15 Ways to Level up Your Solo Practice This Year

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Whether you've juststarted your own law firm, or whether you've been going solo for years, running a legal practice on your own is no small feat.

In addition to meeting your clients' legal needs, you're responsible for all of the billing, accounting, marketing, and administration tasks that come with running a law firm.

With day-to-day pressures, prioritizing changes or additions to improve your business can be challenging. However, there are small investments you can make now that can bring big benefits for the future of your law firm—and your legal career.

Here are 15 useful ways to invest in your law firm's future, based on some of our most popular posts from the Clio Blog.

1. Read a Book

As a solo lawyer, you may not be able to go off-the-grid for a week-long reading bingelike Bill Gates does, but reading books is definitely an underrated way to get inspiration and new ideas to help improve your law firm.

We recommend starting with one book, like the #1 bestseller, *The Client-Centered Law Firm*. Set a goal for how much you'll read each day (or week). Even if you only find time for a few pages a day, you'll get through a few books before you know it, and you never know what ideas you may come across.

Check out this list of the best books for lawyers, as recommended by lawyers and legal professionals. It includes books about business, mental health, and more.

2. Try Out a New App

Even as a busy lawyer, you spend more time on your phone than you think. US consumers spend 3 hours and 43 minutes per day on mobile devices, and British researchers found that a group of UK university students used their smartphones roughlytwice as much as they estimated.

What does this mean for the success of your solo practice and your legal career? Instead of spending that time on social media, it might be worth spending some of that time on apps for your business. There's Fastcase for legal research, Google Keep or Apple Notes for organizing your notes, Clio for managing your practice on the go, and many more capable of meeting the specific needs of your business model and practice area. Explore some of the options on our list of the best apps for lawyers.

3. Make Sure You've Got the Tech You Need

Despite all the fuss over technology, having tech isn't necessary for modern law firms to succeed—having the *right* tech, however, is crucial.

The amount of software to choose from can be overwhelming, so it's important to do your research and choose tools that work for you. If you're short on time, we've put together a list of essentials that you can use as a starting point.

4. Tweak the Way You Get Things Done

Reassessing and optimizing your business processes may not seem like a "quick" undertaking, but by keeping your long-term goals in mind and taking a consistent, iterative approach to optimization, you can make big changes before you know it.

Take Palace Law, for example. The firm is constantly iterating on its client intake process: What started as a paper-based process became one based in Google Sheets and Clio, which became one that incorporates document automation to automate the client intake process from start to finish. In 2017, they saw a 76% increase in year-over-year revenue in just 3 quarters, which Palace Law attributes to changes in its client intake.

Want to see how they did it? Read their story here.

5. Automate Your Client Intake Process

While there are many processes you'd like to automate in your solo practice (faster invoice creation, anyone?), client intake is a top contender. As a first—and with few exceptions, non-billable—interaction that you have with clients, an automated intake process is a welcome time-saver.

Bonus: If done right, it'll be a professional, painless process that will leave a good first impression on your clients, making them more likely to refer friends and family to you down the road.

To get you started, here are three ways to automate your client intake process.

6. Invest in Your Education

Law school may be over, but the business of law and the world of legal technology are always changing. To hear about new ideas and tools for improving your practice, spend an hour attending a webinar or a podcast, spend a day at a local bar association event, or take a trip and spend more than one day at an event like ClioCon.

What you learn may be more rewarding than you think: Just look at how Chris Trebatoski has doubled his law firm's revenue, largely due to learnings he picked up at ClioCon.

Get your passes for ClioCon today.

7. Reassess Your Hourly Rate

Whether you're just starting out, or whether you're a seasoned attorney, knowing what to charge can be difficult. As a solo, you can ask what others in your area are charging at bar association events, but you'll also need to consider your business goals, your expenses, and the number of billable hours you expect to book. You need to charge what you're worth to build a successful and profitable business.

We've outlined a few thoughts on how to decide how much to charge here, but it's also worth looking at hourly rate data from our latest *Legal Trends Report*, which used aggregated and anonymized data from tens of thousands of legal professionals to give lawyers a clear look at market rates.

As a starting point, compare your rates with data from the report using ourLegal Rates Benchmark Tool.

8. Set Up Professional Email

If you haven't set up a professional email address for your solo practice yet, this year is the year to do it. It will help you present a professional image to clients, and it's easier to do than you might think.

Here's how to set up professional email for your firm.

9. Start Looking at Data

The *Legal Trends Report* talks about much more than just billable hourly rates: It also looks at the average number of billable hours recorded per day for lawyers in the US, and includes survey responses that give deeper insights into these data trends.

Take a look at the report, and consider whether any learnings apply to your firm. For example, the report found that lawyers bill just 2.5 hours per day on average—the rest of their time is spent on non-billable work.

How much of your day do you spend on non-billable work? To find out, create a matter for non-billable/administrative work in your practice management system, and use a timer to keep track of time spent on these tasks, just as you would any other billable matter. Then, compare time spent on this matter with time spent on all other matters combined. In case you didn't know, you can track non-billable time easily in Clio.

This will give you an idea of where you stand, and may change your opinion on whether you can afford to invest in extra tools or services for your business—a tool that lets you spend less time on administrative work and more time on billable tasks (and that gives you peace of mind) to some extent pays for itself.

10. Take a New Approach to Marketing

What's the best way to market your law firm? If you're not sure where to start, or if you've tried everything and are stuck on what to do next, take a look at what your peers are doing: Our 16 best marketing tips for lawyers, collected from a variety of professionals in the legal industry, includes plenty of actionable tips you can implement at your firm today.

Tip one? Take advantage of free law firm marketing options.

If you're looking for more of a step-by-step approach, take a look at thismarketing guide.

11. Write a Business Plan

The best time to write a business plan for your solo practice is well before you start your own law firm. The second best time to do it is today!

If you've been running your solo practice without a business plan thus far, or if you're just starting to think about going solo, resolve to write a formal business plan this year.

To kick off your process, read these tips for writing a law firm business plan from practice management expert Chelsea Lambert.

12. Update Your Law Firm Website

In the digital age, having a website for your solo practice is table stakes. But it isn't enough to just have a website: It needs to give your clients, and your potential clients, the information they're looking for in a way that lets them find it easily and quickly.

Take a day to review your website and see if it meets all the requirements on our law firm website checklist. Some items, such as making sure you're featuring your contact information prominently, are easy fixes. For others, consider hiring a law firm web designer (but ask these questions to make sure you're hiring the right person).

13. Start a Blog

You may not think you have time to start a blog, but Kevin O'Keefe, CEO and Founder ofLexBlog, says it's simpler than you might think—and extremely valuable for building an authority and reputation that can help attract potential clients. The key is to start a niche publication, focusing specifically on areas that you have a lot of experience in or feel strongly about.

One of the best marketing tactics for solo law firms is having a great, optimized website. If you're looking for tips on how to create the best website for your solo law firm check out our post: The Complete Guide to Solo Attorney Website Design.

Bonus tip: If you don't currently have a blog, and the idea of setting one up is putting you off writing,consider using a platform like LexBlog to get your work out there.

14. Follow Someone New on Twitter

There are plenty of places to gather ideas to better your practice online, and social media is one of them! Many of the best and brightest in the legal industry tweet regularly, and following them can give you new perspective, innovative thoughts on improving your practice, and inspiration to be the best lawyer you can be.

Start simple: Choose a few accounts from our list of the best people in legal to follow on Twitter, and keep adding new ones whenever you're looking for fresh ideas.

15. Start Using Legal Technology

The technology tools available to law firms are advancing faster than ever before. With the right tools and processes, your solo practice can be more efficient and profitable than you ever thought possible.

It all starts with practice management software, and it's essential to choose a solution that's constantly improving in order to ensure you're investing in the future success of your law firm..

As Jordan Couch of Palace Law puts it, "[Y]ou need practice management software, and if your practice management software won't link directly to [other things], then you're starting off on the wrong foot and nothing's going to work."

Combine practice management with a solid client intake solution like Clio Grow (or get them both together in the Clio Suite) and you'll be set up to provide a solid experience for your clients throughout the whole client journey, from intake to invoice.

About Clio

Clio is the global leader in legal AI, powering legal work across the profession, from law firms of every size to corporate legal teams, government agencies, and courts. Its Intelligent Legal Work Platform unites the business and practice of law, connecting the people, information, and processes behind legal work. Clio's AI brings the context together with legal sources drawn from Clio Library, a growing collection of more than one billion legal documents. Over 400,000 legal professionals in more than 130 countries rely on Clio to run their legal world. Learn more at www.clio.com.