

*Boost Business Profits*

# **HIRE A VIRTUAL ASSISTANT**



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## What You Can Expect From This Report

Congratulations on taking your first step toward outsourcing! If you're tired of running your business alone and know you could turn bigger profits if you only had some help, this report is for you.

It will give you a complete introduction to what a virtual assistant can do for you and how to outsource on any budget. In addition, it will provide you with the steps you need to take and the tools you need to ensure you get the most return on your investment.

### Here's what the report covers:

- Knowing When to Hire a Virtual Assistant
- The Types of Tasks a VA Can Handle
- Hiring Help if You're on a Budget
- Finding the Right Virtual Assistant for You
- How to Train Your VA

So let's get started....

## *Hiring a Virtual Assistant is Good for Business*

Corporations and large businesses hire employees to perform various functions within the company. For example, secretaries manage front office tasks, including answering phones and offering customer support. The marketing department oversees advertising and public relations. Bookkeepers or accountants take care of the finances, and so on.

Many small and home-based businesses don't have the luxury of being able to hire a staff of employees. However, that doesn't mean they have to manage their business alone. By outsourcing to a virtual assistant (often referred to as a VA), they can have specialized help when needed and for a fraction of the cost of hiring full-time employees.

Working with a virtual assistant means:

- **Smaller Learning Curves.** While understanding the basic concepts is excellent, there's no need to learn graphic design, marketing, programming, website creation, etc. Hiring assistants specializing in these areas will save you time and frustration.
- **Balanced Home and Business Life.** Business is important, but so is spending time with family and friends. Maintaining a healthy balance reduces stress, increases productivity, and ensures everyone is happy.
- **Increased Productivity & Profits.** Knowing that your assistant is taking care of the time-consuming tasks allows you to focus on more profit-producing business activities.

In a nutshell, outsourcing to a virtual assistant makes good business sense.

## ***Do You Need A VA?***

Whether you are just starting your business or have been at it for several years, you will reach a point when you cannot or do not want to do everything yourself. This is the time to outsource to a virtual assistant. Outsourcing does not mean you are giving up control. It simply means that you value your time and want to use it productively.

### **Signs that you need a virtual assistant:**

- **You feel overwhelmed.** Are you working long hours to get things done? Maybe you feel paralyzed by the long list of tasks you need to complete. Feeling overwhelmed at times is natural, but if it happens often, it's time to take action and hire an assistant.
- **You dislike the work.** Everyone is good at something, but nobody is good at everything. If you have tasks you dread doing, perhaps you always put them off until the last minute; consider hiring an assistant to do them for you.
- **It takes you forever to.** If you spend three hours trying to draft your weekly newsletter because you struggle with the formatting, stop! It is not worth it when you can outsource the task and have it completed in under an hour.
- **You don't know how to do something.** One great thing about virtual assistants is that many know a lot of areas. So hiring it out may be the answer if you've been doing it without something because you can't do it yourself.
- **Tasks are getting pushed aside.** If emails and phone calls go unanswered, your customer service may suffer. Poor customer service can lead to lost sales. Regardless of the task, if you do not have time, hire someone to take care of it for you.
- **The family is unhappy.** Take your queues from family and friends. When family members start migrating to your office rather than you to the family room, chances are, you're working too much.
- **You are tired of doing it alone.** It's tough operating a one-person business. You must be a creative thinker, implementer, follow-up person, and more. While doing everything is great for the ego, it's not always great for business. So when you tire of doing it alone, call a VA. Remember, even superheroes call in reinforcements when they need them.

When you work with a virtual assistant, you can still do the tasks you enjoy most, but you also have a support system for things that cause you stress or take up too much of your time. As a result, hiring a virtual assistant allows you to reach your goals more quickly, access skills you may not have, take your business to the next level and even enjoy some free time.

## ***What Kind of Tasks Do VAs Do?***

Virtual Assistants are talented people with skill sets in all areas. Most can handle day-to-day administrative tasks like managing email, answering phones, internet research, etc. In addition to these services, many bring specialized skills and training to the table, such as web design, accounting, video creation, or programming.

While it is impossible to list everything, here are some of the more common tasks that virtual assistants can handle:

Accounting	Design – Covers for ebooks, reports, etc
Advertising Campaign Management	Design – Graphic editing
Advertising Copy	Design – Website Logos/Headers
Affiliate Management	Design – Website themes & templates
Affiliate Program Set Up	Desktop Publishing - Brochures
Affiliate Recruitment	Desktop Publishing – Business Cards
Affiliate Sales, Reports, and Payouts	Desktop Publishing - Flyers
Answer Emails	Desktop Publishing - Letterhead
Answer Help Desk Tickets	Desktop Publishing – Mailing Labels
Answer Phone Calls	Desktop Publishing – Stationary
Answer Snail Mail	Direct Mail Marketing
Answer Voice Mails & Faxes	Draft Letters, Agendas, and Other
Article Distribution	Business Documents
Article Topic Research	Ebook Formatting
Auction Management	Event Planning
Audio Editing	Flash Animation
Audio Recording	Guest Speaker Research
Audio Transcription	Illustrations
Autoresponder Setup	Information Product Research
Blog Comment Posting	Interviews
Blog Installation	Invoicing & Payroll
Blog Maintenance: Upgrades, Plugins, etc	Keyword Research
Blog Post Scheduling	Link Building
Book Travel Arrangements	Locate Affiliate Products to Promote
Bookkeeping	Manual/User Guide/FAQ Creation
Branding Assistance	Market Research
Business Plan	Marketing Campaign Management
CD/DVD Cover or Sleeve design	Message Board Management
CD/DVD Creation	Message Board Moderation
CD/DVD Duplication	Message Board Posting
Chat Room Moderation	Newsletter distribution - print & digital
Competitor Research	Pay-Per-Click Maintenance
Contact Management	Pay-Per-Click Set Up
Copy Editing	Photo Editing
Customer Support	Podcast Management
Data Entry	Podcast Recording
Database Development & Maintenance	Podcast Set up
Design – Banners, Buttons, etc	Post Card Marketing

PowerPoint Presentations	Track Affiliate IDs, sales, etc
Press Release Distribution	Transcribe Interviews
Product Development	Transcribe Podcasts
Product Reviews	Transcribe Seminars
Product Shipping	Transcribe Teleseminars
Programming	Transcribe Videos
Project Management	Translation
Proofreading	Video Creation
Publicity Management	Video Editing
Employment/Reference Verifications	Webinar Set Up
Report Formatting	Website – Set up
Scheduling Appointments, Interviews, etc	Website - Updating Content
Search Engine Optimization	Word Processing
Send faxes	Writing – Articles
Shopping Cart Set Up	Writing – Autoresponder messages
Sign up for Affiliate Programs	Writing – Blog posts
Social Bookmark Management	Writing – eBooks
Social Networking Management	Writing – eCourse material
Software Development	Writing – Flyer and Brochure copy
Spreadsheet Set Up & Maintenance	Writing – Newsletters
Survey Set Up & Maintenance	Writing – Press Releases
Tax Preparation	Writing – Reports
Teleseminar Recording	Writing – Website Copy
Teleseminar Set Up	

This list could go on and on. As technology, business, and marketing techniques evolve and improve, so do the talents of virtual assistants. Whether you need a Jack or Jill of all trades or someone talented in one particular area, chances are you can find a VA to fit your needs.

Now that you know the tasks a VA can do, here is a quick exercise to help determine what items to outsource. We are doing this the old fashion way, so grab a pencil and paper. ☺

Think about all the tasks, large and small, that you do in a day, week, or month for your business. Use the list above if you need help. Once your list is complete, go over it again, scoring each one based on the list below.

- 1 – I enjoy this task
- 2 – Not my favorite, but it's okay
- 3 – Eh, I could take it or leave it
- 4 – I wish someone else would do it
- 5 – Thinking about it makes me ill

You may want to add to this list or create a separate list of projects that you need or would like to have done but do not know how to do so. Once you complete the exercise, you should know which tasks to outsource. If your list is long, don't panic; nothing says you have to outsource everything at once.

## ***How to Hire Help If You Are On a Budget***

When discussing outsourcing, people often comment on how they could use the help and would love to hire an assistant, but they simply don't have the budget to do so. While staying within budget is a legitimate concern, almost everyone can afford to outsource. It starts with looking at things from a new perspective.

When starting a new business, there are always expenses involved. Whether purchasing a business phone line, setting up a website or replacing outdated software or equipment, these are necessary expenses to keep the business going and help increase profits. Hiring an assistant should also be looked at as an essential expense. Why? Because an assistant will help your business run smoothly and efficiently, allowing you to do what you do best.

Think of it this way you can spend 2 hours a day answering questions from your customers or use that time to work on new marketing material, create a new product to sell, network with potential joint venture partners, or whatever helps you increase profits.

If you choose option one, you spend 2 hours, sell two \$25 products, and earn \$50.

If you go with option two, you spend 2 hours creating new marketing material and reach 1000 new potential customers. If even 1% of those people purchase, you've earned \$250.

\$250 in sales

- \$40 (estimated cost of hiring a VA to answer customer questions for two hours)

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\$210 profit

A bonus to this is that you can use the marketing material repeatedly for even more sales.

If that is not convincing enough, ask yourself, how much is one hour of my time worth? Then, if someone wanted to pay you for your expertise, how much would you charge; \$50, \$100, or \$200?

Taking that figure, can you hire an assistant for less? If so, do it! If you value your time at \$100 per hour and you can hire an assistant for \$25, you have instantly given yourself a \$ 75-an-hour raise. How sweet is that!

You may think you cannot afford to hire an assistant for two hours a day. That's okay! There are several ways to get assistance without breaking the bank.

**Start Small:** Look back at the list you created earlier. Are there small tasks you dislike or throw off your day? For example, maybe you need a sales report downloaded, a page added to your website, an article written, or a few emails answered. These are great starter projects.

**Break it Down:** Break large projects into smaller ones. Just like writing a book, create an outline of what it takes to complete the entire project. Then hire an assistant to work on one or two components at a time, as your budget allows.

**Shop Around:** While the old adage "You get what you pay for" is true in many cases, it's not always the case. There are good virtual assistants within your budget; you have to shop around.

**Offer Training:** VAs always seek to expand their knowledge and skill set. Some may consider a temporary rate reduction if you teach them how to do the work.

**Prioritize:** If you have an extensive list of tasks you need help with, prioritize them and start at the top. You might consider sharing this list with your assistant, so they automatically know what to work on the next time you pay for service hours.

**Barter:** While not as popular as it once was, some virtual assistants may barter with you. For example, if you are a life coach, they might be willing to swap service hours for free access to your next workshop or seminar.

When working with a virtual assistant, you can decide how much money you spend. You can start with a single project or a few hours each month, and as your needs and budget grow, you can increase the hours you use.

### ***How to Find the Right VA***

Having the right assistant is the key to a good partnership. I say partnership because as you work together to grow your business, it will start to feel like you have a partner who wants to see your business succeed as much as you do.

With so many virtual assistants to choose from, finding the right one is not always easy. Business owners often wait until they are desperate before they start looking for help. They end up hiring the first virtual assistant they find—some base their selection strictly on the VA's skills, price, or location. While selecting an assistant this way can work, it frequently leads to the business owner hopping from one assistant to the next and getting frustrated with the process.

There's a better method of finding the right assistant; it simply requires a bit of forethought. Here are some things to consider before searching for a virtual assistant.

### **Type of Assistant**

Before you begin your search, know what kind of assistance you need. Make a list of the tasks you will assign. What skills or knowledge should the VA have to complete those tasks? Do the jobs require special software or equipment?

In most cases, you will want the VA to have everything they need to complete the work. I say most cases because there are times when it may be more beneficial to you to offer training or purchase the necessary software. For example, let's say you already have an assistant handling customer support. They are doing a great job, you get along well, and they are dependable. But now you need help with managing your affiliate program.

Rather than start from scratch, teaching a new assistant about your business model and how you like things to be done might be more beneficial to train your CS person on how to do the affiliate tasks.

In addition, if you offer brandable items to your affiliates, you may also need to purchase an additional license for your assistant so they can download and use a copy of your special branding software.

You will spend a little time training your assistant and perhaps a few dollars buying a second license. Finally, however, you end up with someone who already knows the inner workings of your business, is trained to manage your affiliate program exactly how you like and has the necessary software to take an additional task off your plate, branding.

## Characteristics

What characteristics would you like to see in your assistant? Which are most important to you? Here are a few to get you started:

- **Forward Thinker.** They see the whole picture & offer ideas to help you reach your goals.
- **Self-Motivated.** They are go-getters. They don't wait until the last minute to start a project.
- **Takes Initiative.** If they see something that needs to be done, they do it.
- **Resourceful.** If they don't know an answer, they know how to find it.
- **Organized.** Disorganization leads to frustration and potential mistakes.
- **Good Communicator.** Good communication reduces confusion and errors.
- **Professional.** They conduct themselves in a professional, self-confident way.
- **Dependable.** They complete work as requested without having to be monitored.
- **Trustworthy.** If they cannot be trusted, the contract should be canceled

You may not find someone who possesses every characteristic on your list, but if the most important ones are covered, you can work with the rest.

## Personality

While thinking about characteristics, you may want to take it a step further and consider the type of personality it takes to do the job(s) you will be assigning. For instance, if your assistant handles customer support, do you want them to be casual with your customers? Do you prefer them to be cut and dry or somewhere in between? Even if your customer support is handled by email, a person's tone can be felt in how they reply. Also, consider the type of customers you have. Are they demanding customers who need a firm hand? If so, an assistant who is shy or timid may not be the right person for the job.



Remember that you aren't looking for a mirror image of yourself but someone who is easy to get along with and similarly handles things as you. While personality and characteristics may be difficult to determine when first contacting an assistant, as you start working together, keep these in mind while trying to decide whether they suit your long-term business needs.

## **Price**

We've already touched on this a bit, but knowing what you can afford to pay will help narrow your search for an assistant.

Virtual assistant rates vary considerably, ranging from \$15 to \$50 per hour. You can find great and not-so-great VAs across the pay scale, so the price does not always reflect how qualified they are.

That being said, if you hire an assistant who has been in business a while, is highly experienced, or has specialized skills, you can typically expect to pay a higher rate. However, if you have tasks you cannot do yourself and want to get done as quickly as possible, hiring an experienced VA, even at a higher rate, may be the way to go.

## **Ask Questions**

Another way to help you decide which assistant is right for you is to ask questions before you hire them. Unlike hiring an employee in a brick-and-mortar business, you do not have the opportunity for a face-to-face interview. Therefore, the only way to get a feel for the person is to ask questions. If you are unsure what questions to ask, here is a list to get you started.

1. What are their hours of operation?
2. When would they be available to start?
3. How do they prefer to communicate?
4. How often do they check their email & reply?
5. Are they available by phone?
6. What is their policy for after-hours, weekend, or rush jobs?
7. What time zone are they in?
8. How do they track their time?
9. Do they offer status reports so that you can monitor their time used & when tasks are complete? If so, how?
10. When do they prefer you assign work (weekly, monthly, on certain days of the week, etc.)?
11. Do they have a project management system where you can assign work (i.e., Taskspiro, Basecamp, etc.)? If not, you may want to consider purchasing one.
12. Will they need anything special from you? (software, training material, etc.)
13. Do they have a backup person for when they are sick or take time off - or does that responsibility fall back on you?

14. What are their rates?
15. Do they offer discount prices?
16. When do they invoice?
17. How do they invoice?
18. What type of payments do they accept?
19. Do they require payment upfront?
20. What kind of software do they own?
21. What type of computer do they use (PC or Mac)?
22. Are they willing to sign a non-disclosure agreement?
23. Do they require a contract?
24. Is there a minimum amount of time you have to contract (i.e., some require a 3-month commitment)?
25. Can they offer references?
26. How do they handle stress?
27. What do they like to see in a client/VA relationship?
28. What are their pet peeves when it comes to working?
29. Are there any tasks that they dislike doing?
30. Are there any holidays or blocks of time that they would be unavailable?

Whether your list is short or long does not matter. The important thing is that you get your questions answered.

As you contact virtual assistants, saving a copy of their replies is a good idea. You could print them out or save them on your computer. You may want to note when and how you contacted them, how long it took to receive a reply, whether their responses seemed well thought out, or if it looked like they were in a hurry. Include any additional notes you feel are essential to helping you make your decision.

This will come in handy after you have contacted several assistants and are ready to decide.

### **Where to Look**

The best way to find a good virtual assistant is to ask for recommendations from those you know and trust; colleagues, friends, and even other assistants that you work with. Ask who they use, what tasks the assistant handles for them, they have had any issues. Unless they contract with the assistant exclusively, people are usually happy to share this information with you.

Suppose you are a member of social media sites, online communities, or other networking sites. In that case, you can view people's profiles and talk to other members to see if they have any recommendations.

Use the power of search engines. For example, type "VA" into a search browser, and most likely, you will see information on veteran affairs or Virginia. Enter "virtual assistant," and you could weed through over a million results. However, creating custom search terms will help narrow the search engine's focus. For instance, if you need help setting up a WordPress, searching for "WordPress assistant" or "virtual assistant" + "WordPress services" will generate much better results.

Lastly, if you contact a virtual assistant who cannot help you with your project, ask them if they can recommend someone else. They usually have a network of colleagues that they can refer you to.

### ***How to Train Your VA***

Whether step-by-step instructions on how to do tasks or simply teaching them the basics of your business, you should be prepared to offer training to your new assistant. How you present, this training is up to you and may depend on what tasks the assistant will be doing.

If you are training them on the general aspects of the business, you might consider self-recording an audio or video for them to listen to. If you send out brochures and information packets to your customers, you may also want to send one to your assistant. You might want to create an FAQ or simple checklist for them to refer to as needed.

For more in-depth tasks requiring step-by-step training, you can use screencast software and create simple tutorials that walk them through each step. Essentially you will be recording your screen, showing them how to do the task. This is perfect because you can also talk while recording and include tips.

If you can't record things, you can still document each step in a Word document and take screenshots of the different stages, so they have visual cues to follow.

As you create your training materials, include any login details they might need to complete each task.

There is more to training your assistant than just creating instructional material. In the beginning, you and your assistant will learn how one another works. It can be a high-stress time for everyone while you work out any kinks. While your assistant is learning the ropes and easing into her new position, you must do what you can to help make the transition smooth. Here are some simple ways you can help out.

**Delegate tasks.** Rather than assigning several projects at once, delegate only one or two to start with. Then, once those are complete, give a few more. This allows you time to check the work and address anything that needs to be changed.

**Streamline communication.** Replying to emails is time-consuming, and most virtual assistants charge for this time. Rather than fire off a new email for each thought you have, take a few minutes to gather your thoughts, so you only have to send one.

**Offer clear instructions.** The more precise and organized you are with your instructions, the faster the VA can complete the work. When writing these out, ensure you include all login details and other necessary information.

**Assign tasks well in advance.** Procrastination may cause your projects to be delayed. Most VAs have multiple clients and busy businesses; therefore, they plan their schedules weeks in advance. If you wait until the last minute to assign work, your assistant may be unable to meet your deadline or possibly help with the project. If they have to rearrange their schedule to complete your work, you should expect to pay a higher rate.

Plan your projects a month or more in advance to avoid being charged a higher rate for rush or weekend work. In addition, this allows your assistant to set aside time for you.

At the same time, it is also essential to let your assistant know if there are delays in an upcoming project. The more forewarning you give, the easier it is for them to adjust their schedule to meet your needs.

**Offer feedback.** Offering feedback benefits everyone. Positive feedback is easy to give, but many find it hard to speak up when something is wrong. If your assistant is not doing a task right, let them know. Please take a few minutes to explain how you would like the work completed, and then ask them to return and fix any mistakes. Do not feel bad about asking! They become more proficient at the task by going back and redoing the work. That, in turn, is beneficial to everyone.

Following these small steps and creating your custom training material will go a long way toward creating a long-term, profitable client-VA partnership.

### **There you have it!**

As you can see, you don't have to be a large corporation with a multi-million dollar budget to hire help. Even small or new businesses can find affordable service through a Virtual Assistant. So whether you start small or jump in with both feet, you now have the tools necessary to take action.