

Some solos like concentration

Most solos take a while to figure out in what practice areas they want to concentrate their work.

Not Dan DeMora. The Swedesboro, N.J., solo immediately opted to have a criminal defense niche practice in undercover drug operations when he began practicing law two years ago.

"So many solos have thrown away their past experience," says DeMora, a former police officer who worked in drug enforcement. "They are searching for something that is right in front of them."

But is it a good idea for a solo to have a niche? Unlike large-firm counterparts, solos can wipe themselves out by making a bad choice about a niche practice.

DeMora says the answer may depend on the niche itself. "Most solos developing a niche law practice still need at least two or three areas that they really work at because of the peaks and valleys. I think that I may work in one of the few niches where the valleys are not as deep because the drug trade is a booming business."

Ruthann Lacey, an Atlanta solo with a niche in special needs law for the elderly, says niche practices are particularly valuable for solos. Not only can specialized practices help solos distinguish themselves, particularly in a crowded metropolitan area, but they also are more focused practices. "I don't know how you stay on top of everything as a general practitioner," she says. "I also like knowing that if someone calls with a matter not in my niche, I can just refer it out."

While she is actively marketing her special needs practice, she does not plan to let it overtake her more established elder law practice. Ideally, Lacey says the special needs work would account for 40 percent of her work, but she has no plans to limit its growth.

New York City solo practitioner Lisa Solomon may have figured out the best way to have a niche practice that transcends blips in the marketplace. She created a service niche instead of an industry-oriented one, concentrating her practice in research and writing for other lawyers.

"I use skills that I practice over and over again



DAN DeMORA put his police experience to good use.

to address a wide variety of subjects, whereas other solos use a wide variety of skills to address a specific subject matter. So, in that sense, my potential client base is unlimited."

Like other solos with niche practices, Solomon says her legal research and writing practice was a natural extension of her previous work as a trainer with Lexis/Nexis.

While Solomon's choice has proven viable, she says solos need to look beyond dollar signs when choosing a niche. "It needs to be something that you are good at and something you enjoy."

—Jill Schachner Chanen