

*How to get the help you need to
keep your business **productive** and **economical***

VIRTUAL ASSISTANTS



AND YOUR BUSINESS

A free mini-eBook by
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Why Virtual Assistants Are Good For Your Business

Business owners and managers of all kinds must deal with a dizzying array of organizational challenges, all centered around establishing the business' sustainability.

In the business world, as you constantly juggle planning, production, PR, finances and reporting, you must also constantly configure the delegation of tasks. And then there's the ever-present pressure of staff oversight.

If you have employees, you must regularly check to ensure their work is structured properly, their production levels are up to par, and their work ethics are in order. You pay wages/salaries, benefits, taxes, rent and utilities and all office bills. You endure a costly and stressful interview and hire process when one of your employees quits.

If you're just starting out and working alone, at least for the time being, you probably are having a great time exploring your business idea. Perhaps you've already seen some success, and the thrill hasn't worn off one bit. But you do wonder if you're losing too much sleep, and your partner is beginning to complain.

Whether you already have employees, or just want to unburden some of your solo work, take a serious look at working with a Virtual Assistant. Here's why.

Virtual Assistants work from a remote location (probably their home office). This means: no facilities costs for you; no cost for office equipment; no wages, benefits or taxes (Virtual Assistants do business by contract); no missed work because of inclement weather or traffic problems.

Virtual Assistants provide a huge variety of services, with each business also specializing in some way. Most of the time, a Virtual Assistant offers a basic service in administration. You can see the services offered at the VA's website. If you need general office skills – phone answering, typing, copying, email management, correspondence, etc. – or marketing, writing or website help, you'll have many VAs to choose from.

Virtual Assistants contract by the hour or by the job, with all conditions set up in advance. You are charged for time actually spent of your work, only. Most VAs use time tracking software to keep their billing accurate. No more paying for coffee breaks!

Virtual Assistants, as noted, often specialize in something. If you need financial assistance, many focus on bookkeeping. If you're looking for website

development or marketing help, VA sites again are the place to go. If you want research, design or even project management, you can find them among VAs.

And yes, there's one other reason: VAs are at home, in comfortable environs, doing what they love to do. In other words, they tend to be well-adjusted people. To put it bluntly, no more employee headaches! Find a VA who smoothly, professionally takes care of business because it truly is in his/her own interest to do so.

Maybe you're starting to see why a Virtual Assistant may be just the solution for you. You will save time, money and hassle; and very likely you'll receive higher quality product. You can agree to a short or long term contract, or simply go week to week. Many VAs serve the same clients year after year; others will simply complete a time-bound project for you. The variety is immense.

Twenty Businesses and Ways They Can Save Time, Money and Stress by Working with Virtual Assistants

This list is about special help your Virtual Assistant can provide, *in addition to* the more customary administrative services such as marketing, research, customer service, general admin, etc. which most – though not all! – VAs offer.

Because Virtual Assistants are very often people who have gone into business for themselves after successful careers working for others, they very often offer specialties. So you can work with a VA as a general assistant, while also benefiting from the VA's individual skill in, for instance, marketing, or bookkeeping, or writing. Look for a VA who focuses especially on the kind of work you need done.

Just a few possibilities are listed, to get business owners started as they think about parts of their operations that might be assigned to a VA. The full list is endless. Read through the following to get the general idea of how much really can be accomplished “off-site,” by a Virtual Assistant. The business type is listed first, followed by tasks that might be accomplished remotely.

1. Accountants – bookkeeping, preparing reports
2. Ad agencies – copywriting, graphics, proofing, billing
3. Architects – correspondence, project management
4. Assisted living facilities – HR assistance, medical coding
5. Associations – newsletters, communications
6. Attorneys – document preparation, scheduling, travel arrangements
7. Caterers – menus, invitations, organizing
8. Garden centers – websites, customer databases, mailings
9. Health clubs – newsletters, informational brochures, registration forms
10. Home builders – scheduling, ordering and tracking, accounts payable/receivable
11. Hotels – graphics, scheduling, executive and staff recruitment
12. Management consultants – custom proposals and reports, confidentiality guaranteed!
13. Market research & analysis – outsource your overload
14. Mortgage companies – document preparation, client communications, appointment setting
15. Personal trainers – correspondence and calendar, blog editing or ghost writing, travel arrangements
16. Printers – proofreading, editing, layout
17. Real estate agents – lead cultivation, start-to-finish oversight of transactions, always-there phone contact
18. Senior Citizens Services – grant research, writing and submission
19. Travel bureaus – websites, article writing, article submission
20. Wineries – websites, eBooks, blogs, special events coordination

It almost goes without saying, as well, that Virtual Assistants are computer-savvy, and many of them specialize in downright geekiness. If your business needs are centered on an ambitious web presence, you'll have an array of options amongst VAs.

Oh yes, and many VAs offer concierge services as well, so your more personal needs such as gift-buying, making reservations and doctor's appointments can also be delegated.

There are many, many more ways Virtual Assistants can save time, money and headaches for people in almost any business or walk of life. Think about it! In what ways might virtual assistance change your business for the better?

If you're still unsure, locate your pick of the Virtual Assistant websites you find for your keywords, get in touch with them, describe your business and ask if they see any way(s) their business could save you time and money. They'll be happy to make some suggestions.

The Virtual Assistant industry is nothing if not diverse. Most of all, perhaps, it's simply a way of working. Rather than hiring staff, you form partnerships with service providers. Odds are good that you'll decide it's the ideal business model for you.

How Can I Choose the Right Virtual Assistant For Me?

The Virtual Assistant industry is all about finding truly satisfactory solutions; structures and relationships that work very well for both (or all) parties in the agreement. As a business owner or entrepreneur, you'll find that VAs generally are extremely upfront about what they can offer. What's more, most will go the extra step of recommending alternatives if the work's not right for them. Why? Because VAs know only a really great match will satisfy all parties involved.

Punching in Virtual Assistant at Google gives millions of responses. Since a VA can often provide indispensable services to you even if s/he is located on the other side of the earth, it's helpful to know where to start your search for the perfect match for your needs.

Of course, if you need someone you can occasionally meet with in person, you'll want to narrow your search to your geographical area. At www.VA4U.com and other host sites, you can find long lists of VAs in your area. Alternatively, you can type in Virtual Assistant (your state) at Google. There, you'll wade through the host sites as well, but individual services are also shown in the usual order.

Still, this kind of searching takes a long time, right? Hopefully you have a really good idea about what you want a VA to do for your business. So the best keywords to enter are probably Virtual Assistant (state)(websites, or bookkeeping, or marketing).

Now, suppose you get this far and still can't figure out what's best. Websites can be deceiving, after all. If you've narrowed your search down as far as possible and are still uncertain, there are several possibilities.

Try to figure out how long the Virtual Assistant has been in practice, either as a VA or in the field in which they work. Longevity always suggests a good amount of respectability!

Call or email some on your short list of VAs and have a good long talk. Ask lots of questions.

Choose a few of the VA businesses, contact them, and ask for a proposal or information packet, or for samples of their work. Compare the ones you receive.

Contract for a very short time, or initially just give some trial work to the VA. Continue your relationship based on your satisfaction with the product you receive. VAs are used to an incremental process in partnering with clients.

Maybe the most straightforward way to find a really great Virtual Assistant is to list your opportunity on one of the VA host websites. Some excellent sources are <http://www.ivaa.org>, <http://www.virtualassistants.com>, the aforementioned <http://www.VA4U.com> and <http://www.VAnetworking.com>. On these sites, you simply list your needs and contact info with the host and then wait for VAs to respond to your Request for Proposals (RFP).

If the VA is not in your area, of course you will be unlikely to meet in person. Otherwise, all the above methods for selecting your VA are still possible, even if you're emailing to France or the South Seas!

If you can appreciate spending less and getting more, working with VAs is the way to go. After a short while, as you experience the services and support of a VA, you'll come to feel that you know them well even if you've never actually met.

Virtual Assistants Are the Ecological Choice

At lunch today, we talked about the likelihood that fluorescent, energy-saving bulbs will soon become the only sensible lighting for American homes. Some of us shuddered to think of this change.

It's understandable. The quality of light is pretty basic to our lives and cherished memories. Fluorescence garishly lacks the warmth of incandescence.

But much in the same way, we must remember that incandescence is vastly more harsh than its predecessor, candlelight.

Since we've definitely made the shift to light bulbs from candles, if necessary we'll shift again to fluorescence. We'll complain, but we'll change.

And then we'll reap the benefits. As the light bulb far more efficiently than candles can illuminate a space, fluorescence will conserve precious energy to appreciably extend our collective human tenure here on Earth. The difficulty in adjusting to change disappears in light of the rewards.

Thinking about forming an association with a Virtual Assistant might be similarly foreign to you, and you might automatically resist the change. On second thought, however, as a business-person or other professional, you know that a choice which is both economical and ecological has to be worth investigating.

To enlist the services of a Virtual Assistant is to organize your work in a way that takes full advantage of all today's resources. You choose your associations from a global slate of candidates, for instance, instead of being limited to those within commuting distance. The VA provides equipment, space and know-how that serve several clients simultaneously, maximizing the VA's skills and saving you money. Your time is significantly freed up, because the VA is taking care of the details. You are able to apply your energies to personal or business growth or other interests.

When you outsource to a VA, you are conserving office space, employee oversight and payroll, equipment expense, and payments for breaks and sick leave. This is great news for you.

Consider, as well, how working with Virtual Assistants benefits the environment.

The expenditure in fuel and time that commuting employees incur daily makes as little sense in the 21st century as refusing to convert to the electric light bulb would have made in the 20th. Given the stresses our world today knows in the areas of energy, water, global weather shifts; and given the well-meaning but

sadly ineffectual responses we are able to provide for natural disasters (e.g. Katrina, tsunamis, wildfires), if it can be done at a home office, it should be. Just as we still enjoy candlelight at times, business owners and professionals will continue to work with on-site employees in many positions. But for most administrative basics, as well as for special projects and flexible jobs, the world is discovering that the VA solution adds significant value to individual business as well as to the health of our planet.

How to Work with a Virtual Assistant

Business owners contemplating using the services of a virtual assistant are the can-do types, the courageous ones who want to try out new systems, the ones who are willing to learn new ropes on the road to smoother, cheaper, and more efficient operations. But how precisely to coordinate work with your VA is a frequently-asked-question, and this article looks at suggested ways to approach the process.

Range of Choices

The virtual assistant industry is something of a wild horse currently, a new business opportunity that people with a huge variety of skills are eagerly seizing in these days of advanced communications and equally accelerated fuel costs. It just makes sense to delete the commute, and for those with office experience of any kind, the concept of working from home can be the most sensible option. Other than in-person public reception, almost any kind of administrative office work can be transmitted digitally.

For the business owner, this means a huge variety of choices when it comes to selecting a VA. Since the work is digital, your VA may live anywhere in the world. You can narrow down the list of candidates by seeking the best expertise (within your price range) for the specific job you need completed. Other ways to locate the right VA for you are discussed in a previous chapter.

The most useful business relationship for a VA is a long-term one. As much as you want and need an efficient solution, your VA shares that goal. So, if you've studied the VA's website and have a solid impression that this person may be able to help you, start out the relationship in mini-bites. Ask for small tasks and evaluate the return. As you're increasingly convinced this VA is capable and faithful, you can add more hours to the arrangement.

Getting to Work: It's All About Organization

Before you start working with a VA, it is best if you do a little soul searching yourself. Since your relationship with a VA is long-distance, it's important to be able to clearly state your needs. You can do this in writing, or on the phone, via IM, or any number of channels, but you must be willing to convey sufficient information in a timely manner so that the VA can deliver to your satisfaction.

It is perfectly possible, however, that you have a hard time knowing, much less expressing, what you need. Some clients think a VA will solve all their problems. She may indeed help do that, but your dynamic participation is also required. Not knowing what you need, but being willing to work on defining and expressing it with assistance from your VA is fine.

So if you want to successfully work with a VA, be honest and as specific as possible about what you seek. To clarify:

In your business, or in various parts of your business, you are either organized or disorganized. Perhaps you're well organized around production, but disorganized when it comes to marketing or distribution or accounting. Maybe you spend all your time in certain areas and tend to neglect others. Or maybe you're brand new in business and everything's pretty helter-skelter.

1. If you are organized and just need assistance getting the job done, your commitment can be no deeper than willingness to delegate and to complete the necessary communications.
2. On the other hand, you may be disorganized and be seeking assistance for that reason. Your soul searching must honestly admit this. In this case, your preparations for working with a VA require that you figure out how to clearly articulate your desires. You must establish the parameters, or risk an unsatisfactory return.

If you can easily and clearly convey the job's related information, you already know what to do for satisfactory work with a VA.

If you are disorganized, either in your business in general, or in specific areas, acknowledge this to the VA. Agree that you are starting on the planning level, and make sure the VA has the expertise to advise you properly on the administration of whatever area is in concern.

Here's an example. Joe sells insurance, and he uses a VA to generate immediate lead follow-ups according to his specific guidelines; this same contractor creates any graphics Joe needs. He has another VA who keeps his books and files his taxes. Joe has been in the business for many years, and his systems are backed by experience.

Henry, in contrast, is just starting out in the insurance world. He's a whiz with figures, and loves selling, but otherwise has little sense of organization in getting his enterprise going. His talents have brought him some early success, and while it's great to be busy, things are starting to get chaotic. Henry seeks a VA, but has a hard time knowing what to request, or how to prioritize his requests, or even how to describe his dilemma.

The Question Is What Is the Question

Both Joe and Henry can benefit enormously from working with VAs, for opposing reasons and in different ways.

Joe's VAs are solid vendors supporting his well-established operations. They are independent contractors who know their success depends on Joe's success and so work hard and well for him.

Henry needs a VA with small business expertise. He should approach that VA with a basic organizational need. Many VAs can advise you about business organization, and work on planning with you. Once a good plan is in place, then they can do the document filing, public relations, marketing, internet presence, research and other work required by the plan.

If Henry asked a VA to do some marketing work, for instance, and bypassed the organizational planning entirely, his new business would not benefit appropriately and it's likely that Henry would come to view his VA as an expense rather than an essential, just like all his other multiple monthly obligations. When there's no organization to the organization, business can't effectively happen.

Don't underestimate the level of service VAs can provide. Don't forget, a VA is a professional, not an employee. Unsatisfactory relationships with VAs may be avoided by careful communications on your part as the business owner; and a willingness to say so if basic organization is really what you need.

Once you're used to working with VAs ...

your challenge is more about the intricacies of communication itself, and finding a sublime flow of direction and response that works perfectly for both parties. This is possible with some patience and faith in the process; willingness to be flexible and also respectful; and a keen, dispassionate honesty on everyone's part.

There are a number of recommended systems and tools to help your communications approach perfection. We can look at these in another ebook!

A Final Note

As a Virtual Assistant specializing in the written word, I enjoy helping clients express themselves in crystal clear and powerful language. This applies to *anything anyone may read about your business*, from marketing materials and public relations materials to in-house forms and manuals. You can ensure the quality and accuracy of all your communications with the help of a dynamic writer.

To schedule a free initial phone consultation with
Virtual Writing & Communications,
please write to mary@writingva.com.

