibm.com/software/lotus/symphony
Case Management Software		
• Credenza	Free	www.credenzasoft.com/
• Clio	\$49/mo.	www.goclio.com
• MyCase	\$39/mo.	www.mycaseinc.com
Bank Accounts		
• Desert Schools Federal Credit Union—Free business checking with minimum balance.	Free	www.desertschools.org
• Chase Bank—No-fee IOLTA account.	Free	http://chase.com
Legal Entity		
• Sole Proprietor	Free	Arizona Corporation Commission Forms: www.azcc.gov/Divisions/Corporations/forms/formsindex.asp
• PLLC	\$50+	
• Professional Corporation	\$50+	
Support and Information		
• Internet—State Bar Member lounge	Free	
• Fee agreements and forms	Free	www.azbar.org/professionaldevelopment/lomap/forms
• Free webinars	Free	www.azbar.org/professionaldevelopment/lomap/webinars
• Set-up Packet	Free	www.azbar.org/professionaldevelopment/lomap/packets

Keep Track of the Money

Free accounting software? Yes, it's called **Wave Accounting**. You can sign in with your Google or Yahoo account or use your own email address. You can connect with a bank account or upload a bank statement. Create client bills easily and email them directly from Wave. You can manage your trust account, your business account and your personal account, all for free.

Although free business checking may be difficult to find, some banks do offer IOLTA accounts without maintenance fees. Review the rules about trust accounts and shop around to find a fee-free account.

Get Support and Information

Formalize your client relationship with a fee agreement or engagement letter using the free samples on the State Bar's website (www.azbar.org/Lawyers). You will find forms, packets and practice tools to help you make the most of your business. There are free webinars about trust accounts, using social media and protecting your online reputation. Check our Practice Tools page for options for professional liability insurance, case management software and more—many at a member discount (www.azbar.org/membership/memberdiscounts). Download our packet on starting a law practice, and get information on everything from forming an LLC to lists of business resources. When you need in-depth information about practice management or a specific area of practice, the State Bar has a CLE Catalog of online and in-person courses to help you.

Starting your own practice is both challenging and exciting. Using free resources keeps the economic risk relatively low and allows your firm to open its doors. As your practice grows, you can add a scanner, consider case management software and hire your first employee. Regardless of the state of the economy or the size of your budget, the success of your practice will be measured by the value you bring to your clients. 