



TECHSHOW2018

Running A Small Law Office on A Mac

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One of the key factors in deciding to open your own law office is the availability of technology and services to help small business owners. Several months before making the move from my big firm, I started exploring exactly what would be necessary to open my own firm and the costs involved and was pleasantly surprised that the overhead was very manageable, especially for someone who was tech savvy. Here are a few of the tech related services and products that I've used while launching my Mac-based small business.

SOFTWARE AND SERVICES:

Web Presence:

Of course, any modern business needs a web presence. I wanted my own domain name, website and custom email address. There are many products and services that could be used for this and I'm sure some will debate my choices. I choose my services based on a number of factors including price, features, ease of use, maintenance (or lack thereof) and security.

I purchased a domain name (www.floydlaw.net) through [Hover](#). I used Hover simply because I had an existing relationship with Hover and their prices are reasonable while they offer ease of customization and privacy. Of course, the biggest challenge was finding an available domain name. You can imagine having a fairly common last name as well as being in the legal field meant that lots of the names I wanted were not available. I couldn't find a good .com so I had to settle with a .net.



For my website hosting and design I choose [SquareSpace](#). Again, SquareSpace is a company that I choose primarily because I was familiar with their product. [This site](#) is hosted on SquareSpace and I've built a number of sites on SquareSpace so I was comfortable that I could put together a site that looked good fairly easily. I had a few friends and colleagues recommend WordPress, and I agree that platform would have offered more flexibility and room for growth in the future. However, I personally wasn't as comfortable working with WordPress as a backend and didn't like the idea of ongoing maintenance.





I struggled a bit with my choice of email provider but ultimately choose a Google Apps for Work account. This provided me not only with ample email storage but also access to other products I thought I would use with my business including Google Drive, Contacts and Calendars. Although I have access to these services through my personal account, because of the nature of my business I wanted to keep work files segregated. I also liked the ability to activate two-factor authentication for additional security and the ability to access these services from almost anywhere. Google Apps for Work costs \$5 per month per user which means I can add on as my business expands and have administrative control over those accounts as well.

Bookkeeping and Invoicing

Bookkeeping is probably the area that I had the least familiarity with and is the one that I'm still figuring out. I have a CPA friend who handles my personal taxes and will also be handling my business affairs so I looked to her for guidance in this area. Essentially I told my CPA what my plan was and asked if I could pay her to setup my business and teach me how to run the books. She gladly agreed as this would make her job during tax time a lot easier.



QuickBooks®

She set me up with a basic QuickBooks Online account. While this does have a monthly fee, my CPA felt it would be the easiest to maintain and for us to share information so she could help me with regular audits and end of the year taxes. For now we've started on one of the lower-tier plans with the idea that we can always move up if my business needs warrant it. Right now I'm basically using QuickBooks as a glorified checking register, but as an attorney we also have to do some fancy things like keep track of client trust accounts.



In addition to QuickBooks I'm testing two similar invoicing services, [Harvest](#) and [Freshbooks](#). My gut reaction is that Harvest may be the better fit for my business because it seems to have better time tracking features (very important for attorneys who often bill hourly) as well as integration with QuickBooks. However, I want to give each of these services, in addition to QuickBooks' own invoicing capabilities a few months worth of trials to see which one wins out.

I haven't adopted a formal "practice management" solution yet as I wanted to wait until I was a few months into my practice to see what my needs were, or even if I needed something like that for my business. However, I am looking at [Clio](#), which is web-based software specifically designed to help lawyers manage their practice.

Brand Identity



I knew one of the most important things for a new business was to have a solid brand identity. I am probably more graphically inclined than most attorneys, but I am not an artist or graphic designer so I knew it would be money well spent to reach out to a true designer to help with my branding. To the rescue was [grafiksyndikat](#) who designed the Mac Power Users logo as well as the artwork for Relay.fm. He was able to put together the logo as well as business cards and letterhead and provide me with print-ready files that I could use for all my marketing.

Most of my colleagues who started their own practices put together a simple logo using text in Microsoft Office or let the person at their local print shop come up with something. I've already been passing out business cards for my new business the past few weeks and have received so many compliments on the branding. It's really the little touches like this that stand out.



Without going too crazy, I have taken my fancy new logo and had some marketing materials printed up. I was able to order 1000 business cards for less than \$30 through [GotPrint](#) and picked up custom notecards with envelopes through [VistaPrint](#). Be careful when ordering print products and compare prices both locally and through online vendors. It's easy to overpay in this area and you may be surprised that some of the online shops are more expensive than buying local.

Office Products and Supplies



I'm renting space in an office complex so while I don't have to stock a full office, I do have to buy all my own supplies and equipment. Because I'm currently an office of one, I don't need huge quantities, but I have greater needs than an individual. I've done a good bit of comparison shopping and found that Amazon has been overall the best place to shop for office supplies and equipment, regularly beating my local office supply store on both price and selection. With 2-day prime shipping, I can order what I need, and it will be delivered to my door within a couple of days meaning I don't have to devote a lot of office space to storing a stockpile of supplies.

Because storage space is at a minimum and I can't risk running out of office essentials, I've tapped into some automatic replenishment services. For example, I purchased a Brother laser printer that is [Amazon Dash Enabled](#) so my printer will automatically reorder toner when it is getting low.

Similarly, I've signed my HP inkjet printer (which I use for color documents) up for [HP's Instant Ink](#) service. Instant Ink is probably a good deal for people who use ink jet printers occasionally and allows you to print between 50 - 300 pages per month for a recurring subscription fee. I'm on the lowest tier plan which includes 50 pages per month (more than enough for me) and at \$36 a year this is a bit less than what I was generally spending a year on ink.

ESSENTIAL HARDWARE FOR MY MAC-BASED BUSINESS

Now that you've got a handle on software, let's take a look at some of the hardware I'm using to run my Mac-based small business.



[Mac mini](#)

I choose to run my Mac-based law practice with a Mac mini primarily out of convenience. I already had one that I could devote to the task. Nevertheless, I think it's a great machine for an office workstation. For most office tasks such as word processing, managing email, web browsing and the like and packs more than enough power. I've upgrade my mini with a 256 GB SSD and 16 GB of RAM so I have no trouble virtualizing Windows or other more intensive tasks. The Mac mini's low cost of entry is appealing, especially if you already have accessories like a monitor, keyboard and mouse.

If you're looking for something with a little more power, or building a workstation completely from scratch, you might want to consider an iMac, especially considering that as of the writing of this paper the Mac mini hasn't been updated by Apple in several years and is now a fairly old machine. Rumors abound of a significant Mac mini update and refresh in the future, so stay tuned..

Of course, if you already have an Apple laptop, there's no reason you can't use your existing computer for business use. However, you will want to make sure that your business files and information are properly secured from accidental disclosure.



[ScanSnap iX500](#)

I've adopted a primarily paperless practice for a number of reasons. I find it easier to manage scanned PDFs than a bunch of files, PDFs are easier to transport, store and backup than paper files, a paperless practice keeps clutter down, and it's less for me to manage. Because I have a lot of documents that come into my life I need a reliable workhouse scanner so the iX500 was a no brainer. One feature I particularly appreciate is the ability to scan wirelessly to my Mac. Because of the way my office is arranged it's not convenient to keep the ScanSnap on my desk physically connected to my computer. I keep the ScanSnap on a credenza out of the way but easily accessible.





[Brother HL-L2340DW Laser Printer](#)

I have access to a larger document center in the office for significant copy/print jobs so I was looking for a basic laser printer for everyday use. I was looking for a few key features including reasonable up-front cost, reasonable replacement toner costs, AirPrint compatibility, the ability to print envelopes, and good enough quality to print my own letterhead. I ultimately chose this model because it was the [Wirecutter pick](#), and while it's fairly basic, it fits the bill. I also appreciate the fact this printer is Amazon Dash enabled meaning you can set it up to auto-reload toner when it's getting low. This is a great feature for me as it means I don't have to keep spare toner around the office when my storage space is at a premium.

[DYMO Twin Turbo Label Printer](#)

As a small business owner I find myself needing lots of labels, mostly for postage and mailing. I keep one side of the twin turbo filled with standard address labels, the other with specialized postage labels. Printing a single label for an envelope or an entire mailing list is easy. I'm also using the DYMO for postage as it's compatible with a number of different services. Right now I'm using Endicia's [free print service for DYMO](#) and a booklet of stamps from my local post office. So far, that's been enough for me and has saved me the expense of a monthly postal service. If at some point I outgrow the restrictions of their free plan, I can always upgrade to either one of their [premium accounts](#) or something like [Stamps.com](#)



APC Battery Backup

If it's important, it needs to be plugged into an APC, especially in Florida where we're prone to flash thunderstorms. In the month since I've opened my practice we've already had one hurricane and a flash storm causing power outages. Because my Mac and monitor was plugged into a battery backup I was able to keep them running long enough to save my work and safely shut down when the building lost power.



HIDEit Wall Mount

Desk space is at a premium in most startup offices and I wanted to keep my cable clutter to a minimum. I found the HIDEit mount that would allow me to mount my Mac mini either to a wall, under a desk, or - as I choose - to the back of my monitor. The HIDEit mount is VESA compatible using 75mm or 100mm pattern, meaning the four screw holes match to the holes in a back of any VESA compatible monitor. My Mac mini is tucked out of the way out and off my desk.

Swivel Stand

I'll regularly meet with clients in my office and although my 27" monitor is off to the side of my desk, it still can create a physical barrier between me and clients who are sitting across the desk. I'll also occasionally want to swing my monitor around to show them something on the computer screen. The solution was an inexpensive swivel stand that will allow me to easily rotate my monitor (and the Mac mounted on the back) out of the way. It turns easy and feels stable

Monitor Stand

While we're on the topic of monitors, you'll want to make sure your monitor is at an ergonomic height. I find most monitors are a little too low for my preference. A simple monitor stand can



raise your monitor a few inches and give you some storage space underneath. There's no need to spend a lot of money here. I'm a big fan of the Amazon Basics line of products and they have a simple monitor stand that is inexpensive and gets the job done. I use this monitor stand in conjunction with the swivel stand with no problems.



[PaperPro Stapler](#)

Go ahead, laugh. I kid you not, this is the best stapler I've ever used. Attorney Ben Carter recommended this stapler and I thought he was kidding, it's amazing. I will never buy another stapler again.

[Wireless Headset](#)

I like to "walk and talk" even if it's just in a loop around my office. I'm a big fan of using a wireless headset. While there are many headsets on the market, I specifically picked the Plantronics Savi 740 because it's a 3-in-1 headset that will work with both my office phone, my cell phone and my computer. With a press of a button I can connect the headset to any of the three devices depending on my needs at the time. The Savi 740 connects to my cell phone by bluetooth, my computer via USB and my office phone using a standard headset connector.

