

# Starting A New Law Office: A Checklist

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On January 14, 2008, after fifteen years at my prior firm, I opened a new office for the practice of law. Actually, “opened” and “office” are misnomers – since I did not yet have an office, what I actually did was walk into my study and start working from my home computer. But the point is that I left an existing firm and started my own office, essentially from scratch.

There are countless good articles about how to open your own office, many of which I studied and learned from. What this article will attempt to do is provide a checklist of the steps – in order – that I learned starting a new office requires. Of course some will not apply to your situation, and there may be some not here that you’ll need to add. But hopefully this will give you a starting point for the things you need to do, and when you need to do them.

## STEP ONE – WHO AM I?

The first step you’ll need to take is to establish the identity of your new entity. Since my practice is almost exclusively litigation, and I need to file pleadings or motions with courts on an almost daily basis, I thought of this as creating my new firm “block” for court filings and e-mails.

### **1. Set up your entity & get an employer identification number (EIN).**

The first thing you need to do is set up the legal entity under which you will be operating, whether it be a corporation or whatever. You’ll also need an EIN right away. Fortunately, both are essentially only a phone call away. In my case, I was setting up a new office for an existing firm, so one of my new partners advised me on the pros and cons of different corporate structures, then set up the new entity for me through an incorporating service – which also handles the paperwork of getting you the EIN you’ll need. Once you have the EIN, go ahead and fill out a W-9 form (available online) with your new EIN and keep it handy – you’ll need it sooner than you think to give corporate clients the information they need to pay you.

### **2. Get a post office box**

The second thing you’ll need – now that you know the name of your new entity – is a permanent location. Whether you know where physically you will be or not yet (at this stage I didn’t) what you don’t know is how long you’ll be there. What you need is a stable, long term official address that your new office can rely on. That means a post office box. I’ll get to “street mail” later.

### **3. Get a phone number**

It can be a temporary one, such as your cell phone, which is what I did for a week until I had a land line. Your goal here is only to populate a signature block – even with a temporary number - so that you can give anyone who asks complete contact information from the minute you open your doors, even if the doors and the opening are only figurative.

#### **4. Get a fax number**

Even though with the advent of e-mail most of what used to be sent by fax now comes by e-mail, you still need a fax number. If you try to get by without one – as I did – within a couple of days you’ll discover how important one still is as requests come in from other lawyers, clients, and vendors who are used to communicating by fax.

What I did was something I had been wanting to do for years, which was eliminate paper faxes altogether. Rather than get a fax line from the phone company and buy a fax machine, I set up an account with eFax, [www.eFax.com](http://www.eFax.com), which gave me a number to give out as my fax number. But any faxes sent to that number the company converts to an e-mail attachment in the format of my choice. Now all faxes come directly to the e-mail addresses I designate as .pdf files. I delete the junk faxes and drag and drop the ones I want to keep to the appropriate folder. All without having to rescan anything – or pay for the cost of toner (you’ll soon learn that that black stuff that makes words on your printer/copier paper is very expensive!) Plus, as you’ll learn below, not having to get a separate fax line is substantially cheaper when you start looking at phones.

#### **5. Get a new e-mail address and Internet access to it.**

You’ll also need a new e-mail address, and while you can get any number of free addresses through providers such as Google or Yahoo, I would suggest that you purchase a domain of your own from providers such as eNom, [www.eNom.com](http://www.eNom.com). A “domain” is the thing that goes between the [www](http://www) and the .com - and usually comes with several free e-mail addresses. That way when you’re ready to set up an Internet website for your new firm, you won’t have to change your e-mail – and your new office will look more professional. In my case, I was opening a new office for an existing firm, so they provided me with whatever addresses I needed, using their already established domain name, [www.siebman.com](http://www.siebman.com).

While you may prefer to access your e-mail primarily via a program on your computer, such as Outlook or Outlook Express, it’s a good idea to make sure that your e-mail is also accessible via the Internet. Some providers have their own online sites for reading e-mail ([www.NetworkSolutions.com](http://www.NetworkSolutions.com) is an example) or you can set the mail up to forward to a Gmail or Yahoo! account. Having a way to access your e-mail from the Internet is not just a good backup – it’s a way that you can work using your new e-mail before you buy office computers. In my case, I worked e-mails from my home computer and/or a borrowed laptop using the e-mail provider’s Internet site for a week before my new office’s computers came in.

If you can automatically forward e-mails from your old e-mail account, do – otherwise make arrangements for someone at your old firm there to monitor your old e-mail and send you any e-mails that are not related to cases that you are not going to be involved in any longer.

## **STEP TWO - WHERE DO I GO?**

Once you know who you are, you need to figure where you’re going to be.

#### **6. Find an office.**

Practicing law requires a “place.” It can be as simple as a folding table and chair, but you need a home base to do most of your work from. You can work out of your home, and many attorneys do, but assuming that you want an office outside the home, the next step is to locate a

place for your new firm. In my case I talked to realtors and other lawyers, but found my new office talking to a friend at a supper club my wife and I are members of the day after I left my old firm. The space I leased was never listed with a realtor, but was far better suited for me than anything I looked at that was on the market at the time.

Once you have identified the space you want, get it set with a signed lease as soon as possible so that you know what you can and can't do, what you need your landlord's permission for, and – most importantly - you can then start planning what goes in your office.

Depending on what your office provides and what it doesn't, you may have other things to do, including (a) setting up an account with the local electric company, gas company and/or water company (b) getting an alarm system installed, or an existing alarm system account transferred to your new firm; and (c) putting up signage. If you are in an office building the landlord may provide the necessary signage – if not, you may need to order and install the signage you want. Advertising is beyond the scope of this article, but every office needs something outside the door for deliveries and visiting clients and attorneys, at the very least. In my case, a piece of paper with the firm name taped beside the front door worked nicely for several weeks until the metal plaques came in.

## **7. Plan your office**

The first thing to do when you know where you physically will be is to sit down and decide what will go where in your new office. Primarily this means determining what locations in your office have phone and/or network connections, and where you'll need to have these added. I was lucky – my office suite had previously been used by a hospital's billing offices and was blanketed with electrical outlets and phone and computer connections, so the decision was really which connections to use, and not where to add new ones.

Furniture is a significantly lower priority when planning your office, since when you get right down to it folding tables and chairs and old furniture from your house are functionally identical to a custom-made mahogany partner's desks and leather chairs, but it is a good idea to make a list of what you need, complete with dimensions, early on so that you can add the furniture you want as the opportunity arises. In my case, I bought one major new piece immediately – a secretary/receptionist station – but put the rest off for several months until I had fees coming in to pay for them with.

## **8. Get a “computer guy” and order computers and related equipment**

How soon you order computers depends in part on how soon you have a concrete idea what you'll need. In my case, I ordered computers on D + 2, since while I didn't know where I'd be, I knew what I'd need. They were installed on D + 7, when I moved into my new offices, but the laptop I would be using as my main computer the “computer guy” brought over on D + 4 when it came in so I could start getting set up on the machine I'd actually be using.

On computers and other office equipment, there are as many different setups and models as there are lawyers, but I think my setup is a good basic one, so I want to go through what I got and why.

**Server** – no matter how small you are, your system really should start with some type of server and a network. It doesn't have to be a “server” per se – just a workstation brainwashed into thinking it's a server may be sufficient. But to be efficient you need a central computer on a network where the other computers can access the files. Connected to the server should be a removable hard drive to which the server's files are routinely backed up. It's also a good idea to

have two of these hard drives so you can rotate the backups and keep one off-site. They're small and cheap, and good insurance, especially if you don't keep paper files.

**Workstations** – each employee needs a computer workstation, starting with you. Typically, this is a CPU tower and a monitor (or two) with keyboard and mouse, which is usually connected to the network using an Ethernet cable. For my workstation, I chose a laptop with a docking station, which sits on my credenza and is hooked up to a large monitor and a wireless keyboard and mouse. Each morning I just drop the laptop on the docking station, press one button, and the exact same desktop I was working on at home the night before pops up, but on dual screens.

**Copier/Printer/Scanner** – what you need here depends heavily on your practice.

As far as **copiers**, for what I do (litigation practice in an all e-filing federal court) it is rare for me actually to have to handle paper documents, much less copy them, so I didn't purchase a copier at all, instead simply relying on the copier features of my networked printer for the rare occasions that I need to make a paper copy of a document. If your practice won't accommodate this, you can either buy or lease a standalone (or networked) copier from an office supply or copier company.

For a **printer**, again, I didn't anticipate needing a lot of actual printing on paper, so I got one of the smallest network printers available that would do double-sided printing. I also got used immediately to printing almost everything on "draft" mode to save toner, and two-sided to save paper. At the current rate of use, despite having several dozen cases in active litigation, our office uses less than one ream of paper *per month*.

For me, the **scanner** features were key, since we intended to run an essentially paperless office, so the network printer also had a sheet-fed scanner so we could easily scan in documents that came in and save them on the server. It took a couple of weeks to determine the right settings, but this is the machine that's used for multi-page scanning. Another option would have been to get a dedicated scanner such as the Fujitsu ScanSnap, which scans documents double-sided quickly and accurately. If you receive a large amount of paper in your office, and don't want to maintain it in that form, something like a ScanSnap would probably be well worth the price.

**Wi-fi network.** Wi-fi networks have become prevalent in law offices, and while the people working in them may not need them because they are already hard-wired into the network and get their Internet access that way, visiting lawyers have come to expect it. Accordingly, I had a wireless network installed in my building, with a security code that we give out to visiting lawyers so that our bandwidth isn't being used by offices around ours. What I do use the wi-fi network for is to read my Google Reader account on my Palm T/X while away from my desk, for example while having lunch in the break room. I can also use it to work from other locations in the office using the laptop so if, for example, I have loaned my office to a visiting lawyer for a meeting, I can keep working from one of the smaller offices, or from the stand-up desk in my office.

**VPN** – Finally, in order to work from home or on the road, you'll need a way to access your server's files remotely using, for example, a virtual private network (VPN). There are other options – you can use a program such as pcAnywhere to access your desktop remotely, and use its connection to the network. But there's little point to having your files on a central server if the only way you can access them is at your office desktop machine.

**Internet access** – Internet access is available several ways, depending on where you are – most locations have cable modem, phone line, or broadband wireless as options. Which you

use is up to you, but as your computer guy will be hooking it up to your system, make the decision at this point and call whoever you need to to get Internet access. In my case, the computer guy was selling broadband wireless, so that's what I got. That way if anything goes wrong – it's his fault.

### **9. Get phone lines activated/buy phones**

Once you know what will be going where, call the phone company and order lines for your office. In my case I had someone come in separately and wire the office up, then come back when I had the numbers and activate them. All I had to do then was plug in the phones I bought, and we were ready to go.

There are three features you should be sure your system has. First, be sure to have the lines you do get “roll over”, so that if line 1 is busy, the call rings on line 2. My setup inadvertently didn't include this, and for several days callers got busy signals when I was on the phone, instead of getting through on the second line. Second, you need an intercom feature on the phones you buy so your receptionist or assistant can tell you who is calling and transfer the call to you. Third, you'll need an answering machine function (sometimes referred to as “night answer”) so you can set it up to take calls when no one is in – that is an accepted feature in law firms, and one you must have available for counsel and your clients. Some firms use an answering service for this, but I find that an answering machine is as useful, especially since almost any answering machine is remotely accessible if you want to check your messages.

How many phone lines do you get? Two is the minimum, because of the aforementioned rollover, and a good rule of thumb is to get as many as you anticipate having employees, plus a fax line if you want one. The disadvantage to having too many lines is not just the additional cost – it is that if you get too many, you'll need a phone “system” which can run into the four figures in terms of cost, and which will be more difficult to learn. In my case, I went with two lines, which allowed me to use off-the-shelf “office” phones which worked together at my local big-box office supply store. Counting three fairly expensive phones, wiring installation, and phone system setup, I spent less than \$700 initially, then another couple of hundred when I added two more phones a few weeks later. You could easily spend four times this much, depending on what decisions you make here.

### **10. Remodel/repaint**

Once you have the computers on order and the phone lines on the way, you can start with any remodeling or repainting that's needed for your new space. In my case I was fortunate to have a father in law who is a home builder and he corralled the contractors I needed for the quickest and most cost-effective remodel for my space. In many cases you won't have to do anything to an existing space, but if you have to do anything major, now's the time – if you have to work out of a supply closet for a few days, or put off buying a piece of furniture you want, it's a small price to pay to only have to move once. There's a definite mental benefit to getting finally settled in and knowing that you won't have to move again.

### **11. Post required notices**

About this time you also need to review your relevant jurisdiction's requirements for posting, among other things, required notices to clients. In Texas, there is a required notice – available in a frameable size on the State Bar's website at [http://www.texasbar.com/Template.cfm?Section=81\\_079\\_Public\\_Notification&Template=/Cont](http://www.texasbar.com/Template.cfm?Section=81_079_Public_Notification&Template=/Cont)

[entManagement/ContentDisplay.cfm&ContentID=2811](#) that the State Bar investigates complaints of misconduct against Texas lawyers. I have always been impressed by firms that, instead of putting the notice on a cheap frame in a corner of the room framed it nicely and placed it on an easel as prominently displayed as their attorneys' cards and firm brochures, so that's what I did.

## **12. Change your addresses with bars/courts/organizations**

At this stage, you need to make sure you get your contact info changed with your state's bar association and with any courts. The jurisdiction I practice in the most is an all e-noticing one, so this was something I did online very quickly to ensure I didn't miss filings in my cases.

Also make sure you contact any organizations you are in, and change over any subscriptions you want to keep receiving. While you may skip some subscriptions for a while, be sure to calendar them to look at again six or twelve months down the road, when you have a better idea how much money and time you'll have available for something other than the *Texas Bar Journal*.

## **13. Insurance**

One other thing you should consider at this stage is what insurance your new office needs. An insurance agent should be able to provide you with information on a law office package which provides liability coverage, as well as insures against theft or other damage to your new office's assets, such as computers, furniture, etc. In some cases your landlord may want to be listed on your policy as an additional insured, so be sure to check your lease before getting the policy.

## **STEP 3 - LEAVING YOUR OLD FIRM**

It is important to sit down with your former or soon-to-be former firm and work through the necessary issues regarding your leaving the firm. Although not done as often as it should be, it is helpful to reduce all your agreement to writing. Things you should cover are:

### **14. Compensation from former firm.**

When is your last paycheck? Are there any reimbursements or retirement contributions due to you or vice versa? What rights will you or your former firm have in fees received (by either of you) after you leave?

### **15. Health insurance.**

There are forms you'll receive from your former employer that outline your rights regarding continuing health insurance, if you are currently receiving it. You'll need to make some decisions and return some forms no matter what you decide to do.

### **16. Retirement.**

If you have a retirement plan through your former firm, you'll need to change that over – there will be some forms here.

### **17. Personal/Professional Information.**

You should also be sure to cover who retains copies of any personal or professional information you have at your old firm. This may include, for example, contact information (whether in Rolodexes, case management or e-mail programs), form files or research directories, or bar activity files.

### **18. Clients/Files.**

What files and clients will stay at your former firm? Which will go with you? How will the files be transferred to you? This subject is often the most difficult for attorneys to work through, but based on my experience, there are a few guidelines:

First, the decision as to what lawyer does their work always belongs to the client. You and your firm can decide where you think the matter should go, but the decision has to be made – or confirmed – by the client. In the meantime, to determine the default, check the contract with the client – did they hire the law firm you were working at, or did they hire you (for example a contract that preexists your employment at the old firm)? If the latter, then the client and the client's files go with you unless the client specifies otherwise. If the former, as will most often be the case, then the file stays with your former firm until the client notifies it that they would like for you to handle the matter going forward. But the initial step is to determine who the client has contracted with to represent them, so you know who is entitled to the file on the client's behalf pending the client's decision.

Second, in my experience there are essentially have three types of clients and files when you leave a firm. The first are the ones where you and your firm agree that you should take the file. In this situation, what is often done is for the former firm or you (or both) send the client a letter notifying them that you have left the firm and suggesting that both the firm and you agree that the file should go with you. The client will be requested to confirm this arrangement and authorize the old firm to release the file and withdraw from any proceedings, if necessary. Some firms are okay with an e-mail or phone call from the client confirming this – some want a signed letter. Typically you will need to prepare a new contract with the client following this, and they may need a W-9 for your new firm, so keep a copy handy.

The second category of clients are those in which you and the firm agree *not* to send this letter, so, in effect, the files stay with the old firm by default. If you're fine with this, then all you'll need to do is file a withdrawal in the event you have entered an appearance in a pending matter, and confirm in writing with the client that you are no longer representing them. If the client asks that you continue to represent them, however, and you agree, you'll probably need to send the letter referred to above authorizing the old firm to transfer the file and withdraw. In any event, you should, as a courtesy to your now-former client and any lawyers you worked with, notify them of your firm change and new contact information. In some cases they'll surprise you and ask you to stay in the case – in many others they'll keep you in mind for future work. But letting them know your status will make the transition easier for all concerned, in the event they need to ask you something.

The third category of clients is the most difficult, and that is where you both want to continue representing the client. In this situation, after you leave the former firm you may contact the client and ask them who they would prefer continue representing them. Some will say you, some will say your former firm, and some will actually say "both". But as with the above, they'll need to notify your former firm of their decision so it can release the files and withdraw, if necessary.

Leaving a firm you've worked at for any period of time can be quite difficult, and is a stressful and emotional experience under the best of circumstances. The entire process is not unlike trying a case before a jury or a judge, and you just have to shrug off the surprises and deal with them as best you can. Be aware that in all likelihood, as in trial, things are going to happen and people are going to say and do things that you didn't expect. Some will be good, and some will not. Just keep in mind that, like trial, you've decided that this is the best course of action to take, and that the possibility of some unforeseen negative developments is just part of the process.

Always keep in mind that both you and your former firm will be far better served by handling your departure with professionalism and patience and dignity – after all, in most cases you're going to be practicing near each other in most cases for many years to come. Above all, as my dad would say, keep your cool, and don't say or do anything that you might regret later – even if someone else does. Keep in mind that most attorneys you will be dealing with have seen this situation before many, many times. Whether you handle this stressful situation with grace or not is something they will remember for a long time.

#### **STEP 4 – RUNNING THE NEW OFFICE**

Once you're in your new offices, there are several things you need to do to get up and running. This article doesn't provide an exhaustive list of the things you need to do to run a law practice by any means – for information on that, see the State Bar's Law Practice Management Program at <http://www.texasbarcle.com/CLE/LMHome.asp> - but it is what I found are the basic first steps you'll need to get started.

##### **19. Sign up for pro bono cases**

As soon as you are capable of seeing clients, be sure that you are signed up with your local legal aid provider for whatever pro bono services you are capable of providing. If you don't know who this is, contact [TexasLawyersHelp.org](http://TexasLawyersHelp.org), and they'll put you in touch with the appropriate pro bono activity.

I don't suggest this just because as lawyers we should all be doing our part to provide legal services to our fellow Texans who can't afford it, and signing up for pro bono at this point reinforces your commitment to that. I suggest it because at this stage in your move you need to be reminded that as vulnerable and insignificant as you may think you are as you try to continue your practice alone, you still have immense power to help people with problems in their life that they cannot resolve without a lawyer's help. Nothing will put things in perspective and remind you of the dignity or the ideals of our profession like taking time to help someone who is really in need.

##### **20. Bookkeeping**

Once you open your doors (and possibly before) you'll find the need to start writing checks. Lots and lots of checks. A necessary early meeting is with an accountant you want to use for your firm's books. Ask them what programs (QuickBooks is a favorite) you should use, and enlist their help training your assistant in how to handle your new firm's books and payroll.

##### **21. Bank accounts/firm credit card**

As soon as you can, you'll need to establish a relationship with a local bank. That means opening an operating account (for which you'll need the EIN and corporate documents I referred to above) and probably an IOLTA (Interest on Lawyers Trust Accounts) account to handle any

client funds. Be sure to order checks for the operating account immediately – you’ll need them soon.

The reason I refer to establishing a relationship with the bank, and not simply opening an account, is that you will probably want to set up a line of credit you can borrow against if necessary during your first months. You may have sufficient savings to get you through the start-up phase, but then again you may not. And in any event, you never know when your practice will need some short term credit, so start establishing that relationship now. If you never use it, fine. But build a good credit history with your lender while you can.

Finally, get a separate firm credit card either through your bank or somewhere else. It will simplify your bookkeeping significantly if you have one credit card for business use, regardless of whether you choose to download the transactions directly into your bookkeeping software, as we do.

## **22. Filing system**

If you’re lucky, you’ll be inundated with documents, both paper and electronic, in the cases you take with you as soon as you leave. You should determine early on what your filing system is going to be, and train anyone working in your office in it, so documents go where they need to with a minimum of fuss and uncertainty.

One of the opportunities in starting a new office is to try to realize efficiencies you could not in your old firm, either because of the existing system or the existing files. In my case, I took the opportunity of creating an essentially paperless case management system when I started my new office. It was actually a fairly easy decision for me, since the files I had been working on were mostly electronic anyway, with only a few pages of unscanned notes or correspondence. In most cases the entire files came over from my former firm simply as files on a disk, which I could simply copy into the file structure I’d already created on the server. What programs to use for your case management, including calendaring and contacts software, is beyond the scope of this paper, but this is your chance to set up how you’d like things to be handled.

I mentioned above that there will probably be a period where you don’t have your computer system set up – what you can do is set up the file system you want, in embryo form, either on your temporary computer, or a server on your home network, if you have one, or even on a standalone hard drive. Then, when the new server is ready, the files can be transferred by thumb USB drive, CD, or external hard drive to the new server.

## **23. Staff**

The best advice for any lawyer starting a new office is to try your hardest to take one good staff person with you when you leave. Running an office with no staff – especially during the startup phase – is incredibly difficult. You need someone, at a bare minimum, to answer phones, file, and handle the innumerable errands that a new office will have. Soon you will need a trained assistant who can handle court filings, service, document preparation and all the other administrative tasks that a lawyer should delegate out, if they can.

If you cannot take someone with you, immediately start contacting people who may know someone. Odds are good that some office you know just finished interviewing to fill a vacancy and will have resumes they are willing to share. You can also advertise with the TWC job data bank.

This is also a good example of the “what goes around comes around” rule. If you have treated support staff in other law offices with respect and courtesy when working with them, that

can pay off here, because frankly, many lawyers do not. When the word gets out that you are looking for experienced administrative help, you may find that someone at another firm is willing to come work for you. If not, in my experience they will go out of their way to try to refer friends to you. But regardless of who you bring in, remember that you will need to train almost anyone in how you want things done, so be prepared to spend some time first in deciding how you want things done, and then explaining it to your new staff.

#### **24. Office Supplies**

I'll never forget buying my first office supplies – a few phone message pads, some Post-Its and a ream of copier paper – and putting them on the shelves in our copier-less “copier” room. You'll need to keep a list of the things that realistically you'll need in your office. For example, paper clips are not a high priority in our office, and I'm still using leftover staples from my grandfather's office supply store that are older than I am. Frankly, for many office supplies, especially in a small town, a quick run to Wal-Mart takes care of things, but there are some larger purchases – office furniture, etc. - where an account at the local Office Depot or other big box store might be a good idea.

Office supplies should also include some light medications – some antacid tablets, aspirins, etc. Even if you don't need them, odds are that you'll have guests (hopefully including clients) who will. You need to learn to start anticipating what people who work in or come to your office need on a regular basis. You are now responsible for making the decisions on how guests in your office are treated, and you need to learn to think on a slightly bigger scale than you had been doing when your prior office was making these decisions for you.

#### **25. Coffemaker**

Ever wonder why you didn't toss your old coffemaker at home? Because you need it now. Toss it, some of your favorite (and your spouse's least favorite) coffee cups, some sweetener and some spoons in a box – and stop to get some coffee and filters on the way to your new office. But brace yourself – for more than one transitioning attorney the relocating of the coffee cups has been an emotional moment. You can run a law office without a refrigerator, microwave, or snacks, but you cannot run a law office without a coffemaker. Whether you need it or not, you will have guests who expect coffee to be offered. However, this being Texas, tea is still optional.

#### **26. Billing software**

Again, it depends on your firm's practice areas and on what other software you are using (many case management programs include billing software) but to get money into the pipeline you'll need to get billing software installed and working so you can get bills out. It also saves double-entry of your time if you have the program up and running quickly.

#### **27. Fill out street mail form.**

One thing that's easy to let slip through the cracks is notifying the Post Office of your new street address. To do so, fill out the form available online at <https://moversguide.usps.com/?referral=USPS>. You can submit it online if you give the Post Office a credit card number and pay a \$1 fee, but your credit card must have the new street address on it. Otherwise, just drop it at the post office or give it to your mail carrier. The Post Office claims it takes 7-10 days to process, but in my experience you started getting mail

(erratically at first) in only a few days. But don't rely on having a sign – they will return your street mail until you give them the form.

#### **28. Legal research.**

The urgency of getting your research sources set up varies from practice to practice, but fortunately it's not hard to do since vendors are more than happy to take your money – just call up your previous provider and open a new account. If that service is now out of your price range, there are a number of other options available – see the LPMP website for more information.

#### **29. Dictation.**

Like many lawyers, I have spent a lot of my career dictating into an existing dictation system, but the cost of installing one from scratch was significant, and an expense I thought new technology could help me avoid. There are many options out there, including voice recognition software, but the one I chose initially was simple and cheap – a \$30 handheld digital voice recorder. It connects to my computer via a standard USB cable, and the included software allows me to transfer dictated files to my assistant for transcription (and helps her with the transcription). The portability is also a big bonus, as it also allows me to dictate while out of the office, and send the files either as e-mail attachments or via the VPN. Since I dictate most of my time sheet information, carrying my e-mail in-box with me means that I can – and often do – spend layovers in airports catching up on reading e-mails and billing time as needed.

## **CONCLUSION**

Opening a new law office is for many lawyers not just a milestone in their career, but one of the most exciting times in it as well. For me, it was a time when I discovered that there is a razor thin line between terror and exhilaration. I hope the above list is helpful to you in spending more time on the latter side.

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