The Ultimate Guide to Discovering a Profitable and Rewarding Virtual Assistant Career
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Living The Virtual Dream

I am living the Dream! For the last seven years I have had the distinct privilege of realizing the dream of working full-time in a Virtual Business free of Office Cubicles, 9-5 Work Days, unproductive mornings, long meetings, water cooler banter and neatly pressed Cache pants!

I officially left the corporate world in 2003 and have never looked back. This virtual dream has afforded my wife and me the opportunity to invest lots of time into raising our three young daughters while working a more flexible, less traditional work schedule. Now, I should qualify by saying that a Virtual Business requires great thought, time and effort in order to be successful, but the bonus is that it is built on your own terms and schedule, which can be very empowering!

I love the Virtual Work Life and could not imagine ever wanting to return to the 9-5 rat race! The great news is that I likely will not have to return to the corporate world, given the rapidly exploding opportunities to work in a whole variety of Virtual Businesses. In fact, more and more companies are seeing the importance of enhancing their employees' quality of life and allowing them to work partially or permanently from a home office.

I can honestly say that there has never been a better time to start a Virtual Assistant Business than in 2010! We are experiencing a Virtual Assistant Revolution, and many small/medium businesses are realizing the huge business building benefits of hiring virtual staff. They are slashing many of their fixed infrastructures and training costs by hiring skilled, web-savvy Virtual Assistants who can hit the ground running with their pertinent business tasks. Not to mention, the rising gas prices and childcare costs are further incentive for many businesses to go Virtual.

A recent poll by Harris Interactive revealed that out of a random sample of 1000 professionals and small business owners, 70% would be very interested in outsourcing their tasks to Virtual Assistants!

The timing is ideal for you to be thinking about setting up a Virtual Assistance Business as we are still very much in the early days with more and more companies realizing the power of hiring Virtual Assistants to take their business to new heights.

In this virtual environment anyone with entrepreneurial spirit and marketable assets can build a successful virtual business without major venture capital or expensive real estate. Every day many profitable enterprises begin with little more than high-speed computer connections, low-scale initial investments, and top-notch skills. More and more people are enjoying the freedom of working for themselves, on their own terms and in their work environment of choice. (i.e. Corner Couch in Starbucks) The Virtual Assistance Industry is quickly becoming the career choice for many work-at-home moms. They are intrigued by the ability to stay home and raise their children, while still engaging in a meaningful and lucrative career. The ability to work during their children's nap times is allowing moms across the world to contribute to their family's finances.
The main purpose of this eBook is to provide a clear roadmap to help you successfully navigate your way to Virtual Business success. Many of you might be ready to make the jump to a virtual career but are not sure where to begin. This guide will serve as a starting point for building a thriving and profitable Virtual Assistance Business.

Let’s roll up our sleeves and begin our Virtual Journey…

**The Rapid Emergence of the Virtual Assistance Business!**

**Are you ready to go SOHO?**

“SOHO” stands for “Small Office/Home Office,” and operating a home-based enterprise is quickly becoming the employment mode of choice. With web-based business applications there is simply no need to make the traditional (and often dreaded) daily commute to work. Online advertising methods offer global exposure to anyone with a product or service to sell. Electronic data transfers and low/no cost telecommunication tools like Skype and Jajah make communication ultra convenient and efficient.

**What is a Virtual Assistant?**

Virtual assistance is one of the hottest and fastest-growing businesses in today’s computer-driven world. “Virtual” refers to the fact that virtual assistants (VAs) work remotely by using communication and data-delivery technologies such as the phone, fax, e-mail, and Internet to correspond with their clients and exchange work-related materials. Remote access can make any VA’s business a global one, putting potential customers from the opposite end of the world only a few clicks and keystrokes away.

The definition of a Virtual Assistant will vary depending on whom you talk to.

Here are a few definitions from recognized VA Networks and Associations:

“A Virtual Assistant (VA) is a highly-trained independent entrepreneur who provides a myriad of business support services virtually via phone, fax and internet-based technology to support and meet the growing needs of businesses worldwide.”

VANetworking.com

**Side Note:** If you are serious about starting a Virtual Assistance Business, then you will want to immediately join VANetworking as it is the premier Virtual Assistant business-building resource center on the Net. The site has a fabulous forum, great weekly seminars and endless resources to help you get your Virtual Assistance business moving in the right direction!

“A VA is a self-employed professional business services operator providing almost any type of admin support service you require on a remote basis from their own office using their own equipment and software.” VATrainer.net
“A Virtual Assistant (VA) is an independent entrepreneur providing administrative, creative and/or technical services. Utilizing advanced technological modes of communication and data delivery, a professional VA assists clients in his/her area of expertise from his/her own office on a contractual basis.” International Virtual Assistant Association.

Regardless of the definition you choose, a Virtual Assistant can offer a whole variety of rapidly expanding niche services in a broad range of categories, such as administrative, creative, technical, real-estate, travel, personal, internet marketing, blogging and project management.

There has been much discussion in the VA Forums such as the VANetworking Forum on the importance of specializing your skills and services in order to be more distinct and competitive. I wholeheartedly agree! It is important to not try and wear too many hats so that you become an ineffective Virtual Assistant.

One of the mandates of our company VAClassroom.com is to provide relevant and “in-demand” training opportunities in order to inspire Virtual Assistants, such as yourself, to carve out the right niches that will lead to the best work and income opportunities. A couple of those niches are covered in our two popular programs, the Internet Marketing Virtual Assistant and the Social Media Marketing Specialist training courses. More on that later!

**Virtual Assistants are Partners, Not Employees**

True Virtual Assistants provide their clients with much more than completed tasks or balanced spreadsheets. Temporary secretaries or project consultants generally operate on a piecemeal basis, focusing only on the jobs at hand and working at intervals for multiple clients. In contrast, VAs consider the big-picture aspect of their clients’ businesses, becoming virtual partners who handle an overflow of important work that would otherwise prevent businesspeople from building and expanding their business efforts. In fact, for business owners, their Virtual Assistants have played an instrumental role in taking their business to new levels of growth and success.

Virtual Assistants free up their clients’ time so they can get on with the business of making money. It is not surprising that many VAs work for owners of small or start-up Internet businesses who would otherwise spend too much time on administrative chores at the expense of activities that increase sales and expansion. With VAs taking care of time-consuming or stress-inducing tasks, business owners can focus on more profitable pursuits.

In some instances, this collaborative work relationship extends into the areas of client contact management. VAs may get to know not only their own clients but also those customers, vendors, or associates who deal with their clients.
A Road Map for the Virtual Assistant Profession

At VAClassroom we receive a lot of inquiries from people that would love to be a VA but are not sure where to start. Before you can chart your course as an “in-demand” virtual assistant, it is important to begin by laying the foundations for building a profitable virtual assistant business.

The first logical step to starting any new business endeavor is to seek out the right kind of advice and information. This eBook is an invaluable tool that can help you navigate every twist and turn on the exciting road to becoming your own boss. In these pages, you will find answers to the questions you already have, as well as ones you may not have considered or come across.
Chapter One: Virtues of Virtual Assistance - Why Become a VA?

So, let us begin with your true motivation for wanting to set up a Virtual Business. A key ingredient to establishing a successful business endeavor is to begin with the right kind of motivation. It is this motivating factor that will fuel your entrepreneurial spirits when the road gets a little bumpy.

Here are a few motivating factors I have heard:

“I am tired of the Corporate Rat Race”
“I am commuting my life away.”
“I do not want to put my kids in daycare all day.”
“I am semi-retired and would like something meaningful to do.”
“I desire a more flexible work schedule and life.”
“I just lost my job due to corporate downsizing and want to start my own business to ensure job security.”
"I don't feel my talents and skills are being used to the fullest potential in my current job."

There are plenty of compelling reasons or motivations why a growing number of professionals from traditional business sectors are increasingly entering the virtual workforce as VAs.

V-I-R-T-U-A-L Spells Opportunity

Here are just some of the many ways that V-I-R-T-U-A-L translates into an excellent way to achieve self-employment through a virtual assistance business.

**Virtuality:** The ability to work from anywhere (including a cozy corner at Starbucks) has strong appeal for most of us, as it offers the freedom to work where, when, and how we want. To appreciate this benefit, consider the prospect of working in your living room early in the evening in your comfy pajamas versus working in a cramped cubicle early in the morning in a business suit. Another perk of working virtually is the money you save on work-related expenses such as gas fill-ups, auto maintenance, business clothes, dry cleaning, and restaurant food.

**Independence:** As a self-employed entrepreneur, your job satisfaction does not depend upon the unpredictable whims of a supervisor or the inflexible policies of a bureaucracy. As your own boss, you decide on the type and amount of work you perform—and you have the added security of knowing that the person in charge of your career always has your best interests at heart! You also get to choose exactly who you want to work with - your ideal client. While traditional employees lose their jobs to downsizing, you can strengthen your own business by monitoring market trends and adapting to them as needed.

**Return on Investment (ROI):** ROI usually applies to the profit resulting from an investment of funds but in this context we are not strictly talking about money. In a virtual assistance business, what you invest most into the enterprise is yourself: your
experience, your education, and your skills. By committing yourself fully to the venture, you enjoy a high return on your investment by gaining even more experience, education, and skills—which in turn makes you more valuable to prospective clients.

**Time Management:** As a self-employed VA, you design your work schedule to fit your life schedule. That puts an end to scrambling to find someone to pick up your kids at school or losing a day’s productivity while you await the arrival of the plumber.

**Unlimited Opportunities:** Most traditional workers are victims of a corporate structure or bureaucratic hierarchy that pigeonholes employees into predetermined positions and limits their growth potential. As the CEO of your own virtual assistance business, you are free to take advantage of every opportunity to learn, grow, and achieve even more success.

**Accessibility:** The Internet offers 24-hour access to a wealth of advertising and marketing opportunities on a global scale. This lets you advertise your services to your target audience in a number of different ways at all times, keeping your business working for you even when you are asleep. Potential clients also benefit from the ability to get in touch with you at their convenience via e-mail or other web-based communication forms.

**Low Start-Up Costs:** Unlike many other ventures, a virtual assistance business does not require a large initial expenditure. You can perform the work almost anywhere and deliver it electronically, so there is no need to rent an office, maintain an inventory, and hire a staff. With basic equipment such as a computer connection, telephone line, and fax machine, you can get your home-based office up and running in no time with little cost.

In Appendix A at the end of this eBook, I have provided a checklist of potential start-up costs for your Virtual Business.
Chapter Two: Virtual Success - What Makes a Good VA?

Being a successful Virtual Assistant requires more than basic office skills and a desire to work in your bathrobe 😊.

To give you a better idea about what goes into a successful virtual assistance business, this chapter will describe some of the most important qualities that set the stage of a successful VA career.

Virtual Inventory: Questions to Ask Yourself

The following questions relate to attributes that influence the success of a virtual assistance business. All of the qualities are important for a VA but the first three are essential if you want to be your own boss and make a profit at it.

Answering “no” to any of these questions does not mean you should not pursue self-employment. However, it does indicate that before you strike out on your own, you may need to work on developing the qualities that will optimize your potential to success.

Are you realistic about life?

One of the things that sets successful people apart from unsuccessful ones is their ability to see things as they are and make decisions based on accurate interpretations. Consistently unrealistic people can fall into one of two categories, seeing nothing but the positives or seeing nothing but the negatives.

When running your own business, you need to avoid any tendency to go overboard in either direction. “Overboard” implies to more than just a matter of whether you see a glass as half-empty or half-full because neither one of those viewpoints is inherently wrong.

In fact, both optimism and “reality checks” are necessary for your business venture to succeed. Without any optimism, your business would come to a standstill because you would never challenge yourself to do more, learn more, and achieve more. Without any regular “reality checks”, your business would likewise come to a standstill because you would take dangerous risks and make promises that you could not possibly keep.

What is the perfect outlook for a successful VA business? It is the healthy balance of optimism and “reality checks” that will help you seize every opportunity to learn, grow, and achieve more without jeopardizing your bottom line through recklessness. It is the gift of seeing things as they are, wanting to make them better, and then reaching that goal by challenging yourself in reasonable ways.

I can promise one thing in your Virtual Assistant Journey – you WILL experience adversity, challenges, and setbacks. It is how you choose to respond to those difficulties that will ultimately shape the future success of your business. I must say that I have experienced my share of gut-wrenching setbacks in my Entrepreneurial Journey but as I
look back, many of these were also defining moments in our ability to “Stay the Course” in the midst of challenges!

“We cannot change the cards we are dealt, just how we play the hand.” Randy Pausch, author of The Last Lecture.

Are you realistic about yourself?

Okay, so that is not really a fair question because people with unrealistic ideas about themselves would hardly give a realistic response! For clues about the accuracy of your self-appraisal, consider your personal history and the input of others.

Do your endeavors generally turn out as you expect or are you continually surprised by the outcome of your efforts? Surprises can be delightful but if you are frequently astonished by the results of your actions, you are probably misreading yourself.

Like the half-empty-versus-half-full situation, there are two extremes to this spectrum. If your outcomes are usually disappointing, you may be making unrealistic demands upon yourself and then feeling let down when you cannot live up to your impossible standards.

On the flip side of this attitudinal coin, you may experience dissatisfaction because you tend to underestimate your abilities and take the easy way out which keeps you firmly stuck right where you are and deprives you of the joy of accomplishment.

If you habitually misjudge yourself, there is a good chance that the people in your life have told you so many times. Is there a pattern of hearing from others that you do not give yourself enough credit or that you do not allow yourself to experience enough challenge in life?

Either approach is self-defeating because it almost guarantees that you will experience a sense of failure in everything you do. To be a successful Virtual Business Owner, you must know your true value and be able to convince others of it in concrete ways. Realism mixed with an equal dose of optimism is a good recipe for business success. It helps you set your sights on what is beyond your grasp but within your reach.

Are you self-motivated and self-directed?

Most of us hate having someone breathing down our necks, but knowing that your nearby boss is waiting for you to finish your work is a stimulus that some of us need to get moving. When you are running your own business, you will have no one but yourself to motivate you to do what needs to be done in a timely manner. If you constantly leave things to the last minute when no one else is watching, you need to reexamine your work ethic and work hard to increase your self-discipline.

Here is a good mental exercise to test your self-motivation but it is useful only if you are completely honest in your response. Remember the previous section about being realistic? Honesty is a big part of that.
Self-Motivation Exercise

Imagine the following scenario (or recall how you behaved in this situation, if you have never experienced it).

“You have a fairly demanding job that requires you to work with a boss who checks up on you throughout the day and gives you regular input. Your boss takes an exotic two-week honeymoon vacation and has no access to cell phones, PDAs, or the Internet during that time – you are on your own!”

While your boss is away, do you:

➢ Say to yourself, “Wow, now I can really get some work done without all those constant interruptions” and spend your solitary time doing all the work your boss expects you to do while catching up on as many overdue business projects as time allows?

  Or

➢ Say to yourself, “Wow, now I can really relax without all those constant demands” and then spend your solitary time doing as little work as possible and then work like crazy the last few days before your boss returns to make sure you get everything done on time?

If you think that your response would be the second one, congratulate yourself on being an honest person! Then consider one of the major distinctions between conventional jobs and self-employment.

Traditional jobs generally bring in a steady wage every pay period, regardless of the time you spend e-mailing your friends or talking on the phone with your mother. When you run your own business, you only earn money when you are actually working. Coffee breaks, sick days, and lunch hours will not generate an income for you, and you must fully appreciate this fact before you become self-employed. Adopt a work ethic that relies on internal rather than external motivation, and your efforts will be rewarded.

Are you an Incurable Learner?

In order to build a thriving Virtual Business, it is absolutely necessary that you become a student of the industry, soaking up new skills and knowledge in order to keep your business as current and competitive as possible. The Internet Landscape is evolving at a rapid rate and it is very easy to fall behind on the current skills businesses need you to know.

Today, more than ever, there are a growing number of web-based applications, systems and software that can benefit from an experienced VA. Entrepreneurs and small businesses usually do not have the time it takes to learn these new tools, but find them necessary to help them build their businesses. “The more you learn, the more you earn” is a popular quote that resounds loudly for the VA profession. Your willingness to grow your professional portfolio increases your opportunities to earn more money. While this
may mean that you need to revise your service offerings from time to time, it will pay off in the long run with more clients and higher earnings.

It is for this reason that VAClassroom.com exists to create current training programs to help you stay as current in your skills as possible. Are you willing and able to network and market yourself aggressively?

There is no shortage of innovative ways to network with prospective clients and market your business effectively. The key principle here is that you need to “put yourself out there” and market your business intentionally to your target audience. I would recommend reviewing the two bonus eBooks, “Ten Sure-Fire Strategies for Marketing your VA Business” and “Digital Work Search Strategies” as they provide some important tips, strategies, and tools for marketing your VA business.

Do you have solid skills and experience (or training)?

One of the major growth areas for Virtual Assistants is working with small and medium Internet Businesses. Many of these businesses are seeking specific skills to address their evolving business demands. Now, I should mention that you do NOT need to take some expensive $3500 VA College program in order to be qualified to work as a Virtual Assistant. Quite the contrary.

While you might not realize it, your experience in the corporate world can have real value and provide a foundation for starting your own VA business. Take a moment to make a list of all your skills and job responsibilities. Once you have done that, take a look at each one and ask yourself, “How can I use this experience to help a small business owner or entrepreneur?”

At the very least, it is important that you possess the following skills and qualities in order to work as an effective Virtual Assistant:

- Internet Savvy – very comfortable surfing and researching on the Net
- Very Organized and Productive – key prerequisites to becoming a highly sought after Virtual Assistant
- Proficient in Office Applications (Word, Excel, PowerPoint)

These qualifications are the starting point. From there, everything else can be learned on the job or through skill-specific training programs like what we offer at VAClassroom.com.

A few years ago, I hired a Virtual Assistant that had worked for many years as an Office Administrator in a corporate setting. She came with a whole bag of skills sets. She was a Master Organizer, proficient in all office applications, and was the unofficial “Spreadsheet Queen.” Over the course of a year or two, we trained her in a whole variety of support tasks pertaining to our Internet company. She eventually played a very instrumental role in supporting our internet marketing efforts. Today, she is a thriving, successful Virtual Assistant, with no intention of returning to the corporate world!
So, the important thing is to start with some of those foundational skills listed above and then build upon those skills through taking courses, listening to e-seminars and webinars, reading books, accessing Virtual Assistant Forums and simply learning on the job! It is imperative that you adopt a “student state of mind” – that you are always seeking to learn some new skills. In our resource guide at the end of this book, we provide some of the best avenues to develop your skills and knowledge as a Virtual Assistant.

**Would you consider yourself web-savvy?**

I should qualify by saying that being “Web Savvy” does not mean that you must possess HTML and programming skills but rather be someone that is an avid Internet user and up on the latest trends and breakthroughs. For example, it is ideal for you to utilize Twitter and Facebook as tools for connecting with prospective clients. It is not imperative that you know those programs now as we will teach you about all those tools in a future course. The key is to have a very good working knowledge of the Internet and be very comfortable with surfing and researching on the Net.

**Do you have good communication skills?**

If you will be the sole proprietor and employee of your virtual assistant business, you will need to deal with clients on a regular basis, whether indirectly via e-mail or directly via telephone. The ability to effectively communicate through verbal and written forms is a great transferable skill required to be a successful Virtual Assistant.

Dealing with people of all types and temperaments is not something that everyone is naturally good at doing. Although you can certainly learn from your mistakes along the way, it is important to know up front that every word you express to your clients, remotely or otherwise, tells them a little bit more about yourself and has an impact on your business’s success.

As a Virtual Assistant, it is important to be an effective “rapport-builder” – that is, you naturally connect with people and build relationships. This will be a vital skill in establishing healthy long-term partnerships with your clients. Of course, there are exceptions to the rule. I have worked with virtual staff that were not super relational but performed high quality work, met my deadlines, and always exceeded my expectations. So while relationship-building can be a key part of the process, it is also important that you can deliver a quality service in a timely and professional manner.

**Can you manage a small business?**

An important part of owning a small business is its management. This includes the day-to-day tasks involving recordkeeping, supplies, invoices, taxes, and so on. If your bookkeeping or managerial skills are lacking, consider a course in basic small business management. Also, in our resource guide at the end of this book, you will find a helpful checklist of all the tasks and tools required to operate your virtual business.

**Are you organized and detail-oriented?**
One challenge of a virtual assistance business (or any other enterprise) is making each client feel like your one and only client, regardless of how many others you may have. Keeping track of different and sometimes competing needs, desires, and projects takes organizational skills and an attention to detail.

Are your skills in demand?

Luckily, the demand for virtual assistance is strong and growing stronger every day. The Internet has allowed more people to become owners of small enterprises that operate out of home offices and transact business virtually. These small business owners usually have a need for someone to perform administrative work but have limited space to accommodate employees.

The solution is virtual assistance. By hiring experienced VAs, small business owners pay only for the services they need and not for associated costs for office equipment, office space, employee insurance, vacation pay, job training, and so on. They avoid these costs because they do not hire salaried employees but virtual partners. Not to mention, the rising gas and daycare costs are motivating many small businesses to make the transition to a home office.

In the next chapter you will find a good overview of some of the services most commonly performed by VAs today and the industries that require those services. Use the information only as a guide because a comprehensive list of all tasks and businesses falling within the realm of VAs would include items numbering in the multiple hundreds and relating to almost every industry found under the sun and over the Internet. Fortunately at VAClassroom, we have already done the necessary legwork to determine the most “in-demand” skills and training businesses are seeking from their Virtual Assistants today!

Also, a quick online Google search of keywords identifying your skills or a review of online classifieds will give you a good idea of the demand for your services. For example, I would recommend visiting some different online marketplaces like Elance.com or Guru.com and do a search for Virtual Assistant Work. This will give you a good idea as to the types of skills businesses are seeking today. You may find valuable clues about your potential virtual profession, such as signs that you should concentrate on specialized aspects of your services or learn new skills to adapt to market shifts.

Do you have a plan to transition into your new role of business owner?

When thinking about becoming a virtual assistant and leaving your regular "corporate job" you also need to consider the transition period. You need to be prepared for some of the incidentals that can change the way you handle your family affairs. For example, do you have a backup plan for health insurance coverage? If you are currently the policy holder, you need to research changing insurance plans with a spouse or private insurance. Do you have a nest egg you can rely on while searching for your first few steady clients? The first few months of self-employment can be challenging when you do not know what your income will be. Having these transition scenarios in place will reduce
some of the stress in starting your own business so you can focus on marketing yourself and doing a great job for your clients.

**Are you interested in becoming part of a new and rapidly growing business opportunity?**

Virtual assistance is a relatively new business that has already spawned many related enterprises, such as virtual assistance certification programs and virtual assistance networks. As with many other professions in their initial stages, there are no rigid rules restricting its operation.

This means that right now is the perfect time for anyone with initiative and creativity to gain an important foothold in this new field. If you discover a market need for specific services and you possess (or can acquire) the ability to provide those services virtually, you have the makings of a profitable small business venture as a VA.
Chapter Three: Exploring 15 Virtual Assistant Career Pathways

One of the most exciting aspects of owning a virtual assistance business is the opportunity to customize it to match your unique interests, passions and abilities. By deciding exactly which services you will offer, you ensure that you spend your working life pursuing activities that you genuinely enjoy. How many nine-to-fivers can say that about their jobs? I am sure there are a few. The key here is to target “in-demand” niches that you would actually enjoy doing. For example, let’s say that virtual accounting and bookkeeping were the hottest growth areas for Virtual Assistants. Well, I do NOT like working with numbers at all, so this type of niche would not be suitable for my particular interests. On the other hand, you might love to be a “bean counter” and would find this kind of work very fulfilling. Well, you might just have found your niche!

In starting your Virtual Assistant business, it is important to determine whether you will be a VA Specialist or Generalist. What do I mean by that? Well, a VA Specialist would be someone that has decided to focus their services and skill development in a couple key areas such as Real-Estate Support Services or as a Virtual Travel Agent. Conversely, a VA Generalist would seek to develop a broad base of skills and service offerings ranging from general administrative support to Internet Marketing and Blogging.

While there are certainly those people that can excel at a whole variety of diverse tasks, I would recommend that if you are just starting a Virtual Assistant business you might want to consider limiting your business offerings to only two or three select services. In a world of ever-increasing specialization, finding your VA niche can enhance your value to potential clients. Consumers generally put more trust in those who have spent the most time developing expertise exclusively in specific areas. I liken this to selecting a restaurant. While there are restaurants that try to be all things to all people, many other restaurants have found great success by focusing on Greek or Korean or Indian Food. They become known for the specialty food they serve.

I currently know a Virtual Assistant who just started his business in the last year and is completely booked up! This particular VA carved out an “in-demand” specialization in setting up e-commerce shopping carts for businesses wanting to sell their products online. He has become so well known in this specialty area that the Shopping Cart providers such as 1shoppingcart.com actually recommend his services to new users. This is a perfect example of identifying and tapping into the right niche at the right time.

Another Virtual Assistant who also does some work for VAClassroom provides blog design and writing services in addition to other services. She has identified that business blogging is on the rise and has really focused her marketing strategies on promoting her blogging services. This has started to pay real dividends as she just added three new blog clients in the last month.

So, it is important to identify those specializations that are in demand and would be of interest to you. Below is a list of fifteen common virtually-delivered services, along with specific industries that have a need for those services and therefore represent good marketing targets.
There is considerable overlap with many jobs applicable in numerous fields. This list represents only a fraction of the possible services you can offer so use it as a prompt to get you thinking about what Virtual Career pathway you might be interested in pursuing.

**Executive Administrative Services**

This is the type of work that most people associate with virtual assistance, as it seems like a natural virtual extension of the on-site secretaries and administrative professionals that most businesses rely on for support. The term “administrative” covers a wide variety of tasks ranging from clerical to creative to legal to personal, so you need to pinpoint which ones you will perform:

- Accounting * Bill payment * Client relationship management * Correspondence *
- Database and website maintenance * Data entry * Forms creation *
- Information organization * Presentation preparation * Scheduling * Telephone answering *
- Transcription * Translation * Travel arrangements * Word processing *
- Statistical reports * Organize executive for business meetings and conferences

Because all businesses require administration to some extent, there is a wide marketing target. If you have specialized skills, you can focus your marketing efforts on companies that depend on those skills. For instance, if you are fluent in a foreign language, target language instruction companies, international companies that deal with the particular country whose language you know, translation services, educational institutions, and so on.

**Recommended Skills for this Virtual Pathway:** Strong Internet research skills, proficient in MS Office applications, highly organized and efficient, basic bookkeeping skills and strong verbal and written communication skills.

**Medical/Legal Transcription and Assistance Services**

This is a good niche area because it requires specialized training and experience with medical or legal terminology. Marketing targets include medical practices, medical institutions, hospitals, medical and pharmaceutical industries (such as medical/pharmaceutical manufacturers/suppliers, publishers, research facilities, advertising firms, and educational organizations), law firms, court systems, and governmental agencies.

**Recommended Skills for this Virtual Pathway:** Completed medical or legal terminology course, strong computer and Internet skills, skilled in all MS office applications, highly organized and efficient, and interpersonal communication skills.
Website Assistance
A website assistant would maintain the entire site on behalf of their clients such as updating content, graphics, and video and ensuring all links are active. This might also involve posting new content (i.e. Newsletters). Many clients use a Content Management System which makes it easy to update, add or change content. In addition, clients may want their Virtual Assistant to track website stats (number of visitors) to evaluate the levels of traffic (users) visiting their website. A website assistant will also respond to customer inquiries via the website as well as liaise with the programmers and webmaster to troubleshoot technical issues that will arise on the site.

Recommended Skills for this Virtual Pathway: Strong technical aptitude, some basic HTML knowledge (just beginner), excellent attention to detail, data-entry experience, comfortable learning new types of software and web-based applications

Virtual Accounting / Bookkeeping Assistance
A bookkeeping virtual assistant manages all aspects of maintaining important financial records for their client’s business, including accounts payable, accounts receivable, payroll, payroll taxes, other tax as required by state and/or provincial regulations. These VAs also prepare financial statements, balance sheets, and ongoing financial reporting as required. In addition, this VA may invoice and process payments for their client’s contractors and such.

Recommended Skills for this Virtual Pathway: Comfortable working knowledge of either QuickBooks (most popular) or Simply Accounting, Excel spreadsheet guru, basic accounting / bookkeeping skills, excellent computer and Internet skills. (As an aside, many small businesses are starting to use web-based billing programs like Freshbooks.com, so it would be good to review the ones listed in the resource guide and get familiarized with them if this is a VA pathway that grabs your interest.)

Publicity Assistance
A publicity assistant can help with all aspects of developing and implementing a public relations campaign for a client’s product or services. Publicity VAs write and distribute press releases, create electronic press kits, send out traditional press kits, schedule press meetings, gather post press coverage information such as news stories, articles, and video clips to feature on the client’s website and blog. Also, they assist with the development of seasonal publicity campaigns. A Publicity VA ultimately assists with everything required to maintain ongoing media relations.

Recommended Skills for this Virtual Pathway: Strong writing and editing skills, people person, excellent Internet Research skills, experienced in setting up and coordinating public relations events.
Author Assistance
A Virtual Author’s Assistant provides regular administrative support as well as tasks related to marketing, sales, and tracking of a new book release. This can include pre-publishing assistance with proofreading and editing, coordination of graphic design, printing, website preparation, press release submission, marketing plan coordination and assistance.

Also, once the book is released, other tasks might include event scheduling, setting up press interviews, book distribution and sales coordination, as well as calendar management.

Recommended Skills for this Virtual Pathway: Excellent writing and proofreading

Real Estate Assistance
A virtual assistant who supports real estate agents, land developers and brokers can provide a wide array of specialized services to these very active and dynamic professionals. Some specific tasks performed by a Real Estate Virtual Assistant include all aspects of listing a property for sale both online and offline, sales transaction coordination, market research and competitive analysis reporting.

In addition, Real Estate agents often will delegate their online marketing activities to a Virtual Assistant from web and blog design to newsletter set-up and management as well as client support.

Recommended Skills for this Virtual Pathway: Knowledge of real estate terminology, strong computer and internet skills, excellent market research abilities, people person, some online marketing experience. (It would be ideal to access the Real Estate Course manual to become more familiarized with the terminology and principles.)

Travel Coordination Assistance
A Travel Coordinator virtual assistant will arrange all the fine details of personal and business travel planning. This includes coordinating air travel, accommodations, vehicle rental and/or other inter-city transportation. The Travel Coordinator will work with brokers to secure the best deals for their clients.

Recommended Skills for this Virtual Pathway: Some Travel Agent training (all possible courses listed in resource guide at end of the eBook), experienced traveller, people person, strong attention to detail, and of course solid computer and Internet skills.
Internet Marketing Virtual Assistance
The Internet Marketing industry offers some of the best and most in-demand work opportunities for Virtual Assistants today. An Internet Marketing VA is typically involved in many facets of marketing the client’s business online. This can involve the maintenance and set-up of many different systems and processes, including online project management, blogs, newsletters, shopping carts, affiliate marketing programs, video, article, and press release distribution, podcasting assistance, teleseminar, webinar and other online communication coordination and keyword research for Search Engine marketing.

While many of these tasks might appear technical, they are actually very straightforward and we provide clear demonstrations of many of these important tasks in our flagship course, The Internet Marketing VA Training Certification. This course will provide you with the necessary skills to work as an Internet Marketing Virtual Assistant as well as equip you with the Internet Marketing know-how to effectively promote your own Virtual Assistance business. If you have an interest in marketing and new technology, this hot virtual career is for you!

Recommended skills for this Virtual Pathway: Take the Internet Marketing VA Training program at VAClassroom, good aptitude in using new Internet technology, Some marketing experience might be beneficial as well.

Social Media Virtual Assistance
The explosion and ever-increasing popularity of Social Media is creating one of the hottest and in-demand skills for 2010! Online business owners as well as brick and mortar businesses are finding it necessary to not only engage in social media, but get support to manage it. Every day, the social media landscape changes; whether it's a new tool to manage your Twitter accounts, a new social network, or policy changes, it is essential to stay informed. A Social Media Virtual Assistant can provide assistance in many areas such as researching new social networks, providing a monthly recap report on all social media activities, setting up and updating profiles on Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, etc., creating and maintaining Facebook Fan Pages, updating the social networks when new content is added, researching and analyzing trends of competitors’ social media endeavors, and so much more.

Recommended skills for this Virtual Pathway: The fastest way to get on board and up to date with the latest social media trends is to take our Social Media Marketing Specialist Course, 2010 Edition. Even if you decide that you do not want to be a Social Media VA, it is a great way to learn how to market your services and find your ideal clients by embracing the trend and participating.

Blogging Assistance
While this area would likely fall under the umbrella of the Internet Marketing Virtual Assistant, it does deserve its own category given the growth of opportunities for Virtual Assistants in the wonderful world of blogging.
A virtual assistant who specializes in blogging services would be able to assist the client with all aspects of blog management, including blog set-up, maintenance, writing, and publicity. This VA would assist the client to develop a blog writing plan, edit, write, and post articles as well as submit new content to popular social media and social news sites such as Digg.com and Technorati.com. They might also enhance blog articles with graphics, audio, and video as required. In addition, this VA could create a targeted blog publicity plan that includes commenting on other relevant blogs as well as moderating blog comments.

**Recommended skills for this Virtual Pathway:** Strong writing, editing and Internet research abilities. The Internet Marketing VA Training Course at VAClassroom reviews and demos all the main tasks and responsibilities that you would perform as a Blogging Virtual Assistant. Our Blog Marketing Tips, Tools and Tactics Mini-Course will provide you with additional information that can help increase traffic and productivity to a blog.

**Online Event Coordination Services**

An online events coordinator can manage all pertinent details of online events such as teleseminars, webinars, workshops, coaching sessions, virtual book tours, and more. Some specific tasks might include arranging speakers, keeping participants notified of important information, publicizing the events through press releases, social media and email marketing strategies, preparing speakers technically and assisting speakers with any requests. During the event, this Virtual Assistant would be there to troubleshoot any issues and designate technical staff to address any problems that arise. Online Events are increasing at such a rapid rate that there is a fast-growing demand for virtual assistants that can coordinate these kinds of virtual events. Also, a virtual event coordinator will certainly coordinate offline events as well (wedding, conferences, speaking engagements, etc...)

**Recommended skills for this virtual pathway:** Some event coordination experience would be useful (or a natural born event planner©), great attention to detail, excellent multi-tasker, super computer and Internet research skills, and a people person. Additionally, our Virtual Event Specialist Certification course was specifically designed to tap into this increasingly popular niche.

**Copywriting / Editing Assistance**

The copywriting and editing virtual assistant prepares a wide variety of documents for both print and online publication. Copywriting and editing projects can include sales copy, website copy, promotional copy, eBooks, special reports, manuscripts, articles, press releases, blog articles, newsletters and more. There is a never-ending demand for Virtual Assistants with a flair for writing, editing and proofreading documents.

**Recommended skills for this Virtual Pathway:** Strong writing and editing abilities (English major) would be the most dominant skill here in addition to strong computer and research abilities.
Business Coaches / Speakers Assistance
Business coaches that provide offline and online training courses frequently hire Virtual Assistants to manage a diverse range of tasks including preparing press kits and speaker presentations, editing and managing newsletters and eBooks as well as teleconference and webinar assistance, press release submission, shopping cart support and transcription services.

Recommended skills for this Virtual Pathway: People person, strong writing, editing and computer skills, natural event coordinator.

Project Management
While this speciality falls under the Internet Marketing assistance, the growing popularity of virtual assistance has created a new category. Many successful VAs have expanded their businesses by subcontracting other VAs and creating a multi-VA team. By subcontracting other VAs themselves, the lead virtual assistant can now take on more clients and earn more money. In turn, the task management function extends to managing workloads within the team. Assigning tasks, ensuring deadlines are met, and maintaining contact with the client is a specialty all on its own.

Recommended skills for this Virtual Pathway:
Previous project management skills, knowledge of online project management tools such as Basecamp, people person, strong organizational skills and general Internet marketing activities.

So, there you have it..... Fifteen Hot Virtual Assistant Career Pathways to consider! We have included some interviews with Virtual Assistants working in these various specialities. Please refer to your bonuses received with the Virtual Pathways eBook.

Another way to learn more about these various career paths is to connect with other VAs in the VANetworking Forum -- an invaluable resource.
Chapter Four: Preparing For Your Virtual Grand Opening

You have sold your business suits on eBay, said goodbye to your dry cleaner, and traded in your fancy footwear for sensible shoes. Now it is time to get started on establishing your new virtual assistance business. Treat this chapter as a checklist for the various stages of business preparation. We have also included a business start-up checklist at the end of the book that will help you complete the important tasks in the proper sequence.

Your Virtual Best: Deciding on Your Services

In chapter three we discussed some of the current services offered by Virtual Assistants but those jobs represent only the tip of the iceberg. The virtual assistance industry is new and wide open, giving you the chance to join the virtual workforce in whatever capacity you choose. There are three criteria for a profitable venture, namely:

- Is this a service I can provide with efficiency and skill? (Will I meet client expectations?)
- Is this a service that is in demand? (Will I generate an income through this service?)
- Is this a service that I can provide remotely?
- Would I enjoy doing this service?

It is important to strike the right balance between your work interests and your skills; otherwise, you could end up performing a service that you are really good at but cannot stand that type of work! So, now is the perfect time to assess your skills and interests, as well as the demand for particular services.

If you have a top-notch skill that can provide clients with a remotely-delivered service that they need, then you have the beginnings of a successful Virtual Assistant business. The key is to tap into the right niche at the right time in order to quickly build a thriving VA business. I currently work with two Virtual Assistants who have a very active client base and both have only been in the business for less than a year. In the bonus Virtual Assistants Interviews provided with this book, you will meet a couple of those VAs and hear how they have been able to find great success in a short period of time.

Is Your Work Meaningful?

Meaningful work is whatever work provides you with the most positive emotional effects, such as pleasure, satisfaction, or interest, and it is an individual-specific attribute. You may believe that no one can enjoy a job that involves rigid mathematical principles and little creative input but there are many people who thrive on exactly that kind of work. Exploit these diverse likes and dislikes by performing virtual assistance work that is meaningful to you. You will be much happier and your clients will reap the benefits of working with someone who genuinely enjoys providing them with a service. This is so important!
How is the Competition?
Besides giving you satisfaction, specializing in certain services or businesses qualifies you to pursue clients in your niche and makes you more desirable and marketable to those potential customers.

By offering specialized services, you will further set yourself apart from the competition and be able to demand a higher wage rate. For example, Michelle Schoen runs a business called VADemoGirl and she specializes in Internet Marketing services and creating web-based demos for clients. As a result of this specialization and the demand for these services, her hourly rate is closer to the $50 mark.

Before settling on a selection of services to offer, it is important to conduct some online research with as many keywords as you can connect to the work you want to perform. I would recommend doing a specific Google Search that includes the term “Virtual Assistant” and your specific skills. An example search might be: “Bookkeeping and Virtual Assistant”.

Are there many virtual assistance businesses offering the type of services you want to perform? Are there fewer VAs advertising their businesses for different services? If the competition is tough for your services, you may want to niche yourself further by specializing in just one aspect of those tasks or offer your services for different work that is underrepresented by VA businesses. I would recommend visiting Virtual Assistant directories and just perusing the different VA websites to get a sense of the types of services they are offering.

Check out this popular Virtual Assistant Directory: http://www.mediamage.com/va/

Virtual Value: Establishing Your Rates
Oddly enough, one of the biggest obstacles to a VA’s success is the tendency to keep thinking like a salaried employee long after leaving a traditional job for a virtual one. As the owner of your own small business, you are no longer an employee who must settle for what someone else decides you are worth. Determine a fair price to charge and stick by it. When quoting prices to prospective clients, remember that you are not asking for a raise but asking for fair compensation for your time and talent.

No matter what you charge, there will always be clients who think it is too high. When dealing with awkward discussions of money, keep in mind (and remind your clients) that by hiring VAs, business owners are saving a considerable amount of money that would normally go to unemployment insurance, medical coverage, workers compensation, job training, sick pay, and other costly factors associated with conventional employment.

As a result of these expenses, the salaries paid to employees represent only a small part of the overall cost of hiring someone in the traditional workplace. Since you are not receiving these costly benefits from your clients, you have a right to expect more than nine-to-fivers, especially if your services are specialized. Check out this cost comparison over a 12-month period for a Virtual Assistant versus an In-house Employee:
Now, if you set up a virtual data-entry business, then you cannot expect the wage rate will be super high given the general nature of this service. However, if you are offering a specialized service in setting up and coordinating online events (webinars or teleseminars), then you will be able to ask for a higher rate. Let’s discuss some of the methods for establishing rates that clients are willing to pay and you are happy to accept.

**Local or Global?**
As the cost of living is so much higher in urban areas, people in New York City pay more for their administrative workers than someone in a small town in Iowa. Whether this impacts a business with a global pool of clients depends on how and where you intend to advertise your services. Although your business operates via the Internet using virtual communication devices, you can still provide services to clients who live in your local area.

If you plan to target these clients with local marketing tactics such as newspaper ads, bulletin boards, and word of mouth, your rates should reflect the general range that people in your area pay for comparable services. If you are planning on focusing your marketing strategy on web-based venues, you should keep your rates in line with what other virtual assistance businesses charge for the same services—at least until you establish yourself and secure a pool of regular clients.

**What Is the Competition Charging?**
In a February survey of 47 people who promote themselves as virtual assistants, we did some professional snooping for you and collected the following statistics on rates:

*How do you charge for your services?*

- **Hourly**: 76.6%
- **Retainer**: 44.7%
- **Project**: 34.0%
- **Other**: 14.9%
What is your hourly rate in U.S. Dollars?

As you can see from these results, the greatest percentage of survey respondents (46.8%) charge their clients from $31 to $40 an hour, with the next largest percentage (45.1%) charging $61 to $90 per hour for their services. This gives you a ballpark figure for virtual assistance, but factors such as skill, education, experience, location, and specialization influence how much someone will make.

You can do a little snooping of your own by visiting the websites of other virtual assistance businesses to see what your competition is charging for your services. In reviewing your fellow VA’s websites, make sure to access all the available information on experience, qualifications, and training. This will help you determine how these factors influence the rates.

So, if you are new to the Virtual Assistance realm, I would say a fair starting wage would be anywhere from $20-$40 per hour, depending of course on your transferable skills and specializations.

Don’t Sell Yourself Short

You may want to charge lower rates until you secure a client base and get your business up and running at full speed but be sure you do not shortchange yourself!
Do not forget to factor in the time you spend communicating with clients via e-mail, telephone, instant messaging, and so on. I would recommend using a web-based time tracking tool like http://www.myhours.com to ensure that you are properly tracking your time for your various clients and projects. It is important to establish a minimum charge policy with your clients right from the beginning, to avoid any issues or misunderstandings later on. Some Virtual Assistants I know have set a 5 or 10-minute minimum, so if a client contacts them via messenger or email, then they would charge at least the minimum. Now, there might be times when you decide to answer a question or two without charging – use your discretion. But it is important that you are being fairly compensated for your work, regardless of the time.

If you plan on accepting credit cards, you must also incorporate into your rates the associated costs of using this form of payment. Credit card companies impose an interchange fee on merchants, and your bank may also charge you several fees for each transaction. You should shop around until you find a bank that offers the best service with the fewest added costs and take extra charges into account when determining your rates.

If you discover that you need to increase your rates, do it in a manner that will not alienate your clients. It is not a good business practice to change your rates too frequently, especially with established clients. It makes you seem unprofessional and arbitrary. Consider charging new clients the increased fees while keeping the old clients at the old fees for a specific length of time. It is customary for businesses to upgrade their fees every year, so be careful about doing so more than once or twice a year. Also, never spring new rates on clients for work that is underway. It is important to always give them a 30-day notice via written communication.

**Consider Volunteering Your Services**

As a new Virtual Assistant, one way to build your credibility and reputation is to offer to volunteer a few hours of your time to perform a service for a prospective client. Now, I am certainly not suggesting you give away endless hours of time for free but rather just a couple hours of time for a new client to “test the waters” and realize the quality services you can provide. This is an opportunity for you to “show your stuff”. Again, this might be an option when you are just getting started as a means to kick-start your client work. While it is possible the client may not hire you on after the volunteer time, at the very least, you might be able to get his/her feedback and even a testimony on your services. In starting your virtual assistant business, we want to exhaust all opportunities to get your name out there, and volunteering might just be one avenue to consider here.

**Time Tracking and Invoicing**

One of the necessary evils of small business ownership is the time you spend invoicing clients and keeping track of the billable hours you charge each one. Even if you have only a few clients, you should take advantage of one of the many software programs designed to streamline these tasks.
While I have provided a variety of solutions to consider in the resource guide at the end of the book, here are my two personal favorites that will significantly streamline the financial management component for your VA business:

**Time Tracking:** [http://www.myhours.com](http://www.myhours.com) (free solution)

**Billing / Invoicing:** [http://www.freshbooks.com](http://www.freshbooks.com) (Free trial up to 3 clients and includes the time-tracking component as well)

Of course, there are many other great solutions to consider as well. These products range in price from free to expensive, depending on their capabilities. When you are just starting out with a limited budget you will probably want to use one of the freebies until your finances improve. Below is a summary of some of the important features to look for when trying out various programs.

If you find that the lack of a particular function is causing you to spend considerable time doing something that another program could do for you, you may want to upgrade from a free no-frills program to a cheap few-frills one. Some of these programs (such as [Simplifythis.com](http://www.simplifythis.com)) cost about ten bucks a month, so you have to calculate the time you save with the enhancement and decide if it is worth it to you.

**Free Trial Programs:** Most completely free programs have their limitations but many programs are available on a free trial basis. Take advantage of these offers, as they give you a great way to try out different applications and features to discover what you like and need.

**Invoicing:** At the very least, the program should allow you to generate and send out invoices to your clients. These automated invoices may look more professional than ones you create yourself but unless you pay more for a program you probably will not be able to send out customized invoices. You can get a free invoicing-only program from [Blinksale](http://www.blinksale.com) and can use one on a trial basis from [SimplifyThis](http://www.simplifythis.com).

**Automatic Billing and Late Notices:** Some programs will automatically send out bills according to the schedule you choose and follow up with late notices for those clients who have not paid within a predetermined amount of time. This is a handy feature!

**Number of Clients/Projects:** Some free programs (such as Freshbooks) are only free if you are working for one to two clients or a limited number of projects, making them an excellent option during the early days of your business start-up. When your client base grows, you must upgrade or switch programs. With Freshbooks, the upgrade to 25 clients is only $14 per month, so a cost-effective solution.

**Time Tracking:** Unless you have a natural aptitude for remembering to watch the clock or set a timer, a time tracking device will make your life much easier. Some programs (such as Freshbooks) keep track of the time you spend on different tasks and use that data to generate invoices for your clients. Seeing how long specific tasks take you to complete gives you a better idea of what is involved in certain projects and helps you
quote rates that are more realistic (and less likely to shortchange you for your efforts). Again, MyHours.com is likely the best free solution for tracking your time.

Many clients require an itemized invoice that shows how much time you spent on each task rather than an invoice with one lump-sum balance under a general heading for a billing period. Time tracking software will make this process much easier, as you can separate tasks by different project names and therefore generate itemized bills as needed.

**Mind Your Money: Accepting Payments**

Long gone are the days when you performed a service, held out your hand, and received some nice green bills for your trouble. Electronic fund transfers, credit card transactions, and popular payment solutions like PayPal make our busy lives easier but they also make the busy lives of thieves and con artists just as easy.

Keep these ill-intentioned people in mind when you are conducting your business. Thanks to computerized financial systems, identity theft is now a highly profitable way of life for anyone who can gain access to sensitive personal and financial information. The same high-tech printers that produce first-class images for legitimate purposes also create counterfeit checks, money orders, and other documents that are very convincing. Protect yourself and your business from fraudulent activity by acquainting yourself with the following methods of payment, as well as their pros and cons.

**PayPal:** PayPal is currently the most widely used payment option by Virtual Assistants due to its simplicity and speed in receiving payment. This third-party merchant offers Personal, Premier, and Business accounts, but you cannot accept credit card payments through a free Personal account. For that you must register for Premier or Business status, which involves fees. In the United States in U.S. Dollars, these charges range from 1.9% + $0.30 to 2.9% + $0.30 for every transaction (rates approximate). It is a very convenient method of payment, as PayPal does all the work and you only need to perform a few keystrokes and clicks to access your funds. PayPal is a safe and secure payment option that I would highly recommend. The only downside is the fees attached to the payment.

**Credit Cards through Merchant or Business Account:** If you plan on accepting credit cards, you can open a merchant’s account or business account at a bank to receive the transferred funds. Depending on the bank’s policy and your accountholder status, you may have to open the account with a minimum deposit or pay a fee. Before you do this, learn whether you will receive free checking and transaction privileges. Ask about any possible costs that the bank adds on, such as credit card transaction fees.

Even if you do not plan on accepting credit cards, a merchant or business account is a good idea because it keeps your business affairs separate from your personal ones. This is important when tax time rolls around, as it also makes recordkeeping and bill paying a lot easier. A merchant or business account also lends your enterprise a professional quality. Although this attitude may be unreasonable, some clients perceive businesses without business accounts as flight-by-night, disreputable concerns. Having
a business or merchant account tells people that you are a serious entrepreneur with roots in the community and every intention of remaining so.
Other Third-Party Merchants: A third-party merchant is a clearinghouse for transactions that offers security and anonymity. Although both you and your client share financial and personal information with the third-party merchant, neither one of you has access to the other’s data (other than an account name or address for transfer purposes). The third-party merchant is therefore an intermediary between the two ends of the transaction, serving to protect the privacy and safety of each party.

Another benefit of this form of payment process is that most third-party merchants let you use either a bank account or a credit/debit card to send and receive money. The client sends money to your third-party merchant, who then transfers the money upon your instructions to whatever account you have set up to receive funds.

All this convenience comes at a price though. Although the registration and set-up are usually free, the third-party merchant charges you for processing transactions, usually on a per-transaction basis, as well as a percentage basis. There are generally different levels of membership, with the most costly ones offering the most advantages. There are numerous third-party merchants (besides PayPal), including ProPay, Clickbank, CCBill, and CCNow.

Certified Check: A certified check reflects the same security as a cashier’s check but it represents funds from your client’s account rather than from the issuing bank. Your client’s bank puts a freeze on the applicable amount and certifies (guarantees) that there is sufficient money to cover the check and that no one but the check’s recipient can access those funds. The client must make a trip to the bank and may have to pay a small service fee. Again, this is a secure form of payment as long as the certified check is legitimate. Take the same precautions recommended for the cashier’s check. Verify that the bank exists and that the information on the check is accurate.

Personal Check: A personal check offers virtually no security because there is no guarantee that the person who wrote the check will honor your right to access the funds. Although the money to cover the check may be in the specified account when the client signs the check, it can disappear in a moment, leaving you with nothing but a rubber check that bounces right back out of your account with a loud and costly thud. Unless you can personally vouch for the check’s owner, it is a risky proposition, which explains why most merchants will not render services or provide goods until a check has cleared and the money is where it should be.

Cover Your Bases: Create a Business Policy Sheet or Terms and Conditions
Word of mouth may be an effective means of acquiring clients, but you need more than just lip service if you want to protect yourself legally while conducting business. Especially when working for someone you have never met, it is important to obtain a client’s signature on some sort of written agreement. Whether you call this document a contract, policy sheet, or something else, it helps your clients to understand exactly what they are agreeing to when they hire you as a VA. It also tells them what you are agreeing to do for them.
Although for you the most important aspect of this agreement may be your fee, there are other considerations that you need to address before you and your client become working partners (remember that you are not an employee but an equal). Here are some tips about what to include in your business policy sheet:

**Name, Business, Address, and Contact Information:** Include your full contact particulars, as well as your client’s, including names, business addresses, phone numbers, fax numbers, email addresses, pagers, and any other available information. If problems arise and you need to contact your client to resolve them, you will be glad to have documented as much information as possible. When entering into contracts with strangers, it is a good idea to verify the contact information via telephone directories or the Internet.

**Work Product:** This section needs to spell out exactly what you will do for your client, and it is better to err on the side of caution by itemizing each task than to use an ambiguous blanket of terms such as “administrative work.” If you are working on a per-project basis, state what that project involves. With long-term clients who know and trust you, you may often skip some of the formalities but with new clients you must be explicit about what you will do (and, by omission, what you will not do). If you are offering a wide range of services, you can list them all and then check and initial items to identify the ones you will perform or you can use different forms for different service categories.

**Lead Time for Work:** It is a good idea to establish a policy for project lead times.

- **Regular work:** Document that clients must schedule regular work a certain amount of time in advance (for instance, “Please schedule regular appointments at least 48 hours in advance so that I can better accommodate your needs.”)
- **Same-day or rush jobs:** The word “regular” implies that you will make exceptions for emergency needs or extraordinary circumstances but you can also qualify the policy by adding that you will accommodate emergency needs whenever possible. The only problem with such a qualifying sentence is that it may encourage clients with a tendency to procrastinate to designate many of their projects as emergency jobs.
- **Same-day or rush jobs fee:** You can protect yourself by stating that rush jobs may incur an additional fee.
- **Major work:** Obviously, even if the client schedules work two days in advance, you cannot meet that deadline if the project is a big one and you have work from other clients booked in between. Your appointment policy should take this into account by expanding the lead time for major work (for example, “Please schedule all major work ten days in advance.”)

**Rates:** Include unit of currency, rate, and unit of measurement (hourly, per project, retainer, and so on). For example, state “U.S. Dollars 35 per hour” or “English Pounds Sterling 50 per project.” If you have a minimum number of units, include that as well: “U.S. Dollars 35 per hour with a minimum of 3 hours.”
**Payment:** Include the following information in this section:

- **Payment schedule:** State when you will invoice the client (once a week, once a month, bimonthly, at project’s completion, and so on).
- **Deposit or Retainer:** If you require a deposit, indicate the amount and state that you will deduct it from the balance owed on the first invoice or retain it if you are not paid for completed work (or you may hold it as security).
- **Payment terms:** State the payment period (one week after submission of an invoice, 30 days after submission of an invoice, and so forth).
- **Late payment terms:** State what actions you will take if the payment is late (grace periods, second notices, late fees, etc.)
- **Payment method:** State what payment methods you accept and any restrictions involved (for instance, waiting until a check clears before submitting work or verifying credit card status before submitting work).
- **Payment disputes:** Indicate what actions you will take if the client disputes an invoiced amount or demands a refund of money already paid. You can mention that payment for all services is non-refundable.
- **Extraordinary circumstances:** Outline how you will compensate the client if you are unable to fulfill your part of the contract due to illness, accident, or other unforeseeable events.

**Resolution of Disputes:** Protect yourself in the event that a client disputes the charges on an invoice, challenges the quality of your work, demands a refund of remitted payments, or otherwise questions your work product or your fees. Possible responses from you include the submission of documents to support your invoiced charges, offers to rectify any problems with your work, application for resolution through a third-party intermediary, and the institution of legal means to secure payment. Such issues may never arise but you cannot anticipate what someone else thinks and does.

**Privacy Policy:** Electronic processing and automated banking systems make every transaction vulnerable to identity theft and fraud, so reassure your client that you will treat all personal/financial information with strict confidence, using it only for payment and work-related purposes and never sharing it with anyone else.

**Signature:** Even when you are emailing your business contract/policy sheet, ask your clients to date, sign and return the document to you via mail, fax, or email (use digital signatures for emailed documents).

**Date:** Include the date that you entered your hand or digital signature, as well as a date field for your client.

It might be good to invest a few dollars to run your agreement by a lawyer before implementing it.
Chapter Five: Virtual Impact - Your Business Website

First impressions count, and nowhere is this fact more apparent than in the world of virtual advertising. Although the Internet has given you tremendous choice in targeting and marketing your services, it has given potential clients the same choice in selecting a virtual assistant.

If you want people to choose your services over those of countless other VAs, you need to make a positive and lasting virtual impact on everyone who visits your business in cyberspace. Nothing in your advertising and marketing campaign should appear by accident or default. Make every word and image work hard for you by thinking carefully about what idea you want to convey and then doing everything possible to get that message across quickly, effectively, and memorably.

Here are a few key steps for building your online presence:

**The Name Game: Choosing a Business/Domain Name**

A business name (the name used to identify your business) and a domain name (the name used to find your website or blog site location online) may be similar or identical but they require different registration processes. You can only operate under a business name that has not already been registered within the applicable governing area (usually the province or state in which you reside but rules vary). If no one within that area owns that name, it is yours, and you must obtain a tax identification number for tax purposes. If you are in Canada, you will need to file for a GST number for your business.

Now, since domain names have global applicability, there is one centralized, publicly accessible database containing all domain names registered through the Domain Name System or DNS. This Shared Registration System (SRS) database ensures that once you register a domain name, no one else can use it unless you fail to renew it or sell the rights to someone else.

When you register a domain name, you are assigning three elements:

- **Registrant** (owner being you)
- **Contacts** (agents or staff who work on behalf of your company): These include administrative contacts, billing contacts, and technical contacts, with most owners serving as the administrative and billing contacts, as well as most registrars (whoever you purchased the domain from) or web hosts acting as technical contacts. When you are just starting out, naturally you will be the main contact across all these areas.
- **Location**: The actual name people will use to find your business online (for example, [www.topnotchvas.com](http://www.topnotchvas.com)). A domain name can consist of:
Numbers, letters, or hyphens with no special characters (names cannot contain spaces and cannot begin or end with a hyphen)

Total character length (including suffix) of no more than 26 characters (for a few browsers and programs) or 67 characters (for most browsers and programs); to be safe, use a maximum of 26 characters.

A top level domain (TLD) or suffix, which can be a global code (.com, .net, .edu, .gov, .org, or .mil) or a country code (such as .uk for the United Kingdom or .ca for Canada); of the most common, .com applies to personal and commercial sites, .net refers to Internet infrastructure sites, and .org signifies non-profit organizations.

I would recommend attempting to first secure a “.com” suffix. If the domain name you desire is not available, you might consider “.net” or even your country suffix (.ca)

When choosing your domain name, keep these points in mind:

- If you already have a business name but no domain name, it is a good idea to protect the business name by registering it as a domain name even if you do not intend on using it that way. Otherwise, someone else may register a domain name that is similar or identical to your business name and confuse, divert, or discourage potential clients.

- Register your name as soon as you choose it to avoid losing the rights to someone else with the same idea. Here are a few cost-effective sites for searching and registering your domain name (Domains under $10 per year):
  - Go Daddy (http://www.godaddy.com)
  - 1and1 (http://www.1and1.com)
  - NetFirms (http://www.netfirms.com)
  - Register.com (http://www.register.com)

- Keep the name as short as possible while still conveying what you need to convey. Consider how your potential clients will search for your services and devise a short, catchy name that gives necessary service identification.

- Pick a name that anyone can understand by ear without having to read or write it (avoid confusing puns, intentional misspellings, or alphanumeric combinations). Say the word aloud to several people. If they need you to write it or spell it before they can understand it and reproduce it on paper, choose another name.

- If there are specific keywords associated with your services, incorporating them into your name may lead clients to you (i.e. JCR Virtual Assistants).

- You can register as many available names as you want and you can “park” names (register them without linking them to an active site) indefinitely, as long as you keep up your yearly renewal fees.

- If someone else has claimed your dream name, you can sometimes negotiate with the current owner to buy the rights. Many sites like Godaddy.com,
Register.com and other domain providers offer brokering services to help you attempt to buy your domain of choice.

- Beware of domain names that are very similar to ones already in use, as users can easily mistype names and go to your competition’s site instead of yours. One way to prevent these detours is to register all common misspellings of your domain name. You might also register other suffixes (VAClassroom.com, VAClassroom.net).

- Use caution when buying a used but recently lapsed/resold name. Without knowing the history of the previous owner’s business, you may be buying a name that arouses negative associations in visitors’ minds.

- If your name is not available under your preferred suffix (for example, .com), try the same name with another suffix (for instance, .net). Think of it in terms of a telephone directory: More than one subscriber can have the same number because their area codes are different.

- Type your name very carefully, as you cannot change a name once you have registered it. If there is a typo, you must register again with the correct spelling and either sell the wrong name or simply let it lapse through non-renewal.

Get the Most from Your Host: Choosing a Hosting Package
Web hosting is a service that provides you with a web server, a system that makes your site accessible via the Internet. (Basically, a host rents you a physical location in cyberspace.) The web host charges you for use of its online systems to store information, videos, graphics, and anything else on your site that needs to be available on the World Wide Web. As with most computer-driven capabilities, size matters. The differences among various web hosting packages (and their prices) come down to the amount of data transfer (bandwidth) used to access the server and the amount of assigned disk space on the server.

I would recommend one of the following low-cost hosts when starting your Virtual Assistant business. As you grow, you might decide to get a bigger hosting package but start with the basics for now.

Recommended Low-Cost Hosting Companies ($60-$80/year)

HostGator: http://www.hostgator.com
1&1.com: http://www.1and1.com
Register.com: http://www.register.com/hosting
Aplus.net: http://hosting.aplus.net/
There are many different low-cost hosting solutions but any of these should work well for you!

Making Your Visitors Feel Welcome: Website or Blog site?
A virtual presence is important in today’s cyberspace economy and it is absolutely essential for any virtual assistance business. It is hard to convince clients of your virtual fluency when you do not even have an online business location.

Now, a big question for Virtual Assistants today is whether they should set up a static website or use a blog site. Let me explain the distinction. A blog site is built on blogging platforms like WordPress and enables you to easily upload video, podcasts, audio and copy to your site. Here are some key benefits to creating a blog site for your new VA business:

- **Cost-Effective** – For under $500, you can have a blog designer create a compelling blog site with all the “bells and whistles” you would need to manage your own blog site independently.
- **Encourages Participation** – A blog site makes it easy to share relevant and current information that might interest your prospective clients and allows them to comment on your site and content.
- **Search Engine Exposure** – With any new Virtual Assistant business the most challenging initial task is getting noticed by prospective clients. Well, search engines LOVE blogs and will quickly index those blogs that provide relevant and fresh posts and content. It is a proven fact that blogs will usually get seen faster in the Search Engines than regular websites.
- **VERY User-friendly** – Some Virtual Assistants work with a Webmaster and have to send them instructions anytime they want to make a change or add copy to their site. Not so with Blogs. It is very easy to add copy, videos, podcasts, and images to further enhance your blog site. To be candid, blog sites can be very fun and addictive, given how simple it is to add all sorts of cool things to your site.

Here are a couple sample Blog sites by Virtual Assistants:

http://www.ultimatebizassistant.com
http://www.bsetc.ca
http://www.vademogirl.com

In terms of making your visitors feel welcome, a website invites people to come in and get to know you and your business. A blog site invites them to come in, take off their shoes, and make themselves comfortable. Which place would you rather visit?

Our course, **Blog Marketing Tips, Tools and Tactics**, reviews step by step how to set up a self-hosted WordPress blog. The course also covers marketing techniques to help you market your blog (and your business) for maximum exposure.
Make It a Bestseller: Pages for Your Site

Regardless of whether you decide on creating a Blog site or website, the following list of typical web pages gives you an idea of what kind of information you should give to your visitors. By customizing these pages you can create a site that lets potential clients know that you are the best VA for their needs.

Home Page: This is the public face of your virtual business and the first page that many prospective clients encounter, so make sure that they stay put. Create a home page that is attractive, professional-looking, and as organized as you want your visitors to know you are. Nothing makes people click off a site faster than links that are hard to find, difficult to navigate, or obscured by annoying pop-ups. Because virtual assistance is a new field, give readers some excellent reasons (especially financial ones) for hiring you instead of a salaried employee. In the bonus guide, “Ten Sure-Fire Marketing Strategies for growing your VA Business”, we discuss the importance of including key elements that will draw your user’s attention to read more.

Presently, I have been talking with the Virtual Assistants at VAClassroom about including personalized videos on their homepage as a way of creatively engaging prospective clients on the homepage. Please refer to the “Digital Work Search Strategies” guide for more information on this. Video Marketing is THE fastest growing marketing channel on the net, so it would be worthwhile considering it for your new VA business.

“About Us” Page: Use this page to sell yourself to visitors by describing the history of your small business and emphasizing your background, experience, and skills. If you are a new virtual assistant, then focus on the transferable skills that you bring from other work you have done that makes you an ideal Virtual Assistant. This page might also be an ideal place to share your business philosophy and values.

Contact Page: If visitors cannot get in touch with you, nothing else on your site matters. Give clients a number of contact options (telephone, fax, email, Skype) so they can reach you in the manner they prefer. In the resources section I have included some low and no-cost telecommunication systems you might consider using for your business.

Press Page: You do not need a write-up about you in the New York Times—or any publication, for that matter—to take advantage of a press page. You can publicize anything you have recently accomplished, such as reaching a business anniversary milestone, adding new niche services, hiring new support staff or increasing your base of satisfied clients. “We’re proud to have served 50 percent more satisfied clients this quarter than last” sounds impressive and only you know if that simply means that you now have two clients instead of one!

It is a great marketing strategy to submit your press releases through online PR distribution sites such as http://www.pr.com and http://www.prleap.com. The biggest online PR site is http://www.prweb.com. There is a cost (ranging from $80 - $250) for submitting your Press Release with this company but you are guaranteed a lot more exposure than the other free sites. It might be a worthwhile investment for your initial business launch. Plus, PRWeb offers cost-effective Press Release editing services as
well. To learn more about the value of submitting online press releases, read one of the articles I had published at SiteProNews a couple of years ago (but still relevant):


In addition, you might consider trying out a FREE Social Media Press Release solution like http://www.pitchengine.com.

If you need help writing a press release, there are many free templates available such as http://www.ducttapemarketing.com/Instant-Press-Release.htm
FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions) Page: Your own experience and a quick Google search will tell you the most common questions that people have about your specific services. Ask and answer them here in a self-confident and reassuring way. Imagine that you are hiring a total stranger on a freelance, virtual basis and think of all the reservations you would have in that situation. Do not forget to ask why hiring a virtual assistant is better, cheaper, and easier than hiring a regular employee, and then answer that question with an emphasis on the financial benefits. I would recommend doing a search in Google for “Virtual Assistants and FAQs” and you will likely find some of the questions other VAs are using in their FAQs for your own reference.

Subscribe Page: If you host a blog site or publish a newsletter, give people a chance to receive pertinent announcements and updates by signing up on this page. Please refer to our bonus marketing strategies guide on the importance of using this subscribe option to build a list of prospective clients.

Service Page: This is the meat-and-potatoes portion of your business menu, giving prospective clients a rundown of the services you offer. You can list rates here if you would like or ask clients to contact you for a quote. Again, it might be good to research other VAs offering your services to see how they have presented it. I would always recommend crafting your service features into benefits for the prospective clients viewing your website.

For example; “Managing your blog maintenance tasks so you can focus on writing great posts.”

I identified a key benefit to the client for accessing my blog maintenance services. This approach will make your service page more memorable than if you just list off your services.

Testimonials: If you have satisfied clients, ask them to write promotional reviews of your services. Prospective clients visiting your site would like to hear what other businesses are saying about your service. Now, if you are new and do not have any testimonies currently, then you might offer a “First-Time Client Discount” or volunteer a couple hours of work in order to further entice prospective clients.

It is essential that you test-drive your site before hitting the virtual superhighway by getting initial reactions from a variety of people both within and outside your field. If you decide to join the VAClassroom Training Program after finishing this book, then we offer live coaching and a discussion forum for new business start-ups. This could be a worthwhile resource especially when you are just starting out.

To Stay or Not to Stay: The Importance of Design Styles

A recent study by US Marketing Research Firm, Marketing Sherpa, revealed that 60% of first-time visitors to your website will only stay less than 8 seconds on your site. Many visitors make a split-second decision to either stay on your site or leave! Therefore, this
only gives you a few seconds to make a good impression causing them to read further into your site.

You may feel that the content on your site is the best it can be, but if no one stays long enough to read it, you will have wasted your time, money, and effort. Your blog or website is your calling card and it is important to give off a good first impression to visitors and a compelling reason to stay on your site.

Give as much thought to orderliness and convenience as you do to appearance. A visually stunning home page will not serve you well if your beautiful medieval calligraphy is difficult to read. Virtual visitors have very short attention spans and generally click off rather than investing more time into a frustrating experience.

Let your design style match the services you offer. As an oversimplified example, VAs who offer graphic design services need to have a beautiful site that demonstrates their ability to make their clients’ sites just as beautiful. You most likely would not hire an interior designer who lived in a dump, would you?

By the same token, clients will not engage a VA to help organize their business if the site has a cluttered, disorganized feel to it. Give your virtual presence the very qualities you are promoting as your own and create a logo that associates your site with the services you offer in a positive way.

Here are a few guiding questions to keep in mind when putting together your Virtual Assistant Website:

1. **Is your design professional or amateurish?**

   In surfing many different Virtual Assistance websites, some sites came across as a bit “homegrown”. They had heavy text, spelling errors, page formatting issues, and confusing navigation. As a business owner, I am always looking for new Virtual Assistants to hire. The low quality and less professional sites raised some questions on whether I could trust this person with key projects and tasks for my business.

   If you plan to market your business effectively as the “crème de la crème” of the VA industry, then it is imperative to have a professional website appeal that speaks to your credibility as a “Superstar Virtual Assistant”!

2. **Is the layout or navigation confusing or unclear?**

   In this Web 2.0 world we live in, a level of simplicity is evident among many of the popular Web 2.0 sites such as [www.37signals.com](http://www.37signals.com) and [www.simplyhired.com](http://www.simplyhired.com). They present clear navigation and straightforward headlines in a simple, user-friendly format.

   Now, I am not suggesting that you copy these examples but take note of the simplicity and easy-to-read layout these sites provide. Make it naturally easy for users to navigate your site content and pages.
3. Are the graphics or images relevant to the site content? Is there generic “feel-good” stuff unrelated to the prospective client?

It is certainly beneficial to add images to the site that resonate with the audience you are targeting and that are relevant to your business. I am often mystified by sites that seem to plop an irrelevant image in a prime location on their homepage. These often seem to serve no real purpose other than filling up space. If you are not able to find a relevant image that really adds value to your site image, then I recommend simply doing without one.

4. Is the wording in the headline clear, compelling and directly selling the benefit of your Virtual Assistant Services?

It is important to have either a key tagline in your header or a headline below your header that clearly sells the benefit of your site and service and ultimately prompts your prospective clients to read on. I recommend headlines in a different color, like maroon, red or another sharper color, so that they stand out from the rest of your content.

In researching many Virtual Assistant websites, I came across a few fabulous headlines or taglines. Kudos to these Virtual Assistants in effectively drawing my attention. Check out these ones:

“Giving Business Owners Freedom by Managing the BS, etc...” - http://www.bsetc.ca
That's a brilliant play on words and very compelling!

“Committed to Assist you Virtually Anywhere” – http://www.ultimatebizassistant.com
This speaks to an accessible and versatile resource for my business!
A powerful headline can be the determining factor for a visitor to read on or move along to the next site.

5. Is the Website content readable and relevant?

It is important to use good font size (at least a 10-11) so that the user does not have to strain his or her eyes or exert any extra energy reading your content. By nature, Internet users are “skimmers” and “scanners”. It is ideal to include shorter paragraphs, bullet points, and to highlight or bold key phrases for further emphasis. Your headline and supporting copy should clearly answer the WIIFM (What's In It for Me) question. You want to communicate the selling benefits of your services effectively as opposed to just describing what you do. Here is an example:

Feature:
Blog Commenting and Forum Marketing
Selling Benefit:

“Represent a voice for your company in relevant blogs and forums so you can focus on your priority tasks.”

See the difference? This example shows the key distinction between descriptive web copy and marketing copy. This selling benefit clearly communicates to the client that he or she will save time and be able to do more by outsourcing this task.

6. Is the website conversion friendly?

In other words, do the layout, headline, images, and copy move a prospective client towards a specific action? This action might be opting into your newsletter or a free report on “How to have a clutter-free work life”. You might also provide other compelling enticers like a contest or special seasonal VA bonus package. It is important to employ various tactics to engage prospective customers such as using a live chat tool like “Live Person” to connect with visitors immediately while they are viewing your site.

Think over these points and the questions therein. They are worthwhile to ensure that you are providing the most compelling website experience for your visitors. Here is a quick summary of some key web design elements to consider for a winning website:

- Visible logo typically at the top left of the page.
- Compelling headline that is clear and concise. It possesses “The Hook” that draws users to look further.
- Bulleted features and selling benefits – they should answer the WIIFM question.
- Effective use of testimonies – they should be very visible on your home page.
- Easy-to-follow navigation and links.
- Relevant images – ensure the file size has been optimized so it does not affect website load times.
- Keyword-rich web content.
- Clear call to action – the special promotions, opt-in boxes for your newsletters and “Contact Us” buttons should be easy to find!
- Consider incorporating an Introduction Video of yourself on your homepage. This personalized approach is proving to be a very effective way to engage your audience to stick around your site. For example, at VAClassroom before we included a video on our homepage, visitors would spend an average of about 1 minute on our site. After we added the 2-minute video, visitors are now spending over 3 minutes on our site!
Success by Design: Finding a Good Web Designer

The designer you choose makes all the difference to your site’s appearance, functionality, and effectiveness, so keep the following things in mind to get the best one for your money.

- **General experience:** Look for a designer who has solid experience in creating websites or blog sites as a living and not one who has simply taken web design courses to set up sites as a sideline business.

- **Specific experience:** If possible, find a designer who has experience in building sites for people in your area of the virtual assistance business. Such a designer will know what features and functions your competitors are using and which ones you need. If you choose to join the VA Classroom Training Center after completing this book, you might consider posting a request for a good designer, and one of our experienced VAs will likely be able to point you in the right direction. You can also contact our support desk and we will recommend great designers we have used in the past.

- **Education:** Is the designer’s training current? Will the site reflect the latest developments in website design technology?

- **Site-user compatibility:** Your site must work for everyone, regardless of the specific operating system or web browser the visitor uses.

- **Important features:** Ideally, look for someone who can provide you with design and development, content, maintenance, graphics, hosting, virtual marketing and promotion, and database creation.

- **Designer’s site:** This is the showpiece for the designer’s work, so if you do not like what you see at the designer’s own website, look elsewhere.

- **Independent freelancer versus large design team:** Price may decide this matter for you, as large-scale design firms generally charge more for their services than independent contractors. A freelancer may be willing to spend more time working with you, and by hiring one at least you know that the same person who designed the samples you admired will be your designer. With a large firm, you get whomever the company assigns to work with you.

- **Referrals and testimonials:** Check these out thoroughly and ask for links to sites that the designer has created so you can see these as well.

**One more tip:** It is important to start your new designer off with a small project so you can properly assess their design skills and ability to meet deadlines. You might ask them to design your logo. If this goes well, then you can proceed with the full design of your website or blog. In the past, I have actually selected two designers and assigned them...
each a small project and then, based on the results, assigned the larger project to the better designer. That is a good option as well.

I would recommend posting your project on popular freelance sites such as:

http://vaclassroom.com/rfp
http://www.elance.com
http://www.guru.com
http://www.odesk.com
http://www.ifreelance.com
Chapter Six: Marketing Yourself Effectively

First of all, I should mention that the two additional bonus eBooks, “10 Sure-Fire Strategies for Marketing Your VA Business” and “Digital Work Search Strategies”, will provide many effective strategies for marketing your business and increasing your client base. With that said, I would like to provide a few other insights into effectively marketing your new VA business.

As a Virtual Assistant, the interview never really ends until you have enough steady clients to meet your personal and financial goals. Until then, every person you come across is a potential client as well as the friend, relative, or associate of other potential clients. You need to be the champion of your own cause and a professional who is not afraid to tell people what you can do for them.

Mass Appeal: Marketing Strategies

If one phrase could capture the essential principle of your business promotion, it would be “Leave no stone unturned.” Marketing yourself is a full-time job, even if you intend to work only part-time. You just never know who or what will lead to your next working relationship, so take advantage of every opportunity (both online and offline) to advertise your services and establish contacts. Below are some of the many ways you can market yourself without spending a fortune in the process.

Pinpoint Your Target and Take Aim:

Go straight to the folks who need the services you offer. For instance, if you intend to write press releases for musical performances or entertainment productions, market yourself in places where those enterprises congregate. Look for trade publications, performance venues, musical theaters, rehearsal halls, and online entertainment sites such as forums, social networks, chat rooms, websites, e-zines, classifieds, or anything else that caters to people involved in your target area. To determine where to focus your marketing efforts, imagine that you are someone in your desired field and consider all the places you would visit and the resources you would use.

If you are going to set up a business for blog maintenance services, then you will want to connect with those who own blogs to see if they would like to outsource some of their ongoing tasks. The more specific and focused you are with your marketing strategies, the better results you will see!

Think Small:

Small business owners often hire virtual assistants so they can save money on employment-related expenses and dispense with tasks that keep them from running their own businesses. Access all the Internet sites, publications, and services geared toward small business owners and do anything you can to promote your services, such as posting ads, writing blogs, or joining chats. You are now a small business owner yourself, so those resources will be helpful to you in their own right as well. With the rapid growth of social networking sites, such as Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter, they are quickly becoming ideal avenues for connecting with small business clients.
Think Big: Canvassing a large audience is worth it if you get even one steady client out of it or a promising lead to possible work. Exploit the Internet’s global applicability by placing ads in the many free online media, networking, and educational sites. Again, networking in such sites as Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter will connect you with prospective clients all over the world! In today’s economy, large businesses are realizing the need for specialized skill sets, but may not have the funds to hire someone on staff. As a VA, you can be in the unique position to help them, while still working from home.

Think Local: As a VA you can work for anyone, anywhere, even in your own neighborhood. Join community organizations, volunteer at charity events, participate in discussion boards, create blogs in local forums, or offer advice in the town website. The nearest Chamber of Commerce or Town Hall is a good source for information on what is happening in your area. Advertise in local editions of print newspapers, classifieds, magazines, and events calendars, as these publications usually charge very affordable rates.

Impress People: Blogs, Facebook Fan Pages, and other Social Network sites provide the ideal platform for connecting with prospective clients and sharing your insights on relevant topics. If you establish a strong online network of business people who know you and appreciate your insights, this could lead to all sorts of new client opportunities.

Network Like Crazy: There are many free resources devoted to helping virtual assistants with advice, information, directories, support, and a host of other things that can make your life easier. Learn from the disappointments and victories of other VAs and find answers to your questions at venues such as www.vanetworking.com.

This is just a general overview of a few marketing insights for growing your Virtual Assistant Business. Again, our bonus eBooks, “Ten Sure-Fire Strategies for Marketing your VA Business” and “Digital Work Search Strategies”, will offer more specific and practical examples on how you can effectively spread the word to the right audience for your new Virtual Assistant business.

Image Booster: Design a Killer Digital Marketing Kit
As the owner of your own virtual assistance business, what you are trying to sell is yourself. Take a lead from the advertising world and design a marketing kit that makes an impact on potential clients. Use whatever creative energy you have or can beg, borrow, or steal to produce a really impressive kit that showcases your skills, and remember that presentation is everything. You want this material to be visually appealing, even if you are offering services that have nothing to do with design or art. People should consider your kit to be professional and pleasing, just like you.

I would recommend just putting together the marketing kit in a PDF form or in a PowerPoint Presentation so that it can be easily presented offline and online. This marketing material should serve as a primer for your Virtual business and services. Your presentation should direct users to your website for more details, information, and promotional videos, etc…
Since a good majority of your prospective clients may be targeted initially online, I would exhaust all channels for presenting your business such as:

- Compelling, user-friendly website
- Online Business Profiles in social networks such as LinkedIn, Facebook, Ryze, Twitter, and others.
- (as mentioned above) Professional PDF and/or PowerPoint Presentation
- YouTube Video – include a brief video presentation that you can easily share with clients. (You might want to include a video on your site.)

Also, it is good to prepare a marketing kit for offline, local clients that may be seeking virtual assistants. I know of one VA that has networked herself very effectively in the Ottawa business associations and has landed a number of key clients through these offline venues.

I personally have never met any of the Virtual Staff I have hired as it has all been done online, but it is important to maximize both offline and online marketing channels.

Here are a few things you might include in an offline marketing package:

- **Pocket Folder**: This is the presentational packaging for your documents, so it needs to be durable and attractive. Do not even think about using one of those nasty-looking buff manila ones that shout “limited budget” to anyone who sees them. High-quality folders can be pricey, so do some shopping around at discount stationery stores or eBay to get a good price. People are generally hesitant about discarding anything that looks like the result of considerable forethought and expense, and the longer people hold on to your folder, the better it is for you. You can also check prices at the larger chain office stores like Office Depot and Staples in their print and copy centers.

- **Professional Template**: Here is where the creativity comes into play, as you need to devise a logo and slogan to use with your contact information. Although it may contain the same information as your letterhead and serve the same purpose, it should look different. This template will serve as the basic setting for all your other documents, so consider investing in professional bulk printing. You can then feed those sheets into your printer as the backdrop for all the different documents you create. In this way, you can easily change the documents themselves while printing them onto the same template.

- **Portable Billboard**: Use this sheet as a wow factor, to advertise the special qualities that make you such a good VA in your particular field (education, experience, personality, humor, honesty, sociability, diligence, creativity, imagination, and so on). Consider how you would promote yourself on a big, attention-grabbing billboard and then create a smaller version of it.

  Do not be afraid to refer to character traits or personal habits to sell yourself. Studies have shown that most interviewers decide the fate of applicants within two minutes of meeting them. The lesson here is that people often hire someone for reasons that
have nothing to do with experience and skills but everything to do with emotional responses. Exploit this tendency by exposing the human qualities that people respond to more than background and qualifications.

In your miniature billboard advertisement, promote your achievements and strengths, and stress whatever suits you for your job if you lack work experience. For instance, if you are offering services in client relationship management or public relations, emphasize your ability to get along well with others by mentioning your club presidency, your reputation for settling disputes, or your successful recruiting campaigns. Present what’s best about you in a format that is easy to read, like, and remember.

- **Samples:** Include samples of your work if your services generate a product, such as an ad copy, business proposals, or press releases.

- **Testimonials:** If you have satisfied clients willing to write good reviews of your services, include them as well. If you have no testimonials, include a sheet that highlights companies or people you have worked for or anything you have done in the past, even if you were not paid for it. Experience is experience, regardless of whether or not you made money from it.

- **Virtual Assistance Money Savers:** Include a page that offers a laundry list of financial incentives for hiring a VA instead of a conventional employee (saving on expenses such as workers compensation, medical insurance, sick pay, vacation leave, office space, computer equipment, and so on). People relate more to stories about individuals rather than reports of statistics. Do some research to find success stories from people who have saved money by using VAs, preferably local businesspeople. VA networking sites and forums are good sources for this information, as well as personal interviews with small business owners in your town. Prepare a write-up about these cases and include it in your kit.

- **Resume:** Add a resume to your kit, especially if it is an impressive one.

- **Business Cards:** They are small and easy for people to carry in their wallets, so include a few in every marketing kit.
Chapter Seven: Virtual Control - Managing Your Business

In your pursuit of self-employment, it is important to consider the logistics and day-to-day details of running a highly productive and successful Virtual Assistant business. In this chapter you will find tips to help you make your new virtual working life as pleasant and productive as possible.

Remotely Interested: Managing Your Clients’ Affairs
As a VA, you are charged with the task of running your own business AND your clients’ as well. That can be a tricky juggling act, especially if you are taking care of projects for several different companies or individuals. The following suggestions will help you keep things running smoothly, while maintaining your sanity.

Who is in Charge?
It is okay to be a control freak when you are self-employed because you are now the only one responsible for earning your income. No matter how hectic things become, remember that you are in control of your work—it is not the other way around, even though it may sometimes seem to be. Manage your affairs instead of letting them manage you.

Fix Any Structural Defects
To some, the word “structure” has extremely negative connotations. If one of your main motivations for self-employment was to escape the rigidity of a conventional job, you may resist the notion of imposing structure on your new life. If so, you must rekindle your relationship with this important business ally. As an entrepreneur, you can certainly rejoice in the fact that you now have the freedom to be flexible in constructing your own career, but there must be an underlying structure that defines your priorities, schedule, and day-to-day business operation.
Take a look at this interesting office setting.

Does this look like your home office? Probably not! Recently, my wife and I were looking at a house and the owners (a semi-retired couple) were keenly interested in what I did at VAClassroom with training Virtual Assistants to build successful virtual businesses. They wanted me to send them information to see if it might be a good fit for them. Well, let me tell you…. The above office is clean compared to what I experienced upon walking into their “home office”. Oh boy!! Now, do not get me wrong, they might work out to be fabulous Virtual Assistants but they might first benefit from a visit by the reality TV show “Clutter-Free My Life” first.

While many of you may not have a home office similar to the above example, my next question is…. “Does your mind look like this?” In other words, do you have difficulty setting clear priorities, identifying daily goals, or multi-tasking multiple client projects in a given day? Your answer might be a definite YES as well, which is great. But for others, this is an area of difficulty that hinders them from being as productive and effective as a Virtual Assistant.

Management Consultant David Allen, author of the National Bestseller “Getting Things Done”, talks about the sheer importance of “Emptying Your Mind” regularly so you can focus in on your most important task at hand! For many of us (myself included), our minds get so jam-packed with work priorities and tasks (as well as non-work-related things) that it becomes hard for us to achieve maximum productivity and focus. David Allen says that when you are working on a “high-priority” project and other tasks and thoughts starting filling your mind, “Empty Them Immediately.” In other words, make note of those other tasks on paper, a PDA, or a computer to get back to later. This enables you to quickly re-focus on the important task at hand. In our training courses at
VAClassroom.com, we go into more detail on how to set up the proper workflow system to ensure that you can “empty your mind” in the most organized fashion possible!

I would like to run through some “quick and dirty” productivity strategies that will help you to stay focused and effective in your new Virtual Assistant Business.

- **Take Your Time:** Assess how much time you must devote to each client’s needs and how often you must address those needs every day, week, or month (depending on whether you work part-time or full-time). Create a schedule for your work hours and clients, and keep it where you can always see it. Get in the habit of working for Client A during specific times and Client B during other times. We recommend some web-based project management tools to help you stay on track here.

- **Remember the Five P’s:** That is “proper planning prevents poor performance.” There is no such thing as preparing yourself too well for your job. Plan ahead for everything you do for your clients, especially if your job involves contact with the customers, associates, and vendors of your clients. Make sure you are fully up to speed before making any phone calls or sending any emails. In addition, I would recommend having a short planning session with your client before the start of each project to ensure the project expectations, details, and time frames are crystal clear.

- **Beware of Time Bandits:** When you work at home, it is easy for distractions to destroy your focus and concentration. Do whatever you can to prevent anyone or anything from robbing you of your productivity. This may mean closing doors, disconnecting phones, removing TVs, or wearing earplugs. If you can, reshuffle your activities so that your working time falls during the hours of least distraction. Just say no to Oprah, or at least record her. This is especially true for WAHMs. Multi-tasking can be detrimental to your productivity and a drain on your energy. It is essential that you establish “work time” with your children so that they learn to understand and respect that time. This also serves two purposes: 1) that your kids know that they will have your undivided attention when you are not working; and 2) it teaches them to play on their own for short periods of time without interrupting you.

- **First Things First:** Keep a running record of your projects arranged in order of importance. Create a schedule in whatever format is easiest for you (computer chart, paper file, notebook entry) and enter every project as you receive it. Consult your schedule every day when you start work and perform tasks in their proper order within their respective client-based time allotments.

- **Watch the Calendar:** Some people prefer a schedule of projects arranged by date order, especially if work follows a regular cycle. Use a computerized calendar template to list work assignments on the dates you need to begin working on them. If you accumulate paper from clients, purchase an accordion file with separate slots marked from 1 to 31. On each sheet you handle, write the month and date when it needs to be addressed and put it into its proper compartment. Check the file every day to see what needs to be done that day and what will be coming up in the near future.
Establish your Daily, Weekly and Monthly MITs (Most Important Tasks): This vitally important task should be repeated daily, weekly, and monthly to ensure that you are keeping check with the high priority tasks for your virtual business. Following my MITs regularly helps me to stay on track and not get lost in my low priority or trivial tasks.

Divide and Conquer: Create separate computer folders for each client with every project in its own file. If you accidentally delete, change, or reformat a file, it will not affect all your work but only that one file. If you keep paper files, use a different color for each client.

Ignore the Mailman: It is hard to get much work done when you keep breaking your rhythm to read, save, delete, share, or answer every new email that comes your way. Turn off your computer speakers if you do not need the audio function and generate some solid work output instead of reading your mail as it arrives, especially if you are on a client’s time clock. Set aside specific times of the day for “mail call” and tend to your emails only during those periods. Pretend that the postman delivers your email only once or twice a day, just like your snail-mail communications. This is called “Batching”, where you take certain repetitive tasks such as checking email and set aside specific blocks of time to perform those tasks – that is hugely effective, especially with email! This is also true of participating in the social networks such as Twitter and Facebook. Both can draw you in and make you want to read more, connect more and network more. But, they can also both rob your day of precious time. Before you know it, an hour or two has passed and you haven’t gotten any work done. Set aside a specific time of day when you will network on Twitter and Facebook and stick to it. You may even want to change it up every day so that you engage with different people.

Keep a “Master To-Do List”: I would recommend identifying the place or location to keep tabs on your To-Do List. I formally used “Sticky Notes” in my corporate position to keep tabs on things I needed to get done or important reminders. The sticky notes only caused me to be more distracted and disorganized! In keeping with Allen’s concept of “Emptying your mind”, I personally use a notebook that I keep with me and write down any important “to-do” tasks as they come to mind. Once they are down on paper, I stop having nagging thoughts about those tasks and can focus on what I am doing. It does not matter where you choose to keep your “To-Do” list; the important thing is that you use ONE location and consistently “empty your mind” of those new tasks.

Build in regular short recovery times during your work day: Studies by Performance Psychologists have revealed that the average individual can only achieve maximum productivity for up to about 90 minutes, before fatigue and energy loss will set in and then your quality of work may start to diminish. This finding fits me to a tee – I start getting distracted and tired after focusing on a task for more than 60-90 minutes. Therefore, I would recommend taking a 15-minute break every 60-90 minutes. Go do something non-work related such as taking a walk, grabbing a snack or coffee, or calling a friend, etc…. For those 15 minutes, do your best to completely shut off work. This will allow your body to replenish some energy so you can be charged up and ready for your next project or task. When I implement regular
recovery times in my day, I have noticed a huge difference in my productivity – night and day!

All in a Day’s Work: Staying Productive and on top of your “Virtual Game”.
Without a boss in the next room to feed you work, you may be tempted to idle away any spare time that crops up between assigned projects. Resist the urge to waste those hours and put them to good use instead.

➤ Work on acquiring new clients for your business because you would not have this downtime if you had enough clients to keep you busy. You might look at new improvements to your website, setting up profiles and joining groups in specific social networks such as Facebook and LinkedIn, distributing your business cards, delivering your marketing kits, and contacting your business leads. Make the rounds of your community businesses and establish new connections. Check the online classifieds and community boards for promising VA work opportunities.

➤ Research business issues that are important to your clients and see if you can find any interesting developments or news items that you can use to your advantage as a means of securing work. For instance, if a client’s competitor has just acquired a new product line of designer handbags, send the information to your client with the suggestion that someone (you) work on acquiring a comparable line of goods. Even if you do not get the job you mentioned, the good-faith contact may prompt your client to send some work your way.

➤ Conduct online research to see what other VAs charge for their services and note how different factors affect the prices. You may find that your fees are not as high as the market average. If so, update your website quotes, change your marketing kits, and redo your business contracts to reflect your improved prospects.

➤ Take some additional training to expand your services into profitable in-demand niches. For example, at VAClassroom, we offer a popular “Internet Marketing Virtual Assistant” training course that equips you with key marketing support skills that many businesses are seeking right now. It is important to adopt a “continual learner” mindset and be looking at ways to hone your skills and tap into hot new niches.

➤ Visit virtual assistance networking sites, community boards, chat rooms, and discussion forums. These are good sources for communicating with other VAs, learning about recent news, and finding new leads. If you want someone’s help in wording your business policy or solving a particular problem, you can exchange ideas with people who also work in the virtual assistance business. Check out the resources at the end of the book for more specifics on these networking sites.

When Time Flies: Effective Scheduling
Time has a way of sneaking up on you when you are working, and as a VA you need to be especially careful about the way you manage your schedule. It is important to divide up your time to reflect the different needs of your clients and keep track of the hours you
devote to each one. The following tips can help you maintain a schedule that will keep you busy without overwhelming you.
Give Yourself Breathing Room

When you are just beginning your new virtual assistance business, it is natural to want to take on as many clients as you can get and generate as much money as possible. This is especially true if you have given up the security of a steady paycheck from a traditional job for the uncertainty of an erratic income from a virtual business.

It takes some time to adjust to such a transition, and part of that adjustment is recognizing that you are now in business to please more than one boss from one workplace. You will now have to accommodate clients from different companies and learn the ins and outs of each of those separate businesses. It takes a while for any employee to feel comfortable at a new job, but in your virtual assistance business there is a breaking-in period every time you gain a new client.

Take this into account when you begin scheduling your work hours. In your eagerness to please clients, you may want to promise the moon, but this is a policy that will backfire when you cannot make good on your claims, and your credibility suffers. Until you determine exactly what your new business will involve, follow these suggestions:

- Add some extra leeway to the time you give yourself for each project. If you think a job will take you thirty minutes to complete, schedule in an hour.
- Decide how many hours a week you want to work but schedule in only about 75% of that time. If you plan on working 40 hours a week, take on only 30 hours of work per week.

Following these precautions can serve the following purposes:

- It covers you in case something unexpected occurs. One of the principles of Murphy’s Law is “Everything takes longer than you think it will.” Equipment fails you, clients phone you, or creativity deserts you. Be ready for anything.
- It lets you better accommodate same-day rush jobs that your clients require from time to time.
- It gives you time to communicate with your clients to make sure you meet their expectations. This might be planned phone calls or via email.
- It allows you to take on those random out-of-the-blue jobs from new clients and maximizes your chances of turning those people into regular clients.
- It gives you time for periodic breaks. You need to leave your workstation and do something else for a few minutes several times a day to stay mentally fresh and alert.
- It offers you the chance to catch up on your own administrative tasks, such as bookkeeping, invoicing, and filing, without having to eat into your non-working hours.
Need a Break? What to Do When Virtual Business Emergencies Happen

I want to tell you about one of my “Business Emergency” horror stories that very few people know. (I guess a lot more will know now😊)

A couple years ago, I was about two weeks away from the launch of a new web business and had many high priority “last-minute” tasks on the go to get ready for this BIG launch! I had taken my laptop over to a family member’s house to give them a “sneak preview” of my business before we went live to the public. After my time there, I had some boxes that I needed to take home, so I set my laptop bag on the ground while I loaded the boxes into the van… Do you see where this is going???

I closed the trunk and got into the van, started the car, and began to back out of the driveway until I heard a “Clunk”. I remember saying to my wife “What is that noise – I think I just ran over something”. Then the most terrible, horrific thought came to mind – “I had just run over my business laptop!!” You might be thinking…. How can anyone possibly be that “Thick-Skulled” to run over their work laptop? Well, I think with the stress of this new business launch, my mind was whirling 24/7 and, well, it happened – Yes, I ran over my laptop and crushed my hard drive really good! Fortunately, my computer tech was able to recover a lot of my important files – phew…

So, while my first few minutes after “the incident” were not so pretty, I was able to clear my head, buy a new laptop, and get focused and ready for my big launch!

Now, if your natural reaction or coping strategy in an emergency like this is to panic, you are in good company. Panic is a perfectly natural reaction to something that seems both disastrous and insurmountable. Although you can never foolproof your life to escape calamities altogether, you can make them less likely to occur and you can teach yourself to respond to them in more productive ways😊.

Take Precautions
You might not be able to predict where and when a crisis will occur but you can identify some common culprits and do your best to keep them from causing problems. For instance, losing the use of your computer to a crash or malfunction is big trouble for any virtual assistance business. Keep all your equipment in tip-top shape and make sure that it benefits from routine maintenance, such as disk cleanup, program updates, and technical service. Be sure to not leave it lying under your tire when backing out of the driveway either😊!

Put a Backup System in Place
If a storm knocked out your power lines and left you without electricity for three days, would you be prepared? What if your computer crashed just after you finished a major project but before you could send it to your client? What if you agreed to do a rush job for a desperate client and then had to spend ten hours at the emergency room with an injured child?
You can hope that nothing like that ever happens but life generally refuses to play by any set rules. You need to create your personal emergency response system. Sit yourself down and try to visualize some common scenarios that would jeopardize your work product. Then devise a backup system, a sort of rehearsal for the real thing that will at least save you time in a crisis.

Start with your equipment. If you could not access your own computer, printer, fax, or other machine that you rely upon every day, is there another one you could use? Survey your friends to see if any of them has a machine that you could use in a pinch. Or go down to your local library or Internet Café to take care of your highest priority tasks. Some people like to use “GoToMyPC.com” or other web-based programs if they are not able to access their own PC.

Follow the same procedure for situations that force you to abandon a major project or rush job. You might have another Virtual Assistant who you know does quality work and delegate a couple important tasks to him or her to ensure that your client remains a “happy camper”. This might cost you some money but it can save your business from losing an important client.

**Learn to R-E-L-A-X in an Emergency**

Panic may be instinctual but it does you very little good in any situation that requires action because it freezes your normal thought processes. Instead, practice the following steps whenever an emergency occurs. Over time, you can train yourself to react in this more adaptive way.

**Retreat** but only for a few minutes. Go to a calm place, sit or lie down in a comfortable position, and clear your mind of disturbing thoughts. This may be difficult but you are not ignoring the problem. You are simply refusing to think about it for a very short time, and it will still be there when you finish. Take long, deep breaths and do whatever relaxes you most. When you are feeling calmer, proceed to the next step.

**Examine your options.** You always have a choice in an emergency, even if it is choosing to do nothing. Of course, that reaction will not get you anywhere, so focus on what you can do to minimize losses, fix problems, and get back to your normal working life as soon as possible. Given the circumstances, what can you do to make the best of the situation?

**Let go of useless second-guessing.** During a work-related emergency, it is normal for your illogical impulses to interrupt your rational thoughts as you try to determine what to do. You keep thinking, “If only this had not happened” or “If only I had not hit that button and erased my whole file” or “Why did I not check with the client on that point before I spent a whole day doing the wrong thing?” Hindsight is always 20/20 but you have to deal with the here and now. These thoughts will only make you waste even more time, and none of them changes the fact that the emergency has occurred and you need to deal with it as best you can.

**Act.** Do whatever you can to minimize your losses and maximize your recovery. Some of the following actions may apply.
Give your clients a heads-up about the problem, as they deserve to know that there may be a delay in the completion of their projects. It is much better to be upfront in disclosing the situation, especially if the delay is inevitable and the clients will eventually learn about it anyway. Sneakiness is not a trait that businesspeople admire in their virtual assistants, and your clients may even surprise you by being more understanding than you expected. When you work with other online entrepreneurs who work from home, they tend to be more understanding when things happen to prevent you from meeting a deadline, as long as it doesn't happen all the time, and it doesn't interfere with one of their major deadlines like a preview call or product launch.

Enlist the help of others, including people you know and those you can hire. This may mean using someone’s equipment or space or getting someone to do your chores for you while you attend to business. Do not be afraid to ask for personal or professional help. It is not a sign of weakness but proof that you are a human being like the rest of us and smart enough to know when you need assistance.

If applicable, take precautions to avoid such an emergency in the future.

**X out this emergency.** When you have handled this problem as best you can, mentally cross it out and label it “under control”. Congratulate yourself on dealing with another difficult situation in a professional manner, and remind yourself that doing so will only get easier as time passes.

**Satisfaction Guaranteed: How to Keep Clients Happy and Loyal**

As a virtual assistant, you are the owner of your own small business, but your enterprise cannot succeed without that crucial external factor, your clients. Having to depend on a steady flow of new clients is risky at best, so the wisest course of action is to do whatever you can to hold on to clients once you attract them. Here are some suggestions to help you please your clients and keep them coming back to you.

**Mind Your Business Basics**

Quality and delivery are the essential features for any client-based business, and without them very little else matters. If you do not deliver a well-done job, in a timely manner, your new clients will never be your old clients.

There is really no wiggle room when it comes to quality and delivery. Most people are reasonable about rare and extraordinary circumstances that affect deadlines but if you are starting out as a VA with no business history to tout, you need to build a reputation for yourself. You must prove that you can provide essential services when needed. Even if you meet deadlines on a steady basis, that will not help you if the quality of your work is poor.

**Be Realistic with Promises**

What is the best way to ensure that your clients are always happy with your quality and delivery? Do not make promises you cannot keep. If you have not gotten around to learning a new application, do not take on any jobs that rely on that system until you are comfortable working with it. If you suspect that you cannot meet a deadline, do not promise that you can. Clients are not interested in hearing excuses. They are only
interested in hearing that you have done what you said you would do—what they paid you to do.

**Use a Self-Discipline Booster**
Nothing motivates us quite as much as money. If you know that your self-discipline is weak, strengthen it with monetary incentives. Offer a slight discount to clients if you deliver two consecutive projects past the deadline, or offer same-day rush delivery for an extra fee. Set up a situation that will give you a financial inducement to be more productive and finish work on time.

**Go to the Source**
The best way to find out if your clients are happy with your services is to ask them. If you are uncomfortable approaching this subject directly, create a follow-up survey that asks about a client’s satisfaction with factors like quality, reliability, and timeliness, or submit open-ended questions that let clients write, in their views, how you can improve your services. Clients will appreciate the fact that you value their opinions and want to accommodate their wishes.

**Say Thank You**
You can send an emailed or snail-mailed thank-you card or postcard to clients after you have finished a project or at periodic intervals throughout the year. Let them know that you appreciate their business and look forward to working with them again. You might want to send them something at Christmas thanking them for their business.

**Make Things Right**
If your client is unsatisfied with your work for any reason, take any complaints seriously and do whatever you can to rectify the situation and make your client happy. You have to decide when it pays to duplicate your efforts and when it does not. In most cases, it is well worth your time (even unpaid time) to hold on to a client. Nothing demonstrates your investment in a client’s business better than your willingness to make things right, and one steady client may lead to more steady clients through word of mouth and referrals.

On the flip side, if you have an unreasonable client that keeps imposing unrealistic deadlines, you might need to evaluate if you want to continue your work with this particular client.

**Stay in Touch**
It is a good idea to send out periodic newsletters or emails to clients. This is a non-aggressive way to remind them that you are still available for any projects, and it may spur them into sending more work your way. You can include any developments in your business, such as new equipment, new training, or news about the advantages of hiring VAs. You can also send clients information you have found that relates to their businesses, as this shows them that you are still invested in their success.

**Communicate with Care**
If you decide to send post-project surveys, thank-you cards, newsletters, or any other communications, do so sparingly. Businesspeople today have to weed through a lot of mail, and contacting them too frequently will only annoy them. That is the last thing you want to do to a client you are hoping to keep.
Think Like a Partner, Not an Employee
Avoid a piecemeal approach to work. Instead of simply doing the job at hand, sending it off, and forgetting about it, consider the big picture and come up with ways to impress your clients with your initiative. For example, if you notice that your client’s website content is out of date, suggest that you update it for them. If several of your client’s customers have expressed a wish for a particular product not currently offered, let your client know about it. Whenever you are doing work for a client, try to go the extra mile by thinking like a partner. You want to make yourself indispensable to your client’s business.

Stay Current
Stay on top of the newest virtual technology. If there is a development that can make things easier, better, or more profitable for your clients, learn how to use it and be sure to tell your clients about it. The virtual world operates at a fast pace and you must keep in step to remain a valuable part of it. Doing so will give your clients the benefits of any new technology and it will make you more valuable as a VA.
Virtual Victory:
Defining Your Pathway to Virtual Business Success

There are few things in life as rewarding as a successful small business that you created with your own initiative, skill, and courage. That last attribute of courage is especially important in any entrepreneurial venture. Although many people consider the prospect of owning their own businesses at some point in their lives, few of them are brave enough to put their ideas to the test.

That may be why so many aspiring small business owners encounter negativity from others who learn of their plans to venture out on their own. Friends, coworkers, and family members often try to discourage any attempts at self-employment, giving voice to the fears that have kept them from realizing their own dreams of small business ownership.

If you are pursuing self-employment as the owner of your own virtual assistance business, you can overcome this resistance by remembering the growing number of fellow entrepreneurs who have built successful careers as virtual assistants. That number is growing every day as more and more people realize that they cannot count on a corporate structure in an uncertain economy to provide security and meaningfulness for them. For those important values, they can rely only on themselves.

If you too want to gain more control over your own life, put your entrepreneurial spirit to work for you as a virtual assistant. The industry is still in its infancy, making it the perfect target for anyone with self-discipline, self-confidence, and self-realization. The Internet will provide you with not only a means of earning a living but also a way of getting the information, support, and advice you need from others in the same business.

As you join that industry’s growing roster of self-employed entrepreneurs, use this eBook to help you through the various stages of your venture. Your success will reflect the strong sense of financial independence and personal fulfillment that you share with others in your field and you will appreciate the tremendous difference that your efforts have made in your life.

It is a journey well worth making, so enjoy every step on the way to your successful new life as the owner of your own virtual assistance business.
Chapter Eight: Virtual Resources - Cool Tools and Hot Spots

Here is an array of super-cool products and sites available to anyone with computer savvy and technological curiosity. Some of these time-saving and user-friendly goodies have the added advantage of being free, so if you have not checked them out yet, get ready to make your working life much more productive.

Virtual Professionalism: Cool Tools for VAs

With the ever-increasing availability of high-tech virtual solutions, you can now access more features than ever before to achieve a new level of professionalism and efficiency. Here are just a few of the many virtual tools you can incorporate into your virtual assistance business.

Thank You, Web Applications

If you use a simple web browser, such as Internet Explorer or Firefox (available through a free download), you can access a number of web-based applications (web apps) that are often important benefits to VAs. You no longer need to purchase a separate desktop computer program for every function, which probably explains why web apps have become such popular virtual tools.

Freshbooks

This web app is a handy tool for anyone who needs to track the time spent working by project and by client, a requirement that applies to virtually every VA. With a few clicks, you turn on the timer when you begin a task, shut it off when you stop working, and turn it back on when you resume working. The convenient clock gives you a minute-by-minute breakdown of how much time you spend for every separate project, letting you create an itemized tally and generate emailed or snail-mailed invoices to your clients.

As if that were not enough, Freshbooks also has features that help you perform client management duties. It can track whether or not your clients have paid their invoices, and you can even share the program with your clients. By logging into the system, your clients can access their itemized invoices to see exactly where their money went. This not only helps your clients monitor and plan their budgets but also demonstrates a high level of professionalism and trust from your end. Everything is there for clients to scrutinize, so your credibility is high and they do not have to worry that you have overcharged them for anything.

Freshbooks is a good web app for start-up virtual assistance businesses because it is free for the first three clients you track. As your business expands, you can trade up to a paying account.

Basecamp
Virtual assistance is a collaborative effort between you and your clients, as people from both ends of the partnership need to access data relating to shared projects. You and your clients must also keep in touch about the ongoing status of work, and Basecamp fulfills all these requirements. The product of 37 Signals, this software offers tools to optimize communication between various people working on the same project.

With Basecamp, VAs and clients can share files, as well as track time to see who has done what and how long it took. Users can draw up to-do lists that indicate what needs to be done and who is responsible for doing it. There is even a milestone schedule to pinpoint the dates for project objectives, along with the names of those who are accountable for them.

All this shared information may sound a bit too Big Brother for you but Basecamp takes care of privacy and security concerns by building in an easy procedure that lets users decide who can and cannot access specific data. This ensures that only those people involved in the project can log in and participate.

To utilize Basecamp, you need a Firefox, Safari, or IE 677 web browser, as well as a monthly pay-as-you-go account. There are different account types ranging from about $24 a month to about $149 per month, but all of them accommodate an unlimited number of users. The price differences reflect file space, availability of options like time tracking, number of projects, and level of security (the high-end accounts boast the same SSL Security that banks use). For those who want to sample it before signing up, there is a free 30-day trial period.

A great alternative to Salesforce and Basecamp. Zoho is a suite of online tools from document management to mail. An affordable option or alternative with services including invoicing, projects and CRM.

ClientSpot is the simplest way for virtual assistants and freelancers who work with remote clients and subcontractors to track projects, files, deadlines and time.

Remember the milk - [http://www.rememberthemilk.com/](http://www.rememberthemilk.com/)
Manage tasks quickly and easily. Receive reminders via email, SMS, and instant messenger (AIM, Gadu-Gadu, Google Talk, ICQ, Jabber, MSN, Skype and Yahoo!) Create and organize lists.

Write, share, revise and compare. Writeboards are shareable web-based text-documents that let you save every edit, roll back to any version, and easily compare any version.

**Desktop Sharing/Online Meetings/Teleseminars**

Screen sharing as well as a place to find an expert in your area or to become an expert in your area.
GoToMyPC - [https://www.gotomypc.com/](https://www.gotomypc.com/)
GoToMyPC is the fast, easy and secure way to access your PC from any Web browser in real time.

GoToMeeting.com – [http://www.gotomeeting.com](http://www.gotomeeting.com)
Easy online meetings, anytime, anywhere.

Yugma.com - [http://www.yugma.com](http://www.yugma.com)
A free web conferencing service that allows you to conduct a meeting and share a desktop presentation with participants.

Tungle.com - [http://www.tungle.com](http://www.tungle.com)
Allows you to display your availability and let others schedule meetings with you.

Skype - [http://www.skype.com/](http://www.skype.com/)
Call other people on Skype for free and call phones and cell phones at great low rates. Send instant messages, video chat, conference calling with instant messaging and more.

Free conference calls on demand. Manage calls online, and free conference call recording.

Simple, convenient, reliable conference call service.

File Sharing/Office Programs/Misc.

MyFax - [http://www.myfax.com/](http://www.myfax.com/)
If you do not own a fax machine there is really no need for you to buy one now. MyFax is a service that lets you send and receive faxes over the Internet. It links your account to your existing email address (so there is no need to create a new one), which means that you can send and receive faxes anywhere as long as you are using that address. You receive a real fax number that you can designate as either a local number or a toll-free number.

OpenOffice.org - [http://www.openoffice.org/](http://www.openoffice.org/)
Compatible with other major office suites, OpenOffice.org is free to download, use, and distribute.

Copyscape - [http://www.copyscape.com/](http://www.copyscape.com/)
Search for copies of your page on the web.

Access and share documents, spreadsheets, presentations and calendars online from anywhere. Users can collaborate virtually, embed documents into websites and blogs, and edit and share documents in real time, free!
FileZilla - http://filezilla-project.org/
FileZilla Client is a fast and reliable cross-platform FTP, FTPS and SFTP client with lots of useful features and an intuitive graphical user interface.

LegalZoom.com - http://www.legalzoom.com
Online resource center that allows you to set up your business quickly with legal forms and additional resources such as preliminary business name clearance and Federal Tax ID (EIN) application preparation.

Blogging and RSS

Roboform - http://www.roboform.com/
RoboForm is the top-rated Password Manager and Web Form Filler that completely automates password entering and form filling.

Google Reader - http://www.google.com/reader
Constantly checks your favorite news sites and blogs for new content.

WordPress.org - http://wordpress.org
WordPress.org is the most popular content management system available today. It is a state-of-the-art publishing platform with a focus on aesthetics, web standards, and usability. WordPress is both free and priceless at the same time.

Feedburner.com - http://www.feedburner.com/fb
Is the leading provider of media distribution and audience engagement services for blogs and RSS feeds.

Virtual Communication: Sites for VAs
As you work to build your virtual assistance business you may sometimes wish that you could have your very own virtual assistant guide to help you through the different stages of your new venture. You can actually enjoy the benefits of having many such guides at your disposal, as advice, support, knowledge, and experience are available to you 24 hours a day through your computer. Visit the following Internet locations and access the input of people who share your professional interests and goals. Better yet, create your own virtual assistance venue and get your name circulating through the World Wide Web.

Blogs
As a shortened form of “weblog,” the word “blog” refers to a website that displays postings by one or more people in chronological order and usually offers links to other postings or commentary. A blog’s format lets you see the progression of communications in date order, and there is usually a listing of old posts by category, as well as an archive of old posts grouped by date, month, or year (depending on how often the author contributes to the blog). A blog is somewhat like a virtual diary of the author(s) that connects you to its different parts.
Keep this diary analogy in mind as you surf for blogs. As is true of virtually any medium, blogs differ widely in tone, content, and usefulness, as they express the personal views and purposes of the authors. But that only makes blogs even more interesting, as you can come across some very unexpected entries in them, just as you would if you stole a peek at someone’s diary.

Virtual assistance blogs generally reflect the thoughts and experiences of an author who works as a virtual assistant, so you can gain some important insights into the business. The Internet gives global exposure to virtually anyone with an agenda to promote, so expect to find a fair amount of marketing worked into some of the blogs you read but read them anyway. Many bloggers are virtual assistants with extensive backgrounds in the industry, so it is well worth your time to hear what they have to say. Here are just a few of the many virtual assistance blogs on the Internet, along with their links as of this writing:

- www.vanetworking.com/blog
- http://www.grittyva.com/
- www.thevirtuallink.com
- www.va4business.com
- www.vadirectory.net
- www.vaclassroomblog.com
- http://www.provirtualsolutions.com

E-Zines
As you would guess from the name, e-zines are online versions of magazines, and they are becoming increasingly popular as more and more people give up the concrete text of print media for the virtual words of electronic formats. There are a multitude of virtual assistance e-zines available online, many of which are free. Here are just three publications, with their applicable links as of this writing.


Networks
Networks are the most comprehensive resource for information and communication, offering a wide range of features to their visitors. One network can include articles, forums, postings, job listings, tutorials, news, and a host of other services. You can choose simply to access available content, or you can interact with other users via blogs or forums. Because of their inclusiveness, networks make excellent starting points for any inquiry, usually providing links or referrals to other resources in addition to their own content. Here are several well-known virtual assistance networking sites with their links
as of this date. Their names give credence to the earlier caution against using a domain name that is too similar to another one:

Virtual Assistant Networking Association at www.vanetworking.com (Best on the Net!)
Canadian Virtual Assistant Network at www.canadianva.net

Forums
Online forums work like traditional forums but without all the pushing and yelling. They are venues for open discussions with other users and by accessing them you have the opportunity to interact with people who have posted news, information, questions, answers, or anything else pertaining to the subject under discussion.

You do not have to be a Chatty Cathy or a Talkative Tom to appreciate this format, and you can remain anonymous by using a non-identifying screen name. Your level of participation is totally up to you. You can simply view posts and the responses to those posts, or you can join in the conversation when you have a question to ask or a contribution to make.

Most forums have moderators who act as traffic cops, stepping in when needed to direct visitors to appropriate locations or to set up special access links for specific purposes that come up during the course of a dialogue. Forums can get you the answers that you want from people who work as virtual assistants. If you need an honest appraisal of a new product you are likely to get a more impartial opinion from someone in the industry who has actually used it rather than the manufacturer who only wants to sell it to you. If you have not eavesdropped on any forums yet, here are some good places to start:

Virtual Assistant Networking Forum at www.vanetworking.com (Highly recommended)
Virtual Assistant Forums at www.virtualassistantforums.com

Another important benefit of participating in forums is the support from other VAs. While you may have a great support system at home, nothing beats the understanding and reassurance from another business owner who has experienced what you are going through. Sometimes you need to brainstorm, sometimes you need to vent, sometimes you just need to hear words of encouragement. Your participation in these forums will help you weather the storm and celebrate success with your new friends and colleagues.

Social Networking As A Virtual Assistant

Social networking as a virtual assistant is a great way to build your network of peers and business contacts online. This will give you the opportunity to meet like-minded people with whom you can share your expertise and learn more about the areas you wish to gain knowledge in. To get the most benefit from your social networking time it’s wise to choose the groups and networks in which you are able to actively participate. Try to allot at least 15 minutes per day to check for new connections, answer questions, and share useful information. Preferably, you should batch your time and try not to randomly network throughout the day. New social networks are springing up every day; however, some of the popular social networks virtual assistants are currently participating in include:
Facebook
Facebook can be an effective networking and lead generation tool for your business. If you are using Facebook for business, you should maintain your profile with business-related information. Use features such as mybox, which will allow you to place html code for your free report, newsletter or blog signup. Check for Virtual Assistant Facebook Groups, small business owners groups, and other groups of interest within your niche specialty. Also become a fan of related Facebook pages.

Twitter
Spend some time learning how to use Twitter as a business tool. You can set up a profile and search by keyword for the type of people you wish to find and follow such as Virtual Assistant, Internet Marketer, Internet Business owner, etc.

LinkedIn
Build a profile on LinkedIn and seek out business contacts. Search for niche groups within LinkedIn that relate to your expertise or target market. Submit answers to frequently asked questions and become a subject matter expert.

Ning
Ning is unique in the sense that virtually anyone can start their own unique social network. There are currently virtual assistants on Ning who have started their own niche networks as well as potential clients and also networks that are geared towards Internet Marketing and other areas of interest to virtual business owners. By joining these groups you are able to learn from other experts while promoting your services and expertise. There are also Mom Entrepreneur groups on Ning such as MommyMillionaire - http://www.mommymillionaire.ning.com.

Get Connected Today
If you have a question, problem, or interest that relates to the virtual assistance industry you can find what you need at one of the many Internet venues devoted to your business. Take advantage of this chance to connect with other VAs and learn from their experiences. It just might open up a whole new world of opportunities for you.

Find out more about the Social Media course at VAClassroom: http://www.vaclassroom.com/SocialMarketingtraining/
Chapter Nine: Transitioning to Self-Employment

If you are currently running in the corporate rat race and dreaming of the day you can quit and start your journey to self-employment, there are a few things to consider before handing in your resignation. Nothing can be more fulfilling than starting your own business, and being prepared can help you transition more quickly and successfully.

Have the Right Mindset!

As trivial as it may sound, preparing yourself mentally for success is a big part of how you start your business and how you will continue. If you go into this with a, "Well, I'll give it a try and see how it works" attitude, you might have challenges keeping the course when things get tough. Preparing yourself for success is different for everyone, but a critical first step in the right direction. Do what works for you. You might try daily positive affirmations, publicizing your goals in your office, or even blogging about your goals to hold yourself accountable.

Think about it this way – do you see successful athletes coming into the game with their head down, doubt on their faces and shrugging their shoulders like, "Well, I hope we win?" NO! They go into each and every game with a positive attitude, a winning attitude, and they exude success. This is no accident. You can take your cues from one of your sports heroes, authors, speakers, coaches or a colleague. See how their attitude helps them succeed and find what works for you.

Test the Waters

It takes a while to get a base of regular clients and be able to comfortably determine your average monthly income. Consider starting out slow, taking on a few clients and assignments while you are still working. You'll have a "night and weekend job" for a few months but it will help you establish realistic income goals and practice marketing yourself and your business. That way you can work out any kinks without the added pressure of having to work "X" amount of hours to earn "X" amount of income.

Have a Nest Egg

Starting your virtual assistant business while you are still working your regular job will also help you earn some extra money. This nest egg will help you get through some challenging months when you may not work as much as you need, or allow you to take some courses to expand your skills and services to move your new VA business into the next level!

You'll also need some extra money for general office supplies like ink for your printer, paper, headphones to talk with clients and take notes at the same time, and possibly a more comfortable and ergonomic chair.

Research Your Insurance Options
If you and your family are on your insurance plan at your current job, you'll need to plan how that will transition to new coverage. This may mean switching to your spouse's insurance plan or purchasing prior insurance. Make special note of any changes in coverage, increase in monthly costs and deductibles as these costs can add up quickly.

**Plan for Your Retirement**

Contributing to your retirement fund is just as important as a self-employed business owner as it is working “for the man”. You will need to be diligent about researching options to save your money and make the payments. Consider adding this to your monthly or quarterly calendar to make sure it gets done.

**Schedule Time for Networking**

As a new business owner, it's important to remember that you always need to be marketing yourself and your business. A key to being successful and sustaining that success is networking, both online and offline. When working for someone else, you are always networking whether you realize it or not. Talking with colleagues, executives, business partners and vendors is somewhat an expectation when you work outside the home. But you need to continue those same networking practices for yourself.

There are several networking options available for you to get yourself and your business out there in front of everyone. Of course, there are the social networks which we've already discussed. But, there are also networking opportunities in your local community. Take the time to research local Toastmaster meetings, professional networking associations and business luncheons. These types of events will help you keep your social interaction skills fresh, while marketing your business and meeting new people. Your new contacts can be an important resource for your business. They can become a new client, refer clients, or provide you with a service for your business.

**Give Yourself a Break**

Part of the allure in starting your own home-based business is being able to work around your schedule. Whether you need to work around your kids' school schedule, doctor's appointments or volunteering at the local hospital, having flexibility is a wonderful thing. But it can also be a huge responsibility. You may start out thinking you need to work the same 40 hours at home as you did at work.

While it may be financially necessary to work 40 hours a week, it's also tempting to want to work as many hours as possible to earn as much money as possible. Try to give yourself a break and get some breathing room. You don't want to spend every minute you are at home working. As home business owners, it's already difficult enough to separate work time from home time. Don't schedule yourself the maximum number of hours every week. This can lead to quick burnout and will not give you any additional flexibility in your day for the incidentals in life that come up.
Chapter Ten: A Special Section for Work-at-Home Moms (WAHMs)

Many women are leaving the corporate world to stay home and raise their children. Unfortunately, the days of being "just" a housewife are gone for most. Women of today are major contributors to the household income, so replacing that income to stay home with the children has been a hot topic.

Starting a virtual assistance business is the ideal solution for many. It allows you to continue your career path, earn money to support the family, build new skills as a business owner and, most importantly, stay home to raise your children. But while the career path is ideal, there are special topics for aspiring WAHMs to consider.

Put Your Children First

Your children's well-being, health and intellectual growth is a huge priority. As a mom, this is probably one of the main reasons you want to stay home and raise your children. You want to be in charge of how they are raised, what they are eating for lunch, and what they are learning.

When you start a home-based business, it can be easy to forget these priorities. Take the time to schedule your work around the activities that will help your children grow and be nurtured. If you have older children, you can even include them in some of your work activities to teach them about money, time management and customer service.

Set Boundaries with Family and Friends

When you decide to be a stay-at-home mom, almost everyone thinks, "How lucky! You get to sit around, play with the kids and watch soap operas all day." Stay-at-home moms have arguably the toughest job on earth, but when you add a home-based business to that, it gets tougher.

One thing you'll need to do early on is set boundaries with family and friends about your "work time". You need to be crystal clear about when you can have visitors and phone calls, and when you are not available. While it might sound rude at first, it's necessary to set these strict boundaries to avoid unpleasant discussions later. When people drop by unexpectedly, or call you to take care of the kids while they run an errand, you'll need to give them a friendly but firm reminder. "I'd love to help you out, but remember I'm working right now."

Create a Support System

Very few people know what it's like to start a business, let alone start a home-based business as a virtual assistant and stay home to raise children. There are many online
Social networks and forums to give you support, understanding and encouragement for those times when you are having a tough day.

Aside from your online friends and colleagues, it’s critical to get your family’s support in your new business venture. One way to get their support is to share your business plan, aspirations and dedication to the business. This helps everyone feel that they are part of your success and helps them understand when you need to dedicate your time to your new business. Keeping the lines of communication open is also another critical step. Give your family periodic business updates so they can celebrate your success with you!

**Separate "Family Time" and "Work Time"**

Working from home makes it challenging to “go home” at the end of the day. When your office is a couple of doors away, it’s easy to just run in and check email or print a document or network on Twitter, etc. You get the picture.

It’s essential to separate work time and family time so that your family knows when they can’t bother you. It also helps you enjoy your time with your family when you are with them. That way, you can devote your entire time to being “in the moment” with your family, and savor the experience.

**Be Realistic About the Number of Hours You Can Work**

You might start out calculating your number of available hours to work each week like this:

- Kids nap 2 hours a day x 5 days = 10 hours
- Spouse comes home at 6 p.m. and I can work till 10 p.m., 4 hours x 5 days = 20 hours
- I can wake up and work 2 hours before the kids get up, 2 hours x 5 days = 10 hours

Yeah! I can work the same 40 hours per week and earn big bucks!

**STOP!**

While the potential income opportunities of working 40 hours a week can be tempting, it’s not realistic to think you can work a full 40 hours a week, every week. Even if you had a steady stream of clients and a backup waiting list of work, working this many hours can create new challenges that are somewhat avoidable.

First, you have to prepare for the unexpected. Children do not always sleep when you expect them to, and for the amount of time you want. If you have more than one child, they can tag-team you and sleep at different times, wake up at different times, have a stomachache, have a headache – the list goes on. If you schedule work for the maximum number of hours per week, you will find yourself scrambling to meet the deadlines.
Second, you need to account for your time to rest and recoup. If you are working late and getting up early to work some more, you are burning both ends of the stick. Your health and well-being are more important than ever. Moms don't get sick days, and neither do self-employed business owners. If you are sick and can't work, that's like a deduction in your paycheck.

Third, scheduling yourself to work the full 40 hours a week will not give you time to network, increase your knowledge and skills by taking courses, or market your business. All these things are necessary to help your business grow and sustain a profitable income.

Take that time you calculated and chop it in half. Working 20 hours a week might be more realistic. Once you've found steady clients and can maintain those 20 hours comfortably while networking, improving your skills and marketing your business, then you can consider gradually increasing the number of hours.

**Recognize Your New Learning Curve**

While the term "mommy brain" has roots in comic relief, there is something to be said about the time it takes to learn a new skill or concept when you are a work-at-home mom.

Learning a new skill takes patience, time and hard work. When you have your kids in the next room playing one minute, then screaming and fighting the next, it's difficult to concentrate on the task at hand. Keep these things in mind when taking courses to expand your skills. Look for courses that are self-paced with videos or audio, have worksheets or printable documents to follow along and take notes, and, most importantly, unlimited access to training materials. This will help you take the time you need to learn and provide the opportunity to go back and refresh your memory when needed.

**Ask For Help**

Sometimes you have to stop and realize that you can't do it all alone, and you need to ask for help. Whether you need someone to watch the kids for a few hours a week so you can get some work done, or hire a housekeeper, it's OK to ask for help.

It is not a sign of weakness. It does not mean you are a bad mother or a bad business owner. It means you realize that your time is valuable and you want to spend it on the things or people that are most important. Think of it this way – if you hire a housekeeper to clean your house once a week, that's 4 more hours you get to spend with your kids and family. If you need a housekeeper, but can't afford one, consider trading your services. Maybe the housekeeper you want to hire needs to find more work. So you can offer to create some marketing flyers and advertisements in exchange.

**Find "ME" Time**

This is one of the hardest things for moms to do, but you have to find some time for yourself, even if you can get out of the house for 30 minutes to get a cup of coffee by
yourself, take a walk or whatever. You need time alone to let go of the daily stress of raising your family and having a business. It would be great if you could get some "me" time every day, but even once a week will be helpful. This time away will make you a better mom, a better spouse and a better business owner.
Chapter Eleven: Beyond Virtual Assistance

Starting your virtual assistance business is really only the beginning of a fruitful career. After you have had some experience as a virtual assistant, you will learn some valuable skills that you can use to take your career to the next level.

For example, VAClassroom has several students who have taken the Social Media Marketing Course and started a new path. We have students who are teaching social media in their local community colleges, presenting at local Chamber of Commerce events and consulting for major companies. While the students took the Social Media Marketing Course to expand their skills and service offerings, their expertise put them on the map for bigger projects. This is where networking offline pays off with your professional circle of influence.

There are also VAs who have started a second career helping others start their own virtual assistant business by creating informational products, holding weekly classes and coaching them and helping them build a virtual assistance business.

Project Manager

Some new VAs start out by subcontracting with established VAs to get experience. Being a part of these multi-VA teams can be very beneficial for many reasons. One reason is that you will get exposure to other services that other VAs are offering and how each person has to do his or her part to complete the project. For example, if clients are going to launch a product, they need a sales letter, a squeeze page, a preview call, their shopping cart set up, autoresponders ready, etc.

When you get to see a project from start to finish, and you learn what needs to get done, you might see the need for project management. That means someone is in charge of making sure deadlines are met within the budgeted number of hours. A project manager is responsible for coordinating the tasks, assigning them to the subcontracting VAs, following up, coordinating approvals with the client, customer service and more.

By taking your VA skills to the next level, you can capitalize on this new expertise and offer it as a service to multi-VA teams or clients who have multiple VAs in their business.

Online Business Manager

Taking the Project Manager position one step further is the Online Business Manager. An OBM, as it’s commonly called, does more than coordinate the VA team. The OBM also helps the business owner strategize to take their business to the next level. In this
role, the OBM acts as a project manager and a coach to help the business owner focus on growing the business.

In this position, an OBM actually works with fewer clients, but has larger responsibilities. The income potential is also higher because this is a very specialized in-demand skill. As an estimate, OBMs earn about $65 per hour plus commission.

For more information about becoming an Online Business Manager, you can go to www.OnlineBusinessManager.com, or you can get the book, "Becoming an Online Business Manager: Playing a Bigger Game with Your Clients and Yourself" by Tina Forsyth.
Virtual Business Set-up Checklist

Here is a quick checklist of “To-Do” items for your new Virtual Businesses:

- Join Virtual Assistant Networks and Communities such as VANetworking
- Consider taking the 30 Day Virtual Business Start-up System which will help to fast-track your VA business growth and success
- Develop niche “in-demand” services by taking other VAClassroom Skills Training Programs. (It is important to NEVER stop learning as a Virtual Assistant.)
- Find a Business Name
- Register your business name and obtain a Tax Identification Number
- Pick your domain name (Think of a name related to your business focus.)
- Establish your Niche (Virtual Business Focus)
- Define your target client audience
- Define your specific services
- Set up your hourly rates and fees
- Create a business policy sheet (might have a lawyer review before using with clients)
- Recruit a website or blog site designer
- Set up your website or blog and complete content for all pages (About us, Services, Contact Form, Policy Form)
- Find the right website or blog host
- Prepare marketing materials (PowerPoint Presentation, PDF, Business Cards, Portfolio)
- Build your business/marketing plan
- Set up Virtual Office (including equipment outlined in business “start-up cost breakdown” sheet)
- Join online business networks, forums, communities to liaise with other VAs as well as connect with new prospective clients
Define your work schedule (especially if you are still working in another job or you are a work-at-home mom)

### Virtual Business Start-Up Costs

Here is an overview of the potential costs you may initially incur in your business. Please note we have not included some of the most basic costs such as computer, desks, office equipment, etc…)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BUSINESS ITEMS</th>
<th>COSTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Domain Name</td>
<td>&lt;$10/year for one domain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business Name Registration (in State or Province)</td>
<td>~$150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Website or Blog Site Design</td>
<td>~$500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Website Host Server</td>
<td>~$70/year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business Phone (you may choose to set up Skype line)</td>
<td>~$50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>eFax System</td>
<td>$10/ month</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business Cards / Marketing Materials</td>
<td>~$75 (depends on quality)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Invoicing Tool (such as Freshbooks)</td>
<td>$14/month</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Web-based Project Management tool (i.e. Basecamp)</td>
<td>$24/month</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial Management software (i.e. Quickbooks)</td>
<td>~$69</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**TOTAL START-UP COSTS**

< $1000 to set-up VA Biz

For less than $1000, you can set up all you need to get your Virtual Business moving in the right direction! There may be other software programs you purchase along the way, but this is a good overview of the initial costs required. Now, if you do not own a laptop, you might consider picking one up so that you can further enjoy the “Freedom of Location” with your new Virtual Business!

In addition, I would highly recommend investing an additional $500-$1000 in VA Business Training through such courses as the [30-Day Virtual Business Startup System](https://www.vaclassroom.com) as well as skills training courses at [VAClassroom](https://www.vaclassroom.com). These highly acclaimed training programs will enable you to more quickly establish a thriving Virtual Assistant Business for yourself!
One of the major benefits of taking training courses at VAClassroom or starting your business with the 30-Day Virtual Business Startup System is that you reduce the amount of time it takes to get your business started on the right foot. While the Internet is filled with free content, it can take a while to train yourself on all the aspects of starting your business. In addition, there is no quality control on the information you get because anyone can post anything at any time.

We know how busy you are. Whether you are a work-at-home mom, or trying to start your own virtual assistance business to leave the corporate world, time is precious. We strive to provide you with relevant and timely information in a concise and easy-to-digest manner so that you can learn exactly what you need to learn, put it into practice and start earning money.
Note: The reason we suggest taking these training programs next is that it will provide you with the necessary Internet marketing skills to effectively promote your VA business. PLUS, you will also acquire new skills and knowledge in one of the most “in-demand” areas for Virtual Assistants right now!
About VAClassroom.com

The inspiration behind VAClassroom.com originated from our own experience in training, managing and working closely with Virtual Assistants and Professionals over the last six years! We have personally experienced the powerful business-building benefits of using Virtual Teams and now seek to impart some of our own virtual training experiences and Internet Business knowledge to a growing base of Online Professionals.

The primary mission of VAClassroom is to equip new and existing Virtual Assistants and Online Professionals with the specific skills and knowledge that businesses are seeking today!

Co-Founder Craig Cannings has been training and managing a diverse group of Virtual Teams since 2003. He managed a large virtual staff while working as a Director of Business Development with a successful Internet Company. His first-hand experience in working with fabulous Virtual Professionals has provided much of the inspiration for launching VAClassroom.com. Craig’s primary passion in life is spending quality time with his 4 main ‘gals’ – his wife and three young daughters!

Co-Founder Kelly Cannings (Craig’s wife and “real boss”) started out working as a Virtual Assistant with an Internet Company way back in 2000. She performed many functions such as setting up and managing Customer Relationship Management Systems, handling billing and accounting functions as well as Affiliate Marketing research and ad campaign management. She admits that the Virtual Assistant Industry is now evolving much faster in 2010 than in the early Internet days and requires more effort to keep current with the latest skills and knowledge! Kelly loves being a mom and enjoys the freedom of working from home while raising her young family.

Join Us!
VA Classroom Premium Membership

The VA Classroom Monthly membership is one of the best ways to stay current and competitive with the skills and services you are offering your new and existing client base.

Here is a quick rundown of the many business-building benefits of becoming a VA Classroom Member today:

✔️ **Relevant webinars and tele-events** for sharpening skills and knowledge in those “in-demand” services areas.

✔️ **Powerful, interactive discussion forum** ideal for posting your questions and dialoguing with myself, the VA Classroom team, as well as other members (who may have the same questions as you).

✔️ **Monthly Group Coaching Opportunities** where you have the opportunity to connect live with myself and experienced VA coaches to help support you in the development of your VA business.

✔️ **Monthly Marketing videos** so you can learn cutting-edge online and offline techniques for building your client base and growing your income opportunities.

✔️ **Valuable Work Search Resources** and practical tools to enhance your business exposure and contact with “ideal clients”.

✔️ **A Dynamic VA Marketplace** for showcasing your new skills and business services to prospective clients.

Plus, as a VA Classroom Member, you will receive premium $100 discounts on all our new and existing Training Certification Programs!
Social Media Specialist Certification

One of the best Social Media Training Programs on the web is VAClassroom's Social Media Marketing Specialist Certification. This comprehensive course is absolutely jam-packed with expertise, strategies, best practices, tips and techniques for efficiently and effectively creating great results for your businesses using such Social Media tools as Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, YouTube, HubPages and so much more.

The SMM Program includes eight comprehensive multimedia modules (including over 30 videos) where your VA will learn the most up-to-date Social Media skills—how to deliver these seven, red-hot services:

✅ Build a Winning Social Media Strategy and Action Plan
✅ Set Up and Manage Social Network Profiles
✅ Engage New Business Leads with Facebook
✅ Create Buzz with Twitter
✅ Capture Audiences with Video Marketing and Submission
✅ Keep an Online Reputation Spotless
✅ Attract the Attention of Search Engines and a Target Audience with Engaging Social Media Content

This program teaches the most current Social Media skills, tools and tactics so you can have the peace of mind that you are "staying ahead of the curve".

Read more about our Social Media Specialist Certification Program
Internet Marketing Specialist Program

Read more about the Internet Marketing VA Certification

This powerful program will equip you with cutting-edge Internet Marketing knowledge and skills to help you take your marketing efforts to the next level. The training system includes over 50 videos and demos, resource guides and templates as well as an interactive class discussion forum so you can connect with VA Classroom staff and other students in the program.

Check out a few of the topics that are covered in this course:

✔ Blog management and support
✔ Social media marketing and submission
✔ Article submission
✔ Affiliate marketing research and recruitment
✔ Online competitor analysis
✔ Web analytics tracking and reporting
✔ Effective keyword research
✔ Press release submissions
✔ Internet market research strategies
✔ Email autoresponder, newsletter and campaign management
✔ Online Project management
✔ Video editing and marketing support
✔ Podcast editing and submission
✔ Online survey set-up and management

And so much more....
Virtual Event Specialist Certification Training

In the fast-moving world of Virtual Events, this four-week training program swiftly gives you:

- A complete picture of the Virtual Event landscape, so you guide each client to the fastest path for success;
- Proven Strategies for cost-effective Virtual Event technologies, so you can guide your clients to solutions they can afford and count on;
- Not one or two but five kinds of virtual venues, so you can thrive as an expert in Tele-Events, Webinars, Live Podcasts, Online Radio and WebTV—specialize in one or offer them all;
- Easy-to-follow blueprints for every detail of setting up, delivering and following up on an event, so that you’ll deliver smooth, professional events every time;
- Repurposing strategies so you can post recordings on the web and make DVDs, giving your client more reach and profits from every event and making yourself invaluable;
- Social Media strategies so you can expand your client’s exposure to the audience and maximize interaction and engagement;
- Ideas and tools you can use for your own marketing, so you can easily connect with a fast-growing base of new clients.

No more wondering if you’ve discovered the most cost-effective virtual venues for your client; no more worrying that you haven’t covered all the bases for prep or event delivery; no more ad hoc researching or endless browsing for clues; no more struggling to prove your competence to potential clients because it’s all here: everything you need to connect with and serve eager new clients as a Virtual Event Specialist.

If you have any questions, please just go to our main site and click on the support link: http://www.vaclassroom.com
Fantastic Facebook Fan Pages

Read more about the Fantastic Facebook Fan Pages Program

VAClassroom offers an easy-to-implement blueprint for creating compelling and traffic-generating Facebook Fan Pages for you and your clients. This multimedia training program will help you to:

- Create compelling Facebook landing pages
- Select the Facebook Applications best suited to your business
- Integrate HTML banner, images and videos into your fan page
- Utilize good SEO strategies to ignite the visibility of your fan page in the search engines
- Track and measure the success of your fan page

And so much more....

Blog Marketing Tips & Tactics

Read more about the Blog Marketing Tips & Tactics Course

Ignite Your Blog Traffic, Business Visibility and Income Opportunities with a Powerful and Easy-to-Implement Blog Marketing System. Access a blog marketing blueprint that will take your blog site to new heights and make you look like "Blog Rock Star" with your clients. In this popular training program you will discover:
✓ Seven blog optimization tactics for significantly increasing the visibility and traffic to your blog;
✓ Proven keyword tactics for boosting your search listings;
✓ Success strategies for leveraging your RSS feeds in key directories and social networks;
✓ Effective blog submission tactics for boosting the viral potential of social media channels, such as Digg, Delicious, Facebook and Twitter.