

# Popular Threads on Solosez

## How Does a Solo Take Overseas Vacation Time without Losing Business???

Howdy All,

I am starting to stress (prematurely, of course) about a planned trip out of the country come summer. Curious as to how other Solos on here with no office staff manage their calls/clients when leaving overseas? E-mail is manageable for the most part.. but not the phone calls. Do you hire a temporary phone service & ask attorney friends to field clients? Do you leave a message on your phone with a forwarding number for while you are away? So many things to think about and I am already losing sleep.....

Any experiences that you would like to share would be very much welcome.....

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I haven't left the country since being solo but I have left my state. I start telling my existing clients that I will be gone for that certain time period about a month before I go. I leave a telephone message saying that I will be away from this date to that date and during that time I will not be retrieving any telephone, fax or mail or email messages but that if the client needs to reach me for an urgent matter, they can call my backup attorney (name and contact info with the permission of my backup attorney) and my attorney will contact me if necessary. I usually do have sporadic email access and certain clients know they can try to reach me that way but that I may not answer them as promptly as I would if I were not away. I haven't lost any clients while I was on a trip and I chalk that up to being really clear with the clients about how long I will be gone and that I will be out of touch unless there is an urgent matter and trying like crazy to get everything to a stage where nothing will need to be done while I am gone.

Naomi C. Fujimoto, Hawaii

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I went to China last April and I was faced with the same problem. I was 1/2 way around the world where night and day was exactly flipped. The emails as you say, are manageable because I can check them when I'm awake. I scheduled all my court dates around my vacation so they didn't conflict. I also told my clients that if they wanted to reach me, they should email since I'll be out of town.

As for new clients, I simply left a phone message saying that I'm out of the office but if they left their information and what they were calling about, I would return their call within 24 hours. Unless you want to hire temp help, this would be the best way to go. I wouldn't suggest getting other attorneys to field your calls because hey, they're your clients and if you get other attorneys to field your calls, the potential client might as well just go another attorney. Be honest and be attentive. When you wake up in the morning, check your voice mail, even if you're 1/2 way around the world. Wake up in the middle of the night to call a new or existing clien if you must. That, unfortunately, is one of the downsides of being solo.

If you prioritize and just return the calls that are important, called all your clients in advance, and did most of your communications via email, you'll find, like I did, that even though you have to do some work while you're on vacation, it won't be so bad.

Gabriel Cheong, Massachusetts

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Here's a link to an article I wrote on solos taking vacations that offers a number of suggestions:

<http://www.abanet.org/genpractice/ereport/vol7/num4/vacation.html>

Andy Simpson, U.S. Virgin Islands

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I say, form relationships with attorneys you trust, go on vacation, and check out. Clients who don't respect the fact that you need a vacation once in a while may not be clients worth having. I have some great relationships with colleagues who I trust wholeheartedly. I would hand them my practice and know they would hand it back. They know I would do the same for them. Some are on this list.

Think about it. If there were an emergency, you would drop everything and deal with the issues after you got back. Why wait for something bad to happen to do that? A couple of summers ago we went with my daughters (dropped my son at college first) to Italy. I had internet access in Rome, and none in Venice. Guess where I was more relaxed? When we went away over Christmas this year, for the first time ever, I did not bring my laptop. It was definitely one of the best family vacations ever.

You may think you are indispensable, but really, your clients can live without you for a few days. Part of this has to do with training clients. Put up some boundaries. You should not "lose" business. Just tell people on your answering machine that you will be returning calls on X day and then do it.

Andrea Goldman, Massachusetts

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I've gone out of the country several times since I have been in solo practice. I always make sure I book a hotel room with internet access. I forward all my calls to my skype number before I leave the USA so when I am in my hotel room and a client calls I can pick up the phone just like I am in the office. If I am not available it goes to voice mail and I return the call just like I would if I were in the office. I have an unlocked GSM quad band cell phone and I purchase a sim card in the country that I am visiting. On occasion I have forwarded my skype number to my local (foreign) phone number and can answer the phone when I am away from my hotel room. In January 2008, I had a new client call me and I discussed her case with her and made an appointment for her to come in my office when I returned, but I don't think she had any idea that when we first spoke that I was out of the country.

Jeffery Gray, Illinois

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I'm in Ireland now on vacation, and managing phone calls with Skype. I have the same number as in Dallas, so that when people call, they just leave messages as normal. I check the messages on the computer via Skype, and return the calls. I have had to schedule a few calls and explained to the client that I'm 6 hours ahead now, so we do the calls in the morning Dallas time, afternoon for me. So far it's working really well.

Elaine Martin

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For litigation matters I file a Notice of Non-Availability with the court so that nothing is scheduled while I am away. Change voice mail recording to state on vacation and will return to the office on \_\_\_ date. I don't take more than a week off so an extended vacation for two - three weeks would be more of a problem. Most clients won't freak out if you are gone for a week.

I had a personal injury client that had just signed the contract and I had very little to do on her case at that early stage of her case. One month later I went on vacation and the client was extremely upset that I went on

vacation 'right after taking her case.' She said she would not have hired me if she new I would be gone for a week. Very unreasonable client and within a few months she fired me and hired another firm. Some clients will not be happy with you taking some time off to recoup.

Dennis Chen, Florida

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I went out of the country at least twice since I became a solo, luckily I had someone available to return phone calls to inform the callers that I was on Vacation until a certain date.

I see at two options for you,

1. Check your voice mail every few days, and call back prospective clients to let them know that you will be back in the office on day X.
2. "Hire" a good friend or relative to check your voice mail every day and return calls to inform people that you will be back in Town on day X.
3. Change your voice mail message to state that you will be on vacation until Day X.

I think Option 2 would be the best, and least likely way to lose business (with the call back occurring within one day). I think employing any of these options however, should be fine, and prevent you from losing sleep.

Good luck.

Michael A. Blake, Connecticut

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I would suggest the following:

1. Notifying your clients on active cases about your plans and that you will be available by e-mail.
2. Also, check voice mail regularly
3. Have your voicemail e-mailed to you
4. Alter your voice mail message to advise that you are available by e-mail,
5. Ask an attorney to be your back up to check messages and emergencies and forward any messages via e-mail.

Cheryl E. Heffernan, Connecticut

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Or send a letter to all clients and opposing counsel, as well as to the judges associated with open litigation-related matters, that you will be overseas and unavailable from X to Y. Send this letter 3 weeks in advance of the vacation.

Send a second letter one week later, referring back to the original letter.

Send a letter to your carrier indicating the steps you have taken regarding your absence, and forward copies of all letters sent.

Change your VM to indicate that you are overseas from X to Y and will have limited access to phone and e-mail. Suggest that the caller send you an email and expect a response within 3 business days.

Denote a backup attorney for putting out fires.

Go on vacation.

Have fun.

Jay S. Fleischman

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The first time I took a vacation in 10 years was out of the country for 2 weeks and I, like you, was quite worried about it. I second much of what others have suggested. You will need to adapt the suggestions to your situation. I think it also depends on what type of practice you have, where you're going, and what your itinerary is.

Since the first time, I've gone several more times (3 times in 2006) and will be going again in 2 months for 2 1/2 weeks.

I do primarily estate planning and probate so very little concern about court dates. I have no staff but am 'of counsel' so I leave a message on voice mail that I'm out of the country until whatever date and if it's an emergency they should dial a different number and speak to a particular person. That person opens my mail, checks my voice mail, and e-mails me about anything that may need attention. She also knows how to contact me by phone if needed.

Letting clients know well in advance and even sending out a short letter was also helpful. Every client that spoke to me about the vacation encouraged me to go and enjoy it.

I sometimes have trouble using logmein from my location in Germany; not sure why, so I check e-mail through web-based interface. I put solosez and other list serves on 'no mail.' No reason to have to deal with 100+ emails per day while on vacation.

Having a trusted friend or family member look at mail, e-mail, faxes, etc. and maybe even having that person return simple calls to assure clients that things are being covered works if there is no staff in your office/building/arrangement.

Most important suggestion: after taking simple, prudent steps to prepare, once you go, let go of the office. Don't make it a working vacation. Don't worry about things. Nobody is indispensable and that includes you. You will be a better person and a better attorney if you can ignore the office and focus on yourself and recharging your batteries.

Good luck and enjoy it.

Clarence Behrend, Wisconsin

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A friend in town is also a solo and had to travel to China to adopt a little girl. He was gone for a few weeks. Before going on the trip he gave his answering service my number for any emergencies that occurred while he was away. There was only one person that called and it was not a real emergency.

Dennis Chen, Florida

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To whomever is going:

2 years ago, I was overseas for 10 days on business. I did two things:

(a) Skype. Go to skype.com. You can log in from overseas and use your phone as if you were in the US. The

cost: \$3 per month. Also, you can call skype to skype anywere in the world for free.

(b) Log me in. Go to logmein.com. You can download software so that you can access your work computer/desktop as if you were sitting in front of it. So, if you need to access email, documents, do emails from anywhere inthe world you can be in front of your computer. The cost: -0-. There are other options that cost money, but remote access is free. I was doing documents, emailing them, sending and receiving faxes.

So, the phone calls and the computer...no one even knew that I was gone.

Have fun

Regards,

Joseph G. Bonanno, Massachusetts

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The whole idea behind a vacation is to take a break, not to continue working from some exotic location.

Dennis Chen, Florida