

Managing Your Solo Practice: Your Administrative Team

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By **Janet Falk** | February 20, 2020 at 01:30 PM



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This column is the first in a monthly series that will provide insights from attorneys on a range of issues to better manage a solo legal practice. Topics will include marketing, technology, public relations, fees, CLE and offices, among other aspects of practice management.

Notably, these are issues rarely discussed in law school. However, if not addressed properly and promptly, attending to them can interrupt work on cases and consume hours of otherwise productive time. Speaking to their peers, several attorneys will share below how they attend to these aspects of

their practices, so they may resolve such mundane issues and move forward to serve their clients.

Starting with the practice's administrative team, consider those individuals who assist in the operational, marketing, technology, bookkeeping and tax aspects of a legal practice. A number of solo attorneys hire or contract with a paralegal. Ayesha Hamilton, with a practice in business and employment law at [Hamilton Law Firm](#) in West Windsor speaks for many solo practitioners: "I use a paralegal who works remotely, but is available to come into the office as needed. She has an independent LLC. She is experienced in my practice area and can efficiently handle certain non-lawyer case related tasks, allowing me to focus my attention on the practice of law. As an independent contractor and litigation support professional, I bill her cost to the client directly and they are happier to have a lower hourly billing rate, where possible. Hiring a paralegal, whether onsite or remote, is a great way to make sure that you are truly focusing on legal work and providing a better, more efficient service to your clients."

Alan Peyrouton adds, "My paralegal is the heart and soul of my practice. She runs all operations of the firm. Specifically, she handles all intake calls, court filings, payment plans, adjournments and scheduling. Additionally, she's compassionate about each client's situation and alleviates their concerns by intently listening to their version of the story." Peyrouton practices criminal defense at [Peyrouton Law](#) in Hackensack.

Some see no need for a paralegal on staff on a regular basis, while other solo attorneys follow Kim Yonta's advice when they have a temporary need for a paralegal: "I will outsource and pay someone per diem if I need extra help" at her criminal defense practice, [Yonta Law](#), in New Brunswick.

Another potential staff member is a legal intern, hired for the summer or at any time during the year. Personal connections may make it easier to find a good candidate. Marc Garfinkle, whose practice in ethics and disciplinary matters [Law Office of Marc Garfinkle](#) is based in Morristown, says “I have used legal interns periodically. I have found them by posting announcements in the placement office at Rutgers Law and Seton Hall Law, or by calling a professor at Seton Hall, asking for interested students to contact me.” Yonta adds, “I use legal interns during the summer and during the school year. My office is located in New Brunswick, so Rutgers University is a resource. When I was a coach for the Rutgers University mock trial team, I was able to draw upon my former Rutgers students who went to law school for my legal interns.”

Marketing and technology management are areas where some attorneys wade in gingerly, while others plunge right in. Lawrence Bloom, with a matrimonial law practice, [Law Offices of Lawrence H. Bloom](#), in Fort Lee, declares, “Website administration is best left to the professionals, in this regard. While I direct my webmaster what content I want, I prefer to let him have free reign with design.” Rajeh Saadeh, with a matrimonial and real estate law practice, [Law Office of Rajeh A. Saadeh](#) in Somerville, agrees. “I contract out the website management. As for technology systems, those have been established so that they are self-operating and maintaining, but if there is ever an issue, I have an IT professional on-call to assist.”

On the other hand, some web platforms make it easy for the do-it-yourselfer. Leona Krasner, who has a matrimonial law practice at [Krasner Law](#) in Jersey City, says, “I manage my website and technology systems myself through Squarespace. It gives me total control over all of the content on my site, and I can immediately change anything that needs updating. Squarespace takes care of my domain, Gmail email and Google Drive for me.” Peyrouton notes

the cost-savings of performing his own website maintenance. “I did away with the webmaster and his astronomical fees. I taught myself SEO and I manage everything related to the website.”

As for marketing activities, relying on one’s own resources for operational tasks takes time away from working on client matters, resulting in fewer billable hours and lost revenue. Hamilton is all too aware of this dynamic. “I work with a marketing assistant who is an independent contractor. We have developed a marketing calendar for the year to ensure at least four marketing touches on social media every month: blog posts, sharing articles, news blasts and other law-related communications. I generate the content; she makes it attractive and posts it. Social media activity is one of those unavoidable tasks in your practice to delegate to someone who can do it better and faster than you, allowing you to focus on the practice of law and client service.” Krasner agrees it is important to be present on social media. “I post little-known matrimonial facts across LinkedIn, Facebook, Instagram and Twitter every day,” driving traffic to her website.

For some, like Yonta, the personal touch of marketing is important. “I manage my marketing myself because I am my best salesperson. Many of my referrals come from other lawyers I know through my work with the state and county bar associations and who do not practice criminal law.”

Another area of administrative activity is bookkeeping, invoicing and taxes. Bloom notes, “The trick to operating a solo practice is to keep overhead low and administrative practices simple.” Several attorneys rely on time-tracking software, such as Practice Panther, Clio and Cosmolex, to record their billable time for each client. These systems include billing and payment of invoices, plus they usually integrate with calendars, email and client contact information. In addition, Saadeh works with “a bookkeeper and CPA through

the bookkeeping platform, which is important primarily for tax and profitability issues.”

A few parting thoughts: Bloom advises “One of the hacks that I have found useful is the multiple calendar system. I keep a master calendar for court dates, appointments and vacations, plus I also have a detailed to-do list that extends months ahead of time. In addition, my time records contain bold print listings of activities to be done and due dates.”

Garfinkle adds “I believe strongly in regular review of all files, especially the dormant ones. Only I can do that; a personal review often prompts thought of other work I might, or should, do for a client.”

Finally, Randall Hirsch, of the [Law Office of Randall J. Hirsch](#), a virtual office and practice in New Jersey focused on personal injury and medical malpractice, sums it up succinctly: “I am my own administrative team: webmaster, accountant, paralegal and chief marketing officer. I try to automate as much as possible and create checklists and standard operating procedures. I make sure that the important tasks, like maintaining client trust accounts and calendaring important deadlines, are done first. Then, if I have time, I can concentrate on secondary needs, like marketing and my website.”

If you, like Hirsch, are the entire administrative team, consider who is the best person to handle these tasks. You might draft someone to pitch in on a regular or ad hoc basis so you may deliver the best service to your clients at an appropriate fee. Speaking about the company that maintains her website, Hamilton observes, “While the service is expensive, I find that the cost is more than paid for by the clients generated through my web presence.”

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