

Checklists of Needs for New Law Office

Get Telephones, Computer Lines, Fax Lines, and Internet Lines Ready

1. Estimate number and kind of instruments needed, as well as number of lines needed by meeting and locations with a phone company marketing representative. Keep in mind that until you are busy, you may not need a lot of extra equipment that will quickly become obsolete before you need it. Consider using services that the phone company can provide. Call forwarding, call waiting, delay call forwarding, speaker phones, remote access to call forwarding, three-way calling, caller ID, high-speed Internet access and other features can be added or dropped on a monthly basis as needed.
2. Order equipment (may be delay of two to six weeks).
3. Order installation date (may require two or three days of work to complete installation).
4. Get telephone and fax numbers and e-mail address reserved in advance of opening office, so you can give them to your printer for announcements, cards, and stationery before opening the office.
5. Consider microwave transmission subscription service if you will have a lot of long-distance calls.
6. Get directory publication dates for telephone or other directory listings.
7. Consider Yellow Pages advertising.
8. Try to get low cash deposit on telephone equipment.
9. Get an answering service used by other lawyers or by doctors.
10. Don't forget eventual secretary, receptionist, and client usage of your telephone.

11. Get an e-mail address or domain name and a Web site if you want to attract international clients.
12. Get separate dedicated lines for your fax machine, computer, and/or modem, or get switching devices.
13. Cell phones. The world of cell phones and their usage is rapidly expanding. Check out the costs and advantages and disadvantages of using cell phones instead of land lines. Keep in mind the transportation of a cell phone number if you change offices or think you might change office location.
14. High-speed Internet. Most major cities and most communities have some form of high-speed Internet capacity available via telephone or cable TV, as an alternative to dial-up service. Get the highest speed service you can afford.

Order Furnishings

1. Determine if major items can be rented instead of being purchased.
2. Determine if used (sometimes called refurbished or remanufactured) furnishings are available (should be about 60 percent of new furnishing price).
3. Read ads in local legal newspapers for used furnishings.
4. Minimum furniture for office:
 - a. Framed photo of spouse and children for desk;
 - b. Lawyer's desk at least six feet wide with overhang in front and treated to protect against scratches and spills;
 - c. A table, desk, or desk return for your computer equipment;
 - d. One "judge's" chair for you. Try it out next to the desk you have selected. Be sure the chair has wheels or roller balls to roll over to your computer if not on your desk;
 - e. Two to four straight-back chairs for clients;
 - f. Wastebasket to match desk;
 - g. Clear floor pad for chair if office is carpeted. (Don't skimp on pad size, or chair will roll off edges.)
 - h. Floor lamp, if office is not light enough;
 - i. Potted plant.
5. Problem: Remember that new furniture may take from two to six months to deliver. Consider furniture rental.

6. Keep in mind that subletting, an office from a law firm or other lessor may provide a completely furnished office.
7. Second telephone extension for client's usage in office.
8. Bookshelf for those books you need or want in your office.
9. Minimum furnishing for reception room:
 - a. Four straight-back chairs;
 - b. Magazine rack or table;
 - c. Reading light for magazines;
 - d. Client telephone;
 - e. Bookshelf for books;
 - f. Coat rack and umbrella stand.

Order Equipment

1. Determine if secretarial service can provide you with dictating equipment as part of its service.
2. Determine if equipment can be rented rather than purchased.
3. Determine if used (sometimes called refurbished or remanufactured) equipment is available (should be about 60 percent of new equipment price).
4. Read ads in legal and local papers for used equipment and for equipment specials.
5. Minimum equipment:
 - a. Secretarial desk (with return for typewriter);
 - b. Secretarial chair (if possible, let secretary choose own chair);
 - c. Small copy machine or scanner, unless one is available nearby;
 - d. Dictating equipment lawyer unit, transcription unit, and two portable tape recorders, one for briefcase and one for car;
 - e. Word processing. Use your law school computer until you have a good understanding of what you need in the way of programs and equipment. Get a laser-quality or ink-jet printer if you don't already have one. Go for laser if you can. Color is nice, but not necessary, and color inks can be expensive. Get the fastest (highest number of pages per minute) black and white laser printer you can afford for printing information and lengthy documents and downloading. Time spent watching a slow printer, waiting for the printed copy, is not time well spent. Use a software program that is most commonly used by lawyers. WordPerfect (Corel) and Word.

(Microsoft) are the most common. Keep an old electric typewriter on the premises as a backup to your system and for odd forms, etc.

f. Word-processing equipment and programs. This requires a whole treatise. Get advice from secretaries, administrators, and other lawyers. Read ABA publications. Don't depend on vendors alone. WordPerfect (Corel) and Word (Microsoft) are the most common.

g. Accurate postage scale and postage meter. This will save you a considerable amount of money over the year. Investigate using online Internet postage.

h. Read the chapter on personal computers and other office technology later in this book.

Arrange for Supplies

Get some office-supply catalogs from two or three nearby office-supply stores. Open charge accounts with the stores. Ask for a discount from the list prices in the catalogs. Ask your secretary or another lawyer's secretary to make up an initial "order list" for you. In addition to stationery, equipment, and furnishings, consider supplies such as staplers, paper clips, scissors, two-hole punch, three-hole punch, telephone message pads, rubber stamps and inking pads, scratch pads, legal pads, paper cutter, felt-tip markers, staple removers, Scotch® tape, desk calendars, pens and pencils (use blue ink), manila envelopes, Rolodex® files, coffee cups and equipment, check protector, fireproof safe for wills, documents, receivable records, etc.

Don't Overlook Office Supply Centers and Copy Service Centers

The traditional separations between office furniture companies, office supply stores, office supply catalog suppliers, and copy centers have disappeared.

Office supply centers now sell everything from computers and paper by the case and desks and chairs to tea bags and candy along with computer rentals and high-speed copy services. Similarly, copy services now manufacture and sell stationery, office supplies, and computer rentals. Many offer twenty-four-hour service.

Before actually spending money on buying your initial setup of supplies, it will be worth your while to go to a few of these stores.

and get an idea of prices and availability. What you see and learn in these stores may affect some of the services you do or don't buy from a landlord or law suite.

I am hesitant to name specific examples like Kinko's or Home Depot because many of the chains, although gigantic, are regional and they constantly merge with other chains, changing their names and consolidating stores. Almost all major suppliers also sell on the Internet, where the price including taxes and shipping and handling may be cheaper.

Buying Supplies on the Internet

Consider Internet purchasing. I have made Internet purchases of supplies and equipment. I have never had a problem. I keep expecting to have a problem but it hasn't happened yet. I suppose it might happen in the future. I make no recommendation as to buying or not buying equipment or supplies via the Internet with big savings.