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Popular Threads on Solosez

The Search for Office Space Begins...

I am a relatively recent NY admittee, and in the beginning stages of conducting the necessary research to open my own shop. Due to financial constraints which I can't see improving any time in the near future (unless I win the lottery), I had relegated myself to the fact that I would probably have to initially operate from home, using the local law library and public conference rooms to meet with clients. I would really prefer to have an office, for obvious reasons, but can't shell out anywhere near \$1500/mo for 150 sq ft of office space in Westchester County.

I was hoping I could solicit some information from the firm re: preferences for home office vs. office suite/sharing vs. virtual office arrangements, contacts for a respectable broker(s) for such office arrangements, or any other way to find available and affordable office space. I've read all of the books, and am aware of the pluses and minuses of each, but, with all due respect to Mr. Foonberg (whose book is my bible and never leaves my side), I wanted to hear it from those who have had to go through it recently.

Thanks for your thoughts.

The monthly newsletters for the Westchester Women's Bar Association and the Westchester County Bar Association carry ads for available office space. Both associations make their newsletters available online (see www.wwbany.org and https://wcbany.org/templates/page6_list.asp?DocID=106&page=0 respectively). The August WCBA newsletter has an ad for 2 individual offices in White Plains w/the use of a conference room for \$500-\$750/month (the other ads don't list the rent). The WWBA September newsletter should be out in a week or two.

Lisa Solomon

I am a 2006 law school graduate and bar admittee, and recently wrestled with the same issue when starting my own practice this May. I made the decision to lease office space, and I am *so* glad that I did! The following thoughts are personal to me, my tastes, strengths and weaknesses, and will not apply to everyone.

The only positive benefit I could think of to working out of my home was saving money. In the end, I'm not even sure it would have saved me any money (because I wouldn't have made any). Furthermore, the drawbacks (for me) would have been huge. I would have stayed in my pajamas, played with my dog, napped, and watched Colbert Report re-runs all day and not gotten anything done. I would have been lonely, probably depressed and unmotivated. Again, this is me. The best thing you can do is



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be realistic about your needs and work habits.

As an investment alone, I can honestly say that the money I have paid in office rent has been repaid to me two-fold each month in overall productivity, client satisfaction, business referrals, and contract work. After a former client of my old law firm visited my office for the first time, his comment was "wow, you are doing well for yourself". He is now my client.

I find it very easy to get in a suit everyday. Having an office helps me be professional and organized in a business-like fashion. It has also been so helpful to have attorneys down the hall with whom I can confer about my cases and with whom I can share research, books, and practice manuals. My conference room has come in handy on so many occasions already (client interviews, a will signing, etc.), I literally don't know what I would have done without it.

One last time, the experience of other people on this list may be 180 degrees from mine. Options are available for virtual offices, conference room rentals, and some people are just emotionally and organizationally better equipped to work from their home. Some people may simply have better homes, with comfortable and handsomely-fitted offices.

Some advice:

1. It is not about the office (mine is like 7'x10'), it is about the lobby and the conference room!;
2. Find a building with other attorneys (they will have work for you!);
- and 3. Know your own needs and limitations.

Best of luck and let us know how it turns out!!

Chris Vaughn-Martel

At minimum I think you should be at least looking into a virtual office set up that includes use of a nicely decorated professional looking conference room as well as receptionist and mail drop.

For my particular practice I don't feel that a home office is practical but I started out (many years ago) in an executive suite (a 10 by 10 interior office that the clients never saw because all they saw when they came to see me was the very impressive shared reception area and the equally impressive shared conference rooms) The owner of the executive suite (he later became a very close friend) put it best when he told me "I'm in the business of selling a professional facade"

If you can't afford this right away I would suggest budgeting for it as soon as possible. With a busy well staffed practice in large offices I've lately found myself yearning to return to those days of low overhead and excellent work in that executive suite.

On a more practical note:

Search the archives. This is a very common topic.

There a number of excellent blogs that focus on this or related topics. The one's I read regularly that seem to focus most particularly on either running a home office or using technology to the point where you can "go virtual" if you do so choose are:

Grant Griffith Home Office Lawyer

Chuck Newton Third Wave Lawyer

Rick Georges Future Lawyer

There are probably another dozen or so wonderful blogs that focus on more traditional small and solo practices. Many of them are written by people who regularly post here but I figured between the archives and the above 3 that focus on running home offices (Rick Georges apparently has a physical office but most of what he posts would be very useful to a home office lawyer) you should have an excellent head start.

Kenneth Alan Forman

I think you can do a lot better than paying \$1500 for 150 sf. I just looked at Craigslist for Westchester, and saw several office rentals for \$500/mo and some more for \$850/mo.

One easy way to find office space, is print out a list of attorneys in the area you want to set up your office (from Martindale, the NY bar website, and/or Yahoo yellow pages) and simply call each attorney with an office and ask them if they have any office space to sublet to a young/new attorney. That's how I found my current office.

However, if you are JUST starting out, then my suggestion is to keep overhead as low as possible, and work out of your home, and meet clients at their homes, office, or at a coffee shop. The fact that you work out of your home can be your selling point, in that you have low overhead, and can pass the savings on to your clients. Then, once you get busy enough, and/or start going stir crazy in your house, get an office. That's what I did, I worked from home for about the first year, started getting very busy, then rented an office. Good luck!!

Michael A. Blake

I have a home office, where I work most of the week. I have a separate space in my house for the office, a separate entrance, and a sign (as an aside, I am spending my Saturday afternoons working on a stained glass sign for the office entrance -- 8 weeks of torture, but I hope it will be worth it in the end). I also have a virtual office in downtown Chicago, in an "A" building, for more important meetings.

Meg Tebo wrote an article on virtual offices (and my use of one) in the August 2007 ABA Journal. It is on the ABA website and can give you a nice idea of whether it will work for you. Mine only costs me \$200/mo for 16 hours of office time per month, so it is very affordable.

Michelle J. Rozovics

I just opened a solo practice on June 11, as a new admittee in Wisconsin. I'm practicing law part time because I am also a half time teacher for the next year. I wrestled with exactly the same questions. I decided to contact some attorneys that I know in the area, and the first one I talked to just happened to have an empty office that I could sublet. This is a perfect arrangement. I pay him a specific sum per month, and for that I have a spectacular office in a very desirable location, receptionist and secretary services, phone, Westlaw, and most important of all, referrals AND help and advice when I'm baffled by things. I learned on about day one that while I'm as competent as anyone when it comes to law, I'm definitely inexperienced when it comes to the processes involved in making something happen. In law school they just don't teach you what to do when the client comes in and dumps a tangled ball of issues on your desk.

My goal has been one new client per week, and that's been pretty accurate. Some weeks I have several, other weeks none. I think in another month or two, I should be bringing in enough to pay my expenses, and then I'm hoping for enough to replace my teaching salary so that I can leave that and practice law full time.

I've enjoyed every minute of it so far.

Good luck,

Linda Schaefer

Nice article and nice picture of Michelle, too.

Sharon Campbell

I found a small interior office with a shared conference space immediately when going on my own because (a) it was cheaper than the fancier virtual offices where I would have 2 days of conference room and a pretty lounge and (b) my house is very tiny and I felt there was no space. That was last June.

HOWEVER -- I was thinking about my practice lately and mistakes made (and moneys owed, ha!), and while I am glad I am in an office now, I wish I had waited 3 months before getting one. Those first 3 months were VERY SLOW and I bet that is normal if you are starting from scratch. I mostly did marketing, read up on legal issues, researched software, etc. I met with a client about 1x every 2 weeks and that could easily have been done at a Denny's.

I do work with individuals, but a good friend who has been solo for over a year is just now getting an office. He found his business clients LOVED the fact that he would go to their office and also I think he sublet let them know his fees were lower in part because he had no offices.

So my advice is wait 3 months -- that is just from my experience. And Craig's List is amazing for office space in my area -- check it out in yours

as well!

-- Amy Kleinpeter

I should add that if anyone is looking for office space in the Boston/North Quincy area, there is an office open for rent in my professional building. The building is 'T' accessible and filled entirely with other solo attorneys. I'd love to see the office filled!

Chris Vaughn-Martel

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