

Are You Losing Money by Doing Your Own Work?

By Kathleen Gage



According to the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA), the average small business owner spends up to 40% of his or her time on routine administrative tasks.

Constantly working on non revenue-producing tasks that could be more productively and cost-effectively performed by a highly skilled, knowledgeable assistant is losing your business significant income.

As you grow your business, it will be necessary to consider outside help. Over the last few years, the Virtual Assistant industry has taken the market by storm. What was practically unheard of a few years ago is now a viable and growing industry.

When done correctly, one of the greatest advantages in hiring a Virtual Assistant (VA's) is you can focus on higher level objectives while your VA takes on a huge part of your workload.

Virtual Assistants range in expertise, specialty and pricing. Most VA's work on a per hour rate, retainer fee or contract basis. VA's either own and operate their business or contract under an umbrella agency. This means you are not responsible for employee taxes, benefits or insurance, which can substantially reduce your costs and liability.

A VA's experience level range from new to the industry to many years of experience. However, most have previous work experience that qualifies them to jump right into the services they offer.

The VA's goal is to help your company grow. In essence, when you succeed, they succeed. Unlike a temporary agency where you might get a different temporary worker for each job you have, with a VA the same person works with you on an ongoing basis.

Depending on your needs, you can hire a VA for as few or as many hours a week as you need. You can also hire on a per project basis. Again, this means you are not burdened with hiring a part- or full-time employee. You simply hire as needed.

In many cases, once you contract a VA you will be charged for phone conversations, planning sessions and any project changes you make.

Be aware of spending too much time just “shooting the breeze” with your VA as it can cost you money and time.

Before hiring a VA, determine your needs, plan how you will utilize their time and be prepared. Some of your projects will require you to contract vendors who handle specific types of tasks such as editing, copywriting, transcription services and web design. However, a highly skilled VA may be able to do many of the above-mentioned tasks.

If you are on a limited budget, you may be able to negotiate the pay structure to include commissions and bonuses. Some VA’s may be willing to take a lower hourly rate if there is an opportunity for commissions or bonuses. For example, if you have a VA who books speaking engagements for you, you can offset the hourly amount with a generous commission structure. However, before you offer commissions and bonuses, make sure the VA is qualified and skilled to handle the specific jobs you need done. You may also be able to negotiate one fee for any training you do and a higher fee when the VA is fully trained.

Hiring a Virtual Assistant is not something that should be taken lightly. It is a position of trust and confidence. Often the VA has access to your usernames and passwords, confidential information, financial data, databases and other highly sensitive information.

A partial list of what a VA can do:

- Transcription services
- Set up a blog
- Blogging on your behalf
- Post to blogs and forums
- Set up Virtual Book Tours
- Submit and track articles to directories
- Answer support emails
- Set up autoresponders
- Write media releases
- Distribute media releases
- Clean up a mailing list
- Do keyword research
- Proof copy and provide editing services
- Assist with teleconferences and seminars
- Update web pages and build squeeze pages
- Input sequential autoresponder messages

- Organize joint ventures and submit bonus items and programs
- Bookkeeping
- Concierge services
- Sales
- Marketing
- Travel arrangements
- Event planning
- Procedure documentation

You can choose to use a VA agency or contract an independent VA. It all depends on your needs, plans and budget. Take time to interview your VA prior to hiring them. Check their references and track record.

To find a qualified Virtual Assistant, do a Google search under *Virtual Assistants*. You can also ask for referrals from other professionals you know and trust. Chances are they have VA's they can recommend.

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