

Outdoor Law Office

So, since the weather in my neck of the woods has finally been improving, and idea came to me the other day that a friend of mine also thought of because he actually went through with it (and people say I'm crazy!)

If you're worried about clients coming into your office, my idea was this:

- 1) Get a small canopy tent, the type you would use for a backyard event or party.
- 2) Get a folding table and some folding chairs.
- 3) Run an extension cord for electronic devices.

Put it all in the parking lot or front lawn of your office building. This way, clients can stop by to sign documents in the fresh air and observe social distancing. You'll be able to keep your phone and laptop charged and if you can log on to your wifi from outside, even better.

I'd go one step further and add a banner advertising your law office to hang from the tent or table, so passersby can see your information. I ordered one from Vistaprint recently because they were having a sale. I'm going to use it at least for my wall behind me when I appear on Zoom. I'm a big fan of inexpensive advertising because normally it's so expensive.

If anyone goes through with it, I'd like to hear your results!

I might do it soon myself depending on much longer the emergency lasts.

Jason T. Komninos, New Jersey

Is a regular weekend spot at the local flea market next? :)

Geoff Wiggs, California

I cannot speak to the banners and balloons, but some estate planning attorneys in this area have stayed open during this disaster and have had their documents signed and witnessed in exactly this manner.

Parking lot, tent and folding chairs. Do you know how hot it is in a tent in southwest Florida when the temperature outside is 91.

Danny E. Meek, Florida

We've been doing our signings outside (on the sidewalk outside the office) for the past 2 weeks. All meetings have been on the phone or video.

Cynthia V. Hall, Florida

We've had a few 'parking lot' signings during this crisis, mostly deeds or POA's, nothing that required much time to sit and explain. The first few times we did it, we had snow flurries!

Now that the weather has broken, I was actually considering a folding table in the parking lot. But Tuesday our governor said we can reopen and see clients on a limited basis, so I guess I won't have to try that.

Michael D. Caccavo, Vermont

Were you drinking when this idea came to you about an outdoors office?

Jim Winiarski

No...is it that bad of an idea? It beats not getting paid or not resolving cases...

Jason T. Komninos

I love it! I have a very high traffic site....This will get attention and free advertising.

Rinky S. Parwani, Florida

I think it's certainly an idea worth exploring (i.e. try it a few times and see if it works). I mean that sincerely and not as a politically-correct way of saying it's a lousy idea. Things are starting to re-open in California also. Some people are going to rush back

in to restaurants, stores, etc. The more prudent course, I think, is to do gradually resume our former lives, just in case corona virus makes a resurgence. During this transition period, there will be a lot of improvisation. It's not like we need an operating room to do our work in.

I analogize this to those pop-up tax booths at Walmart run by Jackson Hewitt and other similar companies. There are desks and booths to try and give some semblance of privacy. Privacy and confidentiality are going to be your big problem, I think. Parking lots are big so maybe that will allow for more spacing than inside a Walmart.

My office in Modesto sort of lends itself to such an idea. The building used to be a house ages ago so there's a big deck outside that has power and Wi-Fi. In the evening, there's about 2 hours of light without heat.

Prior to corona virus, I was planning on getting a big patio umbrella and sticking a desk out there.

Andy I. Chen, California

For client meetings, we are doing them with Zoom.

For signings, we are putting client chairs outside our office. We are putting a rolling table in the doorway of our office so that clients do not need to enter the office. We are wearing gloves, masks, and have single-use ink strips for fingerprints when we notarize a signature.

It's working, but wow is this strange !

Linda Silveria, California

I know we are now allowed to somewhat resume, but Michael, isn't it a good excuse to enjoy this lovely weather while doing the signing! We'll have snow flurries again soon enough. ___ Have a great holiday weekend!

Tammy A. Heffernan, Vermont

How does the idea satisfy the requirement for client confidentiality? I'm not allowed to tell others that (Famous Person) is my client, but then ask him/her to do a consultation in a public place in full view of anyone passing by?

Curtis Drew, Arizona

It seems like the appropriate steps to take regarding where to meet where confidentiality of the attorney-client relationship is concerned is somewhat fact specific. If your client is (Famous Person) and the fact that you are doing a consult for them is something that needs to remain confidential, you could go a few steps further and ask whether you should meet with them at a standalone office that has your firm name plastered over the doors, as someone might see them going inside from the street.

This does seem like something I'd consider adding to my consult/engagement agreement, though. "I understand that due to COVID 19 we are meeting outside, I understand there is some risk that people will know I'm seeing an attorney for a will but agree to accept that risk as being outweighed by the benefit I receive where the alternative is forgoing a consultation altogether, etc."

Noel French, Michigan

For outdoor signings (which is what I indicated my firm is doing, and what Danny made reference to), it is up to the client as to whether they want for us to do the signing at all, and as long as they understand the circumstances, they can consent to it. Plenty of clients, usually those who are not in my local area, have me prepare the document then find their own witnesses and notary and execute it themselves. I prepared documents for a client in a nursing facility a few weeks ago, and she wasn't able to get them signed there. We can't (and even if we could, we wouldn't) go in there and conduct the signing, and they wouldn't bring her outside. In the end, she was released, and a family member brought her by the office on the way home and she stayed in her car to sign (and was apparently quite chipper for it.) You do the best you can in times like these.

As I mentioned, I am not doing actual substantive consultations outdoors, just document executions, which, in Florida, still require live witnesses and a live notary (live notary really only for another 2 weeks or so.) Virus transmission with more

recent reports seems to be predominantly in close quarters and confined spaces. I'm trying to protect my employees here.

Substantive consultations are almost entirely by phone and Zoom only for now. That is difficult for clients who are hard of hearing, and my associate has taken a consultation for such person in the office.

Cynthia V. Hall
