



So, you want to start a law firm?

Here's the **MUST-HAVE** guide
you've been looking for.

Getting serious about starting your own law firm? Congratulations. It's a courageous but exciting life decision.

That's not to say it will be smooth sailing. But there's tenable appeal to going solo – offering a range of benefits to those who succeed.

You can find flexibility and freedom you might not experience as an associate in a larger firm. And although you may not end up working less, you will directly savour the fruits of your labour.

What's more, you'll be able to set your priorities and make your own decisions about the direction of your firm. In time, you'll also get to choose your projects and clients, and focus on cases that interest you most.

Sure, your legal skills will always be your bread and butter. But by running your own firm, you'll develop expertise that extends beyond the practice of law – from marketing to finance and HR.

Most importantly, you'll be creating a business model that works around your personal and career goals. And that, by any standards, is a win.



'It didn't take me long before I realised I could actually do this! It isn't as stressful as I thought it would be and as others made out to be. The industry provides plenty of support.'

LPMC alumni

About this guide

While your legal training has prepared you for being a good lawyer, guidance for starting a firm can be hard to come by.

That's why we've created this guide: to equip you with practical tips for establishing a successful law firm. Complete with checklists, activities and other resources, we hope this guide will set you on the right path – from the outset.

1

GIVE YOURSELF THE GREEN LIGHT

A self-check to make sure you're ready

2

MAKE THE BIG CALLS

Set a clear intention – how will your firm be different to others?

3

GET DOWN TO BUSINESS

Gain the skills and understanding to be a business owner

4

PUT ON YOUR MARKETING HAT

Client acquisition and retention is your goal

5

BE AN EARLY ADOPTER

It's never too early to implement the right systems and technology

6

BECOME A RELATIONSHIPS PERSON

From clients and staff to mentors and colleagues, running a business is all about people

7

CASE STUDY

Learn from the experiences, challenges, tips and advice from someone who has taken the leap.



GIVE YOURSELF THE GREEN LIGHT

Let's get personal. Your law practice will reflect who you are – from the business model you create to the leadership style you adopt. So, before all else, make time for a self-check. Ask yourself: *do I have what it takes?*

Make sure the time is right

Before you quit your job and sign a lease on a new office, be sure now is the right time to start.

Opening a practice is time consuming – and running it can be demanding. Long hours and huge levels of accountability are common stressors. Do you have the space right now, mentally and logistically, to give your business the attention it needs?

If you're currently facing pressure in other aspects of your life, due to family responsibilities or health concerns for example, it's unlikely you'll be able to put your best foot forward at work.

Get ready to get tough

While drive and ambition may have brought you here, you must have *commitment* to keep going.

As a business owner, you need to be disciplined, focused and thick skinned. Maintaining an optimistic and open outlook, and being willing to do the hard yards, will be key to your long-term success.

Reflect on your people skills

Recruiting, networking and most importantly, acquiring and retaining clients will rely on your ability to build relationships with people. That's why strong interpersonal skills are so critical.

Your ability to adapt your communication style, show empathy, manage conflict, negotiate effectively and instil confidence in others will make you a more successful leader and business owner.

In a 2019 LPMC alumni survey, 53.9% of respondents did not go on to start their own practice and attributed this to inappropriate timing.



Know your strengths, interests and passions

It's true that *enjoying* your job and being good at your job go hand in hand. So, take time to think about what comes naturally to you and what you find most rewarding.

Your personal interests and background will come into play here. For someone who has grown up in the country with an interest in farming, it may make sense to focus on an agricultural practice that serves the needs of the community.

It's also a smart idea to revisit your past performance reviews or ask your former colleagues for feedback. Knowing your strengths can help you build your practice – and your role within it.

Surround yourself with support

It's hard work to set yourself up for success. The mental and emotional challenges are real.

Long hours, inconsistent income and solitude, particularly for sole practitioners, can take a toll. But with support from others – such as mentors, former colleagues, the Law Society, online groups, blogs,, friends and family members – the burden becomes so much lighter.

If you're feeling the demands of getting your business started, or the isolation from long hours, talk to others. Self-care will help you stay on top of your business and find energy to enjoy life outside of work.

Ensure you have the financial resources

The size of your upfront investment will depend on several variables – such as your area of practice, office location and your marketing plan.

But one thing is certain; you will need to spend at the outset.

So be sure you have enough financial resources to see you through the set-up phase. And of course, that's where smart budgeting and forecasting comes in.

Readiness Self-Assessment

Take a moment to reflect on the statements below. Please then place a tick in the relevant box to indicate how often these apply to you.

	A	B	C	D	E
	Always	Often	Sometimes	Seldom	Never
1. When I think about running my own law practice, I feel motivated and excited.					
2. I believe in myself as a business owner and feel confident in my ability to succeed.					
3. I am good at managing my time and juggling competing priorities.					
4. I am confident in the support of my family and friends in this transition.					
5. My work colleagues would describe me as an effective leader, communicator and people person.					
6. I feel strong and resilient – both physically and mentally.					
7. I feel passionate about the area of the law I plan to specialise in and believe it is well aligned with my skills and strengths.					
8. I am confident I have enough financial resources to start a law firm and keep it going until I get on my feet.					
9. I am aware of my skills gaps and am keen to work on my personal weaknesses.					
10. I have a solid professional network and feel confident to approach my contacts to ask them for referrals.					
11. I am conscious of the risks of starting a law practice and understand that it won't be easy.					
12. I am open to taking advice from others – especially those who have been there before.					
TALLY					

Now what?

1. Count the number of responses you circled from each sub column
2. Multiply that figure by the number in the 'multiplier' column to get a subtotal
3. Add the subtotals to arrive at a total score
4. See below to see how you rated

SUB COLUMN	# OF RESPONSES	MULTIPLIER	SUBTOTAL
A		x5	
B		x4	
C		x3	
D		x2	
E		x1	
Grand total:			

45 - 60	26-45	25 and under
What are you waiting for?	Proceed with caution	Put on the brakes
<p>You're confident, self-aware and motivated to start your own practice. You're also realistic and sensible – and have the time, support and resources to succeed.</p> <p>You've been ready to do this for a while, haven't you?</p>	<p>You have many of the ingredients to become a successful business owner.</p> <p>However, before moving forward, reflect on yourself a little more to ensure you're going in with your eyes wide open.</p>	<p>We're not saying never – just not now.</p> <p>Perhaps revisit the idea in a couple of years.</p>

2

MAKE THE BIG CALLS



You've taken the time to self-assess. And now you know you've got the attributes, time, support and financial resources needed. But have you got a plan to move forward successfully? It's vital to start your firm with intention – and give thought to how you will build your business and set yourself apart.

Clarify your purpose and proposition

Now is the time to make big decisions about the type of law firm you are starting and the structure of your business. Most importantly – what is your purpose and proposition?

This will help you plan your business and marketing strategies moving forward. Start by answering these critical questions:

Which area will you specialise in?

Ensure you choose an area that aligns with your passion, personality and expertise. Having identified your strengths, your specialisation should reflect this. A litigator, for instance, needs research, writing and analytical thinking skills – and a matter may never go to trial. While a transactional lawyer may require a personality that thrives on the rush of closing a deal.

Where will you practise?

Will it be a metro, regional or rural area? Is there a need for your legal services in this location?

What external factors may affect your firm and clients?

Like most businesses, societal shifts may influence your client base. An economic downturn for example, may affect a family law practice differently to one that specialises in tax.

What related services could you offer down the track?

It can be best to start with one area of law and focus exclusively on that. By trying to do everything, you may not master anything. But in time, with more experience, you may identify a related area to build into your practice.



'Those interested in starting their own law firm should review their previous employment contracts for any non-compete clauses to ensure they don't inadvertently breach these.'

Stafford Whitfield

Principal Solicitor,
Whitfield Legal



Choose the best business structure

What's the best structure for your firm? For example, will you practise with others or are you likely to be a sole practitioner?

Every business structure has advantages and disadvantages, as well as their own legal requirements and long-term tax and financial implications. Arm yourself with this knowledge before making a decision. Your state's Law Society is a smart place to start.

Business structures at a glance:



Sole practitioner

You'll enjoy many freedoms running a sole proprietorship. It's simpler to set up, easier to control and offers various tax benefits. As the sole owner however, you are also personally liable.



Partnership

Running a business with others can improve efficiency and increase flexibility through shared responsibility. But be sure you are on the same page as your partners.



Incorporated legal practice

Incorporation is not for every legal practice and comes with onerous regulatory requirements. But a modern corporate business structure does offer many benefits. These include improved management, the ability to attract a Board, greater flexibility and borrowing capacity – and limited liability for key stakeholders.



Multidisciplinary partnership

A collaboration between law and another discipline takes a fresh approach and can deliver a strategic advantage over legal competition. For example, a firm that combines legal and business consulting services can add value by offering a holistic understanding of a client's company.

Find the right name for your firm

A clear and meaningful name can be a powerful asset to your business. Here are few simple tips to guide you:

- **Make it unique:** You want to ensure your business is not easily confused with competitors and doesn't infringe any existing trademarks.
- **Don't limit yourself:** Avoid choosing a name that refers directly to your area of law if you plan to expand later.
- **Keep it simple:** Stay clear of names that are hard to spell, pronounce and remember.
- **Ask for feedback:** Once you've found a name you like, run it past a few people whose opinions you value.
- **Lock it in:** After you've conducted a thorough internet search and trademark check, register the name and secure your domain.

What is my billing structure?

Your billing structure will depend on your area of practice. But here are the two most common approaches:



Fixed-fee billing

Agreeing to fix a price from the outset works well for process-driven legal work such as conveyancing – since different cases often involve the same processes.



Time-based billing

Although considered 'old school' by some, there are clear advantages to tracking the hourly input of client work. You'll improve staff utilisation, profitability and the ability to estimate the scope of a job.

A combination of fixed-fee and time-based billing also suits many practices.

Make sure the price is right

Determining the right prices to charge for your legal services is a common challenge. Some factors that may influence your prices include:

- Uncertainty around the amount of time and effort required on a particular case
- Competitor rate comparisons
- Indeterminable court dates
- The unpredictable nature of conflicting laws



'Don't undervalue your service by lowering your fees to bring in clients. They will come if you're good at what you do.'

**Fiona
Giannakopoulos**

Principal Solicitor,
Collaborative Lawyer,
Mediator (NMAS)

SWOT Analysis

A SWOT analysis is a useful tool to start the business planning process. So why not give it a go now? We've provided some questions to help get you started. But remember, don't just think about your situation from your point of view. Think about it from your customers' point of view too.

<p>Strengths Leverage these</p>	<p>Weaknesses Improve these</p>
<p>What do you do better than anyone else? What will make your firm unique? What do your peers or colleagues see as your strengths?</p>	<p>What are your areas of improvement? What personal challenges could potentially hold you back or compromise your success?</p>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 2. 3. 4. 5. 6. 7. 8. 9. 10. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 2. 3. 4. 5. 6. 7. 8. 9. 10.
<p>Opportunities Take advantage of these</p>	<p>Threats Minimise or eliminate these</p>
<p>Have you identified a gap in the market? Do you expect to land a big new client? Where do you see your business five years down the track?</p>	<p>What external factors could be harmful to your success? How could your closest competitor impact you?</p>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 2. 3. 4. 5. 6. 7. 8. 9. 10. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 2. 3. 4. 5. 6. 7. 8. 9. 10.

Now what?

From your SWOT lists above, you can then create your strategic action plan.

1. Prioritise your top 3-5 from each box
2. Create **SMART goals** for each that help you capitalise on your strengths, maximise your opportunities, improve your weaknesses and eliminate your threats.

S-specific **M**-measurable **A**-achievable **R**-realistic **T**-timely

3

GET DOWN TO BUSINESS



Now that some of the big decisions are behind you, it's time to set goals and formulate a plan to achieve them – in manageable but strategic steps.

Gain your practising certificate

You will need to get your unrestricted practising certificate before you start your firm.

To become a principal or partner of a law practice, The College of Law **Legal Practice Management Course (LPMC)** meets the requirements of state regulatory bodies in New South Wales, Queensland, Victoria and Western Australia. Offering a solid ground in legal practice management, the program is run and developed by leaders who manage legal businesses.

You will come away from the LPMC with the knowledge and skills you need to manage your own firm – as well as tools, financial spreadsheets and compliance checklists.

[Learn more about the course here.](#)

Write your business plan

Writing a detailed business plan will give you purpose, direction and clarity. It will also help you define your goals and the specific steps to achieving them.

As uncharted territory for many, writing a plan can seem daunting at first. But with the right support and structure, it is not only doable, but an invaluable process for getting started.

As part of your LPMC, you will receive support to draft this plan – the blueprint for how you will operate your business.



Get the paperwork done

With your business plan in hand, it's time to sort out essential paperwork requirements.

- **Register your business:** An Australian Business Number (ABN), Tax File Number (TFN), Goods and Services Tax (GST) and Fringe Benefits Tax (FBT) are some of the requirements.
- **Set up bank accounts:** Now that you have registered your business name, you can open a business account under it (rather than your personal name).
- **Organise insurance:** To protect your firm's future, you need to plan for the unexpected. The right coverage is essential.
- **Open a trust account:** You will be legally required to deposit trust money to a general trust account maintained with an authorised deposit-taking institution.

Finalise your financials

Now is the time to bed down a financial strategy and profitability model.

Aligning your short-term budgets with your long-term goals allows you to secure your future, while staying on top of daily expenses. To begin with:

- **Hire an accountant:** Although you may be tempted to manage your financials yourself, employing an expert offers immense value. And be sure to ask your accountant if you qualify for ATO Small Business **\$30,000 instant asset write-off**.
- **Create a start-up costs spreadsheet:** A crucial exercise, and part of your LPMC, is working out how much it takes to keep the 'lights on and doors open'. Your spreadsheet will cover every conceivable cost including one-off purchases such as office equipment, as well as ongoing expenses such as utilities and insurances.

Start-up Costs Spreadsheet

Start calculating your expected start-up costs by adding your expected costs for each item and add any others not listed too.

Start-up costs		Income \$	
Equipment	\$	Savings	\$
Capital Costs	\$	Income	\$
Utilities	\$	Tax offset	\$
Insurances	\$		
IT set up	\$		
Accountant set up fees	\$		
LPMC	\$		
Rental lease / Bond	\$		
Loan repayments	\$		
Advertising	\$		
Business name registration	\$		
Registering an ABN	\$		
Marketing Logo	\$		
Website & domain name	\$		
Ongoing monthly costs			
Mortgage/rent	\$		
Phone plan	\$		
Transport	\$		
Loans	\$		
Credit cards	\$		
Postage	\$		
Office supplies	\$		
Marketing	\$		
Accountant	\$		
Software and systems	\$		
Insurance	\$		
Wages	\$		
Total Costs	\$	Total	\$
		Costs – Income	\$



PUT ON YOUR MARKETING HAT

Get acquainted with the world of marketing – arguably one of the most important skills when starting any business. With the right marketing strategies, you’ll be able to build a strong brand and ultimately, get new clients through your doors.

Define your target audience

Before creating your logo and website, you need to think about your target audience on a deeper level.

Creating an ‘ideal client’ or ‘customer persona’ will help guide your marketing efforts. This is a fictional character who represents your best client, with information based on reality – including interviews and research from current and past clients or prospects.

Establish a strong brand

You want to establish a brand identity that achieves instant recognition and a positive feeling with every association. Below are a few pointers to get you started.

- **A professional logo:** A professional logo will create a consistent and identifiable feel across your business – from your signage and website to letterheads and business cards. So be sure not to take shortcuts. Hire a graphic designer, rather than DIY with clipart or Microsoft Paint.
- **A simple website:** In today’s digital world, if you don’t have a website, you don’t exist. It’s as simple as that. But once again, avoid taking shortcuts on design and content. Your website is your window to the world – and your prospects’ first impression.
- **Quality marketing collateral:** With so much business done online, you won’t need to go over the top with stationery. But business cards, corporate brochures and flyers may be useful.

A LPMC alumni survey found that nearly 50% of respondents ranked ‘finding new clients’ as their greatest challenge when starting their law firm. Having a plan that addresses both client acquisition and retention is critical.



Create a simple marketing plan

Your marketing priorities will change over time. That's why you need to set objectives, strategies and tactics – and revisit them regularly.

For example, your objective may be to acquire more inbound leads. A key strategy may be to attract more traffic to your website, using tactics such as social media marketing.

Give yourself the best chance of achieving your objectives with a clear, practical plan. Be mindful of how you're tracking, what's working and what isn't – and when it's time to move the goalposts.

Here are some marketing activities you may want to consider:

- **Digital marketing:** From LinkedIn to Google Ads, you have a myriad of opportunities to promote yourself and your firm online. Prioritise the channels that best suit your brand and key messages.
- **Content marketing:** Creating content for your website or for other industry websites is an effective way to boost your professional profile and visibility.
- **Traditional marketing:** 'Tried and tested' marketing initiatives – such as local advertising and event sponsorship – can connect you with your local community and potential clients.
- **Testimonials and word-of-mouth:** Never underestimate the power of word-of-mouth marketing and a glowing testimonial or case study. Make sure you encourage your satisfied clients to write you a review or share their positive experiences with others.
- **Existing client communications:** It's a lot more expensive to acquire new clients than it is to retain your existing clients. Whether it's email newsletters or regular seminars, make a concerted and consistent effort to stay top of mind with your existing client base.



'I've found that positive word-of-mouth is the best way to get started. And that comes from integrity – being thorough, honest and a good communicator. I say it's better to take on fewer clients so you can be more attentive and do better work.'

Paul O'Keeffe

Paul O'Keeffe Legal
Assistance

Start-up Marketing Checklist

Be sure you can tick off each of these important items

- I am clear on my start-up marketing goals and budget
- I have defined my target audiences specifically – and I understand their values, pain points and motivations.
- I have identified my key competitors and understand the strengths and weaknesses of each.
- I have hired a graphic designer to create a logo, business cards, basic stationery and marketing collateral.
- I have registered the business domain name.
- I have a professionally designed and written website that reflects the positioning of my firm – one that I am proud to promote.
- I have decided which marketing channels I will use
- I have begun collating names and email addresses of people within my network who may be interested in engaging my services or refer me work in the future.
- I have started creating my firm's digital footprint to maximise online visibility (e.g. **LinkedIn Company Page, Facebook business page, Google My business, Yellow Pages, True Local**).
I have also updated my own LinkedIn profile to show that I am now running the firm.

5

BE AN EARLY ADOPTER



Getting the right systems, processes and technology in place from day one can mean the difference between success and failure. An efficient, streamlined firm ultimately means one thing – more time to focus on your clients and their cases. And let's face it, customer centricity is the bottom line.

Develop a tech work plan

Legal technology is complex and constantly changing. So, it's understandable if you feel overwhelmed. But keeping up with the latest tech is no longer a 'nice to have'. It's a must.

Start by outlining your short-term and long-term goals – and the resources for each step. You will need some systems from the get-go, while others can wait until you're more financially stable.



'Invest in technology from the outset. Use it in your practice and make it available to your clients. This will reduce your costs and allow you to focus on strategy rather than admin.'

LPMC Alumni

Short term setup

Once you've got a grasp on your immediate needs, aim to adopt your technology early in the process. For a lean start-up firm, efficiency is everything.

Practice management software

Implementing a practice management solution will help streamline your daily office routines. For example, it will help you:

- Organise administrative tasks
- Schedule appointments
- Simplify invoicing and payments
- Manage client files

Examples: [LEAP](#), [Actionstep](#), [FilePro](#) and [SILQ](#)

Accounting software

With the right accounting software, you can manage your firm's finances with efficiency and clarity. You'll be able to:

- Track expense quickly and easily
- Generate and follow up invoices efficiently
- Run financial reports at the click of a button

Examples: [MYOB](#) and [Xero](#)

Cloud-based servers

By running a virtual office and being able to connect to your business from anywhere at any time, you'll achieve:

- Lower IT costs
- Easier continuity and collaboration
- More flexible remote work practices
- Greater scalability as your business grows

Examples: [Microsoft Azure](#) and [Google Cloud Platform](#)

Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system

Critical to your sales and marketing efforts, a CRM system will help you:

- Maintain a centralised database of clients
- Track leads and conversions
- Improve client retention
- Automate your sales and marketing workflow

Examples: [Salesforce](#) and [Zoho](#)

Security and support

Ensuring the security of your firm's data is your duty as owner of the law firm.

Make sure you understand the threats to security and how you may be putting client information at risk. Develop a policy and data security practices. This may include effective passwords, two-factor authentication, back-ups and encryption.

You may also need to consider getting technical support and training – especially if you're not overly confident with technology.

While you don't have to meet all these requirements in a day, make them part of your long-term strategy.



BECOME A RELATIONSHIPS PERSON



No matter what type of business you run, relationship building is key to success in the long term. Investing time and effort in relationships will instil trust in those you work with. With the right reputation, you can attract new clients, retain your existing ones – and build a team of productive and positive staff.

Learn from those before you

It's never too early to start networking.

Regardless of your legal experience, you should build strong relationships with fellow practitioners both in and outside your field. This may end up being where most of your referrals come from.

Attending networking events is a good way to meet other professionals and gain valuable insights.

Sometimes you'll be asking for advice, other times you'll be giving it. But surrounding yourself with people who understand where you're at, both personally and professionally, will help you feel more connected and confident.



'It's important to build a good professional network to discuss and share ideas, especially as a sole practitioner. Be colleagues, not adversaries!'

Patrick Dawson, Principal

Patrick Dawson Law

Brush up on your leadership skills

Recruiting the right people. Managing teams effectively. Creating a rewarding workplace culture.

Effective leadership skills will get you far – no matter how big or small your firm. But unsurprisingly, very few people are born leaders. For most of us, it takes time, effort and lots of mistakes before we get it right.

Here are some basic tips to get you started:

- **Recruitment:** Don't just focus on technical skills when hiring. Also consider attitude, professionalism and integrity. Ultimately you want people who will be a good cultural fit.
- **Feedback and performance management:** Learn how to give constructive feedback. Catch people doing the 'right' thing more often. And reward staff for their achievements – in the way they want to be rewarded.
- **Role modelling:** As a leader, your attitudes and behaviours will set the standard within your firm. For example, if you maintain a calm and positive demeanor when under pressure, your team will too.
- **Communication and delegation:** Communicate with clarity and compassion – and delegate with confidence. Let your staff know you trust them and be sure they know what's expected of them.

Build relationships that are mutually beneficial

One of the best ways to develop professional relationships is to think of ways you can help others. You'll find that it's easier asking people how you can help them – rather than asking them to help you.

For example, you may be tech savvy and have insights on legal technology. Offering advice to another practitioner on how this can help them stay ahead of their competitors could put you in good stead.

Once you've established a strong foundation, you can then ask for their advice on something else.

Perhaps sales and marketing? Many experienced lawyers will gladly help.

Create brand advocates

Once you start to establish a client base, it's time to nurture them. By giving your clients ongoing value, you will encourage repeat business. It will also help you:

- **Lower your marketing costs:** A regular client base can mean lower marketing costs to win new clients.
- **Create brand advocates:** Satisfaction with your service increases the chances of a client promoting your work to others – a form of word-of-mouth marketing.
- **Achieve better outcomes:** By taking time to know your clients, you'll be better equipped to understand their needs. This in turn leads to better outcomes and an enhanced business profile.

Asking your clients to refer you to other clients can be awkward. While a strong relationship will definitely help, take some time to hone your skills in the art of **referral marketing**.

Find a mentor

Running a successful law firm is a continual learning process. That's why having a mentor can be an invaluable way to grow – both personally and professionally.

Yet, finding the right mentor and maintaining a fulfilling and mutually beneficial relationship isn't necessarily easy.

Start by arming yourself with information on 'how to find' a mentor. Your local law society may also offer some good advice and contacts.



CASE STUDY: AMANDA'S STORY



Amanda Mead

Principal Lawyer, Co-owner
Everyday-Legal (Lismore, NSW)

My business partner and I founded Everyday-Legal four years ago. From the get-go, we knew what was important to us and how we would be different. For us, it was all about being approachable and affordable.

Our vision was clear from the start

Everyday-Legal provides legal advice and affordable court representation to clients in the Northern Rivers and surrounding areas. We work across all areas of the law including Local Court, AVO, Tribunal, Civil and Criminal.

Underpinned by our fundamental belief that everyone has right of access to justice, we operate on low overheads and costs – so that we can offer our clients fixed affordable fees, wherever possible.

But the seed was planted a lot earlier

Before founding Everyday-Legal, I spent some time volunteering at a community legal centre, which was an invaluable learning opportunity.

More importantly, the experience helped me identify a gap in the market. I could see a real need for legal advice and representation for people unable to afford expensive lawyers – but not suited to Legal Aid.

And as it turns out, it also set me up for the future. Many of the people I met during that period now work at Legal Aid, which is a where many of our firm's client referrals come from.

The early challenges were unexpected

Strangely, we didn't encounter the typical challenges of starting a business – namely, finding clients. We are both business savvy and marketing came easily to both of us.

Instead, our biggest problem was underestimating the need for our offering.

Preaching the mantra 'low overheads and lower costs' we planned to run a minimal operation, mainly from our laptops and phones. But from day one, the phone rang off the hook and people were lining up outside our door. We immediately regretted not having more systems in place.

What it feels like to start your own law practice

Imagine jumping from a plane as it falls apart around you. You're handed instructions and must reassemble the aircraft... then learn how to fly it before you hit the ground.

That's what it feels like to start your own law firm.

I think back to the day I signed the admission register at the Supreme Court as a graduate – with a non-academic career history as a tennis coach and personal trainer. I was also a single mother, a few weeks away from giving birth to my second child.

But today, nearly four years on, I have an award-winning business in a profession that I love. As a side interest, I also have a vision to support other lawyers, particularly surrounding issues of mental health.

So, this is what I would say to anyone determined to start their own law firm: if I can do it, so can you!

My final pieces of advice

I believe there's a fine balance between knowing what you're getting into and knowing too much. But once you've made the decision, jump in, without hesitation.

Ultimately, your business is a reflection of you – your values, your work ethic and even your personal interests. That's what will keep you motivated when times get tough.

Finally, I believe it's fundamentally important to:

- **Clarify your focus:** Define your offer and stick to it. When you start out, it's tempting to take any work that comes to you. The risk is that you'll end up undercharging and undervaluing your service. We focus on family law, care and protection and crime. So, when we receive enquiries about tenancy disputes or conveyancing for example, we explain it's not our specialty and refer them on.
- **Do your groundwork:** Understand your clients and their needs. Determine what you stand for and how you're going to be different. But at the same time, maintain a little naïvety. Be prepared to do what needs to be done. Make no excuses. And don't overthink it.
- **Stay relatable:** My clients don't want to talk to a pompous lawyer and feel judged. I need to be approachable and accessible. Not distant or condescending.
- **Get support:** Surround yourself with like-minded people who understand what you're going through. It's the friends I met at the community centre that support me through all the tough times.

Learn the business of running a law firm

Transitioning from solicitor to principal of a law practice requires new skills and an in-depth understanding of the business of managing a firm.

The **Legal Practice Management Course (LPMC)** from The College of Law will open your eyes to what's involved – giving you the fresh perspective you need. The course also meets the licencing requirements of state regulating bodies in NSW, QLD, VIC and WA.

At the end of your course, you will understand:

- The challenges of running your own practice
- The financial mechanics of your practice
- How to lead and supervise staff
- How to lead stress and balance personal and professional objectives
- Your professional responsibility and ethical practice requirements
- How to manage legal practice risk and avoid negligence
- Practice management systems and new technologies
- Trust accounts and Lawcover

You'll also walk away with a detailed business plan – with sound business development and marketing strategies to get your firm off the ground.

How to learn more

Phone: 1300 506 402

[More about the LPMC](#)

[Find an LPMC course near me](#)