

Virtual Assistants

VIRTUAL ASSISTANCE DEFINED

If an individual is assisting you and/or your business from a remote location, it can be considered virtual assistance. Initially the term “virtual assistant”, also referred to as a VA, only applied to a single individual providing administrative duties - such as those an in-house secretary would have performed - the term has been stretched over the last decade and has been used for any work being offered on a remote sub-contractual basis. Since the Virtual Assistant runs his/her own business and is sub-contracted by you, s/he is not an employee. You may also hear the term “outsourcing” when working with a VA.

Typically, Virtual Assistants work on a recurring basis and may require monthly retainers.

DO YOU NEED A VIRTUAL ASSISTANT?

- Do you get all your key items accomplished on a daily basis?
- Is your email inbox growing larger with each passing day?
- Are you missing out on business because you can't follow up on leads in a timely manner?
- Are you being proactive in your business as opposed to reactive?
- Are you able to keep your business funnel full by marketing consistently?
- Are you taking advantage of new marketing & lead generation channels such as social media?
- Are you able to stay on top of trends & new tools in your industry?
- Could you use more time off to pursue personal interests or enjoy time with friends and family?
- Are you able to take a vacation?
- Has your in-house assistant been with you long term?
- In addition to administrative skills does your in-house assistant provide creative or technology based skills?

If you answered no to any of the above statements, you likely could benefit from using the services of a Virtual Assistant (VA).

WHAT DOES A VIRTUAL ASSISTANT DO?

It's actually easier to list what a virtual assistant does **NOT** do.

- S/he does not come into your office and organize your files. She could organize the files on your computer remotely.
- S/he does not adhere to hours the client sets. Virtual Assistants are independent contractors and set their own hours, if you want to control availability to specific hours, it's best to hire an employee. S/he might agree to be available between certain hours but that should be negotiated up front.

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- S/he does not have an obligation to perform every task you throw her/his way. Be specific about what your needs are prior to working with your VA. If you need work outside of your VAs skill set, s/he can refer you to someone, or if you are working with a Virtual Assistant team, they can bring someone on who is a specialist in that particular area.
- S/he will not pick up your dry cleaning, but s/he could arrange all your travel plans, mail birthday cards and order gifts online.
- S/he will not bring you coffee, but s/he can help you find your closest coffee shop via an online search.

The tasks a Virtual Assistant performs vary by individual or team. Here is a list of sample tasks that VAs can do, but the actual skill sets will be unique to the VA **YOU** hire.

TASK	DESCRIPTION
Email Screening & Management	A VA can check your email, your spam filter, reply on your behalf and forward only the high priority emails to you. They can also set up tasks, appointments, product fulfillment and more. Saves you a great deal of time dealing with your inbox!
Administrative Duties	An administrative VA handles typical secretarial tasks such as document creation, letter writing, meeting preparation, supply ordering, answering phones etc.
Project Management	An Online Business Manager (OBM) or Virtual Project Manager (VPM) oversees large projects or multiple tasks leaving you to focus on what you do best.
Creates Content	Marketing has become very content driven and VAs are able to strategize, research, write, design layouts and reformat content for online and offline marketing platforms. This includes - but is not limited to - Reports, Blog Posts, E-Books, Books, Social Media, Brochures.
Post Content Online	Your VA can take your content and post it to your web site, blog, social media accounts, and submit to article dispersement sites or guest post opportunities. S/he can also comment on your behalf on targeted web sites and social media accounts. Understanding keywords is important.
Article Marketing	Your VA Can dispense your articles to article syndication sites. Understanding keywords is important.
Evaluates Analytics	A strategy oriented VA will evaluate analytics for your web sites, social media and email open rates to help you improve your reach, marketing and search engine optimization.
Strategy	A VA who assists with strategy becomes intimately aware of all aspects of your business and goals. All tasks are created and completed with your business strategy in mind. If you have an overall strategy in place, a VA can integrate that strategy with a complementary strategy for your online presence.
Video Editing & Uploads	Video is an important marketing tool for several reasons. A VA is able to edit, add audio, text, opening & closing slides to your video. S/he can also compress it and upload it to a variety of online platforms. Understanding keywords is important.

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TASK	DESCRIPTION
Web Site & Blog Design, Build, Management	Technical VAs are able to build web sites (including blogs). They may or may not be able to provide the graphic design, content writing and search engine optimization components, so be sure to do your homework. VAs can also manage technical/security updates, content posting, spam and comments.
Customize Social Media Accounts	Most of the social media accounts allow for customization, a VA with graphic design experience can help.
Set Up Social Media Accounts	VA's can set up your social media accounts, input the required information, upload images and ensure bios are customized or consistent for each platform
Manage Social Media Accounts	Social Media savvy VA's can write and schedule content for your social media accounts
Membership Sites Design, Build, Management	Membership sites require a different skill set than web sites. A specialized VA can build, and manage a membership site for you. Design & content creation may or may not be included.
Teleseminar, Webinar, Podcast (organization, coordination, recording, circulation)	If your business will benefit from the use of Teleseminars, Webinars or Podcasts, a VA can scout and approach guests, promote the event, send out reminders, set up the technology, test the technology, handle any technical issues during the event, and record the event.
Reputation Management	A Social Media VA can "listen" online for mentions of your brand, your company, you and respond as appropriate. S/he can also track predetermined key words, such as "selling my house".
Presentations (Keynote, PowerPoint, SlideShare)	VAs can create presentations and slide shows based on the content you provide for a meeting or presentation.
Graphic Design (online and print)	VAs with graphic design skills can create brochures, postcards, adjust images, portraits, create web site graphics, logos and more.
Process/Procedure Creation	When delegating duties it's always a good idea to create a process for each task delegated. This ensures the task is done correctly each time (and not left to memory) as well as it allows you to pass the task onto any future VAs should something happen to the current one. Some VAs will create the processes for you, others will require you supply one.
Database Management	Your list of customers/clients is important. Along with being able to research and recommend the best database software for your situation, a VA can keep your database updated for you. S/he can research missing information. She can target networking events for you and then input the business cards you collect. S/he can send out letters and communication to your database as planned.
Newsletter Creation (online and print)	A VA will evaluate and recommend online newsletter platforms meeting your needs and budget. Creative VAs will be able to design a customized template for print or electronic sending. S/he can research & create content or add your content & images to the newsletter. If sending electronically, an understanding of how spam filters work would be beneficial to your open rates. If sending by mail, s/he can print and mail them for you as well.
E-zine Creation	Just as in the newsletters, a VA can create and post or distribute an E-zine for you.
Events Planning	Some VAs specialize in event planning, whether it be a personal or business event. S/he can coordinate, travel, literature, signage, meals, hotels, everything from idea to completion.

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TASK	DESCRIPTION
Travel Plans	If you travel for personal or professional reasons, a VA can oversee your transportation, flight & hotel bookings as well as coordinate the people and meeting rooms when you arrive.
Search Engine Optimization	VAs with a knowledge of search engine optimization can incorporate key words into your online content and web sites, working to increase your organic search engine ranking.
Online Advertising	VAs can research, initiate and manage your online advertising including, banner ads, text ads, pay-per-click and affiliate relationships.
Sends Birthday Cards/ Orders Gifts	Provide a list and gift ideas and a VA can arrange birthday cards and gifts to be sent to targeted clients, friends and family members on your behalf.
Transcription Services	If you have recordings that need to be transcribed to text for a variety of reasons. Often this is done to extend the marketing potential of a service or product.
Reminders Personal &/or Business	So busy you can't always remember where you should be when? Or perhaps some important details fall through the cracks in your day. A VA can schedule a reminder call/text/or email to keep you on track.
Calendar Coordination	Do you need to coordinate schedule among team or family members? Perhaps you just need help maintaining your calendar. A VA can take your notes/phone calls/emails to create & maintain a calendar that all pertinent people will have access to.
Bookkeeping	There are a variety of tasks a VA can complete in the bookkeeping business. S/he can do everything from logging expenses to paying your bills. How much or how little s/he is involved is up to you. Screen applicants thoroughly!
Research	A VA is able to spend time researching a variety of items to save you time. Information for projects, articles, books, software choices, and resources are a few examples.
Phone Answer/Forward	Some VAs will also handle calls on your behalf, allowing you to be more (or less) accessible as you require. They can also follow up with clients or staff on your behalf.
Appointment Scheduling, Confirmation & Reminders	As mentioned previously, a VA can schedule all your appointments, confirm them and send you reminders as required.

The above list is not exhaustive but hopefully gets your creative juices flowing as to tasks that could possibly be delegated in your business.

"Keep doing what you do best and delegate the rest!"

Virtual Assistants for Real Estate Agents

Although CyberCletch works with many types of businesses, we have an exceptional understanding of the Real Estate Industry. All tasks can be scaled to assist Real Estate teams and Brokerages.

TASK	DESCRIPTION
Multiple Listing Service Information Input	You get a listing and your VA can input the information into the MLS for you (dependent on your Board's rules and regulations)
Posts Listings Online	A VA can adjust your images as required, resize and post images, listing descriptions & details to multiple online platforms and web sites.
Maintains Listings (Price & Status Changes)	Price change? Your VA can update all the web sites, virtual tours and brochures as required.
Drip Email Campaigns	Your VA can source the best solution for your email drip campaigns, or s/he can create one for you. Then comes setting it up, importing your contacts, and monitoring the system.
Schedules showings	No time to schedule showings? Your VA can set them up for you, confirm showings and send you a map of your route.
Showing Feedback Requests	Your VA can follow up with agents by email or phone to collect feedback from showings on your listings.
Requests/ Follows up on Testimonials/Feedback	Your VA can contact recent clients and request feedback on your behalf to be used in your marketing materials
Creates/Manages Virtual Tours	There are many virtual tour options available today. Your VA can upload information as appropriate, write descriptions, place links where required, mark solds and deactivate as needed.
Resize/Adjust Photography	Want to remove that car from the driveway or the garbage can from the road? Your VA may be able to do this easily. She can also adjust brightness and shadows to some degree.
Editing & Proofreading	Want to ensure your brochures are void of spelling mistakes? Ask your VA to edit & proofread all your written materials.
Write Property Descriptions	Using bullet points, MLS information, video and images, your VA can probably write a bang up description of the house, without ever having stepped inside.
Establish, Manage & Monitor Social Media Accounts	Not sure where to start with social media? Your VA can help you determine the platforms best suited to your goals, activate accounts, add bios and images so you are ready to post.
Transaction Management	A Transaction Management VA can help you move a listing from "in contract" to closed by keeping a close eye on the deadlines and timelines. S/he can communicate with all parties involved to keep them on track as well.
Listing Brochure Creation (Sales Flyer)	A VA can use one of the many industry templates or create a customized brochure of your own. S/he can arrange printing and delivery to the appropriate location. Brochures can also be loaded online.
Buyer/Seller/Relocation Package Creation	A VA can research and create the content for your buyer, seller & relocation packages. S/he can print and collate as well.
Recruiting Support	Database management, follow up, event planning, lead generation are a few of the tasks that can be performed by a VA.

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WHAT SHOULD I LOOK FOR IN A VIRTUAL ASSISTANT?

After you've determined what work you want a VA to complete, you need to consider what type of VA will be best.

Virtual Assistants come from many countries and have varied backgrounds. Their fees vary considerably as well. I've broken the VA industry into 4 sections to help you get a visual image of practices that tend to accompany the different price points.

WHAT IS THE GOING RATE FOR A VIRTUAL ASSISTANT?

You've heard the expression, "You get what you pay for." It applies to VAs too, but that doesn't necessarily mean you need to work with a VA charging top dollar. Of course, if you don't want to spend a significant amount of time micromanaging the processes, you should probably choose a mid-high range VA. If you are clear on the tasks and the type of VA that would best complete those tasks, the next phase is to interview VAs who fit that bill. There is no average rate for a Virtual Assistant since the hourly rates can vary from a couple of dollars per hour to over a hundred dollars per hour. Below is a chart, offering an evaluation based on experience. You may be fortunate to find a certain calibre of VA charging rates differing from the chart below.

LOW RANGE \$	MID RANGE INDIVIDUAL \$\$	MID RANGE TEAM \$\$\$	HIGH RANGE \$\$\$\$
\$3 - \$15 per hour	\$15 - \$40 per hour	\$40 - \$80 per hour	\$80 & up per hour
Skills are limited Task oriented work Requires ongoing management High follow up required You train to your expectations Most often off-shore labor High turnover Processes & procedures created by you	Skills are likely limited to an area or two Task oriented work Requires some management Some follow up required You train to your expectations Most often domestic labor Some turnover Processes & procedures created by you	Wide range of skills offered Strategy oriented work Requires communication Requires feedback Excellent customer skills Most often domestic labor Very little turnover Online business management skills Processes & procedures created for you	Either wide range of skills offered or very specific high end skills Exceptional customer skills Strategy oriented work Requires communication Requires feedback Most often domestic labor Very little turnover Business management skills Processes & procedures created for you

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A VIRTUAL ASSISTANT AND A VIRTUAL ASSISTANT TEAM?

A Virtual Assistant is one person working with you on your business needs. That person will have a particular skill set and it's up to him/her to keep individual skills current. If your relationship with the VA is terminated, you will need to spend your time finding a replacement. If you need skills outside of your existing VA's skill set, it is

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your responsibility to find and hire that service out. Sometimes your VA can help you with that, depending on her/his abilities.

A Virtual Assistant Team is a group of individuals who are specialists in a variety of fields. Typically the team leader (or project manager) will train the team members, will follow up on them, will ensure the projects & tasks are completed on schedule with the quality expected. The team leader is responsible for replacing team members and should VAs come and go, it usually does not affect your business. If you spend the time necessary to evaluate a VA Team and consider its longevity in the market, needing to replace a team is less likely than losing an individual.

HOW SHOULD I PREPARE BEFORE HIRING A VA?

The best thing you can do before searching for a Virtual Assistant is spend some time evaluating your needs.

1. Begin to make a list of all the items you would comfortably delegate.
2. Record how much time it takes you to complete those items. Understand that in many cases a VA may be able to complete those tasks faster or s/he may be able to do a more thorough job in the same amount of time.
3. Consider whether these tasks require thoughtful decision-making or whether the VA will just need to follow a set of directions to complete.
4. Will the VA require access to sensitive information? (passwords, logins, credit cards, client details)
5. Will you be creating the processes? (Step-by-step directions)
6. Are there areas where you require outside expertise? (Web Design, Search Engine Optimization, Copy Writing, Graphic Design etc)

After creating your list of needs consider whether the tasks fall into a particular area of expertise. If so, search for a VA that specializes in that area. Determine whether they can also complete any tasks that may lay outside that area of expertise.

If you're looking for a VA who will guide you through setting up systems and procedures, or you require a VA to make higher level decisions, or have access to sensitive information, then you are looking for a mid to high range VA.

Ultimately, your budget may make the decision for you, but often mid-to-high range VAs will be able to create a plan of action based on your monthly investment.

WHAT QUESTIONS SHOULD I ASK BEFORE SIGNING A CONTRACT?

After determining what tasks you need to delegate and what kind of a VA you are looking for, the questions you need to ask will likely become clear. Here are a few to help you get started:

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BACKGROUND

1. How long have you been in business?
2. What is the average length of time your clients have been with you?
3. Why is this opening currently available

AVAILABILITY

4. What is the best method to communicate with you? (phone, email, chat, skype etc)
5. How many new clients do you take on in a month/year?
6. How many hours do you have available for clients in your day/week?
7. How many of those hours are currently filled?
8. If I need to increase the number of hours I use you in the future, will you be able to accommodate my growth?
9. What is the turnaround for unscheduled work?
10. How will my work be completed when you take a vacation?
11. How will my work be completed if you become ill?

EXPERIENCE

12. If you are recent to the industry (within 2-5 years) what was your prior career and how did it prepare you to be a Virtual Assistant?
13. What education do you have?
14. What do you enjoy most about being a Virtual Assistant?
15. What are the short term plans for your business?
16. What are the long term plans for your business?
17. What is your area of expertise?
18. What tasks outside of your area of expertise can you perform well?
19. Do you complete any continuing education on an annual basis?

EVIDENCE

20. Do you have references I can contact?
21. Do you have samples of your work that I can view?

SECURITY

22. Do you perform regular back ups?
23. Are those back ups on site or off site?
24. What is your contingency plan if your computer crashes?
25. Will you sign a confidentiality or non-disclosure agreement?
26. Do you have a confidentiality or non-disclosure agreement for your team members in place?

RECORD KEEPING

27. How do you record the hours you work for me?
28. Will I receive a monthly report detailing the tasks and hours you work for me?

TECHNOLOGY

29. What type of internet connection do you have (consider speed), and is it reliable?

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- 30. Do you possess the software I require for task completion?
- 31. Do you keep your software up to date?

FINANCES

- 32. What is your fee?
- 33. Are there any incidentals your fee does not cover?
- 34. Is there a minimum number of hours per month you invoice?
- 35. Do you invoice by the minute or in fifteen minute increments?
- 36. Is there a monthly retainer required to reserve my work hours?
- 37. If retainer based - will I lose my investment if I do not use all the hours in a month?
- 38. Will I be charged a higher per hour fee if I go over my monthly retainer hours?
- 39. Do you charge extra for rush jobs? Please define what a rush job is.
- 40. How do you take payments? (check, paypal, credit card etc)

COMPATIBILITY (Questions to ask yourself after you've talked with the VA)

- 41. Are you comfortable making him/her a part of your team?
- 42. Do you feel they will work in your best interest?
- 43. Do you like his/her personality?
- 44. Do you like his/her communication style?
- 45. Did you ask questions related to compatibility and style from the references?
- 46. Did you like what the references had to say about working with the VA?

Keep in mind, hiring a VA is quite different than hiring an employee. S/he has their own business to run and will be interviewing you as well. A professional Virtual Assistant will ask you questions and will be evaluating whether you and your company are a good addition to his/her existing clientele and work style. If you're not a good match s/he may be able to recommend someone who is.

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VIRTUAL ASSISTANT MYTHS

MYTH	EXPLANATION
Virtual Assistants only perform secretarial work	Not true. Often the most affordable VA's handle task oriented administrative work, but Virtual Assistants provide many different services from Event Planning to Search Engine Optimization.
Virtual Assistants are cheap labor	Some VAs are very affordable, but the more complex the task, the more responsibility the Virtual Assistant has, the higher the fee.
My Virtual Assistant will be at my beck & call	A Virtual Assistant is a business owner just like you. S/he has more clients than just you. A VA will work hard to accommodate you but s/he will have his/her own list of priorities to complete.
Children interfere with VA's who are mothers (or fathers!)	There are many Virtual Assistants who work from home and happen to have children. A professional VA will complete the work required on time, as expected. How s/he works her/his family, is her/his business. As long as you are getting your work when expected with the quality you expect, it should not make a difference. If your VA is talking to your clients and background noise could be an issue, you can ask how that will be handled.
They MUST belong to an organization or be accredited to be a professional in their industry	Organizations and accreditations are definitely a benefit to a VA new to the business and learning the ropes, but the bottom line in this industry is skills and professionalism.
Virtual Assistants are less/more expensive than employees	In some cases VAs are less expensive and in others they can be more. If they are more expensive than employees it is often because they possess skills that make it more affordable to use a VA on an "as needed" basis rather than pay employee rates, taxes, benefits, vacation etc.
I'll spend too much time training the VA	Depending upon the calibre of VA you hire, training could be much less than you expect. Initially as a Virtual Assistant gets to know you and your business, contact is more frequent but it quickly tapers off as the VA understands your expectations.
My company is too small to use a VA	Solopreneurs use VAs all the time! Small business owners are pulled in so many different directions that it makes sense to delegate in order to free up time to focus on the key elements of your business.
I work for a large company, I don't need a VA	In the past couple of decades, corporations downsized their teams and left sales people and managers handling all of their own administrative work. It makes sense to have a VA handle scheduling, letters, presentations etc so you can spend more time actually in front of your customers instead of preparing to get there.
My tasks are too complex for a VA	Mid-high range VAs can handle complex tasks. Decide what skills or knowledge is required and request it when searching for your ideal VA.
VA tasks are supposed to be simple	Not always, more often than not the Virtual Assistants are training the business owners while they work with them. Many businesses rely on VAs to keep them on top of technology advancements in areas such as social media and web design.

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WHAT A VIRTUAL ASSISTANT NEEDS FROM YOU

1. Communication - clear directions on what you need and what your expectations are.
2. Feedback - on what is working well and what needs to be adapted.
3. Respect - S/he wants your business to succeed and your respect creates a positive environment where ideas that will benefit your business can be shared.
4. Payment - if your Virtual Assistant is providing you services, s/he expects a timely payment in return for those services.
5. Honesty - sometimes a virtual assistant relationship is not what you'd hoped it would be. If you've communicated and provided feedback but the person is not meeting your expectations, it's time to move on. Chances are your VA is feeling the same way. Be sure to refer back to your contract to determine the procedure for termination.

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VIRTUAL ASSISTANT RESOURCES

CyberCletch LLC, *Your Marketing Management Team* offers a Virtual Assistant Team environment. Many of our clients come to us for web site design, and stay to take advantage of our complimentary services. We offer package rates, retainer discounts and hourly work to accommodate a variety of business needs.

If you are looking for a Virtual Assistant to partner with your company, and want the peace of knowing your work is being completed to the highest standards, we'd love to work with you. Please contact us to discuss how we can best help you.

ASSOCIATIONS

Many of the Virtual Assistant Associations offer the opportunity to connect with their members. It's important to note that many of the VA lists below do not screen members. A VA only has to pay a fee to the organization to put their name on the roster. They do not guarantee the quality of the Virtual Assistants.

<http://www.assistu.com>
<http://www.ivaa.org>
<http://www.vanetworking.com>
<http://valeague.com>
<http://www.cvac.ca>
<http://www.bemyva.com>

There are often local virtual assistant organizations such as the following:

<http://michiganvas.com>
<http://www.dvvaa.org>

OUTSOURCING WEB SITES

There are several online services to help you outsource virtual assistance. These tend to be the lowest rates.

www.Odesk.com
www.Fiverr.com
www.Guru.com
www.Elance.com

As with most services, it is buyer beware. Do your homework, check references diligently, ask for referrals from other business owners you know and trust.

If you find yourself willing to invest \$1000 a month for online marketing management, please call CyberCletch. We will perform traditional Virtual Assistant tasks for those clients who hire us as a comprehensive online marketing management team. The annual cost is less than hiring another in-office assistant!