# Ten Start Up Strategies to Help Solo Lawyers Hit the Ground Running

Opening a solo law firm is not for the weak at heart. There are the costs of getting the business up and running, countless decisions to make, and the uncertainty of what's to come. But once a proper groundwork is laid, a solo startup firm can be an extremely rewarding and successful endeavor.

To help solo practitioners through the startup process, we've come up with 10 strategies and practical advice. With some contemplation, preparation, and implementation, solo lawyers can hang their shingles and hit the ground running.

## #1 Contemplate Your Costs

The cost of starting a law practice can vary greatly depending on such variables as location, staffing needs, overhead costs, and marketing efforts. Add in the cost of malpractice insurance and personal living expenses, and the numbers start to quickly increase.

The decisions made about a new law office can greatly influence the immediate and long-term costs. For example, the decision to operate a virtual practice instead of maintaining a physical office space can reduce the upfront investment. A new solo practice may also be able to get by with limited staffing for a period of time to lessen monthly business expenses.

Whatever choices are made, solo attorneys need to consider all options before opening their startup law practice.

## #2 Watch Your Debt

Whether startup funding comes from a family loan, personal savings, or a business loan, it's important for solo practitioners to minimize the amount of debt carried into a new legal practice.

When borrowing from family or friends, a simple loan agreement can outline payment details while preventing possible misunderstandings. With personal savings, solos need to sustain enough money to handle their personal expenses. Personal savings also become vital during those inevitable periods of slow profit.

With a business loan, solos should only borrow what they think they can handle during their first years of practice. The loan may be the first step in establishing the firm's business credit. Solos should not ruin it by taking on more debt than they can handle.

## #3 Set Your Fees

Solos should decide on their hourly rate before opening their doors. When setting fees, solo attorneys should consider using alternative billing arrangements like flat fee billing. While hourly billing is a tradition within the legal community, many attorneys have chosen to move away from it, in favor of fixed fees or hybrid billing models.

Clients appreciate these options because they get a better idea of what their legal representation will cost. They also do not have to worry about a larger-than-expected invoice down the line. For a startup solo practice, fixed fee billing can prove more efficient and profitable.

## #4 Find a Mentor

Starting a solo legal practice can be stressful. A seasoned mentor can offer advice on how to grow from a fledgling startup to a thriving law firm. Local Bar meetings offer valuable opportunities for meeting potential mentors.

## #5 Track All of Your Time

Solos should not take one client before crafting and implementing a time tracking method. When starting a new endeavor, it is so easy to fall into bad habits, especially when it comes to the tedious tasks of time tracking and invoicing. If solo attorneys start off with an effective time tracking software like TimeSolv, they can establish effective habits that will endure.

Solo startup lawyers should also get in the habit of recording how they spend all the hours of their workday. It may seem like a lot, but tracking every hour provides a better picture of how valuable work time is being spent. Solos can then use that information to make decisions that promote efficiency as well as profitability.

## #6 Provide Excellent Client Services From Day One

It's important for solo attorneys to treat all clients well from day one. They need to treat their clients with respect, and always be honest about their cases and the cost of services. Solo attorneys need systems in place to ensure that phone calls and emails are timely addressed, and detailed invoices are consistently sent. If solos make the effort from day one, excellent client service will become a habit.

## # 7 Maintain a Calendaring System

When a startup gets up and running, solos will find themselves juggling client meetings, court appearances, and paperwork. Keeping track of what's due and when is crucial to providing excellent legal services. Solos should find and use an effective calendaring system. Memory often proves unreliable. Regular calendaring is essential to keeping the solo practitioner on track.

## #8 Efficient Invoicing

Regular compensation requires regular invoicing. Even in the largest law firms, billing can be a stressful and time-consuming task. The key to effective invoicing is an effective technology that streamlines the process. With TimeSolv legal billing software, even the newest solo practitioner can quickly create timely and detailed billing statements for their clients.

## #9 Pay Attention

Any successful business owner knows that they have to keep an eye on the company's financial health. Solo startups can accomplish this through detailed reporting. The gathered data provides valuable insight into what is and what is not working within the firm. Through reporting, solos can confidently answer the following questions:

- Are there too many outstanding invoices?
- Is time not being properly tracked?
- Is overhead too high?

With more than 30 reporting capabilities, TimeSolv gives solo attorneys the ability to easily run the reports they need to keep their law practices viable and open for business.

## #10 Self Care

When starting a practice, solo attorneys should not fall into the habit of overworking themselves and neglecting their wellbeing. Depression and anxiety loom over the legal industry because far too many attorneys sacrifice their physical and mental health to bill a few more hours. While hard work is honorable, so is taking the time that the mind and body needs to refuel. Solos should be kind to themselves, which can ultimately make them better attorneys.

To explore all that TimeSolv has to offer a startup solo law firm, click here for a free 30-day trial.

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**About Erika Winston:**

*Erika Winston is a freelance writer with a passion for law. Through her business, Personal Touch Edits, she helps legal professionals deliver effective written messages. Erika is a regular contributor to TimeSolv and a variety of other publications.*