

# **JUMPSTART**

## **YOUR VIRTUAL ASSISTANT BUSINESS**

*Find out not only WHAT to do,  
also HOW to do it!*



**Francis van Wyk &  
Marietjie Steyn**

## **DISCLAIMER**

All information contained in this e-book is solely for educational purposes. This is a basic informational guide to assist you to get started and the authors do not offer any guarantees of your income or success when applying or using information and resources provided in this e-book. As with any business it takes research, planning, motivation, dedication and hard work to reap any rewards.

While all attempts have been made to verify provided information the authors disclaim any responsibility for errors, omissions or contradictory interpretation of the subject matter herein. The authors recommend that the reader always do research regarding the legalities involved in starting a home-based business.

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## **FOREWORD**

*Jumpstart Your Virtual Assistant Business* is an easy to use step-by-step guide to assist you in starting your own Virtual Assistant business. In fact, the information in this e-book will be valuable to anybody who wants to start a home based business.

Reflecting on more than 50 odd years (collectively) as successful independent business owners, we can relate to the endless search for guidance and information that adequately answer the everyday questions arising when starting and running your own business.

This e-book is designed to afford you the opportunity to make notes and insert information for cross referencing whenever necessary. It is, however, not a magic bullet that will make your business succeed.

Key to your success is that you work through the sections and take action in order to reap the rewards.

**Success is the result of hard work, persistence  
and the will to succeed.**

Throughout the book you will see the beanie figures below...



### **ACTION STEPS**

These sections are your “homework.” The moment you see it you’ll have to complete some necessary tasks.

To fully reap the benefit of this e-book it is important that you take time to work through the action steps and exercises. They build on each other and will assist you with decisions and cross references later on.

## ***JUMPSTART YOUR VIRTUAL ASSISTANT BUSINESS***

You will also find many inspirational quotes throughout the text. Inspirational quotes are something we all need from time to time. Let it inspire you to do whatever you have to do.

Building a successful business is one of the most rewarding things in life. May your journey of building your Virtual Assistant business bring you lifelong happiness and joy!

To Your Success!

**Francis van Wyk & Marietjie Steyn**



## **PART 1 - GETTING READY**

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### **VIRTUAL ASSISTANCE**

If you had asked people what a Virtual Assistant (VA) was in the early years of this millennium, they would have stared at you as if you were from another planet or provided you with an answer equally fantastic.

Today, the Virtual Assistant industry is gaining fast momentum as more people enter the industry for delivering services virtually. Also, more entrepreneurs and small to medium sized business owners (and in some instances even corporate companies) are making use of the services of Virtual Assistants.

### **WHAT IS A VIRTUAL ASSISTANT?**

A Virtual Assistant can do just about anything that a personal assistant or secretary would do, but with a difference.

A Virtual Assistant is an entrepreneur in his or her own right. They operate as independent business owners and offer a wide range of administrative and/or specialised services to any person, entrepreneur or business owner who might need those services.

Virtual Assistants are skilled professionals who run their own businesses. They work from their own home based offices and use their own office equipment, communicating with their clients via telephone, fax, instant messaging and other internet technologies.

It is important to note that Virtual Assistants are neither temporary workers nor employees. They are business owners – entrepreneurs in their own right. They set their own rates, sign their own contracts, arrange their own schedules and pay their own taxes and benefits.

A Virtual Assistant is the ideal solution for all businesses, large or small, including non-profit organizations or other entrepreneurs who would like to outsource administrative and or other specialised tasks.

Virtual Assistants are professionals who stand out in their given area of expertise. They work alongside business owners and entrepreneurs to increase profitability, free up time and to save money for their clients.

Even if clients or companies relocate, they have the uncanny luxury of still using the same Virtual Assistant. Location does not impact a Virtual Assistant's ability to do the job. Virtual Assistants can utilize time zone differences optimally to improve turnaround times when assisting international clients.

### **HOW DOES VIRTUAL ASSISTANCE WORK?**

People often ask: “How do you deliver a service when you are not working face to face with a client?”

Well, it doesn't really differ much from an office situation.

You know how in a typical office set-up you work face-to-face with your employer and colleagues, files are stored on a central network drive and you email your information from one office to another? Well, virtual assistance pretty much works the same way.

However, instead of working face-to-face, virtual assistants rarely meet their clients in person. Instead of sharing files via walking to a person's office or via an intranet or a network drive in an office set-up, VAs and their clients share files via email, or they use the internet for downloading and uploading documents via online file sharing applications. Often work are faxed through, mailed, picked up or delivered; it really depends on what needs to be done.

### **HOW DO VAs RECEIVE WORK FROM CLIENTS?**

Here's a few examples how VAs can receive work from clients.

For example, let's say you are working on a PowerPoint presentation for a client. The client can email information; provide handwritten notes; fax drawings; or have a verbal conversation on important information to include. The finalised presentation can then be emailed to the clients or uploaded on an online file-sharing application.

If you are asked to enter contacts into a database, the business cards or information can be sent to you by mail. Alternatively they could be photocopied and faxed

A letter can be handwritten by the client and faxed to the VA.

A report can be dictated onto a tape and couriered to the VA or dictated using various audio software (such as AudioAcrobat, Audacity or even SmartPhone applications). It is then uploaded to a PC in mp3 format and emailed or shared via the internet.

Documents that need formatting can be emailed, scanned or mailed.

If a client is local, you may pick the work up from them or they may deliver the work to you.

There are many online file sharing applications e.g. Dropbox that can handle large size documents. With these file sharing applications both you and your clients have access to the same documentation online to make or approve changes. This is extremely handy as it eliminates all the struggles and time to email documents from one person to another.

### **HOW DO VAs COMMUNICATE WITH CLIENTS**

VAs can communicate with clients via phone, fax and email, but also via technologies such as instant messaging or VOIP.

VOIP stands for “Voice over internet protocol” and it only means you actually speak to someone else via internet technologies – much the same as a telephone call.

Maybe you’ve heard about Skype, or are even using it. Skype is a well-known VOIP service provider and many VAs use Skype because it a free service if both you and you client have it installed on your computers. All you need is to acquire a good microphone and speakers or a microphone headset.

Other ways that VAs and their clients communicate are via technologies such as teleconferences or webinars.

In actual fact the communication methods VAs use depend on what they and their clients prefer.

## **SERVICES THAT VIRTUAL ASSISTANTS PROVIDE**

There is quite an array of areas where a Virtual Assistant can be of great benefit to anybody who utilises their services. It is important for you as a Virtual Assistant to determine exactly what your particular niche area is in terms of skill and experience, and to concentrate on that specific area.

Working through a list of possible outsourced services and tasks that could be provided by a Virtual Assistant, we became lost in the excitement and ended up listing as many services as possible. However, the list still has great potential for even further expansion.

Work your way through the lists below and identify the services you believe you are able to offer your clients.

### **VIRTUAL ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT**

Virtual Administrative Assistants are by far the most common VA niche. Administrative Assistants provide services ranging from basic to advanced administrative support to clients.

#### **Typical Administrative Services:**

<b>General Administration</b>	
Diary / Calendar Management	Bulk Mailings
Appointment & Meeting Scheduling	Announcements
E-Mail / Voice Mail Management	Customer Service & Follow-up
Outlook distribution lists	Forms Design
Reminder Services	Travel Arrangements
Faxing	Internet Research

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<b>General Administration</b>	
Document Scanning	Holiday and Birthday Cards
E-filing	

<b>Account Management Services</b>	
Inventory Management	Shipment Management
Account or Vendor Organization	Tender / Proposal Documentation
Order Taking	Lead Management
Contact Management	Cold calling
Customer follow-up /	Lead Tracking
Invoicing	Preparing Quotes
Reports	After sale services

<b>Word Processing</b>	
Composing / Typing of Letters	Mailing Labels / Envelopes
General Correspondence	Writing Proposals / Bids
Copywriting	File / PDF conversions
Editing / Proofreading	Import / export data
Mail Merge	PowerPoint Presentations, hand-outs and notes

<b>Desktop Publishing</b>	
Newsletters	Catalogues
Brochures	Business Stationery
Postcards	Restaurant Menus

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Flyers	Invitations
Pamphlets	Calendars
Business Cards	Certificates

### **Data Entry and Database Management**

Data Entry services	SQL design and maintenance
Database creation and management	Data processing
Spread sheet design/maintenance	Data verification

### **Event Planning and Management**

Site Selection and Inspection	Entertainment
Catering Selection	Marketing and Promotion
Menu Planning	Promotional Gifts
Audio / Visual Arrangements	Business Seminars
Guest list / Registration Coordination	Corporate Hospitality
Invitations	Team Building
Decorations and Floral Arrangements	Travel Arrangements
Exhibitions	Vacation Planning

### **Translation**

### **Transcription**

Professional translation and language services	Transcribe audio, video to text (Medical, Legal, General)
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The support is predominantly based on prior administrative experience obtained through a career as an administrative assistant, secretary, personal assistant and/or executive assistant. Administrative

Virtual Assistants could specialise in a specific area of administration, however most can perform a wide array of administration tasks, such as those outlined above.

## **VIRTUAL ASSISTANT – ACCOUNTING & BOOKKEEPING**

Virtual Assistants who offer Accounting and Bookkeeping services assist entrepreneurs with daily financial record-keeping tasks as well as month-end and even year-end closing tasks. They ensure that the accounting systems accurately reflect the business' financial situation and as a result of providing this service, free up time for business owners to concentrate on their core business and thus their business's bottom-line.

Virtual bookkeeping assistants typically have previous experience as bookkeepers; accountants and/or financial managers.

### **Typical Accounting and Bookkeeping Services:**

<b>Accounting &amp; Bookkeeping</b>	
Accounting System Setup	Account Reconciliations
Bookkeeping	Credit control
Budgeting	Invoicing
Accounts Payable	Month End Closing
Financial Overviews and Projections	QuickBooks Support / Management
Accounts Receivable	Payroll
Journal Entry and General Ledger	Tax Support

## **VIRTUAL ASSISTANT – LEGAL SERVICES**

A Virtual Legal Assistant (VLA) provides administrative support to attorneys and/or lawyers in much the same way as administrative services that are provided in-house in a law firm.

A VLA usually has several years of experience as a legal secretary / legal assistant and is familiar with legal terminology and law office procedures.

Many small to medium size law firms are facing increasing client pressure to build greater value and efficiency into their firm's legal services and cost structures. This opens the door for them to use a virtual legal assistant to cut costs, save time and increase the firm's value to their clients.

### **Typical Legal Services:**

<b>Legal Services</b>	
Draft documents (affidavits, motion materials, pleadings, discovery responses, retainer letters and other)	PDF file conversion
Proofread and format court documents	Research case law and provide summarizing memorandum
Form creation	e-mail management
Digital Transcription	e-File court documents
Type handwritten notes	Update and manage calendars
Docketing	Call management

## **VIRTUAL BANKRUPTCY ASSISTANT**

A Virtual Bankruptcy Assistant (VBA) is a skilled professional who specializes in drafting bankruptcy petitions for consumer bankruptcy attorneys.

VBA's are independent contractors whose expertise is sought by attorneys who recognize that outsourcing petition preparation is a proven method for increasing their office efficiency and overall profit margin.

A VBA has to keep current with bankruptcy laws through continuous education in the form of online seminars and by participating as members in various Bankruptcy associations.

### **Typical Virtual Bankruptcy Services:**

<b>Virtual Bankruptcy Services</b>	
Prepare a well-detailed summary sheet pertaining to the bankruptcy case	Online searches for home values, judgments, liens, court records, and other documents
Contact the debtor(s) to obtain missing information	On-line criminal and civil records search, if necessary
Handle all client phone calls / questions	Return of bankruptcy petition for the client file and/or electronic filing

## **VIRTUAL ASSISTANT – REAL ESTATE SERVICES**

A Real Estate Virtual Assistant (REVA) can be very effective with assisting busy real estate professionals to manage all the daily tasks associated with running their businesses.

Since real estate professionals are most often ‘solo-preneurs’, they are frequently inundated with a vast amount of tasks and demands that leave their limited resources (especially their time) stretched. Working with a real estate virtual assistant can be the solution they are searching for.

### **Typical Real Estate Services:**

<b>Real Estate Services</b>	
Schedule appointments, showings, closings or inspections	Handle rental maintenance issues
Manage emails and calendar	Manage calls / takes messages
Process incoming and outgoing referrals	Maintain contact database / Add new leads
Maintain mailing lists	Compile listing packages
Handle all mailing requests	Complete contract forms
Create forms and templates	Input listing to MLS
Order closing gifts	Pull expired listings
Design, place ads in newspaper and magazine	Manage property photos and descriptions
Handle rental calls	Website creation and maintenance

## **VIRTUAL ASSISTANT – RESEARCH SERVICES**

A Virtual Research Assistant usually has adequate research experience to assist professionals with research on any specific academic and/or informational topic.

The difference between an administrative VA and a research VA is that, whilst an administrative assistant usually handles a number of different tasks, a research VA focuses solely on a specific requested research topic.

As a research VA, it is necessary to ensure you have sufficient knowledge of the terminology and of the specific research field.

### **Typical Research Services:**

<b>Research Services</b>	
Develop research protocol	Data collection
Develop a research survey, questionnaire	Web / journal / literature / academic research on any required topic
Data Tabulation	Data analyses
Trends analyses	Maintain research databases
Qualitative and quantitative research	Prepare research reports, presentations and publications

## **VIRTUAL ASSISTANT – WEB DESIGN SERVICES**

Virtual Assistant web design specialists have sufficient internet / web-design knowledge and experience to design web-sites to specification.

They make use of approved and recommended software packages and programming protocols to provide professional web designs that enhance the fundamental purpose of a client's business.

### **Typical Web Design Services:**

<b>Web Design Services</b>	
Website design (WordPress, Joomla etc.)	e-commerce and shopping cart sites
JavaScript	CSS, HTML, etc.
Search engine optimisation (SEO)	Promotion and submission services
Programming	Website re-writing

## **VIRTUAL ASSISTANT – SOCIAL MEDIA**

More and more small, medium and micro enterprises (SMMEs) today are making use of social media to market their business. A Social Media Virtual Assistant needs to have working knowledge of the different social media applications (e.g. Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, StumbleUpon, YouTube, Forums, Blogs and other) to be able to help business owners determine an overall strategy for social media marketing.

Although social networking and social media marketing do require a unique presence and brand management, Social Media Virtual

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Assistants provide SMMEs with guidance on implementing the strategy and help to maintain their client's social media and online networking accounts.

### **Typical Social Media Services:**

<b>Social Media Services</b>	
Create an overall social media strategy	Research industry specific online and social media activities
Setting up social networking profiles	Manage e-newsletters and e-mail marketing campaigns
Set up systems to automate social media tasks and updates	Researching content and graphics for e-marketing campaigns
Post or refresh content	Track campaign statistics
Maintain profiles	Submit articles to directories
Upload blog posts, find relevant graphics or photos to go with posts, moderate comment	Optimise social media campaign to increase site rankings
Submit blogs or website to online directories	Do online reputation management

### **VIRTUAL ASSISTANT – TRANSCRIPTION**

A Virtual Assistant Transcriptionist (Transcriptionist for short) offers timely and accurate transcription services to professionals who need to convert audio and/or video files to text. The audio/video is mostly pre-recorded in a digital format, on other digital storage systems or directly uploaded to their Virtual Assistant workstation.

## **JUMPSTART YOUR VIRTUAL ASSISTANT BUSINESS**

Transcriptions in some fields, e.g. medical and legal fields, are generally highly specialised and require certain industry specific skills, knowledge and/or training with regards to using the correct terminology.

### **Typical Transcription Services:**

<b>Transcription Services</b>	
Academic Transcription	Media Transcription
Closed Captioning	Medical Transcription
Corporate Transcription	Podcast Transcription
Digital Dictation	Video Transcription
Legal Transcription	

## **MORE SERVICES AND SKILLS**

### **Blog Creation & Maintenance Skills**

<b>Typical Services</b>	
Set up a client blog (mostly done via Wordpress)	Post content to client blog
Create and add widgets and plug-ins as needed	Research websites to submit clients blog to
Link client blog to his social media platforms	Research other blogs for posting comments to provide back links
Research keywords to include in post	Monitor and respond to comments on client blog
Find and use images with blog posts to make the content more appealing	Post content to client blog

## **E-Commerce & Shopping Cart Skills**

<b>Typical Services</b>	
Implement and customise client shopping cart system	Set up automation of buying process – e.g. Products to be delivered once paid for by the customer
Link client merchant account to shopping cart	Set up the shipping details in the shopping cart
Setup cycle of payment	Set up coupons for special offers
Set up new products in shopping cart	Review orders and cancel/reimburse orders as required
Create and implement email auto responders	Run regular sales reports

## **Article- & Press Release Marketing Skills**

<b>Typical services</b>	
Research and advise on the best free and paid sites for placing articles and press releases	Proofread the documents
Assist in drafting documents (if appropriate)	Distribute the articles and press releases online
Research keywords the client can use within the body of the document	Track success of articles and press releases placements and make changes as appropriate

## **Product Creation Skills**

<b>Typical Services</b>	
Assist with developing written and audio products	Develop e-book cover or connect with graphic designer to create appropriate image for product
Proofread and provide semi-final reviews to client for final approval	Transcribe audio products to create written products (e.g. E-books, articles, press releases)

## **JUMPSTART YOUR VIRTUAL ASSISTANT BUSINESS**

Assist with developing written and audio products	
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### **List Building Skills**

#### **Typical services**

Work with client to identify the overall list building strategy	Write draft copy for auto responder(s)
Assist with identifying and developing potential “free offer/lead magnet” topics that will make visitors want to sign up to client list	Implement the auto responders and include appropriate links
Develop a squeeze page/webpage that contains “pink spoon/lead magnet” with an opt-in box (or work in collaboration with web designer)	Implement tracking links where possible on all list building activities to evaluate which strategy is attracting new website visitors and sign ups
Design and set-up “thank you” pages where people will be directed to after sign up	Create strategies to drive traffic to clients website /squeeze page

### **Online e-Zine / Newsletter Skills**

#### **Typical services**

Implement an email delivery program (e.g. Aweber, Profollow, iContact Graphicmail, etc)	Find and add images to the content that relate to the topics
Create a master template for	Use tracking links within the ezine copy to track click through rates and

## JUMPSTART YOUR VIRTUAL ASSISTANT BUSINESS

Typical services	
newsletter	conversion
Develop and set-up auto responder emails, and Thank you page	Review the stats every month and evaluate open rate and tracking of links
Create a schedule of the newsletter delivery to keep client accountable for when material must be ready	'recycle' the content to post sections of the ezine on the clients blog
Assist with drafting various sections of the ezine (gather details from current events in the business, upcoming promotions etc.)	Update clients social media platforms with info about the newsletter contents to encourage more readers
Proofread ezine, provide suggestions and ensure important information is included	Create sign up forms to place on clients website

### Virtual Event and Video Production Skills

Typical services	
Discuss and create a virtual event schedule	Respond to questions and inquiries during event
Recommend best software to fit client needs (e.g. InstantTeleseminar, GotoWebinar)	Post audio recordings of event to client website
Schedule/reserve a bridge line for teleseminars	Convert event into a product
Provide client with a summary prior to	Transcribe event

## **JUMPSTART YOUR VIRTUAL ASSISTANT BUSINESS**

the event with important details - date/time, topic, summary, how many registered	
Draft event correspondence - announcement, reminders, follow up emails	Create a video of event. Edit, upload video to video sites
Assist with recordings of audio during event	Use pieces of the content for new articles/blog posts

### **Membership Site Creation & Maintenance Skills**

<b>Typical services</b>	
Assist with setting up a membership site	Provide customer support to members
Connect the membership site with membership management software (i.e. Amember, wishlist)	Assist client with a strategy to attract new members
Create membership levels	Request testimonials from members to use for future marketing efforts
Integrate membership management software to a shopping cart	Maintain content management in the membership area on a regular basis

## Event Management Skills

Typical services	
Research organisations within clients niche market for speaking engagements	Research local media outlets in event location - radio, television, newspaper
Submit a speaker proposal to these organisations	Draft press release to submit to media outlets
Research locations to hold a live event	Assist with creating any presentation materials and hand outs for speaking engagements
Handle venue arrangements – caterers, florists, seating arrangements, meals, beverages, audio/visual equipment	Create feedback forms to use after the event
Assist in the marketing of the event	Make travel and hotel arrangements
Post information about client’s upcoming event on his website and social media platforms	Work with videographer to record event



### **ACTION STEPS**

1. List all the services in which you have experience in. This will show you exactly what you can do, which services you could offer and what you need to focus on first.

2. List all the services you would like to *expand* into or develop in future. This is if you would like to diversify your services or if you would like to explore services in another niche area.

***"Successful people are willing to do what the average person is not willing to do." ~ Anonymous ~***

Don't procrastinate and make your lists today. Professional VAs never delay when things need to be done.

## **IS VIRTUAL ASSISTANCE FOR YOU**

By now you know what a Virtual Assistant is and what services they would typically deliver. The next step is to determine whether Virtual Assistance is the right thing for you to involve yourself with.

We've mentioned in the first section that a Virtual Assistant is an entrepreneur in his or her own right. This means that you should determine whether you have the qualities of an entrepreneur. But this is not enough. As a Virtual Assistant you are delivering services and selling your time to your clients, which mean you need to look at the qualities which make you an excellent "service provider".

## **JUMPSTART YOUR VIRTUAL ASSISTANT BUSINESS**

At first we're going to address entrepreneurship and the qualities of an entrepreneur after which we will explore the qualities that distinguishes an excellent Virtual Assistant from the normal 9 – 5 job situation.

Entrepreneurship is more of a mind-set than anything else. Entrepreneurs have a number of fundamental, innate elements in their characters and personalities that set them apart from those people who are prepared to be followers and who tend to accept less out of life. It is as if entrepreneurs have qualities that cannot be taught, only discovered within themselves through experiences and self-analysis.

Let's take a look at the qualities of successful entrepreneurs.

### **Typical Qualities of Entrepreneurs:**

<b>Entrepreneurial Characteristics</b>	
Flexible, adaptable and creative	Initiative
Ability to make decisions	Know their limitations and surround themselves with people who have the skills they lack
Ability to take risks and do so in a calculated way	Leaders
Alert	Make things happen, they do not spend their time dreaming about success. They get an idea and act swiftly.
Assertive	Multi-task with the capacity to cope and deal with several ideas and projects at one time.
Bad losers, wants to win all the time	Negotiate and compromise

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<b>Entrepreneurial Characteristics</b>	
Be Self Starters	Never stop thinking about business, ideas and business opportunities.
Be Ready for Anything	Novel
Believe in themselves	Open minded and prepared to listen and learn from everyone
Bounce back after failure	Organised, not necessarily on paper but in their heads and able to maintain information and monitor progress at all times
Creative	Persistent and able to endure rejection and setbacks.
Decisive, they take risks, they act impulsively on gut feelings	Prepared to make personal sacrifices in order to succeed
Do not recognise limits of boundaries, they set high targets, achieve them and set further goals.	Determined to succeed no matter what it takes.
Problem solver	Passion to Innovate
Confident	Passionate
Does their research to ensure they have the answers before problems arise?	Professional in their approach to business at all times.
Dogged Committers	Resilient after Failure
Don't be afraid or embarrassed to ask for help	Risk Taker
Dreamers	Self-motivated
Driven and focused on their sales targets at all times	Sense of Urgency
Driven by the need to succeed	Stress management

<b>Entrepreneurial Characteristics</b>	
Effective at persuasion	The ability to produce results
Energetic	The ability to reflect and improve
Enjoy the race	The ability to think strategically
Exacting and exhaustive mentality	Think "out of the box"
Follow through	Think Positively
Imaginative	Time Management

Hey, **STOP!! Don't run away.** It is not necessary or even possible to have **ALL** of the characteristics and qualities above to become a successful entrepreneur. You need not be a genius, only a couple of these qualities will do.



***ACTION STEP***

- 1. Take time and list the qualities *you* possess. Read through the above and list your entrepreneurial qualities right now. **Once again, don't procrastinate ... Make your list now.****

## **JUMPSTART YOUR VIRTUAL ASSISTANT BUSINESS**

Now that you know you possess some of the qualities of an entrepreneur, let's take a look at what qualities you will need to become an outstanding Virtual Assistant.

Skills are one thing, but it takes more than being good at data entry, desktop publishing, composing letters or designing Power Point slides to become an outstanding and successful Virtual Assistant.

Those skills are important, but there's another level of hidden skills or qualities that are equally important in this business.

### **Qualities of Virtual Assistants:**

<b>Virtual Assistant Characteristics</b>	
A pleasant personality	Hard worker
Ability to interact at all levels including senior	Honest
Ability to manage and prioritise multiple tasks to achieve deadlines	Looking for challenging new roles where they can make a difference
Ability to work under pressure and to tight deadlines	Intelligent
Asks questions	Knowledgeable
Available	Initiative
Calm	Multitasking Ability
Charitable	Open minded
Committed	Open to suggestions
Compassionate	Organised and confident
Compatible	Organizational Skills
Comprehensive experience of working with computers	Pleasant Telephone Manner
Confident	Realistic

## JUMPSTART YOUR VIRTUAL ASSISTANT BUSINESS

Virtual Assistant Characteristics	
Cooperative	Proactive
Creative and innovative	Problem solver
Customer Service	Professional
Dedicated	Punctual
Demonstrate organisational and time management skills	Possess discretion, reliability, strict confidentiality and initiative
Dependable	Reliable
Detail Orientated	Resourceful
Don't procrastinate or delay	Self-confident
Easy to communicate with	Self-Motivated
Energetic and enthusiastic	Skilled
Ethical	Stable
Excellent interpersonal and communication skills	Strong attention to detail and administrative skills
Experienced	Trustworthy
Fair	Versatile and pro-active - constantly thinking outside the box
Follows directions	Versed in the current technology
Friendly and approachable	Willing to learn
Good Communication Skills	Work completed efficiently and on time

I know, I know, I know. You do not have all these qualities either, but then, nobody has them all. Once again, you need not be a genius, but it is necessary to have a look at the qualities you do possess in order to make the right decisions.

***“People don’t make the company, the right people do.”***  
***~Jim Collins~***

The above quote is also true in the Virtual Assistant Industry. The right people make a huge success of being a Virtual Assistant.



### ACTION STEPS

1. You've guessed it. List all your Virtual Assistant skills and qualities and amaze yourself.

**Don't delay! List them now.** Doing things immediately is one of the skills you should possess to be an outstanding Virtual Assistant ... **never procrastinate.**

Remember the following:

***"Success does not come to those who wait . . . and it does not wait for anyone to come to it." ~Anonymous~***

Before we move on to the next section, let's highlight just a couple of skills and qualities that stand out above the rest. If you have these qualities, you are on the right track.

## **QUALITIES OF SUCCESSFUL VIRTUAL ASSISTANTS**

### **Self-Motivated**

When you have a 9-5 job, you come into the office at a certain time, do your work, take tea and lunch breaks and leave at a set time. You know what your employer expects of you and someone else determines how much work you do and when you do it.

As a Virtual Assistant, you're the boss and the buck stops with you. A top Virtual Assistant plans their schedule well in advance and shows up at the home office ready to work. Nobody tells them what to do, nobody motivates them and nobody determines their pace.

Successful and determined Virtual Assistants are self-motivators and go-getters. They know: "If I don't work, I don't earn an income." In other words: "No money, no honey" and that motivates them.

### **Organised and Confident**

Once your business is established, you will be working with several clients. You'll need to keep your workspace and projects well organised. It may seem as if this goes without saying, but it does take effort and planning to stay on top of matters.

Procrastination, delay and tardiness can be fatal for your business. It is common for Virtual Assistants to sometimes work after hours, weekends and on holidays. Get used to a routine and you will shine in your career as a top Virtual Assistant.

### Resourceful and Taking Initiative

One of the exciting things about the Virtual Assistant industry is that you will do various tasks for various clients. This means that you'll have to become a vast resource of information. This does not mean that you should know everything. You should however be willing to dig around, do research and come up with an answer to the best of your ability.

Occasionally, you'll have to put your 'problem solver' hat on and figure out the answer to something that's baffling you or your client. Remember, when you don't know something, reaching out and asking others for help is okay. Resourcefulness, initiative and pro-activeness are excellent qualities of top Virtual Assistants.

### Intelligence and Good Communication Skills

Intelligence is very important. But by intelligence, I don't mean that you have to be a Harvard Scholar by any means! You have to ***be Virtual Assistant Wise*** which is almost like being street-wise.

To be Virtual Assistant wise means that you are a quick thinker, that you know what to do and how to do it. This will definitely set you apart and impress your clients.

Although you'll be working from home, you'll be communicating constantly with clients. Communication skills are essential when discussing project details. You need to be able to ask clients the right questions so that you can do a great job on their projects. Clear, concise communication is a must.

## **Professionalism**

Professionalism is perhaps the most important quality of them all. However, to define professionalism is not that easy. It could best be described as a mixture of courtesy, integrity, class and excellence.

As a Virtual Assistant, professionalism is paramount. You are a professional service provider. It is not just a job that you do from home - it's YOUR business. **Your bread and butter.**

As a top Virtual Assistant you should always project self-confidence and professionalism when dealing with clients or potential clients. Be prepared when they ask you some questions about your qualifications and never be shy to let clients know that you are honest, reliable, organized, flexible and good at what you do.

Feeling better now? I bet you do!

*"Success does not come to those who wait . . . and it does not wait for anyone to come to it." ~Anonymous~*

## **WHAT EQUIPMENT DO YOU NEED**

In order to run a successful business and to deliver quality services to clients, Virtual Assistants should have the right equipment and tools, not so?

Once again the list of equipment goes on and on. Keep in mind that technology changes daily and to remain up to date and on track you

## **JUMPSTART YOUR VIRTUAL ASSISTANT BUSINESS**

have to know as much as possible in order to make the right decisions when starting your Virtual Assistant business.

The kind of work you are setting out to do as a Virtual Assistant (in other words your niche) will determine the equipment you'll need.

Assuming you are going to do general work such as administrative or secretarial assistance, you would require only some basic equipment and software.

However, if your work is more specialized such as transcription services, web design services or accounting and bookkeeping, you will need some customised software suited to your services.

At first we'll look at the "hardware", in other words the feel and touch equipment you'll typically need. Then we'll look at the "software" necessary to run your business.

### **Equipment Requirements:**

<b>Basic "Hardware" Equipment Requirements</b>	
Broadband Internet Connection	Dustbin
Cell Phone	Fax Facility for sending and receiving
Comfortable Chair	Photocopier
Comfortable Desk	Printer
Computer - Desktop or Laptop or Both	Telephone

**Nice to Have “Hardware” Equipment**

Colour Printer	Filing Cabinet(s)
Digital Camera	Personal Digital Assistant



**ACTION STEPS...**

1. Make a list of all the “hardware” equipment you already have in order to see what you will need to set up your office and also to determine how much it will cost you to start your Virtual Assistant business. Equipment and start-up costs will be covered in more detail in the next section.

Now it’s time to look at the “software” requirements.

**Software Requirements:**

**Basic “Software”**

Accounting / invoicing system/software	Firewall
Adobe Reader	Instant Messaging
Anti-Virus Programme	Microsoft Office
E-mail such as Microsoft Outlook or web based	Zip- programme

Nice to Have “Software”	
Adobe Photoshop	PDF Creator
Anti-Spyware like MS Windows Defender	Print Master
Business Plan Writer	Quick Books Customer Manager
Microsoft Access	Quick Books Pro
Microsoft Front Page	Time Tracking Software
Microsoft Publisher	Paint Shop Pro
Whatever software you need to deliver services in your specific niche	

The above table contains only general software requirements. It will be an impossible task to state all the available software packages for all the Virtual Assistant niche areas. It is likely that there will be other equipment and software you might need, depending on the services you deliver.



### **ACTION STEPS**

1. Make a list of all the “software” you already have in order to determine what you will need prior to starting or setting up your office.

Ensure you have the right equipment and software to serve the clients who give you the opportunity to do so.

***“A customer is the most important visitor on our premises; he is not dependent on us. We are dependent on him. He is not an interruption in our work. He is the purpose of it. He is not an outsider in our business. He is part of it. We are not doing him a favour by serving him. He is doing us a favour by giving us an opportunity to do so.” ~Mahatma Gandhi~***

### **COSTS TO SET UP YOUR VIRTUAL ASSISTANT OFFICE**

When comparing the start-up costs of a Virtual Assistant home based office with starting a home franchise or other work from home opportunities, you will notice that the costs are very reasonable. With franchises or other opportunities you have to put a lot of capital down up-front, as opposed to a Virtual Assistant business where you might already have some or all the basic equipment.

It is difficult to put figures to needs because prices increase daily and you will have to do some homework in order to get the exact amount of what it is going to cost you.

We will however – using the information you’ve jotted down in the previous sections (*you have made your lists, haven’t you?*) – guide you through the steps.

## **JUMPSTART YOUR VIRTUAL ASSISTANT BUSINESS**

*Oh by the way* ... keep track of all the expenses to start up your Virtual Assistant business because it is tax deductible.

Keep in mind that the list below is not the ultimate or even an all-inclusive list of the equipment needed to run your business effectively. It is just a basic check list of the more important equipment that is generic for most VA practices.

Your specific service and/or niche market will determine the specific equipment necessary to cater for your client's needs.

### **Equipment Cost Planning:**

<b>Equipment Cost Planning</b>			
<b>"Hardware"</b>	<b>Do Have</b>	<b>Should Get</b>	<b>Costs</b>
<b>Basic "Hardware" Equipment</b>			
<b>Broadband Internet Connection</b>			
<b>Cell Phone</b>			
<b>Comfortable Chair</b>			
<b>Comfortable Desk</b>			
<b>Computer - Desktop / Laptop or Both</b>			
<b>Dustbin</b>			
<b>Fax Machine and Fax Line</b>			
<b>Photocopier</b>			

**JUMPSTART YOUR VIRTUAL ASSISTANT BUSINESS**

<b>Printer</b>			
<b>Telephone</b>			
<b>Nice to Have “Hardware” Equipment</b>			
<b>Colour Printer</b>			
<b>Digital Camera</b>			
<b>Filing Cabinet(s)</b>			
<b>Personal Digital Assistant</b>			
<b>Other</b>			
<b>Basic “Software” Equipment</b>			
<b>Accounting/Invoicing System/Software</b>			
<b>Adobe Reader</b>			
<b>Anti-Virus Programme</b>			
<b>Firewall</b>			
<b>Instant Messaging</b>			
<b>Microsoft Office</b>			
<b>Microsoft Outlook (email software)</b>			
<b>Zip programme</b>			
<b>Nice to Have “Software” Equipment</b>			
<b>Adobe Photoshop</b>			
<b>Anti-Spyware</b>			

## **JUMPSTART YOUR VIRTUAL ASSISTANT BUSINESS**

<b>Business Plan Writer</b>			
<b>Microsoft Access</b>			
<b>Microsoft Front Page</b>			
<b>Microsoft Publisher</b>			
<b>Paint Shop Pro</b>			
<b>PDF Creator</b>			
<b>Print Master</b>			
<b>QuickBooks Customer Manager</b>			
<b>QuickBooks Pro</b>			
<b>Time tracking software</b>			
<b>Other</b>			
<b>Niche Specific Software</b>			
<b>Total Cost</b>			

Some of the “nice to have” software mentioned in the table are part of Microsoft Office Professional Package and some of them are downloadable from the web. An all in one fax, copier, scanner, and printer might furthermore save you a lot of extra costs.

Remember that the costs do not stop here. You have to make provision for business cards, stationary, marketing materials, professional fees and monthly running costs. This however, should not be seen as **start-up costs** but rather as **operating costs** of the business.

*“I really want people to know that I’ve worked hard, very hard, to get to where I am today. This didn’t just happen overnight. I started in business over 25 years ago and have found a way to build on what I’ve learned through every partnership and opportunity.” ~Magic Johnson~*

Nothing worthwhile happens overnight. You have to work hard, build on what you’ve learned and grab opportunity when it comes.

## **CHOOSING A BUSINESS NAME**

Choosing a name for your business is more or less the same than choosing a name for your child. The name is going to stick with you for the rest of your business life.

Some people find it easy to come up with the perfect business name, but for others finding the right name can be a major challenge.

Choosing a winning business name might take some thinking and brainstorming, but it is one of the most important decisions during the process of starting your Virtual Assistant business.

A weak business name will be like playing golf with only one club in your bag. You might sink some shots but it will be a whole lot harder.

Remember there is no magic formula for the proper business name, but if you apply and work through the following rules, the odds are good that you will end up with the “perfect name” for your business.

## **BASIC GUIDELINES FOR CHOOSING A BUSINESS NAME**

Use the following guidelines to find a business name.

### **1. Your business name should be memorable yet simple and easy to spell.**

You want your potential customers and clients to remember your business name, not so? They should be able to find it easily when they are looking for it in a phone book, directory or online.

When people hear your business name, they should be able to **remember** it and your name should be **unique** enough to stick to a potential customer's mind.

Choosing a business name such as “Phorgetmenot VA Services” or “Pappadopoulous Admin Services” is maybe not such a good idea. It might be unique, but nobody will remember the spelling.

The best way to create a winning business name is to get your family, friends and or colleagues involved when brainstorming the perfect name.

A good rule of thumb to follow is to pay attention to what happens when you tell other people your business name. If you always have to spell or pronounce it slowly, it will be difficult for people to remember it or to find it later on. The best choice of business names roll off the tongue easily, can be spelled with ease and do not require much explanation.

## **2. Your business name should reflect what you do and what your target niche (function/role) is.**

Sometimes new Virtual Assistants are in such a rush to get started that they jump right into working with customers and clients without giving much thought to their business name.

Others decide to: *“Just do business under my own name until I find something I like.”* This can be a costly decision. If you change your name a couple of months down the line, you will have to change all your documentation and even your bank account. Changing a name might also result in losing ground in the marketing arena – it takes time and effort to build up **brand recognition**, and that time is lost when you change names.

A business name like “M Steyn and Associates” does not tell a potential customer what you do and what your niche is and is not the preferred way to go.

Your business name should clearly reach your target audience. Include something in your name that describes your product or service like “Graphic Design” or “Administrative Services” or “Legal Transcription” so that customers won’t wonder what type of business you have.

Please don’t get me wrong. I am not saying that you should not use your personal name. What I am trying to say is: “M Steyn Graphic Design Services” will be a far better choice than “M Steyn and Associates”.

Another striking element of a name is to use “feeling good” words. A name that can capture the imagination of a potential client can do

wonders for your business. A “feeling good” element is any word that portrays a positive image such as; success, speedy, best, top etc.

It is a proven fact that positive words achieve positive results. Names for example such as “Speedy Graphic Designs” instead of just “Graphic Designs” will enhance a positive picture in your customer’s mind.

People are generally hard-wired to “see” images when they read or hear language. Incorporating visual elements like “graphic design” and/or a “feeling good” word into your business name can be a powerful aid to a customer’s memory. It is also a very powerful advertising tool.

### **3. Your business name should be flexible and expandable.**

You want your name to stand out in front of your customers and prospects. Be careful not to restrict your name to a field that you may grow out of. Make your name expandable.

“Canned Typing Services” may sound good at first, but what if you want to change your niche to web design. Also be careful to use a specific location like “Vanderbijl Typing Services” in your business name as customers might think that you are only working in that specific area.

Avoid names that are close or similar to your competitors. For example, if they use “ABC Typing Services”, position yourself differently with a name like “Virtual Administrative Services”.

Your business is your baby, your investment in your future and you will have it with you for (hopefully) a long time. Don’t short-change

it by skipping out on one of the important steps of selecting just the right name.

### **4. Avoid trendy, silly and geographical names.**

A winning business name is a name that draws business in itself. Every so often trends like “Assistance-4-U” or “Services-2-U” make the rounds but once everybody starts using them they are not unique anymore.

Customers are looking to build a relationship with you and a name like “Bambi’s Secretarial Service” will not generate the confidence of your potential clients. A customer will be more inclined to call “Deadline Secretarial Services” for assistance.

Another pitfall is the spelling of your name. “Phine Admin Services” or “Phorgetmenot VA Services” might be a unique name, but clients may find it difficult to find you if they look for “Fine Admin Services” or “Forgetmenot VA Services”.

### **5. Remember the colours**

An important component of your business name is your logo. Think about the colours when choosing your business name as it will play a big role in your web site design as well as day to day promotional materials.

Colours are non-verbal communication tools which have a symbolism and meaning that go beyond ink. Colours have strong emotional associations and can be very useful in the total set-up of your business name.

## **6. Make sure that you are not stepping on someone's toes.**

Once you've decided on a name, do an internet name search to make sure the name you picked is not already in use.

Some websites can help you to see if the name that you choose is still available.

We recommend the following:

<http://www.domainsbot.com/>

<http://domain-suggestions.domaintools.com/>

<http://www.betterwhois.com/>



### ***ACTION STEPS ...***

1. Sit down in your favourite quiet spot, take a pencil and a piece of paper and make a list of all the business names that come into your head. Then evaluate them by taking the above into consideration.

***“A business (name) has to be involving, it has to be fun,  
and it has to exercise your creative instincts.”  
~Richard Branson ~***

## **DECIDING ON A BUSINESS STRUCTURE**

Decisions, decisions, decisions.

Once you’ve decided on a name for your Virtual Assistant business, you have to decide what type of business structure will suit your business best.

Remember, some forms of businesses must be registered with the Registrar of Companies and has to meet certain legal requirements. This may vary from country to country, so make sure you are aware of the applicable laws and requirements of your specific country.

Most Virtual Assistant businesses are run as sole proprietors, but there is nothing wrong with partnerships or registering your business as a company. Evaluate the following and decide what structure is the right one for your business.

### **SOLE PROPRIETOR**

When you start your Virtual Assistant business as a sole proprietorship it means that you are the only person who owns this business since “proprietor” means owner.

This is the easiest way to conduct business, but you have to keep the following in mind:

## *JUMPSTART YOUR VIRTUAL ASSISTANT BUSINESS*

When you are a sole proprietor there is no difference between the assets that belong to you and the assets that belong to your business.

This means that the computer you use to deliver services to your clients belongs to you in the same way that your bed belongs to you. There is no difference between business assets (the computer) and personal assets (the bed).

When you are a sole proprietor there is also no difference between the money your business owes people and the money **you** owe people.

This means that the money you pay when buying your computer is considered no different than the money you pay when buying a bed.

Please note: I am not talking about your business expenses versus personal expenses for tax purposes – we will address that later

Now what am I talking about?

Let's say you buy your computer on an instalment agreement, but somewhere along the line you are not able to pay your instalments. And let's say the supplier decides to take you to court to demand payment. If you do not have the money to pay the supplier, then the Court may take away your business assets (the computer) as well as your personal assets (the bed) and sell it in order to pay the supplier.

With a sole proprietorship there is no difference between business assets and personal assets. There is also no difference between business debt and personal debt because you are the sole owner of the business and thus liable for all.

When you are a sole proprietor you have to use your own name and then t/a (trading as) your business name.

Let's say your name is M Steyn and your business name is "VirtualAssist". When filling in forms for business purposes or when signing contracts or when opening a business bank account you should use: M Steyn t/a VirtualAssist.

### **PARTNERSHIP**

A partnership is a business where more than one person owns the business. A partnership can have anything between 2 and 20 partners and they own the business together.

If you decide to go into partnership with your virtual assistant business, make sure you sign a written agreement, preferably drawn up by a lawyer or an auditor and make sure it includes the following points:

- ❖ What happens to the assets of the business (for example the tools, furniture etc.) if the partnership ends?
- ❖ How will the partners share the profit?
- ❖ What happens if one of the partners wants to leave the partnership?

Remember: Every time a new partner joins, the partners have to sign a new agreement.

With a partnership, the law does not recognise a difference between the partnership's assets and debts, and the assets and debts of the partners themselves. The law also does not recognise a difference between different partners' assets and debts.

## **JUMPSTART YOUR VIRTUAL ASSISTANT BUSINESS**

*For example: Your partner (Ben) builds a house and does not pay the builder. The builder takes him to court to get his money. The court can take the tools and furniture of the partnership and sell it in order to give the builder his money. The court can do this because there is no difference between Ben's assets and debts and the assets and debts of the partnership. So Ben's debts are also the debts of the partnership. If Ben cannot pay the builder, the builder can get his money from the partnership.*

*You would be able to go to court to get the money back from Ben, but it is expensive to pay lawyers to take a case to court and it takes a long time before the court will hear your case.*

When partners fill in any business forms or sign contracts or open business bank accounts (banks may have different criteria) on behalf of the business, the same rules apply as for a sole proprietorship.

Let's say your name is M Steyn and your partner's name is F van Wyk and let's say your business name is "VirtualAssist". When filling in forms and signing contracts on behalf of VirtualAssist you should always state M Steyn (Partner) and your partner should do the same.

### **COMPANY**

Companies have to obey all the rules of the Companies Act, which is a long and complicated law.

A company should be registered. A company also has shareholders and directors. Shareholders can be people and/or other companies.

Shareholders put the money into the business and are the owners of the business. Directors are the managers of the business. In a VA business, the owner is normally the sole shareholder as well as the director.

The law sees a company as separate from its shareholders and directors. This means that the assets and debts of the business belong to the company and the assets and debts of the shareholders and directors have nothing to do with the company.

Suppliers or banks, which lend money to companies, will often ask the shareholders or the directors to sign surety for the company. If the company cannot pay its debts, then the people who have signed surety will have to pay the company's debts.

A company name should always have Pty (Ltd) behind the name of the company. For instance if you decide to run your virtual assistant business, VirtualAssist, as a company the name should be VirtualAssist (Pty) Ltd.

When running your business as a company, the registration number of the company as well as all the names of the directors must be printed at the bottom of the letterhead.



### **ACTION STEPS**

1. After taking the above into consideration, decide and write down what structure you think will suit your business best.

## **TAX AND VIRTUAL ASSISTANCE**

The question often arises whether it is necessary for a Virtual Assistant to pay Income Tax.

Well, the law states that **everybody** has to pay tax.

If you are an employee, then your employer registers for SITE/PAYE, deducts the tax from your salary and sends it to the Receiver of Revenue.

If you own a business - and Virtual Assistants are independent business owners - the Income Tax Act states that you must register yourself as a provisional taxpayer. It does not matter whether you are a sole trader, a partner or a director of a company - it works the same for everybody.

If you run your Virtual Assistant business as a sole trader or partnership, you only need to register in your own name (and not in the business name as well) as the law does not make a distinction between the debts and assets of the people who own the business and the debts and assets of the business.

If you run your business as a company, you must register the business for income tax purposes. All the shareholders and the directors of the company still have to pay their own personal tax, so they will also have to be registered as taxpayers.



### ***ACTION STEPS.***

1. Visit your nearest Receiver of Revenue office to register your business for provisional tax.

## **KEEP RECORD OF YOUR EXPENSES**

Working from home as a Virtual Assistant means you are running your own business and are allowed to deduct your expenses from your income for tax purposes.

The following are just a couple of expenses that might be deducted from your income.

For a complete list please talk to your auditor.

### **Deductible Expenses:**

<b>Expenses that can be deducted from tax</b>	
Advertising	Marketing Material
Business Cards	Membership to Organizations
Business Lunches	Office Expenses
Copier	Petrol
Fax	Stationary
Internet connection	Telephone Expenses (Landline and Cell)

Remember you have to keep proof of all the expenses you had during the year. In other words, if you buy a pen for your office, keep the slip. When you pay your membership fees, keep proof of the electronic funds transfer (EFT). When you advertise in the local papers, keep your invoice and receipt.

## **BUSINESS INSURANCE**

All Virtual Assistant businesses should have some form of insurance.

It unfortunately happens that new VAs are sometimes so busy with the actual operational side of their businesses that they don't consider planning for the unexpected bumps in the road.

While many of these bumps are beyond your control, it is necessary to make sure you're able to cope when something happens.

Not having the proper plans and insurances in place can cost a lot of money and even forces a VA to shut down completely. It is therefore important to understand the different types of insurance that are available and know what you need to properly protect your business from all types of risks.



### ***ACTION STEPS.***

1. We are not experts on this subject and thus recommend that you talk to an experienced insurance broker or company about the correct cover for you and your business.

As a virtual assistant you will need insurance that can cover you for unexpected incidences. Below are some insurance types.

### PROFESSIONAL LIABILITY

Professional liability insurance, also known as **errors and omissions insurance**, protects you and your business against claims by a client if you make a mistake or have been negligent. Sometimes mistakes can result in large losses for your clients.

Without professional liability insurance, you would be forced to compensate the client for the losses.

Even if you did not make a mistake, the costs of proving yourself innocent in a court could cripple your company.

#### **Examples:**

- *A Virtual Assistant books a flight for a client. She books the wrong flight, and the client misses a meeting that causes him a financial loss.*
- *A transcriptionist made a mistake between two closely related medical terms that leads to the doctor performing the wrong treatment on the patient.*

In some cases, errors can create a ripple effect and the extra costs and damages incurred by all separate parties (due to the initial error) is added up to the final claim amount.

An important factor to keep in mind when taking out liability insurance is that there could be a time delay between an event and a claim. Even if you close your business you are liable for a period of

time afterwards and should have indemnity insurance to cover this latency. Ensure that you are covered across the entire period.

NB: Professional liability insurance is a specialist area and professional advice from an experienced insurance broker is essential.

### **SMALL BUSINESS INSURANCE**

Any VA business should have some form of small business insurance. If you own a computer, laptop, printer, scanner, fax machine, smartphone, office furniture, carpets, lights, desks, chairs etc. you should consider taking insurance to ensure that these items are protected against theft or damage.

In most cases, you are covered under your general home content insurance. If that is not the case, it might be a better option to insure the business assets separately. It's also a good idea to take stock of all your assets every year to make sure that you have sufficient cover. Discovering too late that you are under-insured can be a costly mistake.

#### **Examples:**

- *Your computer is stolen during a burglary or your home office was destroyed in an unexpected fire and you need to replace equipment.*
- *A VA loses client documents and business files in a fire and it cost money to reprint / recreate 1000s of documents.*

## **LEGAL INSURANCE**

It may sound far-fetched, but you might need a lawyer or legal advice from time to time and it can become quite expensive. Legal insurance mostly includes legal advice and service from a lawyer that is qualified to assist you with your problems.

### **Example:**

*Client charge-backs are a common problem for Virtual Assistants. It is therefore important to always use a proper contract prior to rendering services to any client. It might however happen that you can become the victim of a fraudulent client charge-back, and need legal advice to solve the problem.*

We all live in hope that none of these things will ever happen to us, but sometimes the inevitable does happen and it's thus important to have measures in place to soften the blow.



### **ACTION STEPS.**

1. Speak to your insurance advisor or shop around for the best insurance for your business.

## **BUSINESS BANK ACCOUNT**

Everything you do in business revolves around money and part of having a business identity is to keep your business finances separate from your personal finances.

The best way to do this is to open a separate business bank account.

I know you might argue that a separate bank account means more bank charges but it is the best way to go, even if you are a sole proprietor and feels it is not “really” necessary for a separate account.

Having a business account gives credibility to your business.

Some clients may prefer to either pay by cheque or electronic funds transfer and giving them the name of your business account, for instance “VirtualAssist” rather than MP Steyn, will definitely score some points.

Apart from the above, with a business bank account you will be able to keep track of all your business income and expenses.



### ***ACTION STEPS***

1. Different banks have different products and criteria. Take some time to find out more about their products and evaluate which one will suit your business best.

## **DOCUMENTATION**

The saying: “no work is ever completed before the paperwork is done”, is true and of utmost importance when conducting business and delivering services.

Why?

Well, let’s ask you a question. Will you sell your house to a buyer without signing a proper “Offer to Purchase” or “Deed of Sale” which specifies the purchase amount, the deposit, the bond amount and all the other conditions of the sale?

No?

Of course not, because you want to make sure the buyer is serious and that he will stick to the contract and fulfil all the conditions and of course, pay you your money.

For the same reason you, the service provider, need to have a contract with your clients because no verbal agreement will cover you or the client when the relationship turns sour or when conflicts arise.

## **GETTING THE PAPERWORK IN ORDER**

Many Virtual Assistants do not complete and sign the necessary documentation with their clients just to regret their negligence a few months down the line.

Don’t fall into the same trap.

Be upfront with your clients and inform them about the way you conduct business. Tell them that your contract covers all the

necessary terms and conditions, your duties and compensation and that it protect both parties.

When you are upfront and handle the signing of your contract with confidence, your clients will know they are dealing with a professional.

### **DIFFERENT CONTRACTS / WORK AGREEMENTS**

#### **Independent Contractor Agreement**

This contract states the names of the parties to the contract; i.e. your client's name as well as your name, it sets out the normal conditions like duties, terms and compensation, what expenses the client will be entitle to pay, when you are going to give feedback and all legalities necessary to protect both parties.

No VA should conduct any business with a client prior to signing an Independent Contractor Agreement.

#### **Non-disclosure Agreement**

A non-disclosure agreement is usually signed where parties wish to exchange certain confidential information and wish to protect such information in the manner as set out in the agreement.

#### **Retainer Agreement**

The Retainer Agreement comes into place when you and a client agree upon a retainer fee. A "retainer fee" means you are charging a

“per hour” rate and the client pays you in **advance** for the number of hours at the price per hour agreed to.

This can be an excellent way of ensuring income when doing on-going business with a client but it is noteworthy to mention that you should be readily available to do work for this client even if it means you have to sometimes turn other clients away.



### ACTION STEPS...

1. Ensure all your documentation is in place before conducting business with your first client.
2. What are your next steps to get your documentation in place?

*“A verbal contract isn’t worth the ‘paper’ it is written on”  
~Sam Goldwyn~*

## **SETTING UP YOUR OFFICE**

Virtual Assistants often tend to think that because they are working from home they can put a desk and chair in the corner of a room and start working.

It might work in the beginning, but as your business grows you will have to look into designing a home office that better fits your work and lifestyle. Do this from the start and save yourself lots of frustration and time.

Why did you decided to work from home in the first place?

Was it because you wanted freedom, a better working environment and hated working in a cramped, stuffy office?

Your home office should be truly all about **YOU**. It should be whatever you can imagine.

Remember, you are going to spend most of your day in your home office and how you plan and set it up might affect your business.

Your office will be the place where your bread and butter comes from, why not design it as if it has jam on it as well.

Think about a bright colour for your office to differentiate it from the dull colour you had in a normal office environment. A poster that motivates you or a picture of your family will add some extra touch.

A “fun” office that brings a smile to your face with a plant or two or a fish bowl and a lamp or two (just because you love a beautiful lamp) will bring life into your office and make your work something you are looking forward to.

Your framed mission statement and goals will remind you why you decided to change your working environment and a radio to listen to your favourite radio station will ensure that you keep in touch with what is happening in your area.

The above are all ideas to stimulate your imagination. Elaborate on this and decide what you want most!

### OFFICE EQUIPMENT – THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND

You've already made your lists in the section "What Equipment Do You Need" and know exactly what your equipment requirements are for your specific niche. This section will tickle your brain with some basics to keep in mind as well.

Use a *desk* that allows movement of your legs as it will help to avoid cramps and stiffness.

Your home office will literally revolve around your *office chair* and you can expect to spend a lot of time in it, so don't cut corners here. A rapid route to extreme back problems is to use a cheap or substandard office chair.

When choosing a *computer* (desk-top or laptop) make sure you can adjust the monitor height to avoid neck strain. Make sure you are not sitting too near or too far from the monitor screen in order to avoid eye strain. An arm length from the monitor is normally a safe distance.

A *printer, copier, scanner and fax* will assist you to do your work properly but should fit in around the office and not become the focus of it. Check out the all-in-one options if you have limited space.

Make sure your *internet connection* is dependable as your work depends on proper and fast internet communication with your clients.

Though a *dustbin* may seem a luxury during the initial stages of setting up the home office it should find its way into the interior of your home office. A dedicated dustbin ensures that the home-office space is neat and tidy.

Although not equipment, any work area needs to feature *sufficient lighting*. Natural light is the ideal type of light for working in but this doesn't always mix well with computer screens. The lighting in your work area should not be so strong as to cause discomfort to your eyesight. Equally the lighting should not be so weak as to force you to sit closer to your monitor to counter the low level of light in the room.

Last but not least, make sure that there is no excessive *noise* in your home office. Noise can be distracting and take your focus off what you're doing.

Design your home office not only to be functional but also to be fun. Make it a playground as much as a working environment in order to enjoy working there.

## DETERMINE YOUR RATES

Many VAs struggle to know how much they should charge for their services - even VAs that have been in business for a while sometimes struggle with it.

It is because there is not a “one-size-fits-all-solution” to pricing, especially in a services business. As Virtual Assistants we do not sell

something concrete like a car or some household items that have a fixed price tag.

VAs sell time, experience and benefits – and it is sometimes a grey area to put a price tag on.

To put this whole pricing issue into perspective, let's consider the story below from Harry Beckwith's book "*Selling the Invisible*". It is actually quite funny, but has a lot of truth behind it and is a classic example of **selling the perceived benefit** - something that Virtual Assistants all need to strive to achieve in their own businesses as well.

*“The story goes that one day a woman was strolling along a street in Paris when she spotted Picasso sketching at a sidewalk café. She stopped and politely asked Picasso if he will sketch her, and charge accordingly. Picasso obliged and in just minutes, there she was: An original Picasso.*

*“And what do I owe you?” she asked.*

*“Five thousand francs”, he answered.*

*“But it only took 3 minutes”, she politely reminded him.*

*“No,” Picasso said. “It took me all my life”.*”

We can learn a lot from this story, but first we should understand a few important things about Picasso himself.

Picasso knew that it takes time to build a good reputation. He didn't become famous overnight, and didn't have clients streaming in to buy his paintings when he first started out. He had to work very hard, a typical lifetime, to get the deserved recognition for his work.

He knew that when your services or products are distinct, are different from what others provide, clients will recognise it and will always find you – even in the most unexpected places.

He also knew that when you are an expert in your field, you won't have to go looking for clients all the time.

Picasso understood that it is the skill, the expertise AND the end result that the customer pays for, not only the time it takes.

Lastly he knew that the perceived value of his services automatically raise the price he can ask for his work.

OK, you might ask: “WHAT does this have to do with determining VA rates.”

When you've worked hard - a typical “lifetime” (such as in the Picasso example) to develop a good reputation, distinguish yourself as an expert and developed a name for yourself as a Virtual Assistant, people mostly do not mind to pay a premium price for the perceived benefits that they will receive from your services.

The simple reason for it is: There is no right price.

PRICE is what somebody is willing to pay, NOT what you're willing to charge, and it's all about perceived value.

The truth is, clients are willing to pay for perceived value, and thus determining your rates is NOT about the price. It is about the value and the benefits that you offer your clients. It is this perceived benefits that you need to put a price tag on.

Therefore, the bottom line is: Don't undersell your services just to get the work.

Although it is sometimes tempting to charge lower rates when you are just starting out because you may feel insecure, it can give clients a false idea of what those services are really worth, and it also devalues our industry.

Remember, you can **never** afford to charge less than the minimum needed to keep your business viable. Charge enough to make a profit and learn to value your work.

You are providing a great service so don't be afraid to charge what you are worth!

### **FACTORS TO CONSIDER WHEN DETERMINING YOUR RATES**

It doesn't matter how you look at it; determining your price is often a difficult task. It involves part guesswork, part experience and part number crunching. Take the following factors into consideration when determining your rates.

#### **How Much Do “You” Cost?**

How much is your blood, sweat and tears worth? Even if you are just sitting at your desk typing and writing reports, you are incurring an opportunity cost by NOT making yourself available elsewhere for a dependable salary or receiving a nice benefit package from an employer. By working on your own, you are also giving up on the ability to mentally clock-out at five o'clock each afternoon.

What are you willing to give up, to be an entrepreneur? This figure for opportunity costs is not necessarily used when calculating your

price, but having a faint idea of how much “*you*” cost can guide your thoughts in the right direction.

### The Costs to Run Your Business

When setting your price, the most important thing you need is to have a good idea of what all your costs are. If you do not know your estimated costs, you will not be able to determine a price that should produce a profit. Remember that

$$\textit{Profit} = \textit{Price} - \textit{Costs}$$

To determine your costs, you need to add up all expenses for running your business. Also make sure you factor in all the hidden costs of your business like insurance, invoices that never get paid for one reason or another, as well as taxes.

### The Number of Billable Hours

Whatever you do, you can't bill every available hour. Think about how many hours in a week you are willing to work to keep your business operating smoothly and at a profit.

Then account for non-billable hours such as sick days, holidays, hours working **on** your business such as your own administration, hours with no work, time for marketing and so on.

Administration tasks can easily take up 15% of your work week and most successful small business entrepreneurs spend approximately 25% of their work week on marketing activities.

### **Your Profit Percentage**

Somewhat related to your costs, you should always consider how much money you are trying to make above breaking even. This is business after all.

### **The Market Demand**

If what you do is in high demand, e.g. a lot of people are searching for these services or there are not enough VAs to deliver these specific services, you can raise your price. Conversely if there's hardly any work around, it might be a good idea to cheapen up to compete.

Signs that demand are high include too much work coming in, other VAs being overloaded and people telling you they've been struggling to find someone to do the job.

Signs that demand are low include finding you competing to win jobs and a shortage of work.

### **The Industry Standards**

It's hard to know what others are charging, but try asking around. Find out what businesses charge as well as other VAs that perform similar tasks. The more you know about what others are charging and what services they provide for the money, the better you'll know how you fit into the market.

### Your Skill level

Not every VA delivers the same skill level and one would expect to pay accordingly.

**Example:** *A newbie might charge a certain rate per hour for internet research. After a few years her rate might be twice as much since she is more skilful in performing the task*

Same person, same task, but at different times. After a few years she has a different skill level and hence is producing a different result. Whatever your rate, expect it to match your skill level.

### Your Experience

Although often bundled with skill, experience is a different factor altogether.

You may have two very talented VAs, but one with more experience might have better client skills, be able to foresee problems and thus save the client time and money.

A more experienced VA can intuitively know what's going to work for a certain audience and so on. Experience should affect how much you charge.

### Your Business Strategy (Specialisation)

Your business strategy and target market will impact on how you price your services.

**Example:** *Think about the difference between Revlon and Chanel: The two companies could make the same perfume but you would never expect to pay the same price for both. Revlon will sell the perfume to a mass market and thus sell it at a cheaper price, but Chanel targets a smaller niche market of elite clientele and thus will charge a higher price for the same perfume.*

Figure out how you are pitching yourself and use that to help determine if you are “cheap-’n-cheerful”, having a high end niche or are somewhere in between.

### Your Clients

Your price will often vary for different clients. This happens for a few reasons. Some clients require more effort, some are riskier, some are repeat clients, some have jobs you are dying to do, some you wouldn’t want to go near with a stick. You can vary your price to account for these factors as well.

### Your Service

What services you provide for your clients will also make a big difference to your price tag. Pure administrative tasks are usually at the lower end of the pricing scale where more technical services such as web design, social media- and internet marketing charge higher premium prices. Whatever the case might be, adjusting your price to the type and level of service you provide, is a must.

**For example:** *You do transcriptions and need to determine your price. You've already taken all the above factors into account and came up with a rough indication of what you should charge. But you also realise that different services sometimes need different pricing strategies. What else can impact your transcription rate?*

*Should you charge per audio hour or per audio minute? What about the number of speakers? It surely is much more intensive to transcribe a multi-speaker audio, than a single speaker one. What about the sound quality? If the quality is poor and you can barely hear the speaker, it should definitely impact your rate, because you need to put in more effort to do the job. What about turnaround time? If someone needs an urgent transcription (say within 12- 24h) in comparison with a similar transcription that you can complete in two weeks' time – it should also have an impact on your rates.*

Each type of service and sometimes also each job require a bit of thinking to include all factors that can influence the job at hand and help you set your price accordingly.

Give pricing lots of thought.

All the factors above have an impact on your price. However, the only three that can be determined easily by some number crunching are (1) your costs, (2) billable hours and (3) your desired profit. These are the 3 factors to use for determining a base price.

The others 8 factors such as market demand, the type of client, the type of services etc. are all intangible factors – you cannot easily determine a number value for them. It is however important to think about these “intangible” factors as well, because they can help you

determine the real “worth” of the services you deliver – much the same as in the Picasso example above.

Thus, the more you think about your reasoning behind your price, the easier it will become to determine the best rates for your specific services.

Below is a guideline to determine your base price – the minimum rate you should charge to ensure you do not operate your business at a loss. You can adjust your base price to incorporate the eight intangible factors and / or adjust it according to the situation with client work.



## **ACTION STEPS**

### **Quick guide to determine your minimum hourly rate**

The opportunity cost to run my own VA business:

R \_\_\_\_\_

*To determine opportunity costs take into account previous pay cheques and benefits packages. It's not used in the final calculation, but is just good to keep this figure in mind.*

### **Determine the following:**

1. Number of available hours you can work per year \_\_\_\_\_

2. Number of non-billable hours per year \_\_\_\_\_

## JUMPSTART YOUR VIRTUAL ASSISTANT BUSINESS

3. Number of billable hours per year  
(*available hours – non-billable hours*)

4. Total Costs to run my business

5. Desired profit percentage

%

6. Rate per Hour without Profit (*Total Cost ÷ Billable hours*)

7. Rate per Hour with Profit (*Total Cost + Profit ÷ Billable hours*)

**My Minimum Hourly Rate** = \_\_\_\_\_ (*Rate per Hour without Profit*)

**Remember:** The above calculated rate / hour is the minimum hourly rate to charge for ensuring you will be able to cover all your costs.

Compare the calculated rate / hour with the going rate charged by competitors. If it is much higher than your competitors, you can do the following to bring it in line:

- Increase the number of billable hours;
  - Lower overall costs;
  - Lower the % profit wanted;
- ❖
- ❖ Use the intangible factors to explain and defend your rates when clients asked why it is much higher than competitors.

***“Pricing is like gravity. Going down is easier than going up, but that’s not what you necessarily want”***

## **PRICING STRATEGIES FOR VIRTUAL ASSISTANTS**

Some of the most popular approaches that Virtual Assistants use are (1) billing by the hour, (2) billing per project, (3) billing on a monthly retainer or a combination of all. We will explore these strategies in more detail below.

### **BILLING BY THE HOUR**

The main advantage of hourly billing is that it is simple. Work 10 hours, get paid for 10 hours. It's also an easy way to get started with a new client who may not yet be willing to commit to a long term relationship.

For those just starting out as part-time virtual assistants, hourly billing can be attractive for its simplicity.

On the downside, hourly billing puts a cap on your earning potential. There are a limited number of hours in the day, so at some point, you're out of hours.

Even a "normal" 40 hours per week is difficult to bill for. Unlike being employed (where just being in the office is something you're paid for), as an independent business person, you need to actually be doing client work to get paid for it.

Another drawback is that there is no commitment from clients for regular work. One month you may get 40 billable hours of work from a particular client, and the next, zero. This means more (un-billable) time used for marketing and client outreach to sustain a constant inflow of work.

### RETAINER BILLING

Retainer billing is an approach where a client commits to purchasing a fixed amount of time and pays typically upfront.

**Example:** *A virtual assistant might offer a minimum 10-hour monthly retainer package at an hourly rate of 12-15% lower than the normal hourly rate.*

The benefit for the client is twofold: some level of assurance that their work and priorities will get the hours they have paid for, and typically a reduced rate for that work.

For the VA, the benefit is a predictability of cash flow - retainer payments are usually received in advance of performing the work, so you know exactly what's coming in and can actually fill your business in a relatively reliable manner.

Another common feature of retainers is that they tend to be “use it or lose it” arrangements. This is very common in other industries (like your local fitness centre). If your client doesn't take advantage of their retainer hours available, they will expire at the end of the month.

What seems to happen in practice is that most clients use all of the hours they've purchased, but just enough do not. This balances out the discounted retainer rate. In other words, your average hourly rate would be roughly the same as if you didn't offer retainer discounts. So you get the benefit of predictability at little to no drop in income.

A drawback of retainer billing is that you do need to commit to be available for the hours that are being paid for by your clients. So time management becomes a key skill - you don't want to overbook hours and be unable to perform the work.

Another concern about retainer billing is that it can be more complex to manage - you need to keep track of how many hours are left and when they expire for each client.

However, software like *ClientSpot* makes retainer client management easy by tracking remaining hours and expiration dates, and it also provides a simple report to let you and each client see how much time is left on the retainer.

### **BILLING PER PROJECT**

It is sometimes needed to charge per project e.g. when designing a website or designing a brochure.

The basic formula for figuring out how much a specific project will cost is

$$(\text{Hourly Rate} \times \text{Labour}) + \text{Other Expenses} = \text{Project Estimate}$$

Where:

Hourly Rate = the rate you've determined for your time.

Labour = time spent doing the work e.g. research, conceptualization, choosing fonts, creating layouts, printing, making client-directed changes, meeting with the client, etc. In other words, all the time required to take the project from beginning to end. Estimating time is a process that may become easier as you gain experience with working on various projects.

Expenses = all the costs associated with the project. There may be one-time expenses associated with a particular job. For example the

client may require a specific typeface that you'll have to purchase or the cost of paper, envelopes or other supplies specific to that project.

You may choose to pass additional costs along to the client since it may sometimes happen that extra costs are not included in the quote you gave for a project.

Thus **always** specify in the contract between you and your client, who will be responsibility for additional charges not included in the initial project estimate.

### **SERVICE PACKAGES**

At some stage in your business, you can become stuck in the “time for money trap”. When you exchange your time for money, your income will always be restricted. After all, there are only so many hours in a day, right? And at some point you just cannot raise your hourly rate any further without a negative impact on your business.

#### **Some negatives about hourly rates are:**

- ❖ You have to constantly track your time – which is in my eyes wasting valuable time.
- ❖ You get penalized in your income when you are quick and efficient.
- ❖ Potential clients are hesitant to work with you because they inherently have the perception you will drag out your services to make more money.

## JUMPSTART YOUR VIRTUAL ASSISTANT BUSINESS

- ❖ Working hourly is an open ended money pit where your clients don't know how much they will need to pay and thus they don't easily say yes to working with you.
- ❖ It's impossible to convey the value of your services to your clients.
- ❖ To break free from all this, you can start looking into service packages.

Creating a service package can be done when you group a few services together and provide it to your clients at a fixed rate.

*EXAMPLE: Let's say you deliver the following social media services to a client.*

- 1) Setting up social media profiles on Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn;*
- 2) Brand all profiles according to the client's website;*
- 3) Integrate social media profiles with the client's website.*

*Scenario 1 Charging hourly: Let's say you charge \$20/hour\* (NB: this is just an example rate and not an actual rate) and you tell the client it will take approximately 10 hours to perform all those services.*

*Your income: ± \$200\* for this job. If you however finish the job in less than 10 hours, you lose money - so you will typically pace yourself to get it done in 10 hours.*

*Your client's subconscious reaction: "She says it will be more or less 10 hours, but what if it takes longer? Will I get a surprise invoice at the end of the day? I'm not sure if I should do it – maybe I should rather do it myself and save the expenses."*

In charging by the hour your client mostly focuses on the time and money aspect and not on the outcome.

*Scenario 2 Service package: Bundling the 3 services together and sell it as a package to clients for \$300\*.*

*Your income: \$300\* for this job. If you finish the job in less than 10 hours, you still get \$300. In fact when you are more effective and more efficient you can fit in more clients in the 10 hours.*

*Your client's reaction: "Great, I know what I will get from the deal – professionally branded Social Media pages to grow my business. I know it will cost me just \$300 – nothing more, nothing less. It sounds like a good deal – Let's go for it."*

When selling services as a package, you make it seem more like a tangible product and the client focuses on the outcome and the results and not so much on the money.

It is all about the psychology of selling - how the human mind works!

The secret behind bundling services and selling it as a package is that: even when you perform exactly the same services, you can sell a package for more money, because you focus the client's attention on the outcome, results and value you deliver and not on the time it takes you to complete it. That's why you can often charge much more for a services package and grow your income much faster.

***\*NB: All rates quoted are just for explanatory purpose and should not be confused with actual rates and incomes for these services.***

### **INCENTIVE BASED PAY**

Another way to get away from the time for money trap is to look at Incentive Based Pay.

This is where you receive an income as a percentage of your input in relation to the growth of your client's business. However, incentive based pay is a whole different ballgame for VAs and is not for the faint of heart. There must be some key elements in place in your business before you can even consider discussing incentive compensation with your client. But, when you feel that you've reached bursting point in your business, it might be worthwhile to start looking into what incentive really is and how it can benefit both you and your clients.

The Bottom Line: Depending on your situation you will most likely use a combination of some hourly rates, per project compensation, services packages and some retainer billing.

If you're looking for more stability and predictability, you'll want to focus on attracting clients who are comfortable with a retainer arrangement over time and /or work only with services packages.

For clients just starting out with you, hourly might be the way to go until trust is established.

### **Payment Facilities**

For clients based in your own country it is usually easiest to get paid via electronic bank transfer.

With remote clients, you can set up credit card payment facilities through Paypal, Wordpay or Paymate. Evaluate their fees, set-up charges and policies before signing up.

## **PART 2 – BUSINESS PLANNING**

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What happens after knowing what your services will be, deciding on a business name and structure, opening a business bank account, setting up your office and determining your rates?

The next steps should be to do some business planning in the form of:

- ❖ Setting goals;
- ❖ Drawing up a business plan;
- ❖ Defining a marketing strategy.

Quite a mouth full hey, but very, very important if you want your business to survive and grow over the next five years.

### **SETTING GOALS**

Setting goals and be persistent in reaching your goals is unfortunately something that only a few Vas do.

***"Choosing a goal and sticking to it changes everything."  
~Scott Reed~***

But, if you're like me, goal setting can become quite a nightmare. The reason is that everybody is talking about long, medium and short term goals, smart goals, personal goals, business goals, spiritual goals,

family goals and who knows what other goals. I get so confused that I don't know where to start.

I've attended several goal-setting workshops and every single one said more or less the same thing. The more goal-setting workshops I attended, the more confused I got.

If you are a "brain-thinker", you will understand all of the above, but if you are a "heart-thinker", nothing will make sense.

My explanation of "brain-thinkers", (those people who think with the left side of their brain) is that they only see black and white while "heart-thinkers" see colourful pictures.

Although goal setting might be a nightmare I realized very early in my career that it is the most important aspect of any business. So I had to do something about it.

I came to the conclusion that to be able to set my goals, I have to understand the incomprehensible. I decided to work with all the information I had, but to make it more understandable to me.

It took quite some time to figure everything out, but I would like to share my version of goal setting with you.

### **WHAT ARE GOALS**

To be able to set goals, one has to understand what goals are and once again, there are numerous explanations.

I would like to define a goal as a dream with a deadline and if you can dream it, you can achieve it.

So I had to start dreaming about what I would like to achieve and here is the catch. You cannot dream only about your business or only about your personal life. You have to dream about every aspect of your life. In other words, your dreams (or goals if you like) should be in balance with your whole life.

Working through everything, I came to the conclusion that there are a lot of categories for goal setting but I've defined the most common ones as:

- ❖ Physical and Health Goals;
- ❖ Spiritual & Emotional Goals;
- ❖ Family and Home Goals;
- ❖ Professional and Career Goals;
- ❖ Financial and Wealth Goals.

It is very important to set goals for all the above to create balance in life. Luckily you can use the same method to set goals in all areas.

It is also important to set short, medium and long term goals for each of the above.

In other words what you would like to achieve within the next year (short term), the next 1-2 years (medium term) and the next 2-5 years (long term).

### **HOW TO SET GOALS**

I've adopted the S.M.A.R.T. concept for my goal setting routine. So be SMART and start dreaming about your goals.

Striving on examples, I would like to use weight loss to explain my point.

Let's say I am a bit overweight and want to lose some of it. Previously my goal would have been: *"I want to lose weight"*.

Nowadays when setting goals according to the S.M.A.R.T. concept, my goal will be...

**Specific** (exact; precise; detailed)

**Measurable** (assessable; calculable; able to be gauged)

**Achievable** (possible; doable; feasible; reachable)

**Realistic** (sensible; reasonable; logical; practical)

**Timely** (well-timed; relevant; appropriate)

In other words, instead of the vague goal of: *"I want to lose weight"*, my goal will be:

*"Today is the 25<sup>th</sup> of March. I want to lose 5 kg before the 30<sup>th</sup> of June because we are leaving for vacation on the 7<sup>th</sup> of July and I would like to wear my polka dot bikini during this holiday."*

Now that's a S.M.A.R.T. goal.

If you want to reach your goals you have to dream and set S.M.A.R.T. goals - goals that are **specific**, **measurable**, **achievable**, **realistic** and **timely**.

If you analyse the above mentioned goal, you will see that it contains all 5 aspects.

It's a proven fact that the one thing distinguishing successful people from unsuccessful ones, is that successful people tend to meet their

dreams and goals and are willing to do the things unsuccessful people won't do.

### WHY DO YOU NEED GOALS

Because goals are your direction in life!

I love the **AB**-principle (or **ARE** – **BE** principle) because of its simplicity.



Let's say you are all set up to write down your goals right now, you will know exactly where you **ARE** at this stage. Your goals on the other hand will take you where you want to **BE** in a month, six months, a year, five years and even ten years from now.

It is therefore necessary to set short, medium and long term goals in order to grow and achieve the final goal over a period of time.

A positive and expectant attitude is vital when setting your goals. Cultivate an attitude which always expects the very best, an attitude with the highest and happiest outcome.

Remember, we become who we are based on the quality of our thoughts.

### WHAT TO PUT ON YOUR GOAL LIST

Your dreams!

## **JUMPSTART YOUR VIRTUAL ASSISTANT BUSINESS**

As mentioned previously, if you can dream it you can achieve it ... no matter the size of the dream. Do not make your goals a wish list; make it your **Dream List** and dream big!

When writing down a goal, close your eyes and visualize it with clarity. Visualization is a key ingredient in successful goal setting and can bring breath-taking changes into our lives. Once again, if you can see it you can achieve it.

***Whatever the mind can conceive and believe, the body can achieve." ~Norman Vincent Peal~***

Make this your motto!!

Do you know Arnold Schwarzenegger? Before he became governor of California USA, he won a couple of Mr Universe titles. When he won his first title, he said:

***"I am not surprised. I've seen myself winning this title so many times in my head that I had no doubt I will win tonight."***

Of course he exercised to get his body in shape, but he visualized himself as the Mr World all the way through his training program.

The things we say and think whether aloud or just in our mind, will be the things that take up our time and become our focus. Do yourself one big favour. See and visualize yourself as the unique person the Creator intended you to be!

It is very important to set yourself **“BIC”** goals. If you set yourself **“Believe I Can”** goals you will reap the rewards.

The crux is however to set realistic goals. Most people don't stick with something that they believe in their heart is unrealistic or unachievable.

### **WHERE TO PUT YOUR GOALS**

There where you can see them each and every day!

You have to see your goals in order to remind you of them.

A good friend of mine writes all her goals down on pieces of paper and puts them up on the fridge, on the mirror, on her drawer, in her car - literally everywhere. Another good idea is to use pictures instead of only the written goals.

For example, let's say one of your goals is to buy yourself a white 330 BMW with black leather interior in three years' time. Then go to your nearest BMW dealer and ask them to design your dream car for you or cut out pictures of a white 330 BMW and put it where you can see it every day. This will help you stick to your goal and to work towards realizing it.

## **WHEN TO START WRITING YOUR GOALS**

Today!

Fear is the one thing that gets in the way of writing goals. Fear that you might not achieve your goals. Fear that there might be obstacles in the way. Fear for that tiny little voice that says:

“What if ...”

People who are prone to be fearful tend to always assume the negative effects of failure when confronted with a challenge. They also tend to procrastinate. Why?

Because they expect failure from the beginning!

Teach yourself to believe that the best is yet to come, rather than indulging in the belief that the worst is here to stay.

Remember, a life without dreams and goals is like a garden without flowers.

***"Fear and worry are like echoes; they do not exist until we call for them; and the louder we call the louder is their response. We can never drown them, yet if left alone, they will drown us." ~ Horace Fletcher ~***

Nobody - except yourself - will keep you accountable for reaching your goals. Do not procrastinate, set your goals S.M.A.R.T. and always remember:



**ACTION STEPS ...**

1. Make a list of your dreams (goals) in each of the following mentioned areas of your life. Apply the S.M.A.R.T. principle to each of them. Only once you've done that, move on to the next section.

➤ **Physical and Health Goals:**

➤ **Spiritual & Emotional Goals:**

➤ **Family and Home Goals:**

➤ **Professional and Career Goals:**

➤ **Financial and Wealth Goals:**

*"To accomplish great things, we must not only act, but also dream; not only plan, but also believe." ~Anatole France~*

## **DEVELOP A BUSINESS PLAN**

Have you heard about stories of businesses that were conceived on a serviette or the back of an envelope?

That might stir the imagination. However, if you're not just dreaming of success but are serious about having a successful Virtual Assistant business you will certainly need more than a serviette, you will need a good business plan.

Your business plan will serve as a compass for the direction your business will take in future.

A business plan is a written document that clearly identifies and defines the goals you've set for your business and it precisely outlines the methods for achieving your goals.

Your business plan is furthermore a complete and detailed description of how you intend to operate your business.

Your plan will be a working tool on how you are going to build your Virtual Assistant business. It should be to the point and specifies the strategy you are going to follow in order to achieve your business mission.

***"You can't overestimate the need to plan and prepare. In most of the mistakes I've made, there has been this common theme of inadequate planning beforehand. You really can't over-prepare in business!" ~Chris Corrigan~***

A lot of new business owners neglect their business plan. I would therefore like to elaborate a bit more on it in order to help you recognise the absolute value of spending some time to complete it properly.

### **IMPORTANCE OF A BUSINESS PLAN**

Developing a business plan for your business is important because....

#### **Your business plan offers a path to follow when making crucial start-up decisions.**

A business plan is the most important guide to starting, building and managing a successful business. In other words it is your management and financial “blueprint” or compass.

#### **Your business plan clarifies your ideas and establishes a plan of action.**

A business plan explains how your business is functioning in the marketplace. It describes your services and niche area, your qualifications and background, how you plan to promote your business, who your prospective clients will be and what is needed to build your business.

#### **Your business plan is a valuable financial tool.**

It determines how much money is needed for start-up costs and outlines how your business will be financed. It can also be an important tool to help you obtain financing if necessary.

**Your business plan is the benchmark for good operational management.**

A business plan outlines the characteristics of your business. It helps you manage your business to work towards its success. A completed business plan gives you operational guidance when you plan activities to help your business move forward.

**Your business plan provides for future growth.**

A business plan is a detailed guide of what you are going to do and how you are going to increase your profits. It outlines your specific goals for the coming one up to five years. By breaking your goals down into annual milestones your objectives will be accepted as a realistic determinant of your final success.

Below is an outline of what should be included in your business plan.

- ❖ The Executive Summary
- ❖ The Company Description
- ❖ The Marketing Plan
- ❖ The Financial Plan
- ❖ Addendums

Let's look at all the components in more detail.

## **COMPONENTS OF A BUSINESS PLAN**

### **Component 1: Executive Summary**

When you want to use your business plan to acquire additional financing for your business, it should always include an executive summary.

The definition of an executive summary according to Wikipedia states:

*“Executive summary is a term used in business for a short document that summarises a longer report, proposal or group of related reports in such a way that readers can rapidly become acquainted with a large body of material without having to read it all.”*

WOW, what does that mean in plain language?

It means that the executive summary is a summary of the highlights of all the different elements in your business plan. It is an introduction but also the doorway to the rest of the plan and should inform the reader about all the important things.

If you grab your reader’s attention here, they will go on and read the rest of your business plan.

Although the executive summary is the first few paragraphs the readers of your business plan see, you can leave the actual writing of it until you’ve completed the rest of your plan because you will use information from all the other sections to complete it.

What Should an Executive Summary Include?

For a Virtual Assistant business plan (or any business plan for that matter) you should include:

- Your business name and location;
- How you manage your business;
- Your services and your customers;
- Financial projections and plans.

Finish your executive summary with a clinching sentence or two that answers the reader's question of "Why your business is the winning business".

Here are a few tips to keep in mind when writing your business plan's executive summary

- ❖ Focus on providing a summary. The business plan will provide full details.
- ❖ Make sure your language is strong and positive, e.g. "ABC Virtual Assistance **are** in an excellent position..." instead of "ABC Virtual Assistance **might** be in an excellent position ...".
- ❖ Resist the temptation to cushion the executive summary with details or pleas. The executive summary is to present the facts and tempt your reader to read the rest of the document.
- ❖ It should not be longer than two pages.
- ❖ Polish your executive summary until it is clear and to the point. Read it aloud and when it sounds good to you, have someone

who knows nothing about your business read it and make suggestions for improvement.

- ❖ Tailor the executive summary of your business plan to your audience. If the purpose of your business plan is to attract funding, your executive summary should focus on the opportunities to develop your business into a viable and sustainable enterprise
- ❖ Put yourself in your readers' shoes and read your executive summary again. Does it create interest or excitement for the reader? If not, why?

Remember, the executive summary of your business plan is the first part of document that your readers will read. If poorly written, it will also be the last thing they'll read.



### **ACTION STEPS ...**

1. Write your business plan's executive summary by taking the above points into account and write a couple of sentences about each topic.

## **Component 2: Company Description**

The company description describes the company in detail and outlines the basic business concepts. When writing the company description, make sure to cover / include the following:

### **Mission Statement**

A mission statement is a short written statement that answers the following questions:

- ❖ What is the purpose of your business?
- ❖ What services do you deliver?
- ❖ What are the values of your business?

When writing a mission statement for your business, make sure to address all three questions above.

An excellent way to start is to make a list of words, phrases and ideas that come to mind when reading the questions and use them to formulate the mission statement.

Read the questions one by one and make your list of words for each question right now.

If you already have a mission statement, write it down in the space provided.

*Example Mission Statement:*

*Virtual Administrative Services (VAS) strives to:*

## **JUMPSTART YOUR VIRTUAL ASSISTANT BUSINESS**

- *become a valuable arm to our clients in assisting them to grow their business without worrying about their administrative duties;*
- *deliver exceptional administrative support and services to our customers and clients;*
- *grow our business on a referral basis earned through excellent service and good relationship with our clients.*



### **ACTION STEPS...**

1. What is the purpose of your business?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. What services do you deliver?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. What are the values of your business?

Shuffle the words around and create a sentence or two that answer all the questions. Make sure your mission statement is clear and concise and explains why your business exists and what it hopes to achieve.

The best way is to write your mission statement and give it a day or two to grow on you. Make the necessary changes until you feel comfortable with it.

### **Goals**

You have set your goals in the previous section and now is the time to put your goals into your business plan.

Make sure you cover Operational Goals, Financial Goals and Marketing Goals and you outline your short, medium and long term goals for each of them.



### ***ACTION STEPS***

1. Write at least 5 goals out. One for each area of your life and business

### **Company Strengths**

List and define the following:

- ❖ Education, previous experience and skills;
- ❖ Your strengths and core competencies;
- ❖ The factors that will make your business succeed;
- ❖ Your competitive advantages and / or disadvantages.

## **Services Offered**

**Note:** Services were covered in Part 1. Re-capture that list in this section of the business plan and provide a detailed description of each.

Remember to include information about the specific benefits that these services will offer your clients.

Also try to state your ability to meet your client's needs and any advantage(s) your service has over that of your competition.

## **Hours of Operation**

Set out your hours available and if and whether you are flexible to meet your client's needs.

## **Operation Strategy**

The operation strategy explains what is going to happen **after** the client has decided to make use of your services.

*Example: once your business is contacted by a potential client the following actions will usually be performed:*

- *A date will be scheduled for a free consultation to discuss the specific job requirements;*
- *A contract will be forwarded to the client outlining the scope of work, timeframe for completion of projects, price, payment terms, confidentiality clauses and material ownership;*

## **JUMPSTART YOUR VIRTUAL ASSISTANT BUSINESS**

- *The client needs to sign acceptance of the contract and return it to you;*
- *A deposit will be collected from the client if necessary for work to commence;*
- *Feedback discussions will be held with clients to discuss progress and if it was required, to receive approval on work done so far;*
- *Upon completion of project an invoice will be send to the client;*
- *The completed work will be delivered to the client upon receipt of full payment.*

### **Pricing Strategy**

In Part 1, pricing is explained in more detail. Use that detail to complete this section of the business plan.

- ❖ Explain exactly what your pricing strategy is. For example hourly rates, rates per project and/or retainer rates.
- ❖ Explain your invoicing and billing system.
- ❖ Explain the method of payment.

### **Tools and Equipment**

Refer to Part 1 where you've made your list of equipment needed.

## **Business Legal Structure**

- ❖ Provide your business legal structure.
- ❖ Mention the location of the business.
- ❖ Mention who will be in direct control and who will be responsible for all the operations.

## **Insurance**

Define the insurance pertaining to your business.



### ***ACTION STEPS...***

**Use the criteria above to:**

1. Define your company strengths.
2. State the services you will offer.
3. Describe the benefits your services offer to your clients.
4. What are your hours of operation?
5. What are your hours of operation?
6. What is your pricing strategy?
7. What equipment and software will you use?
8. What is your business legal structure?
9. Insurance?

## **Component 3: Marketing Strategy**

**NOTE:** Marketing Strategy Planning will be discussed in more detail in a later section of the e-book. It can help you with writing this part of the business plan.

Within your marketing strategy you need to outline the industry, your specific niche market, your competitors and your marketing strategy.

### **Industry and Market Analysis**

Provide general highlights of the Virtual Assistant Industry as perceived by you.



#### ***ACTION STEPS...***

1. Do some research on the growth of the VA industry over the years and provide some info on future growth forecasts.
  
2. Outline where your business fits into this picture.

## **Niche / Target Market**

Give information on the unique characteristics of your niche / target market with regards to:



### ***ACTION STEPS...***

1. Who are the clients you are targeting?
2. What are their needs and how will you address those needs?
3. What is the geographic location and demographics of your market?
4. What is the potential size of your target market?
5. How many potential customers do you intent to have?

## **Competitive Analysis**

List the strengths and weaknesses of your direct competition in the area where your business is situated and where you operate.

This can be done in table format in order to observe their strengths and weaknesses in once glance.

***For Example:***

<i>Business Name</i>	<i>Strengths</i>	<i>Weaknesses</i>	<i>Comments</i>
<i>Company A</i> <i>Owner: Person X</i> <i>URL:</i> <i>http://www.xxx.com</i>	<i>Provide wide range of administrative services</i>	<i>No desktop publishing</i> <i>Only 1 year in business</i>	<i>Focus mainly on local clients</i>

## **Marketing Plan**

**Note:** Review “Marketing – Getting and Keeping Clients” in later sections of this e-book to help you write the marketing plan section of the business plan.



### ***ACTION STEPS...***

1. Compile a list of competitors and analyse them in terms of their strengths and weaknesses.
2. How are will reach your potential clients;
3. How you will grow your business;

## **Component IV: Financial Strategy**

Give a short overview of the financial elements of your business. The amount of detail depends on whether your business plan will be used to secure financing.

Make sure to include the following basic elements:



### ***ACTION STEPS...***

1. Determine all start-up expenses and running capital needed.
  
2. Provide a monthly cash flow projection – income / expenses for the first year

## **Component V: Addendum**

Include:

- ❖ Full Financial statements
- ❖ Details of Marketing plan with details of market studies
- ❖ Legal documents
- ❖ List of your business consultants including your attorney and accountant
- ❖ Copy of your resume

When everything is completed, remember to go back to executive summary and summarize your business plan in order to grab your reader's attention!

### MARKETING STRATEGY PLANNING

It is important to understand that there is a slight difference between a marketing strategy and a marketing plan.

Your *marketing strategy* includes a definition of your business, a description of your services and a profile of your target market or clients. It also defines your business's role in relationship to that of your competition.

To put it in another way, your marketing strategy is a summary of the services you as a Virtual Assistant will render to your clients in comparison to the services your competitors (other Virtual Assistants and / or full time personnel) will deliver.

The *marketing plan* is the practical application of your marketing strategy. The marketing strategy provides the goals for your marketing plan whilst the marketing plan is the specific roadmap that steers you towards achieving your goals.

Another way to think about your marketing strategy versus your marketing plan is to think about your annual vacation. You first decide where you want to go before you can book your flight or create your daily vacation schedule.

So, let's define your marketing strategy specifically centred on the key concept of customer satisfaction and let us:

- ❖ Describe your business's unique selling proposition

- ❖ Define your target market;
- ❖ Write down the benefits of your services;
- ❖ Define your marketing methods.

### **UNIQUE SELLING PROPOSITION (USP)**

In marketing circles we talk about developing your “unique selling proposition” (USP). It simply means the things that make your business or services unique and valuable to your target market.

Your USP is one of the most important aspects of attracting all the clients you want because your USP is your business’s secret weapon which sets you apart from all the others.

When you use your USP in all your marketing materials it helps your prospective clients to figure out why they should work with you as opposed to the competitor down the street.

Over the past couple of years I’ve worked with many people and they often say, “Well, I don’t know what makes me unique.” or “There’s nothing that makes me unique.”

Well, as you certainly know, that’s absolutely not true. As human beings we are all unique and different.

You have different talents and skills and even different experiences that shape you into what you are – and because of that, nobody on earth is quite like you.

As professionals, especially as self-employed people we ALL have something that sets us apart from everyone else, including our competitors.

For example, there are lots of other people who can teach you how to start your business. But I've got my own unique way, my previous knowledge and training, my own system, my own personality, my own corner of the world and that makes me different from the rest of them. Just as I am different from my competitors, you are different from your competitors.

Perhaps you have a different way of providing your service that has more benefits to your clients, or perhaps you specialise in a specific niche or only work with a specific group of people, or you have expertise in a certain field that no-one else has or more years' experience in doing something.

Whatever it is that sets you apart and sets your business apart from others is important to figure out, to identify and then to communicate to people.

The thing is: You don't have to find something that is completely unique in the world, (e.g. that you have three eyes or purple hair or something like that). It's about finding out what makes you unique and different from most people in your industry. So don't go too far down that rabbit hole.

Here is how you determine your USP.

You've already determined your competitor's strengths and weaknesses (through your competitor analyses in a previous section). That information will give you a pretty good idea what makes you different.

However, to take it further,

- ❖ Evaluate what your own strengths are. Find a strength that you have, that most of your competitors don't?

## *JUMPSTART YOUR VIRTUAL ASSISTANT BUSINESS*

- ❖ What benefits do you offer to your clients that your competitors don't / can't.
- ❖ What extras can you do that others don't do.
- ❖ What are those things that make you credible? Things that will make people WANT to work with you?

Remember, your clients will want to know what makes you unique and different from your competition.



### *ACTION STEPS...*

1. What makes you different from most other service providers out there?
2. Take all the point above into consideration to refine and formulate your USP.

### **DEFINE YOUR TARGET MARKET**

Virtual Assistants normally have an array of skills and can go after a rather large market.

It is however much better to define your ideal client and concentrate on that target market segment. This will help to prevent the situation where you run yourself ragged trying to do everything for every client.

With a clearly defined target audience, it is much easier to determine where and how to market your services. It will also help you not getting into trouble when you try to perform services that you are not really competent to provide.



#### ***ACTION STEPS...***

To help you define your target market, ask yourself the following questions and answer it according to your skills and experience.

1. Who is your ideal client?
2. What services do your ideal clients need?
3. Where are your ideal clients located? It could be local, national or international.

4. What is the best way to market your services to this targeted market?
5. Does this market have enough resources to pay for your services in order to reach your financial goals?

Don't leave this for later. By doing it now, you will save yourself a lot of time when drawing up your marketing plan.

Remember: Defining your target market is an important decision.

Be realistic about it. Not every service you are thinking off has a huge market. On the other hand, you don't need a huge market, only a realistic, well defined one. If you are able to define your target market and effectively reach your clients, you're in business.

## **THE BENEFITS OF YOUR SERVICES**

Please do not only list the features of your services, but stretch out the benefits. In other words answer your client's question, "*Why should I make use of your service?*" with strong benefits to help them solve their problems. Benefits sell!

The best way to do this is to write down at least 5 benefits for each of the services you are going to deliver to your clients.

For example your client does not only want to know that you are going to update his diary, arrange his meetings and sort out his e-mails! What's going to hook him is the benefit of having more time to concentrate on core activities, more money and less stress.



### *ACTION STEPS...*

1. Set yourself apart from your opposition. Writing down the benefits of your services in order to hook potential clients.

## **PART 3 - MARKETING**

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### **GETTING AND KEEPING CLIENTS**

We frequently receive the question: “*How do I market my business?*”

It is such an important question, but unfortunately it does not have a straight forward answer. If it had, running a business would be as easy as “pie”.

But marketing is not really about rocket science – it’s just about knowing the answers to:

1. **What do** you want to sell? (your specific services )
2. **Who** will be interested in what you want to sell? (your niche market)
3. **Where** are these people? (understanding your market and their needs)
4. **Why** should they use you and not the next VA? In other words, what is your USP - what differentiates you from other VAs?
5. **How** do you find these clients? (marketing methods)



#### **ACTION STEPS...**

In Part 1 “**Services**” & Part 2 “**Marketing Strategy Planning**”, we discussed the first four questions above since it forms important aspects of the strategic planning for marketing your business – your roadmap of successfully getting clients. If you skipped that part and thought it was unimportant, involved too much

thinking power or not necessary to do, I would strongly suggest that you maybe recap on what we've said there.

A marketing plan is just as important as or maybe even more important than a business plan, because your whole business is going to succeed or not succeed based on the fact that you are able to get and retain clients.

Bottom line, if you do not have clients, you won't see some profit coming your way.

The nice thing about a marketing plan is that it's really mostly about *you*, your skills and experience and what you can bring to the table.

By fine-tuning your plan you start to think about *who* will be able to use these skills or experience, *what* are the problems they struggle with and *how* you can solve those problems?

In the end when you combine your skills and your client's needs, you will be able to develop the perfect marketing plan.

OK, back to the drawing board. Don't worry, I'll wait for you while you recap on what you've said in your marketing strategy and you can return to this point at any time when you're done.

At least now you have the answers to the critical questions 1 – 4 and can we tackle the different methods of marketing

## MARKETING METHODS

In principle there are 2 ways of marketing: Offline- and Online Marketing

## **OFFLINE MARKETING**

Offline marketing is spreading the word about your business via methods that do not involve the internet. These include:

- Sending out snail mail (etc. handwritten notes to your clients),
- Handing out flyers,
- Advertising in newspapers, school newsletters, church publications etc.
- Networking at your local chamber of commerce or children's sporting events,
- Face-to-face marketing
- Speaking at public events and many more

It is important to remember, that although you work virtually, offline marketing is just as effective and also creates good business leads. The answer to questions 2 and 3 can help you to determine how important offline marketing will be for your marketing mix.

**Tip:** Even if you're not going to focus on off-line marketing methods, just have a few of the tools below ready for those days that you urgently need to dish up something to give to a client. The bare minimum should at least include some business cards.

### **Tools for Off-line Marketing**

An important tool for off-line marketing is a well prepared portfolio. A portfolio is just a collection of documents to show prospective clients what you are capable of doing.

It can also be a valuable tool to present to people who is interested in your services. Your portfolio can contain the following:

## JUMPSTART YOUR VIRTUAL ASSISTANT BUSINESS

- Business cards
- An introduction letter (template) to tell clients who you are, what you can do and the benefits of your services. You can tailor it according to a client's needs.
- Previous articles or press releases about your company
- A few testimonials from previous clients
- Examples of previous projects and work you've completed
- Your pricing sheet containing all the necessary information and tariffs your clients might need.
- Z-folders or other marketing pieces for advertising or educating clients about virtual assistance and to get your Virtual Assistant message out.



### ACTION STEPS...

1. What off-line marketing tools will you get in place? Indicate *when* and *how* you will do it.

An example of the “how” for instance is: if you do not have any testimonials at this stage, indicate that you will ask each future (and past) client for a testimonial. It is also important to put a date next to each item - regard this as some of your short term, SMART goals.

***“The most important thing a marketer can possess is a good review or testimonial, and there are only two reasons why you might not have a bounty of these on hand: your product or service stinks or you're not asking.”***

***~Dan Hollings~***

## **ONLINE MARKETING**

Online marketing has everything to do with the internet and this is actually where you want to make your mark, isn't it?

You are working virtual aren't you? That's why we will spend a bit more time on online marketing in this e-book.

The Internet has greatly enabled VA businesses to prosper because of the reasonably low cost to start and maintain a web presence as well as the ease of spreading the word via effective online marketing techniques.

Therefore, online marketing should definitely be part of your business plan and your overall marketing strategy.

Well, everybody is telling you to get your name out there, but what does it in effect mean? I believe it is the following.

It's ....

- ❖ To establish yourself as an expert and getting clients / potential clients to come to you and want to work with you.

## ***JUMPSTART YOUR VIRTUAL ASSISTANT BUSINESS***

- ❖ To get the recognition that you are the one to call when the media or clients' needs something.
- ❖ To effectively promote your business to draw more attention to you and your services.
- ❖ But most importantly, it's about **learning** how to do it right. This is one area, where every little difference can have a big outcome. Let's dig in!

### **TOOLS FOR ONLINE MARKETING**

Important tools for online marketing include:

- ❖ Having a knock-out website (very important);
- ❖ Sending out press releases & articles;
- ❖ Social media networking – big, big, big to spread the word about yourself. Facebook, Twitter, Linked In, blogging and more open up so many avenues to spread the word about yourself;
- ❖ Online networking via Forums (among VAs and also where your clients hang out);
- ❖ Search Engine Marketing.
- ❖ We will tackle each of the areas in a little bit more detail.

## **Marketing via Articles and Press Releases**

Writing articles and press releases are two of the more efficient ways to get exposure and traffic to your site - and the best part is, it's mostly free.

Article writing is the practice of posting keyword-focused articles about basically anything in your industry / niche on free content submission article sites.

Online press releases are similar to articles, but instead of writing a piece on just about anything, a press release involves placing a newsworthy story about your company, website and / or your services on the web.

A press release is more time sensitive (much the same as news), and is generally used to create short-term buzz for a particular event or to promote a certain aspect of your business for a specific purpose.

The reason why articles and press releases are important online marketing techniques is because it can result in a traffic boost for your website as some of these free content submission sites have a significant readership following.

It promotes your business to a wider audience which can result in more potential clients interested in your services and ultimately an increase in your sales and income.

## **Benefits of Article Marketing and Writing Press Releases**

### **It's absolutely free**

All you need is your thoughts, your computer, and your hands. If you have those, nothing can stop you from typing and completing an article or press release for your business.

### **Obtain back links automatically**

When you submit your articles and press releases to content directories, you have the option to complete a resource box or bio line where you can include a link to your website.

Sometimes even other websites will make use of your articles too. With the copyright terms in place, the URL of your website will still be intact and can subsequently direct even more traffic to your website.

### **Your website will get noticed**

Submitting articles and press releases to directories that get high web traffic will help your site get noticed by human visitors as well as search engine spiders.

### **Improve your reputation**

As your list of submitted articles and press releases grows, the total number of back links to your site grows.

It also shows that you are knowledgeable on your field and the “go to” person when services are needed. A well written piece will catch the eyes and interest of your customers and keep them coming back for more.

Article marketing and submitting press releases are two of the most powerful online marketing techniques available. It does wonders for you and your business, and contrary to what you might think, it is not that hard to get started.

The key however is to write helpful, informative and easy-to-understand pieces that can actually help readers.

The tables below contain lists of article and press release sites for your convenience.

### **Free Article and Press Release Submission Sites**

Free Article Submission Sites
<a href="http://knol.google.com/">http://knol.google.com/</a>
<a href="http://www.101homebusiness.org/">http://www.101homebusiness.org/</a>
<a href="http://www.aardvarkarticles.net/login.php">http://www.aardvarkarticles.net/login.php</a>
<a href="http://www.advertisingknowhow.com/">http://www.advertisingknowhow.com/</a>
<a href="http://www.allfreelancework.com/">http://www.allfreelancework.com/</a>
<a href="http://www.allthewebsites.org/">http://www.allthewebsites.org/</a>
<a href="http://www.alumbo.com/submitcontent.html">http://www.alumbo.com/submitcontent.html</a>
<a href="http://www.amazines.com/">http://www.amazines.com/</a>
<a href="http://www.article99.com/">http://www.article99.com/</a>
<a href="http://www.articlealley.com/">http://www.articlealley.com/</a>
<a href="http://www.articlebin.com/login.php">http://www.articlebin.com/login.php</a>
<a href="http://www.articlecity.com/">http://www.articlecity.com/</a>

Free Article Submission Sites
<a href="http://www.articlefinders.com/">http://www.articlefinders.com/</a>
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<a href="http://www.biz-whiz.com/">http://www.biz-whiz.com/</a>
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<a href="http://www.boonline.com/boonline/Login2.asp">http://www.boonline.com/boonline/Login2.asp</a>
<a href="http://www.businesshighlight.org/">http://www.businesshighlight.org/</a>
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## JUMPSTART YOUR VIRTUAL ASSISTANT BUSINESS

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<a href="http://www.prleap.com/">http://www.prleap.com/</a>
<a href="http://www.prlog.org/">http://www.prlog.org/</a>



### ACTION STEPS...

1. If article marketing and writing press releases will be one of your marketing tools, now is the time to write down a short term goal to get this ball rolling. *E.g. I will write at least (number) articles / press releases every (period)*

## **Social Media Networking**

So, what is this “thing” they call Social Media Networking?

Social media networking on the internet is done via websites known as social media sites. Social networking websites function like an online community of internet users.

Many of these online community members share common interests in hobbies, religion, politics or business. Once you’ve created an account on a social media website you can begin to socialize.

This socialization may include reading the profile pages of other members, updating your own status and profile frequently and interacting with people in your own network.

Social Media can sometimes be rather overwhelming especially if you are new to it. If you just look at all the available options: Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, Flickr, Stumbleupon, The Grid , and 100’s more, it is easy to be confused on where to start and what to do to benefit from this booming phenomena.

The secret however in using social media effectively, is not to have a presence on each and every social media platform that is available. You can only choose one (or two) that fits your style best.

I will recommend that you start with Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn as they are the most popular social media sites on the web. Use them to find and connect with friends and other people in your niche area.

It's important to get involved with social media - not only with an eye towards using it for your business, but with the intention to connect with people.

Do not focus on what you can get from the community you join, but on what you can give. That's the best recipe for social-media-networking-success.

### **Benefits of Using Social Media**

Benefits of social media include the following:

#### **Making Friends**

We all know that making friends is actually easy, but building relationships and trust is what we are looking for.

Social media networking is an easy way to communicate, especially when you group your online friends according to their interests, hobbies and personalities. In this way you can eliminate members who do not share the same interests and goals when communicating about a specific topic.

"Talking" to new friends online can be used to your advantage but remember to be subtle. Do not blatantly advertise your business or services while communicating, as this might not be well received by everyone.

A good idea of spreading the word is the "What" or "Have" question. Instead of saying, "I am a Virtual Assistant"; rather pop a question like: "What do you know about Virtual Assistants" or "Have you ever heard about Virtual Assistance?"

#### **Create Diversity**

Diversity is one of the biggest benefits of online networking. The internet gives you the opportunity to connect with different people

around the globe - people with different beliefs, cultures and viewpoints. It also gives you the opportunity to build relationships with them.

South Africa alone offers ample opportunity to build relationships with different people and cultures and to learn from them.

If you have a number of South African friends on your list you may as well inform them about the wonderful industry you're in.

Remember, the Virtual Assistant Industry is new in South Africa. Telling your friends about the industry and mentioning that you are part of it might result in leads you've never thought of.

### **Create Online Presence**

Social networking services like Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter provide purpose-built spaces for members to create and present an online image of themselves, either within friendship or wider business related networks.

You have to remember that trust is key if you want to build online presence and reap the rewards of online networking.

To build trust you have to spend time looking for questions you are an expert in. Once you've found these questions, respond with free advice. If people see you have the knowledge they will want to know more.

The truth is: We'd rather believe a trusted friend than a complete stranger. It is only when you give, that you will receive and you will be amazed by how many business leads can come your way through sharing.

Having online presence will make it possible to share experiences with other Virtual Assistants as well. You can share views, new approaches that work, techniques on networking methods and learn a lot from each other.

### **Get the message out**

Social Media Networking has clear business benefits as well. You have the advantage to ask business related questions and have people spend their time and effort in replying to you. Wow, what a great advantage!

The same goes the other way round. Imagine asking for business referrals and having people refer their friends to you. Social networking can be all around if you want it to be, no different to networking in real life. The trick is trust and "quality" not "quantity".

Social networking is also an excellent way to keep in touch with people as you change jobs or move.

Whatever you do, don't just sit on the side lines as business is undeniably moving on.

Remember the old saying:

***"Don't throw a little at everything, but throw whatever you have at something significant."***

Go out and visit social media sites, build online presence and get the message out to reap the rewards.

It can have a positive impact on your business by simply enlarging your own internet footprint. But more than that...

Social media is revolutionising the way people communicate with each other, and in future many businesses in South Africa will start realising the benefits of a social media presence to market their businesses.

Having your own Facebook, Twitter or LinkedIn page early on creates an excellent opportunity for VAs to gain experience with this aspect of social media marketing and when the full social media wave is reaching South Africa (maybe sooner than we expect), you will be in a very good position to offer these additional services to clients.

Just a word of caution: There are many good reasons to use social media but it can become addictive. Do not spend all your time on, Facebook, Twitter etc. Use your time wisely and keep a balance.

Do not forget that, unless you are an internet marketing or social media marketing VA, social media is not your business - it is only a tool that can enhance your business.



### ACTION STEPS...

1. If social media networking will be one of your marketing tools, write down a short term goal to get this ball rolling. *E.g. I will create a social profile on (social media site) before (date) and learn how to use it effectively.*

### **Online Networking**

As with off-line networking, online networking is another important marketing technique to build contacts for your business. Online networking is primarily through joining forums and chat groups.

A forum is a community meeting place for discussion of a variety of topics where people can interact to give advice, seek answers to burning questions or just network with people to discuss a specific topic.

Did you know that by simply participating in various forums and posting your views and ideas, you can potentially bring new growth and life to your online business?

Forums are where you can connect with as many people as possible to learn more about the VA industry, your client's industry, new technology trends, business in general, marketing techniques and so much more.

The golden rule however is to do diverse networking. Do not only subscribe to VA forums and chat groups (although that is pretty important too), but also build some networks on business forums, marketing forums, women's forums etc. as it broadens your horizons and many job leads can come from these different networking platforms.

Let's look at some of the positive aspects that forum participation can bring to your business.

- ❖ We are all looking for traffic to our websites and if we can get it for free with little effort, that's even better. Did you know that when you sign up as a new member at a forum, you can create a "signature" line that will be attached to every post you make in a

forum (but only if the forum allows this)? This signature line can contain your website address, and as other members read your post, your signature will provide an additional route for potential customers to find your website.

- ❖ Forums are excellent ways of building trust with potential clients by giving them a chance to get to know you, and by letting some of your knowledge, honesty and integrity show in the posts you make at a forum.
- ❖ Running a Virtual Assistant business can be a very lonely occupation. There is very little interaction with other people and this can be devastating to some. By participating in forums, you will meet other people who have online businesses and who have a lot in common with you. It's sometimes comforting to know that there are others who share your occupational frustrations, and will be there to support you if you need them.
- ❖ It's a proven fact that two minds are better than one. Everyone goes through learning curves on the Internet. Whether that learning curve involves starting out or building your business, there is always someone in your favourite forum that has been there and done that. These people will be more than happy to give you "free consultations".



### ACTION STEPS...

1. If forum networking will be one of your marketing tools, write down a short term goal to get this ball rolling.

## Search Engine Marketing

Search Engine Marketing (SEM) means marketing an online business by:

- ❖ Improving your website's ranking through **search engine optimization (SEO)**. SEO is the active practice of optimizing your web site by improving internal and external aspects in order to increase the traffic your site receives from search engines like Google, Yahoo, Bing etc. We will not go into the detail of SEO, but if you want to learn more about it, just do a quick Google search for the term “search engine optimisation”. It is a whole world of its own.
- ❖ **Buying pay-per-click (PPC) ads:** These are ads that you place for your website with a search engine, such as Google or Yahoo. These ads will then appear on other websites and will direct traffic to your site.

❖ **Listings in website directories:** It's similar to offline yellow page listings. These web directories may be general in nature or related to a specific topic. Most South African (SA) based directories are still free of charge, but most worthwhile international directories do charge for a listing. You can find a list of good international directories at <http://www.strongestlinks.com/directories.php>.

❖ **Link Building:** Requesting links from non-competing, quality websites related to the VA industry is a simple but effective online marketing technique. Links allow you to get quality traffic while increasing the prestige of your business. Visitors who enter your site from a link they found on another site are prone to believe they will find something of value. If not, why would the site take the time and effort to link to you?



### **ACTION STEPS...**

1. If Search Engine Marketing (SEM) will be one of your marketing tools, write down your goals to get this ball rolling.

## **DESIGN A KNOCKOUT WEBSITE**

There's no two ways about it; Virtual Assistants need to have a web presence

You probably agree that this is a **BOLD** statement to make, but let me share a story with you on why I believe it is so important.

About two years ago my son phoned me one morning and asked me to log onto a well-known jewellery store's web site to take a look at their selection of engagement rings. He was in the process of getting engaged.

At first, I was quite amazed but I soon realized that this is how the younger generation is doing business.

The matter of the fact is, he browsed several websites to see what's available but he only visited **ONE** jewellery store and bought his fiancé's ring. The scary fact is that jewellery stores without web sites were not even considered.

Nowadays more and more people (not only the youngsters) are using the internet to browse for business solutions and information as it is convenient and introduces you to anything by the click of a "mouse".

Running a Virtual Assistant business without a website is like missing out on a goldmine of potential clients

## **BENEFITS OF A WEBSITE**

A website gives you access to....

- ❖ 24/7 exposure 365 days a year;
- ❖ an online showcase for your business and services;

- ❖ a global audience;
- ❖ expanding your business across geographical borders;
- ❖ cost effective marketing strategies;
- ❖ keeping your clients updated and informed by the click of a button;

OK, so now you hopefully agree with me that it is important for a Virtual Assistant to have a web site.

The first question that probably pops up in your mind is: “It’s all good and well, but I’m not a web designer and I don’t know anything about html, css and all that other technical stuff. How will I get a website?”

Well, don’t fear, we will take you through the basics of building a knock-out website that can drive traffic to your doorstep.

### BASIC STEPS FOR CREATING A WEBSITE

#### Step 1: What is the Purpose of Your Website?

Everything you do in business should have a purpose – if not, a lot of time and effort will go to waste. The same is true for having a website.

If you want to use your website to attract clients and sell your services, then that is what you should be pitching on your website: Your VA business.

Yet the websites of many virtual assistants do so much more than just pitch their VA business. And that can be a costly mistake.

Virtual assistants who try to *do* everything, *be* everything and *sell* everything with their website will chase prospective clients away.

Thus, to make your website more effective you need to know exactly why you have it.

### **Do you want to “attract” clients?**

If that's the number one purpose of your website, then everything on your website should play a role in selling your services to prospective clients.

Many of your prospective clients may purposely come to your website, or they may accidentally stumble across it. No matter which road they took, you need to show them which direction to go from there.

Lead clients purposefully through your site. Do this by starting with a great headline suggesting how they will benefit from your services.

End their "guided" trip with a call to action, such as to contact you for a free consultation and quote.

### **Do you want to “educate” people about virtual assistance?**

Some virtual assistant websites provides so much information about virtual assistance as an industry and prominently displays text-book definitions about “what a virtual assistant is”, “the history of the industry”, “how to work with a VA” and much more educational stuff, that their sites have a more educational purpose than simply selling their services. If that is the purpose of your site, it's great!!

But, if the purpose of your site is a sales tool and not an educational tool, don't show page long definitions explaining “what a virtual assistant is”.

Rather define a virtual assistant in a sentence or two - better yet work that sentence definition into a sentence that discusses benefits to the client.

In reality, most prospective clients want to know how **you** as a virtual assistant can benefit them – that's why they are on your site in the first place. Tell them in the simplest terms possible.

### **Do you want to make money from affiliate products not directly associated with you and your business?**

Some Virtual Assistant websites have many flashing advertisements, Google AdSense and offers to books, training courses and other affiliated products from which they derive a stream of income: If this is the purpose of your site, no problem.

However, if it is not, don't distract prospective clients with ads to other businesses, perhaps even competing VA businesses.

All these advertisements lead your prospective clients right out of your website.

If you're trying to increase client activity for your business, you're working against yourself by giving prospects an almost immediate reason to leave your site. Let them get to know you first, and have a chance to get his business.



#### **ACTION STEPS ...**

1. What will the purpose of your website be? You will use this purpose later when you decide what content you need to include on your site.

## **Step 2: Who Do You Write For?**

Why is it important? By knowing who you are writing for, you'll know *what* you need to write on your site. This information also comes from your marketing plan when you answered the question "Who will be interested in what you want to sell?" In other words, who is your target market?

I honestly believe that identifying your target market is essential for a successful website. You can have the best looking site, however, without an identified target market the information on your website might be too general.

It will miss the specific language your potential client needs to convince them that they actually need your services. By knowing your market and understanding their needs, you can guide them with your words to gain an interest in learning more about you and what you have to offer.

Your website needs to convey your businesses message and inform existing and potential customers of the features and benefits of your services. View your website as a great way to establish your business identity and as the Internet equivalent of an offline brochure or catalogue.



### **ACTION STEPS...**

Part 2 helped you to determine your target market. Refer back to your notes to recap on who you are writing for. If you haven't done those exercises yet, you can answer the following questions here.

## **JUMPSTART YOUR VIRTUAL ASSISTANT BUSINESS**

1. Who is your ideal client?
2. What services do they need?
3. Where are these ideal clients located? It could be local, national or international.
4. What benefits do your services provide to your target market?

***“The aim of marketing is to know and understand the customer so well that the product or service fits him and sells itself.” ~Peter F Drucker~***

### **Step 3 - Get your Website Online**

By now you have a pretty good idea of what the purpose of your website will be and who you will be writing the content for.

The next step is to actually start the process of getting a website on the net.

It should not be a daunting experience and is in effect quite simple if you just understand a few basic terms as well as the basic process on how to get started.

To unravel the mystery I will try to break it down in a few simple steps.

You basically have 2 options: Either do it yourself (*benefit*: more cost effective) or hire someone to do it (*benefit*: saves time).

If you want to outsource this step to a professional web designer, you can skip Step 3 as your web designer will guide and assist you with the necessary actions. If you however want to opt the way of doing it yourself (as we did), the following are needed:

- ❖ A Domain Name
- ❖ A Web Hosting Company
- ❖ Designing your web pages and making them available for visitors to see.

### Get a Domain Name

A domain name is the name you want to give to your website.

It's the name people will use to find you on the web. For example, the domain name of our website is <http://www.be-virtual-assistant-wise.com>.

The first thing you need to do when building your website is to get a domain name. You've probably already decided on a name for your business and it can be used "as is" for your domain. It is however just necessary to ensure that it is not already taken by another company.

To be able to use your chosen domain name, you need to pay an annual fee to a domain registrar for the right to use that name.

There are basically two options to do this. You can either register the domain name yourself or let a hosting company do it on your behalf.

Most hosting companies include the price for a domain name in their hosting packages and will also register your domain automatically. This is actually the easier route to go than trying to do it yourself.

Remember, getting a name does not get you a website - it's just a name. It's basically the same as registering a business name in the brick-and-mortar world; having that business name does not mean that you also have the shop premises to go with the name.

### **Tips on Choosing a Domain Name**

#### **Use your company name as your domain.**

Naming your website after your company (e.g. [yourcompany.co.za](#) or [yourcompany.com](#)) is important, for the simple reason that when people think of your website, they'll think of it by name. If your company name is also your website domain, clients will automatically know where to go.

#### **Long vs Short Domain Names?**

Domain names can be of any length up to 67 characters. You don't have to settle for an obscure domain name like [avab.com](#) when what you actually mean is [AVirtualAssistantBusiness.com](#).

Having said that, there appears to be some disagreement about whether a long or short domain name is better.

Some argue that shorter domain names are easier to remember, easier to type and far less susceptible to mistakes: for example, "[GetyourVA.com](#)" is easier to remember and less prone to typing errors than "[connecttomywebsiteandgetyourvirtualassistant.com](#)".

Others argue that a longer domain name is usually easier on the human memory - for example, "gavatww.com" is a sequence of unrelated letters that is difficult to remember and type correctly, whereas if we expand it to its long form, "GetAVirtualAssistantToWorkWith.com", people are more likely to remember the domain name.

Some of these arguments are actually academic. However, it's increasingly difficult to get short meaningful domain names.

Short names like "VirtualAssist.com" and "VA4U.com" have long been sold out. If you manage to get a short domain name though, the key is to make sure it's a meaningful combination of characters and not the obscure "gavatww.com" in the example above.

Tip: Longer domain names that have your site keywords in them also have an advantage that they perform better in a number of search engines. So, for example, if your company name is *Virtual Assistant For You*, a domain name like [virtualassistant4U.co.za](http://virtualassistant4U.co.za), might fare better in a search for the term "virtual assistant" than if it was called [VA4U.co.za](http://VA4U.co.za).

### Hyphenated Names?

Should you get a hyphenated name e.g. [virtual-assistant-business.com](http://virtual-assistant-business.com) vs. [virtualassistantbusiness.com](http://virtualassistantbusiness.com)?

Advantages of hyphenate names are:

- ❖ Search engines can distinguish your keywords better and thus return your site more prominently in search results for those keywords occurring in your domain name.

- ❖ The non-hyphenated form may no longer be available. At least this way, you still get the domain name you want.

### **.com or .co.za Extension?**

Which one to use? Well, this is an interesting question and the answer is sometimes not as straightforward as you might think.

If your VA business mostly caters to the local niche community, e.g. business coaches in SA, then it makes sense to get a country-specific domain. You actually benefit from having such a local domain because your clients know that they're dealing with a local VA, which is probably what they want.

However, if your services primarily focus on an international audience it might be beneficial to consider a .com domain.

Something to keep in mind: If you have a .com domain and your website is hosted on an international server (see webhosting later), it will be very difficult to get your website indexed on local Search Engines.



### **ACTION STEPS ...**

1. Decided on a domain name?

### **Choose a Web Host and Sign Up for an Account**

A web host is basically a company that has many computers connected to the Internet. When you place your web pages on their computers (also called servers), everyone in the world will be able to connect to your site and view it.

Thus, your website needs to be on such a server to enable people to find it on the web. These servers are maintained by your hosting company and can be located nationally (in your own country) or internationally.

The second step to get your website on the net is to sign up for an account with a web host so that your website has a home.

If getting a domain name is analogous to getting a business name in the brick-and-mortar world, getting a web hosting account is analogous to renting office premises for your business.

Finding a good webhost can sometimes feel like a daunting task, just because there are so many to choose from. Below are a few factors that we personally evaluated in our process of finding a good hosting company.

### **Tips on Choosing a Web Host**

Some of the more important things to look for in a good host are the following.

**Support** - Without doubt the most important aspect of any hosting plan is support. You want to know that if you have a problem, you can get help fast. Your host need to offer 24/7 phone/email/ticket support and you should not have to wait hours for a response.

**Server Location** - You can sign up with a web host anywhere in the world and have your website hosted on servers locally or internationally. However, if your target market is local, then local based servers might be a good choice. You'll find it easier to deal with your host and it also means a faster web experience for your visitors making their visit to your site more enjoyable! However, it does not really matter where you host your website.

**Disk Space** - All hosting plans will quote server disk space. This is the amount of space you can use on the server to host your website. On average a web page size is between 10kb to 50kb. Depending on your plans for your website, any hosting plan offering 50+ MB of disk space will be more than enough.

In effect, most sites need less than 10 MB of web space, so even if you are provided with a host that tempts you with "unlimited space", be aware that you are unlikely to use that space, so don't let the high MB space be a big factor in your consideration when comparing web hosts. As a rough guide, [be-virtual-assistant-wise.com](http://be-virtual-assistant-wise.com), which had about 121 pages when this e-book was first written, used less than 5 MB for its pages and associated files.

**Data Transfer (Traffic/Bandwidth)** - Bandwidth relates to the number of visitors the server receives via your website each month and the amount of information downloaded from your site. Most hosts offer very generous amounts which again, the average website will never exceed. In general 500MB-3GB traffic per month is more than adequate for a small site just starting out.

**Reliability and speed of access** - Not only should the web host be reliable and fast, it should guarantee its uptime (the time when it is functional). Look for a minimum uptime of 99%. In fact, even 99% is actually too low - it really should be 99.5% or higher.

Other factors to take into consideration when choosing a good host are:

**FTP, PHP, Perl, SSI, .htaccess, telnet, SSH, MySQL, crontabs** - If you are paying for a site, you really should make sure you have all of these. Even if you do not know what all of them are at this stage, your knowledge about it can change in future. If you are like me, the more you explore these technical things, the more you get intrigued by it and can sometimes kick yourself when you realise you do not have the features that you need available on your host.

**SSL (secure server), Shopping Cart** - If you are planning on receiving money through your website, you might want your host to provide these facilities. These facilities normally involve a higher priced package or additional charges. The main thing is to check to see if they are available at all before you commit to the host. You will definitely need SSL if you want to collect credit card payments on your site.

**Email, Autoresponders, POP3, Mail Forwarding** - If you have your own site, you would probably want to have email addresses at your own domain, like info@yourdomain.com, etc.

**Control Panel** - This is called various names by different hosts, but essentially, they all allow you to manage different aspects of your web account yourself. Typically, and at the very minimum, it should allow you to do things like add, delete, manage your email addresses and change passwords for your account.

Additional programs in your control panel such as Fantastico or SimpleScripts enable you to easily install software such as Content Management Software (eg. Joomla) or Blogging Software (e.g. WordPress) if you want to build your site that way.

**Server (Windows vs Linux)** - My preference is to sign up for accounts using the often cheaper, more stable and feature-laden Linux systems. Don't be fooled to think that if you have a windows PC you need to have a Windows hosting server.

**Price** - I was actually hesitant to list this, but I guess it's futile not to. However, I would caution that while price is always a factor, you should realise that you often get what you pay for, although it's not necessarily true that the most expensive hosts are the best.

**What about Free Hosting?** Although it might be tempting to opt for free hosting, it might not be the best option. Free Hosting Sites are sometimes frowned upon. If you want to have your website gain some sort of reputation the first thing you need is a unique domain name. This is also the very first thing you won't have with a free hosting service.

Free hosting can sometimes be risky. Since your domain is just an extension of their site – if the main site goes down, so does yours.

Some free hosting plans furthermore generate a number of other problems and issues such as crowding your site with compulsory advertisements, because that is how they make their money.

**Reviews** - Make a point to check out what others have to say about the web host you want to choose. It is the quickest way to know if it a reputable host or not.

### **Recommended Hosting Companies:**

We've done a long and hard search for the right company to host our websites and can recommend the following companies

## **SiteBuildIt! (SBI)**

SBI is more than just a hosting company. They help you built your business!

Where standard hosting companies only help you to get access to the web, SBI has proven strategies to help you build a website that gets found and help you to build free, targeted traffic, *your* traffic.

SBI also takes care of the technical issues of creating a website and provides a proven process and a tech-free, complete set of site-brainstorming-building-hosting-and-marketing tools.

This combination delivers a thriving, profitable web business.

Our site <http://www.be-virtual-assistant-wise.com> uses [SiteBuildIt!](#) as hosting and web building company. Without their tools, our site would never have been so successful and driving such targeted traffic to our business. Visit

## **Afrihost**

Afrihost is a South African hosting company with excellent customer services. They have been hosting websites for the last 9 years and aim to deliver robust, superfast, quality webhosting plans. Their promise of “100% Passion, 100% Web Hosting, or your Money Back”, takes the risk out of the transaction. Our SA site <http://www.be-virtual-assistant-wise.co.za> is hosted with [Afrihost](#).

Other hosting companies to consider are:

### **Hosting Companies**

BlueHost.com

Hosting Companies
GoDaddy.com
HostGator.com
JustHost.com
HostMonster.com
iPage.com
FatCow.com
IXwebHosting.com
WebHostingPad.com
myHosting.com

Most hosting companies register your domain name on your behalf and have your site up and running in a very short time.

## **Designing your Web Pages**

Once you have settled your domain name and web host, the next step is to design the web site and all its pages.

If you use SiteBuildIt! to design your web pages it's as easy as pie.

If you do not use SBI, you can use a WYSIWYG ("What You See Is What You Get") web editor to do it.

Such editors allow you to design your site's pages visually, without having to muck around with the technical details. They work just like

a normal word processor and the web pages can be uploaded to the web via FTP (File Transfer Protocol) software such as Filezilla.

For those who don't mind spending money on a good commercial web editor, one of the most highly-regarded WYSIWYG web editors is Dreamweaver.

There are also many commercial and free web editors around. If you prefer to use free software, we can recommend

- ❖ Arachnophilia
- ❖ KompoZer

Another way to design your web pages is to make use of Content Management Systems such as Joomla or Blogging software such as WordPress. These programs can be installed via your host and have pre-set templates that can be used and modified to fit your needs.

NOTE: Ensure your host have Fantastico or Simplescripts included to enable easy one-click installation of these programs.

### **Step 4: What Information Should your Website Contain**

When you surf the internet you'll find websites that result in an immediate "no" and you will find websites that immediately catches your attention and just make you want to read further.

What is that magic element? Well, I believe that all eye catching websites have one thing in common. They know their target market and leverage that knowledge in developing their Unique Selling Proposition.

Thus, one of the most important elements of creating a knockout website is to ensure that your site emphasises your Unique Selling Proposition (USP). In other words, the reason for its existence, the “what is in it for the client” and each page needs to be relevant to your USP.

Some things to keep in mind:

- ❖ The outline of the site will be dependent on the purpose you want to achieve. It can be anything from a simple internet brochure stipulating your services, client benefits and contact details, to something more complex that includes online payment facilities
- ❖ Most visitors do not read everything. Thus your pages need to be easy to follow. Headings, bullet points and short paragraphs make it easier to read and find relevant information
- ❖ Keep your navigation simple. Have a navigation bar that have access to all your important pages
- ❖ Have a dedicated page with your contact details and put a link on your navigation bar
- ❖ Apart from functionality, it is also important to have a nice “Look and Feel” to your site. Don’t use lots of pop-up advertisements, banner ads, flash photos, videos etc. A clean and simple page is much more attractive and is also faster to open.

## **8 “MUST HAVE” ATTRIBUTES OF A WEBSITE**

### **Home Page:**

The home page is usually the first thing that visitors see. Make it welcoming, clean and clear because it should be appealing enough to make people want to visit the rest of your pages as well. Use your home page as a brief introduction to your company.

### **Your contact information:**

Offer visitors and potential clients as many ways to reach you as you are comfortable with.

- ❖ Your business email - a business mailing address on the site lends credibility.
- ❖ A contact form if possible.
- ❖ Even if you do have a business telephone line you may want to include business telephone hours and time zone info to prevent your phone from ringing at all hours.
- ❖ A fax isn't usually needed in our internet generation, but if you have one include it.
- ❖ Some virtual assistants like to provide customer service through Instant Messengers. Include those details.

### **About Me Page:**

Write a short business biography that highlights why you are the expert Virtual Assistant for your niche.

### **A professional photo/logo:**

Include a good quality professional picture of yourself (preferably only head and shoulders) or a logo on your site. People sometimes prefer to know the person behind the scenes.

### **Services Page:**

Include the different services you offer. It is important not only to state the services, but to also mention the benefits of your services and how these services would improve your client's business. Write the information with the potential client in mind.

### **Rates Page:**

Most clients want to see rates upfront. If you're not comfortable displaying your rates, at least explain the different available options (e.g. hourly rates, retainer options, per project etc.) and your payment policies.

### **Client Testimonials:**

Let your potential clients see what others have to say about you and the quality of your services. A testimonial has the greatest impact when it tells about the pleasing results of your work and includes the full name of the person who gave it. You might have to ask for testimonials and that is OK. Most clients will be happy to provide one when you request it.

### **Privacy policy:**

Clients want to know that their work and their details will not be made public - put them at ease with a privacy policy on your site.

**NOTE:** Update your content regularly and keep it current.



**ACTION STEPS...**

A website *should* be one of your marketing tools. Write down your goals to get this website ball rolling. Remember to make it SMART (*specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and timely*)

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## **PART 4 -DAILY OPERATIONS**

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### **A TYPICAL DAY IN THE LIFE OF A VIRTUAL ASSISTANT**

Wow, this is a tricky one as we are not clones and have different ways of getting “things done”.

What I’ll try to accomplish is to at least set a guideline of activities that should be addressed on a daily basis in order to manage your day effectively and to satisfy your clients’ needs.

#### **E-MAILS**

E-mails are the lifeline of every Virtual Assistant business and therefore I believe this should be your starting point each morning. Check your e-mails and respond to those you need to and schedule the others.

Get into the habit to award certain time frames during your working day to attend to e-mails and close your inbox after responding and scheduling.

An open inbox can be very disturbing and because we are human, we tend to run to the inbox the moment an e-mail arrives.

#### **CALENDER**

Review your calendar and your clients’ calendars in order to know where they will be and what their schedules are for the day.

Depending on the type of services you deliver, reserve one or two hour blocks on your daily calendar for each of your clients. This is an excellent way to get organised and to know what to do next.

### **CLIENTS**

#### **New Clients or Assignments**

When you receive an e-mail from a new client or for a new assignment or you are contacted through your website, attend to it as quickly as possible. Prompt response is key when dealing with clients.

#### **Current clients**

You can either call your current clients early in the morning or during their scheduled time frames. A good idea might be to make prior arrangements with your clients so that you'll know what their preferences are.

Early morning calls work for me. This is my way of putting my clients at ease for the rest of the day knowing I am busy with their projects. By doing this I have ample time to concentrate on what I am doing without the disturbance of a ringing telephone.

#### **Attending to Assignments**

This is your bread and butter. Make sure you have set due dates and working times for each assignment and stick to your working schedule in order to deliver excellent service to your clients.

## **Marketing**

I am a firm believer that you should never stop marketing yourself, your business or your services. By doing marketing on a regular basis you will always be visible and visibility reap rewards.

Reserve regular time frames on your calendar for marketing, not necessarily on a daily basis but at least twice a week depending on what method you are going to use for marketing.

## **EXPANDING YOUR KNOWLEDGE**

Socrates said:

***“There is only one “good” namely Knowledge ...  
and one “evil” namely Ignorance”***

and Sir Francis Baker said:

***“Knowledge is Power”***

Do you agree with them? I definitely do.

It is necessary to know what is going on around you and by that I mean in the Virtual Assistant Industry.

Block out some time on your calendar to read about the Virtual Assistant Industry on a daily basis, or to do planning or just to daydream where you want your business to go.

There is super information available everywhere. Join forums, browse the internet and broaden your knowledge about our industry.

Read about your niche, about your competitors, about new fields, about marketing, about networking, about getting clients, about literally everything you can think off.

### **Last but not least...**

Spend the last hour of your day preparing for the next day:

- ❖ Update your calendar;
- ❖ Make sure you have replied to all incoming and scheduled e-mails;
- ❖ Make sure you have returned all telephone calls;
- ❖ Assign new tasks;
- ❖ Make sure you have met your deadlines.

By doing the above, you will not be in a rush in the morning and you will be able to enjoy whatever you are doing.

***“Persistence with patience and prayer pays with profit, prosperity and peace of mind.” ~David Lloyd Kuntze~***

I would like to amend it a little bit to:

***“Persistence to get the paperwork done, pays with peace of mind, prosperity and profit.”***

## **GROW YOUR BUSINESS**

Congratulations!

You’ve successfully met your milestones. Your business has found a number of clients. Your reputation is growing and eventually you’ve reach a point in time when one or more of the following things happens:

- ❖ You’ve gained good experience and feel confident that you can take on more or different work;
- ❖ Your business “out grows” you. You can no longer manage all the tasks and work by yourself. You need help, larger space and better equipment;
- ❖ You are ready to set your next goal; Growing your Business.

But how do you know for sure when the time is right to change or kick your business into a higher gear?

## **TRIGGERS FOR CHANGE**

Six of the most obvious “triggers” that can let you know when the time is right to grow, expand or change your business are the following:

### **You are bored.**

You have clients, they are satisfied with your work, but you are just bored doing the same type of work or working with the same clients every day. It doesn't excite you anymore and getting up to start working feels like climbing a big mountain every morning.

### **Your income is not what you expected it to be.**

Your hours are filled, yet you struggle to pay all the bills each month.

### **You can no longer fill customer needs in a timely manner.**

If customers are leaving empty handed or going to your competitors because you are "too busy" then the time has come to do something about it.

### **You can no longer keep up with service demands.**

You begin to make more and more mistakes and missing deadlines. Due to the increased pressures of your job you start making poor business decisions or using a "quick fix" for problems that need a long term repair.

### **Your competition changes.**

If your competitors are expanding and taking business from you because of their expansion you should at least evaluate the possibility to change. But, don't misunderstand the above. I'm a big believer in

"NOT" always reacting to every little thing the competition does. Just "evaluate" the situation first – then decide. Do not over react.

### **There are significant changes in the marketplace or industry.**

A Virtual Assistant business is affected by many factors. One of those factors is the very industry we are in. New technologies or services might force you to change the way you do business or even provide new opportunities. For example, a few years ago, nobody knew about social media like Twitter and Facebook. Today there are numerous Social Media Marketing VAs, who have an excellent niche providing social media marketing services to clients.

There are certainly many other triggers that can also indicate it is time for change. In today's technology-rich-society things are changing rapidly - on a daily and even hourly basis and one of the challenges of being a successful VA is to ensure we can keep up with most of these changes.

### **ARE YOU READY FOR CHANGE**

When you are at the point where you want to, or have to change, it can be worthwhile to ask yourself a few questions such as:

**What Type of Change is Right for Me?** Not all types of change will work for every Virtual Assistant business - rule out the options you know are not viable or that you simply don't have the time, money or desire to pursue.

**Will I Really Benefit From the Change?** There are several benefits that could come with business expansion and business changes, but there are also a lot of assumed risks. Some things to consider include:

- ❖ **Customer base:** Will this change expose you to new customers? And will your existing customers remain loyal while you work through any growing pains?
- ❖ **You:** Will the expansion or change bring unavoidable stress into your life that could potentially deter your ability to successfully operate your business?

**Can I Afford Growing my Business?** Do you need any financing to expand? Can you finance it yourself or do you need a loan? Consider how you will fund your expansion / change before taking any drastic steps.

**What do I Need to Start?** Once you have decided to take the initial steps toward growth / change, consider exactly how you will make it happen and what you need to get in place first.

While there are countless considerations to make, taking the above questions into consideration can help facilitate your decision-making process.



### ***ACTION STEPS...***

Triggers in my business that are currently an early indicator to help me decide whether I should consider growing or changing my business.

#### **1. What Type of Change is Right for Me**

2. Will I Really Benefit from this Change? Reasons?

3. Can I Afford Growing / Changing my Business?

4. What do I Need to Get Started?

## **STRATEGIES TO GROW YOUR BUSINESS**

There are plenty of ways to grow a business. Choosing the proper one (or ones) will however depend on the type of business you own, your available resources and how much money, time and sweat you're willing to invest.

The most basic forms of growth are outlined in Figure 1.

### **A. Market Penetration: Deliver Current Service to Current Market**

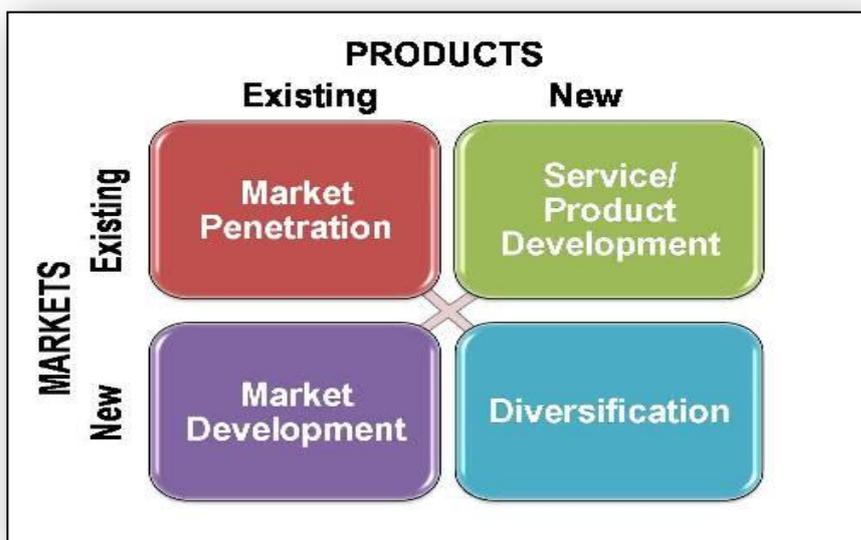
Market penetration is a strategy that will increase your share of your existing target market. You can achieve this by raising the awareness

of your services among your current customers as well as new clients within your niche.

**Example:**

- 1. You have a huge database of past, present and potential clients, but only a few of them are currently using your services. Use this database and get in contact with all these clients. Remind them of all your services and what you can do for them.*
- 2. Your target market is business coaches. Up to now, you've run your business without a website. Now, you want to create a website to make more business coaches aware of your business and services.*

**Figure1: Business Growth Strategies**



## **B. Market Development: Deliver Current Service to a New Market**

This strategy will help you to find and enter new target markets with your current services. This new market could be a new region/country or a totally new target market.

### ***Example:***

*1. You've been doing database management for financial advisors in South Africa only. You know that financial advisors in Russia have the same need and you want to reach them as well (expanding to a new region). So you adapt your marketing to attract new financial advisors from Russia as well.*

*2. You've been doing database management for financial advisors. You realise that other markets such as business coaches also need somebody to maintain their databases and you want to tap into that new market segment of business coaches as well (new target market).*

## **C. Service/Product Development: Deliver New Service to Current Market**

It is a strategy for enhancing the benefits you deliver to your clients by improving your existing services or developing new ones.

### ***Example:***

*You perform database management for a number of clients. You now want to expand your services to also do contact management for these clients to help them reach the people on*

*their databases on a more frequent basis. Thus you can now deliver two services to your current clients instead of only one.*

### **D. Diversification: Deliver New Service to a New Market**

This strategy usually carries higher costs and higher risks and often requires adopting new ways of doing business.

#### ***Example:***

*You've been doing only database management for business coaches. One day you realise that a number of new VAs enter the VA industry daily and they all need a website. You decide you have the right knowledge and experience to develop websites and know it is a good niche to enter. So you start doing web design and search engine optimisation (SEO) specifically for new VAs entering the industry. Thus changing totally from database management for business coaches to web design for virtual assistants.*

Diversification can sometimes be an effective business strategy, but needs good planning and some caution.

Changes in the industry and or the market usually open up opportunities for diversification of your services. The rise of Social Media Marketing VAs is an excellent example of a diversification strategy.

**OTHER GROWTH IDEAS INCLUDE:**

**Forming an Alliance** - Aligning your business with a similar type of business that complements your own service offerings can be a powerful way to expand quickly.

*Example:*

- ❖ Subcontracting work (that you cannot do or that you do not have time for) to another VA with whom you have a working alliance;
- ❖ Making your specific services available to other VAs to enable them to subcontract work to you.

Just remember that with subcontracting comes new responsibilities and it requires a new level of communication with both the other VAs and your clients.

It is furthermore advisable to ensure that there is always a signed contract between you and the person you're subcontracting with. This contract or agreement should stipulate the terms, conditions and payment of performing the work – exactly the same type of contract that you will prepare for any other client.

Growing and expanding a business isn't for everyone.

Some VAs are content with the way they do business and the results they achieve – and that is perfectly OK.

Others put their eyes on becoming the new “Business Women of the Year” – and that is also perfectly OK.



## **BALANCING BUSINESS AND FAMILY LIFE**

Being a Virtual Assistant working from home may sound like a very simple concept, but there is a lot more involved than just rolling out of bed, pouring yourself a cup of coffee and heading to your laptop.

Being able to spend more time with your children is a very popular incentive when deciding to work from home *but* it can also be the reason why so many home-based businesses fail.

The matter of the fact is that you will have to perform a delicate balancing act to ensure that you will have time for your family while at the same time running a successful VA business from your home.

We tend to forget that a “going-to-the-office job” has a lot of natural built-in structures and boundaries that most people often take for granted when deciding to work from home.

I believe ...

When your home is your office and your office is your home, you need to have a plan to set boundaries effectively in order to stay focused, motivated and productive without neglecting your spouse and children.

Imagine getting lost in the woods without a trail or a map. You will be going in circles with little hope of finding your way back out. The same goes for working from home without having a plan and a strategy to balance business and family life.

In my eyes if you focus on your family first and then on the business when creating your plan and strategy you will have a solid foundation, the support from your family and the boost to keep everything going.

So let's start with the family.

By asking certain questions you will be able to determine what you need to do and how you need to do it in order to balance your business and family life. Ask your family to assist you with this.

A good idea might be to call a family meeting and sit around the table to discuss the various questions and answers to enable you to work out a plan.

If your children are still small or cannot give any input, you and your spouse should discuss the situation and decide what will work best. Typical questions to ask are:

- ❖ Why am I working and why do I want to work from home? E.g. To contribute to the financial situation of the family; to save for retirement; to buy something special; to become financially independent; to be available for my children; to be able to attend my children's after school sporting events etc.
- ❖ What do I have to do, adjust or implement in my family's life in order to make this working from home dream come true? E.g. Get up earlier to get some work done; pack lunch boxes the night before; set specific "office" hours; arrange for mornings only day care for the little ones; getting domestic help etc.
- ❖ When will my spouse and/or my children need my attention? This is very important. Clarify when your spouse and children will need you to be available for family affairs and to address their needs
- ❖ How can I make the most of my time with my spouse and children? Remember, effective families have a number of traits

and a reliable schedule is usually one of them. Chaos is not effective and does not promote balance. Implement a schedule; set boundaries; get organized.

- ❖ How do I want to remember my life when I am 80 years old? Work is only your tool to earn an income ... it's not your life. Money is a temporary justification for not being there for your loved ones. Time is passing, memories are priceless. Always choose life over work any chance you get, as long as you get your work done!

Once you've answered all the questions that might arise (the above questions are only guidelines) you will be able to draw up a plan and develop a strategy in order to get the balance you need.



### ***ACTION STEPS...***

1. Write down all the questions you might have and answer them as complete as possible. That's right; if you are serious about balancing your business and family life you have to know the answers to the questions that might arise and work out a plan to accommodate everything.

## **SEPARATE WORK FROM FAMILY LIFE**

More often than not the person working from home gets involved in the “family” against “work” battle. This is when you end up with either bleeding your personal and family life into your work or your work life into your family.

My advice is to “be in the moment” - while at work or with family.

It’s actually all about focus. When you work, do the best you can at being committed to your job.

But when you are with the family do the best you can at just being a parent and a spouse. The key is to stay in the moment and to focus on what you’re doing right now.

## **WHEN TO WORK AND WHEN TO PLAY**

Don’t get caught by the “being my own boss myth”. You may be the CEO of your home based business, but you still have a Board of Directors to report to and this board has power.

The chairperson is always the youngest in your household and the vice-chair is held by your spouse. Furthermore the board is rounded out by the rest of your kids, the dog, the cat and other pets.

Thus, although you are not clocking into a workplace you still have to create and set regular working hours. Sit down and write out an ideal schedule for your family’s specific needs. This should actually be easy once you’ve answered the questions above.

Explain to them that according to what you've discussed previously during the family discussions, these will be your determined working hours.

It might take some time for the family to adapt, but they will eventually do so if you stick to your schedule. When you've implemented the schedule you will have a greater sense of accomplishment for your day and you will definitely have more time to spend with your family in the process.

Your main goal is balance. When you're working, you are the highly skilled professional and when you are playing, you're the consummate parent and spouse.

Best of all, you can be both - just find the balance.

### **WHERE TO WORK AND WHERE TO PLAY**

**Get dressed for work.** I know one of the biggest luxuries of working from home is to be able to:

- ❖ walk from the bedroom to the office in your pj's to turn on the computer;
- ❖ walk downstairs with bed hair to make coffee;
- ❖ make that all important call before brushing your teeth.

But, it is very important to cue your body and mind to take the "home" off and to put the "work" on. By doing that you might also be able to get out of your work mode when taking your "work clothes" off.

By this I don't mean you should get dressed in a suit and a tie – wear something comfortable but just get dressed!

**Create a work space.** Don't work in bed or on the couch. Create a space where you can get peace, quietness and privacy and make this space separate and different from the rest of your house (if needed refer back to the section about setting up your office).

Make sure it is well equipped in order to conduct your business. You can also look at [‘Home Office Design – Ideas from Tip to Toe’](#) on our website.

If you are taking your laptop all around the house to work, your family might feel that they have nowhere to “play”.

Make sure your children know and understand that your work space is for work and not for play. Remember, by creating a boundary for your work space, you will also be setting up a “home” and “play” space by default.

**Be professional.** As a Virtual Assistant you will be dealing with other business owners. Don't assume your clients will understand and accept that it's okay to have kids in the background when dealing with them.

Although you might find it adorable when your toddler sings “Father Jacob” your clients might not feel the same when you're on the phone discussing work with them.

Make sure your children know the boundaries. If they are too small to understand, make sure you have somebody attending to their needs while you are working.

## **CLIENT HOURS VS OFFICE HOURS**

This is always so funny to me. Most working from home people assume they should be available 24/7 to attend to their clients' needs.

By doing this they create the scenario that their clients might call them around the clock. Why? Well I assume they are afraid they might lose business.

You know what? I was one of those “funnies” for quite some time. It took me several years of being available 24/7 before I realized that I am the one losing out.

I took my business with me even when we went on holiday. It was only when my daughter popped me the following question that I've realized enough is enough. I still recall his question as if she asked it yesterday: “Mom”, she asked: “When are we as a family going to spend a whole day together without you running back to the apartment to work?” Wow!

All I can say is: Establish office hours and communicate them to those you work with and then stick to your guns.

Once you have established your work or office hours, make sure your clients (and your family and friends) respect them. I know it's a slippery slope but once you start making exceptions you are creating a loophole for your clients, family and friends to completely destroy the integrity of your business hours.

Sticking to your set office hours and communicating it to your clients will ensure your clients know “after hours” is not an option.

## **WHY AND WHEN TO RELAX**

No one can be productive for 80+ hours per week. You need to make time to relax. Remember the saying:

***“All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy!”***

For most 9 to 5-ers it is easy to wind down. They know they have to start finishing things up for the day by a certain time so that they can go home. They are prepared to do what they can, leave office and get back to it tomorrow. But for those who work from home, this is very difficult.

With the computer within reach it is always possible to get back to work to get more things done whenever you want to or have a spare moment.

But the above shouldn't be an option. You have to get into the habit to wind down and to let go ... until the next day.

A good idea is to decide on a time every day to close your e-mail, write up notes, create your to do list and plan out your next day. This will help you to leave “work” until tomorrow without feeling guilty about stopping, even though you know there are still things to do.

Another thing working-from-homers tend to neglect is to take regular breaks during working hours. It's imperative to get out of the house. Try to do something to get the blood pumping and remember to stay hydrated.

## **JUMPSTART YOUR VIRTUAL ASSISTANT BUSINESS**

Make sure you schedule slots to get some real world time every day, even if it is just to step out on your porch for a couple of minutes. An excellent way to quickly get perspective is to take a walk, get some sun and smell the fresh air.

Don't forget there's a lot of life to live and remember what and who you're working so hard for. Make sure you don't miss any of it.

Balancing business and family life is a delicate act and it may vary from family to family. Make sure that your balancing act is in synergy with your family needs and most of all with what you had in mind when you've decided to work from home.

***"I don't care how poor a man is; if he has family he is rich."  
~Dan Wilcox~***

Treasure your family and don't neglect them.

## **AFTERWORD**

*And just before we go ...*

Thank you for taking the time to work through this book. Most people jump into business without proper planning and the necessary ‘nitty gritty’ of setting goals, creating a business plan and defining marketing strategies and then they wonder why they swim and swim without reaching the shore.

Our wish for you is to set yourself apart from the norm and that you will reach heights beyond your expectation.

We wish you the very best of luck with your business and are confident that you will make a huge success of it.

Remember, it takes consistent, “step-by-step” action to succeed in a Virtual Assistant business. If you’re proactive and persistent, you’ll be amazed at how quickly you will master all the different aspect of running your own business.

Most of all...

**...Enjoy the exciting journey.**

*Francis & Marietjie*

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***There's really no magic to success. Just act while everyone else sits around talking about acting!***