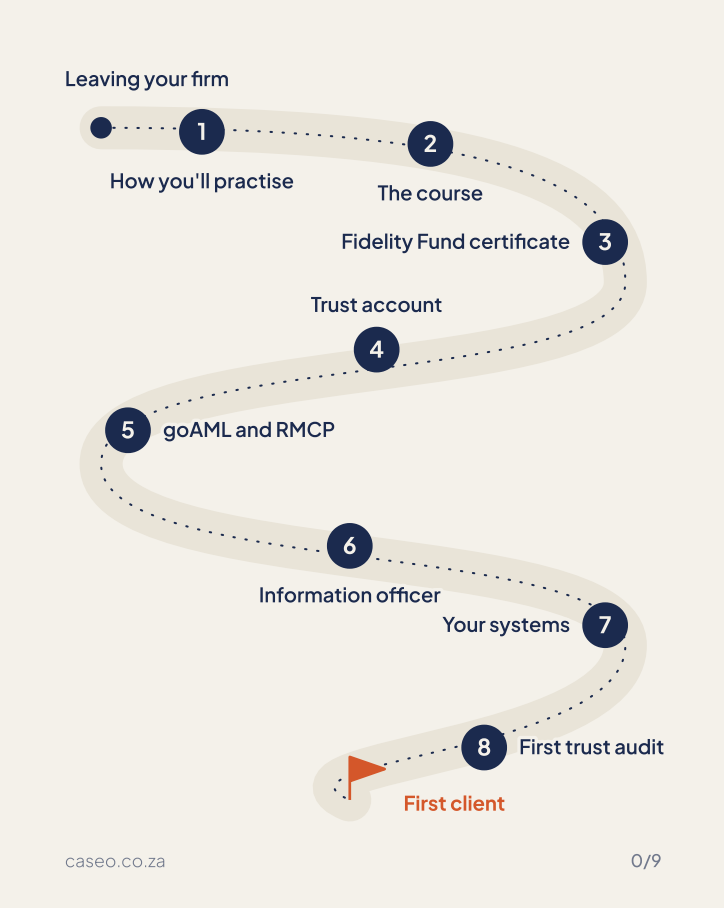
Opening your own practice

The Caseo pack for attorneys starting out in South Africa

A checklist you can work through, in order, from "I'm leaving my firm" to your first client. Every step names the law or rule behind it, so you can check it yourself.

General information, not legal advice. Fees and dates change each year, so check the current notice from the LPC, the Fidelity Fund, the FIC, the Information Regulator or SARS before you rely on one. Last checked 24 October 2026.

The order at a glance



1. **Choose how you'll practise:** alone, in partnership, or as an incorporated practice.
2. **Finish the practice management course,** or get an exemption or extension.
3. **Apply for your Fidelity Fund certificate.** No certificate, no trust money.
4. **Open your trust account** at a bank that has an arrangement with the Fund, and open your business account.
5. **Register with the FIC on goAML** within 90 days, and write your RMCP.
6. **Register your information officer** with the Information Regulator.
7. **Set up your systems:** diary, matters, trust and business books, letterhead.
8. **Diarise your first trust audit report:** it's due within six months of starting.

1. Choose how you'll practise

The Legal Practice Act lets an attorney practise:

- **alone, for your own account** (s34(5)(a));
- **in partnership** with other attorneys; or
- **as a commercial juristic entity**, such as an incorporated practice, when every shareholder is an attorney (s34(7)).

If you choose an incorporated practice, the shareholders, past and present, are liable together with the practice for its debts incurred while they held office (s34(7)). Talk to your accountant about tax before you choose.

Write down: the form you've chosen, and the date you plan to open.

2. The practice management course

Before the Fidelity Fund will issue your first certificate, you must have completed the Legal Practice Management course, or have an exemption or extension from the LPC (s85(1)(b) of the Act; the LPC asks for proof with the certificate application).

- Register for the course, or for an exemption, through the LPC. The LPC lists the fee on its fees page.
- Keep your certificate of completion with your practice documents.

Write down: course registration date, completion date.

3. Your Fidelity Fund certificate

Every attorney who practises for their own account, alone or in partnership, or as a director of an incorporated practice, needs a Fidelity Fund certificate (s84(1)).

- **Without one, you may not receive or hold money that belongs to anyone,** and neither may anyone you employ or supervise (s84(2)). That includes a deposit towards fees for work you haven't done yet (s84(3)).
- You apply online on the Fidelity Fund's portal, ffc.fidfund.co.za.
- If you open in the middle of the year, you apply for the rest of that year. A certificate isn't issued for a period that has already passed.
- **Every certificate expires on 31 December** of the year it was issued for (s85(7)). You apply again every year.

While you hold a valid certificate, your practice is covered by the Legal Practitioners Indemnity Insurance Fund's master policy. Read the current policy on lpiif.co.za for what's covered and the excess you'd pay.

Write down: application date, certificate number, expiry (31 December).

4. Your trust account and business account

Every attorney who needs a Fidelity Fund certificate must operate a trust account (s86(1)).

- It must be at a bank that has an arrangement with the Fidelity Fund (s86(2)). Ask the bank to confirm this before you open it.
- Client money goes into trust. Your fees, once you've earned and billed them, go to your business account. Keep the two apart from day one.
- Each month, your trust bank balance, your trust ledger and the total of what you hold for each client must agree (LPC Rule 54).

Write down: the trust account's bank and number, the business account's bank and number.

5. FICA: goAML and your RMCP

Attorneys are accountable institutions under the Financial Intelligence Centre Act.

- **Register your practice on goAML,** the FIC's system, within 90 days of starting. Registration is free.
- **Write your Risk Management and Compliance Programme (RMCP):** how your practice identifies and verifies clients, rates risk, and keeps records (FICA s42).
- **Appoint someone responsible for compliance.** In a one-person practice, that's you (FICA s42A).
- Check the FIC's website for when the RMCP must be filed: the FIC's directives set the dates.

Write down: goAML registration date and number, the date your RMCP was approved, your compliance officer.

6. POPIA: your information officer

Your practice holds personal information about clients, so it's a responsible party under POPIA.

- The head of the practice is the information officer by default, and **must be registered with the Information Regulator before taking up their duties** (POPIA s55(2)).
- Register on the Regulator's eServices portal (eservices.inforegulator.org.za). Create a profile first, then register the information officer, and any deputies on the same form.

Write down: information officer, deputy (if any), registration date.

7. Your systems

Before your first client walks in, decide where these will live:

- **The diary:** court dates, prescription dates, consultations. Everyone in the firm should see the same diary.
- **Matters and clients:** one place for each client's matters, documents, notes and FICA documents.

- **The books:** trust and business kept apart, matter by matter, so month-end balances.
- **Your letterhead, invoices and statements:** they should carry your practice's details, and many firms print the Fidelity Fund certificate number too.

A practice management system can hold all four. Caseo is one: it's built for South African firms, and you can open your own firm in it to try it. That's on the last page.

Write down: where each of the four lives.

8. Your first trust audit report

A new practice must deliver its first trust audit report within **six months of starting**. It covers the first four months of practice (LPC Rule 54.21).

- Appoint your auditor early. Every trust account practice needs one at least once a calendar year (Rule 54.20).
- After that, the report is due within six months of your firm's year-end each year (Rule 54.24.1), and it decides next year's Fidelity Fund certificate.

Write down: your auditor, the date you started, and the date six months later.

VAT

- You must register for VAT once your taxable supplies go over **R2.3 million in 12 months**. You may register voluntarily from **R120,000**. Both thresholds apply from 1 April 2026 (SARS).

Your first 30 days (fill this in)

Done	What	Date
☐	Practice management course done, or an exemption	
☐	Fidelity Fund certificate issued	
☐	Trust account opened (bank confirmed the Fund arrangement)	
☐	Business account opened	
☐	Information officer registered	
☐	goAML registration (within 90 days)	
☐	RMCP written and approved	
☐	Auditor appointed	
☐	Diary, matters, books and letterhead set up	
☐	First trust audit report diarised (six months from opening)	

Try it in your own Caseo firm

Open your own firm in Caseo before you open your doors. You'll add your Fidelity Fund number once, and it prints on your letterhead, invoices and statements. Your trust and business accounts are kept apart from the first matter, and the diary is shared by everyone you invite.

Leave your email at caseo.co.za/guides/opening-a-practice, and we'll send you a firm pass.

Sources

- Legal Practice Act 28 of 2014: s34(5)(a) and s34(7) (forms of practice), s84(1)–(3) (who needs a certificate, no trust money without one), s85(1)(b) (practice management course), s85(7) (expiry), s86(1)–(2) (trust account at an arrangement bank).
- LPC Rules: Rule 54 (trust accounting), 54.20 (auditor), 54.21 (first report for a new practice), 54.24.1 (annual report).
- Fidelity Fund: applications on ffc.fidfund.co.za; fidfund.co.za.
- LPIIF master policy: lpiif.co.za.
- FIC: goAML registration and the 90-day rule (fic.gov.za FAQ); FICA s42 (RMCP), s42A (compliance function).
- POPIA s55(2); Information Regulator eServices portal.
- SARS: VAT registration thresholds from 1 April 2026 (sars.gov.za).