

HIRING A V.A.

A Beginner's Guide To Hiring A Virtual Assistant



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Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION	4
WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF USING A VIRTUAL ASSISTANT?	4
WHAT IS A VA?	6
WHAT A VA CAN DO FOR YOU AND YOUR BUSINESS	6
HOW DO YOU KNOW WHEN YOU NEED TO HIRE A VA?	7
DIFFERENT TYPES OF VA'S	10
RANGE OF TASKS YOU CAN DELEGATE TO A VA	11
GETTING STARTED	14
WHERE TO FIND VA'S	17
SHOULD YOU HIRE FROM THE WEST OR OVERSEAS?	18
WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN A VA	19
STEPS TO MAKE WORKING WITH YOUR VA EASY	21
CONCLUSION	25

Introduction

Twenty five years ago, a concept like "virtual assistant" could have seemed impossible. But this is now a common idea. Today, online entrepreneurs and other small businesses can hire an assistant from anywhere in the world.

Because of the enormous amount of daunting tasks a small business owner has to do each day, a virtual assistant, or VA, could be vital to the success of your business. It's easy to see how this kind of helper could save you both time and money, though many business owners procrastinate hiring a VA because they don't know where to start.

Business owners often feel they shouldn't need any help—that they should be able to do it all on their own.

What are the Benefits of Using a Virtual Assistant?

Using a VA means you can concentrate on the business rather than the paperwork that goes with it. You get more time to do what you do best, without having to supervise, train or worry about staff.

1. Save Time

Time is something that we all run short of. You can save time while improving your business by delegating tasks that are time-consuming, boring or that you aren't good at to virtual assistants. This will help you utilize your time for completing revenue-generating tasks.

2. Save Money

It is better to hire remote assistants who are experienced in providing services to small businesses than hiring in-house workers because you only have to pay VA's on for the hours worked. You'll also be able to cut costs by not having to provide computers, office space, insurance, etc.

3. Retain Qualified, Experienced Experts

VAs are professional experts who have plenty of experience in a variety of fields. They act as your better half in taking care of your business. When you are sick, busy or on vacation, your business doesn't have to shut down because your VA is there to take care of everything.

4. Complete Any Task

Whatever the tasks you want to delegate, there's a VA for it, be it label printing, customer service, web design, article writing, SEO optimization. Another important factor is that you can hire a VA part-time or full-time, depending on your needs.

5. Accessible Anytime

Since these professionals are accessible throughout the world, they may work while you sleep! When you assign a VA in a different time zone work at the end of your day, they will be ready to start it immediately. So when you wake up, the work is already completed!

Virtual Assistants can take on your trivial tasks, and help you to concentrate more on your business development so you can increase your profit and reputation.

In this ebook, we will be exploring everything you need to know about virtual assistants so that you can start outsourcing effectively right away.

What is a VA?

A VA is an experienced, skilled person who remotely provides administrative, accounting, marketing, technical, creative and/or personal support to any entrepreneur, business or start-up. They work remotely, usually from their home offices. Virtual assistants have a variety of skills that you might not have acquired, which makes them more efficient at completing tasks. Instead of spending time to learn how to use a new program or complete a task you aren't good at, you could hire a VA to do it instead. This saves valuable time you can use to focus on generating income.

While freelancers and personal assistants (PAs) have been in demand for some time, small businesses and online entrepreneurs are now becoming aware of the amazing benefits of hiring virtual assistants as well. VA's provide exceptional value through the flexibility and cost-effectiveness of their services.

What a VA Can Do for You and Your Business

Nowadays, the dynamic business environment brings a lot of new challenges and exciting opportunities for entrepreneurs and small business owners. To be relevant, successful and competitive in running any business, it's all about productivity and efficiency, so you can fully utilize your talents and professional skills. In other words, it is all about focusing on your strengths and making a large contribution to growing your business, while outsourcing and training the right people to take care of the rest.

When you are an entrepreneur, a start-up or a small business, it is only natural that over time you won't be able to keep up with all the tasks that need to be performed to grow your business.

The constant lack of time to finish necessary tasks or the lack of resources to hire additional full-time employees can result in a decreased level of productivity and efficiency in your business. This can make it hard for you to stay competitive in the existing market. And when you think about it, there are many important tasks that don't actually help you make progress in achieving professional goals.

The easiest way to deal with this challenge, while growing your company, is to outsource to virtual assistances who can help you with your accounting, bookkeeping, marketing, customer service and anything else that you have on the list.

HOW DO YOU KNOW WHEN YOU NEED TO HIRE A VA?

As an entrepreneur, you understand that each business owners scenario is different, as is each virtual assistant. Even so, there are some common signs that the time has come to hire a VA. Keep in mind each VA or VA Company will have different requirements and expectations. However, this also means that there is more than one choice. Just like the search for any new member of the company, the process may take some time, but it's worth not short-cutting the process.

If you're wondering whether you need a virtual assistant, the answer is probably a yes!

Here are just some of the signs that you need a virtual assistant to help you take your business forward:

You Find The Day Is Shorter Than Your Task List

Most of us have this happen at least occasionally, but if it happens all the time, you are obviously trying to do too much. Particularly if you find the things that remain undone are necessary, strategic tasks. Most likely you are spending too much time on tasks that are habit, routine, and/or part of daily operations. These are often the tasks you can outsource to a VA.

You Realize You Are Missing Great Opportunities

As our businesses grow and develop, we want to take advantage of every opportunity that comes our way, but that isn't realistic. We have to be picky about pursuing those that are the best match for our strategic goals.

But if you can't say yes to opportunities that are a perfect match, something has got to give. Often the work that got us to this new opportunity no longer *requires* our full attention. Even if you can

outsource a few pieces to a VA, you will often find enough space to take on something new.

At Least One Area Of Your Business Is Suffering

Everyone has aspects of the business they enjoy and others not so much. Those dreaded tasks often get ignored, even though they are usually still important to your business' overall health and success.

When we don't enjoy or feel skilled in a particular area, it is easy to avoid doing that work. Hiring a VA who has skills in those areas not only will improve those elements, but often will help you find similar areas where they can also assist. Removing the dread or guilt will open you up to more positive thoughts and actions.

Things are Falling Through the Cracks

You've got so many projects going and people you need to communicate with that you can't keep track. It's starting to show in missed deadlines, missed communication and possibly in your overall revenue trends. When you hit that point, it's past time to partner with a virtual assistant to help you manage all those details and emails so that you can focus on the bigger picture.

You're Living in your Inbox

If you're spending your entire day in your inbox, you're not accomplishing the things you really need to be producing as a leader. Email is the lifeblood of most companies today, no doubt—but it can also be the leading killer of productivity and keep you from achieving what really needs to happen. Let a virtual assistant become your inbox gatekeeper and triage your incoming email. This way, you'll be able to focus completely on the tasks you need to do without feeling the pressure to constantly check your inbox.

You Are Not As Responsive To Customers As You Would Like

With the advent of instant connections, people expect amazingly fast customer service. However, responding to every email beep is also very inefficient, particularly if you are trying to focus on a bigger project.

Although some customer service communications *require* your unique knowledge, many can be handled by anyone who is given sufficient basic knowledge. A VA can be that person. For the more complicated matters, they can still respond, acknowledging the issue and letting the customer know what to expect in terms of hearing back from you.

You Want To Create New Products But Can't Seem To Pull The Pieces Together

Entrepreneurs have ideas - lots of them - but converting them from an idea into a product is often much more difficult than it should be.

The reasons vary for each person, but usually include an element of lack of time, lack of knowledge/skill, or lack of desire to complete the next step. More often than not, these are areas where a VA can make a difference. Often some research, proposed alternatives or simple prep-

work can move a project forward and doesn't *require* any unique business knowledge.

Different Types of VA's

In the early days VAs were offering home-based secretarial services and as the Internet evolved, so did the skills of the virtual assistant. Today the term is used to describe people who utilize online tools to work virtually and through the broadening of the VA's skills, different types of Virtual Assistants were born.

There are no official "types" however many people in the industry would generally agree that VA's can be broken into different categories.

The General Virtual Assistant

Every business has specific internal functions to maintain—all of which cover the daily tasks necessary to run the business. If you find yourself overwhelmed with a lot of little tasks that are never the less necessary to keep your business running, you need a general virtual assistant.

They work alongside you to complete those important functions. General VAs serve behind the scenes, and work to ensure that everything runs smoothly. They can lessen your load when it comes to the following tasks:

- Data entry
- Meeting schedules
- Travel schedules
- Flight bookings
- Company workflow
- Customer *inquiries*

- Bookkeeping

Simply put, anything that has to do with clerical, secretarial, or assistant jobs are suitable for general VAs. Many consider them as the jack-of-all-trades since they do a variety of tasks.

Regardless of the workload they have, general VAs receive less compensation in contrast to specialized ones.

The Specialized Virtual Assistant

Many business owners are in love with the idea of having a “Rockstar VA,”—someone who can do it all. But just as that’s impossible with a full-time employee, it’s also not realistic for a VA.

When it comes to distinct functions like web design or media management, then you’re in need of specialized VA’s. Among other tasks, they can complete:

- Website development
- Social media management
- SEO optimization
- Hardware and software issues
- Blog writing
- Graphic design

They have backgrounds in those specific areas, and may even have certifications. For this, they receive a higher compensation in contrast to general VAs.

Range of Tasks You Can Delegate to a VA

There’s a huge array of tasks a VA can help you with. In fact, no matter what you need help with, you will be able to find someone who can

complete the tasks. Here are some examples of common tasks entrepreneurs hand over to their VA's.

Personal Tasks

VA's can keep you organized by managing your calendar and schedule, organizing meetings with your team, taking care of your e-mail, making a restaurant reservation, booking dentist or doctor appointments, and arranging your travel plans.

Administrative Work

VA's can schedule appointments with your clients, plan and coordinate upcoming events or staff meetings, manage customer relations and incoming enquiries, send invoices, update and enter information in your database, edit and proofread content, keep track of your stock and order supplies.

Financial Admin Work

VA's can prepare financial statements and management reports, respond to inquiries to credit institutions and local tax authorities, calculate salaries, provide payslips to employees, prepare year-end reports and payments, manage bank accounts, enter credit card transactions, prepare and send invoices, balance your books and provide end of month reports.

Marketing and Social Media

VA's can design digital marketing campaigns, conduct market research, provide online marketing analytics, and find industry-related groups for you to join. VA's can also help you to create e-mail marketing campaigns and newsletters, increase your followers on social media, write and schedule your tweets and post on social platforms, and make sure your website is SEO friendly.

Research

VA's can research your competitors and vendors, investigate potential customers and business opportunities, prepare reports about the target industry and existing market, find new products and services, compile market data and find statistics, update you about changes in the industry, and locate business contacts.

Customer Service

Virtual Assistants can help you to manage customer relations and deal with the incoming enquiries, respond to phone calls and e-mails, provide technical support and live chat services, manage the information of your website, monitor user conversation on different social platforms, help you to grow your social network and increase your followers on social media, engage with your customers and followers, as well as, create, manage and schedule your advertising material and newsletter.

Create Content

VA's can proofread your content, transcribe the information, design marketing e-mail templates, write guides and instructions for your products or services, edit and format documents, write blog posts and social media updates and create presentations.

Web Design, Development & Maintenance

VA's can build, design and maintain your website, upload new information to your website, make simple text changes, add new products and service, promote your website, find the right keywords, and optimize information on your website to improve search engine traffic.

One-time Projects

If you don't need to hire a full-time VA, you can always hire a VA for that specific project and pay them a one-time fee.

GETTING STARTED

There are two ways to hire a virtual assistant. You can hire a freelancer directly or work with a virtual assistant services company.

Making the right choice between the two will depend on your needs and the specific characteristics of both categories.

Let's go through the most important criteria in the selection and consider the pros and cons of working with a virtual assistant company and working with a freelancer.

Virtual assistant company

Pros

- When you partner with a VA company, you get immediate access to a wide variety of skills. Since you're not working with a single person, but with a whole talent pool, you can use their services for tasks as diverse as accounting and blog writing. This can be arranged under a single contract.
- When you use a VA service provider, you typically get assigned a project manager. This person delegates tasks to assistants on a case-by-case basis. The project manager is your point of contact. For recurring tasks, you may also get a dedicated VA.
- In case you're not satisfied with the work of an employee, you can request a replacement. In some cases, you also have a money-back guarantee if you're not happy with the services.
- VA service providers often have people on the job around the clock. Since they have big teams that handle numerous projects, they have to ensure they cover all pending work as fast as possible. This means they're more likely to react quickly when you have a task for them.

- Virtual assistant service providers often offer a free trial period before you start using their paid services. This is a great opportunity to test your work chemistry without investing a lot of money in advance.
- After that, you pay one price for monthly services or a specific number of hours. As mentioned earlier, they also usually provide a money-back guarantee.

Cons

- While you get access to a large set of skills, you can't check the portfolio of the VA who will be assigned to your account. So there's a risk you might not be happy with the services or attitude of a certain employee (though many services have policies in place to deal with this.)
- When you get assigned a VA from the service, they need to get acquainted with your projects. This makes it hard to know exactly what you're getting. And it could take time for multiple assistants to get to know your workflow and requirements.
- As mentioned earlier, assignments are not under your control. Even though you get full availability, the specific VA may not be the best fit for the work you outsource.
- While the payment rates and conditions vary, in most cases VA service providers will require a higher payment commitment from you. Typically, you'll have to cover a monthly fee.
- Since virtual assistant services are running a whole company, they are likely to charge more for sustaining their administrative structure.

Freelancers

Pros

- You have full control over who you work with. You can select a freelance virtual assistant who has the exact knowledge and experience *required* for the tasks at hand. This is especially useful if you need an external contractor to help you with a project that *requires* a certain skill set.
- Since you communicate directly, you can better judge if their personality will match the style of your team.
- When you work with a freelancer for some time, they're likely to get used to your style of work and the types of tasks you have. They can invest time in adapting to your preferences.
- You communicate directly with your assistant, so you can clarify your expectations straight to them. Simply put, you'll develop a more stable work relationship with a freelance virtual assistant.
- You can negotiate your availability needs in advance. Often you'll be able to reach a working model that fits both of you.
- In most cases, working with a freelancer will cost you less than a service. Freelancers have lower overhead because they don't have payroll, office, or administrative expenses. They may be more flexible with how they'll charge you.
- It could be per hour, per completed task, or a fixed monthly fee. You may also be able to negotiate discounts if you work together on a long-term basis.

Cons

- Since one person can only have a limited number of skills, you may need to hire separate freelancers for different activities. This can be tedious in terms of contracts and payments.

- If you're not happy with the services of a freelancer, you don't have many choices. Typically, there's no money-back guarantee, and you can't take the issue to anybody else.
- Freelance virtual assistants are more likely to have specific days and hours during which they can work on your tasks. They are usually serving a number of clients at the same time and need to juggle their priorities. So, unfortunately, there may be cases when the freelancer you're working with won't be available when you need their help.
- If you need different types of services, you might have to pay a few people instead of one, which may turn into a bit of a hassle.

Where to Find VA's

Here's a list of places where you can find qualified VA's. Each of these provides excellent workers; it just depends on your needs.

Membership Sites

OnlineJobs.ph

BestJobs.ph

EasyOutsource.ph

Freelancer Marketplaces

UpWork

PeoplePerHour

Fiverr

Guru

Recruiting Services

Virtual Staff Finder

Outsource Managed Services

MrOutsource

Virtual CoWorker

Virtual Done Well

Should You Hire From the West or Overseas?

For many business owners looking from the outside in, the thought of working with a VA located in a foreign country, especially a developing one, brings up many questions like:

- Is this exploitation or opportunity?
- What are the people like to work with over there?
- What can an overseas VA do for me?
- How much money can I expect to save by hiring an overseas VA?
- Can I really expect *quality* work from someone who is getting paid only \$2.15 an hour?
- How do I choose the right candidate?
- What is the best way to train an overseas VA?
- Where are the best sites to go to get hire a VA based overseas?

There are pros and cons to working with both groups of VA's. Here are a few pros to consider as you decide where to hire your first VA.

Overseas VA's

- Because of the exchange rate and cost of living in developing countries, you can find extremely cost-effective employees overseas.

- Many of the VA's are highly educated, but because of the economy and unemployment in their country, can't find jobs within their field.
- Most of these people are thrilled to have work and so will do an outstanding job when given a job.

Western VA's

On the other side, here are some reasons why Western VA's might be a more attractive option:

- There aren't as many social, cultural and language barriers in Western countries.
- You are closer to the same time zone, which makes it easier to communicate.
- The internet is more stable in Western countries.

What to Look for in a VA

Personality

The key to finding a virtual assistant you can work well with is that she/he clicks with you as a person. Your way of working at your business has to be understood by the VA. So it makes sense to find someone who is compatible with you on a personal level. A good way to find this out is just to talk with them over Skype for a little while. In this way, you can also test their language abilities and their communication skills if that's a concern.

Experience and Education

The second thing you have to look at is past experience and education. Obviously, if the VA has worked in similar business as yours before that is an advantage. Once you are serious about hiring a certain VA or need to choose between a couples of good candidates, you can also

ask for references and contact the companies they worked for before. In this way, it is not dissimilar to a standard hiring process. It is even better if you know others with an online business owners who can recommend virtual assistants they work with or have worked with in the past.

Pricing

Now, prices among VA's differ wildly. Some charge as low as \$100 a month, while extremely experienced ones charge a normal four-figure monthly salary. More expensive is not always better though. First, it depends on your requirements for the job. If it is a simple data entry job or link building, this is not hard to learn so you do need an experienced VA. Also "experienced" does not equate to more capable, but obviously, your chances of finding a great VA is bigger at the higher end than in the low end of the pay scale.

Essentially, the more time you are willing to spend to search for the perfect VA, the better the chance that you will find him or her. And when you have a good one for the long term it really can grow your business. So it can be very beneficial to invest something upfront in a VA as it will provide you many benefits in the long run.

Steps to Make Working with your VA Easy

You've hired a fantastic virtual assistant - now what?

The key to working effectively with your virtual assistant is to take the plunge and delegate, delegate, delegate. I know that's hard. You may be reluctant to delegate tasks because, after all, who could do them better than you? It's called superhero syndrome, and it's very real - especially for driven, focused small business owners and entrepreneurs.

But you are not a superhero. You're an executive or small business owner who realizes his own limits (and time limitations). That's why you hired a virtual assistant. So learn to delegate. Give yourself the freedom to step away from tasks that don't *require* your specialized attention and focus on the things only you can do. Here are some tips for working with your VA.

Step 1: Be Gone, Dreaded Tasks!

First, make an exhaustive list of the things you hate to do. These can be anything from daily to-dos to hated once-a-week or once-a-month necessities. The only criteria: You really don't enjoy it. If you never had to do this thing, ever again, you would be significantly happier and more satisfied with your work life.

Step 2: Say Goodbye to Mediocrity

Now, you're going to make a second list, but this one is a little different. Write down all the things you know you should do, but either don't have the time, the expertise or the drive to do them. Additionally, note the tasks you already do, but not to an acceptable standard.

These items depend not only on your company, but also on you - on your expertise and preferences. Some prime examples include maintaining a social media presence across several platforms or establishing a system to follow-up with leads on a set schedule.

Step 3: Document Your Instructions

It's important to remember that even a highly *q*ualified VA with years of experience and expertise is still only as good as her instructions. The most important factor in successful delegation is establishing your expectations and guidelines. You have your own style and approach to company standards, and it is important to carefully establish detailed instructions that help your VA team match your tone.

If you haven't already documented your work guidelines, your new VA is the perfect solution. Carve out a time - with your VA - to document your expectations and standards. She will then turn your thoughts into a comprehensive training guide, so she or any future team member will always have a point of reference. This one-time investment will return itself 100 times over, as your VA can take over your tasks, perform them to your standards, and free up you time.

Step 4: Put Your Superpowers to Best Use

You're not done writing yet! The third list you'll make is a creative exercise, and one that will force you to stretch your limits and step a little outside your comfort zone. It goes back to the reason you hired a virtual assistant: you want to free up your time for pursuits only you're qualified for.

Put your thinking cap on and start brainstorming on how to put your superpowers to best use. Make short-term, medium-term, and long-term goals for you and your business. What actions today will take your company to the next level tomorrow?

It's okay if your list is a work in progress.

Now, go back to step 2 and delegate to your VA anything that doesn't need your specific attention, or that you don't want to do. What's left? Well, your paper (or screen) should be crowded with goals that excite you - tasks that you can't wait to tackle.

Now, add these to-dos into your calendar. Your time is free to dedicate yourself to these tasks, and only these tasks for the next days, weeks and months.

If at any point you look at your calendar and realize you don't have enough time in the day to complete your new goals, go back to Step 2. Re-delegate to your VA more of your daily, weekly and monthly chores, so you really, truly have time in your schedule to stretch your business-owner muscles. We know it's hard to let go, but it's worth it.

Step 5: Collaborate

You can put down your pen, because the next step is putting into place collaborative systems that will make your work and life infinitely easier. These are the programs, online software, and protocols that to make it simple to work with your virtual team.

The good news: you don't have to re-invent the wheel. Provided you've chosen a professional and experienced virtual assistant they will know exactly what systems to put in place to maximize collaboration and minimize headaches. To begin with, you'll need:

- A project management system
- Sharable calendar
- Email management system

Tools to Use With Your VA's

Here is a list of tools that can be very useful when working with a remote assistant.

Tutorials

- SweetProcess
- Jing
- Camtasia

Communication

- GroupMe
- Skype
- Messages
- Glip

Project Management

- Google Calendar
- Team Work PM
- Web Office
- Trello
- Basecamp

File And Screen Sharing

- Dropbox
- LogMeIn
- Evernote Skitch
- Techsmith Jing

Time Tracking

- 1TimeTracking

Security

- LastPass
- Agilebits
- Plaxo

Conclusion

It's one of the biggest conundrums that small business owners face. They need more, better-qualified staff in order to take their business to the next level, but because they can't take that crucial step, their turnover means they can't afford to hire great people.

Whether you're running a home based business, or have a small brick and mortar company, chances are you've encountered that particular problem at some point.

The good news is that today, more than ever, outsourcing can help you solve your problem, and take that important step in your business, without blowing your budget.

The idea behind outsourcing is the same as it's always been. Small and medium business owners who need a particular skill, talent or expertise use external service providers on a contract basis, rather than hiring staff to do the job for them on a full-time basis.

The benefit to the business owner is that they can hire top-notch professionals to do the work for them, and pay only for the work done. Either it becomes a one-off, per project expense, or they save by paying a professional for just a few hours per month, instead of a fixed salary every month. Either way, it's a cost saving, and puts professional services within the budget of the small business owner.

The internet has made finding qualified professionals much easier. Whether you look on free classified advertising platforms, or use a professional third party platform like Fiverr or Upwork to search for service providers, there are literally millions of qualified candidates, right at your fingertips. From lawyers to engineers, and everything in between, outsourcing puts you in contact with the very best professionals, at a price you can afford.

Outsourcing is definitely a great solution to small businesses that are operating on a tight budget, but it's not entirely without its pitfalls. However, the benefits by far outweigh the problems, and if you're serious

about building your business, you should certainly look into expanding your team using virtual assistants!