

Introduction

Your business is booming. You know you need to tackle your admin but there just aren't enough hours in the day. What would be the consequences if you continued to work day-in-day-out, seven days a week? What do you do? Do you struggle on, working day and night and/or weekends or do you look for someone to help you? You don't want to employ an assistant so you decide to outsource to a Virtual Assistant (VA). But where do you start in terms of finding a *good* VA who is the right fit for you and your business?

Businesses are turning to outsourcing so that they can concentrate on the core tasks of the business that earn them income rather than getting bogged down with their business admin. There's no getting away from the admin function and it can quite often be this part of the business that contributes to the business failure, because let's face it, not all of us went into business to be an Administrator, now did we?



Business owners are beginning to realise the benefits of outsourcing to a VA and the demand for virtual services is rapidly increasing. Virtual 'hands-on' support provides greater flexibility and the services on offer can be wide-ranging.

So, how do you seek out a VA who will help you and your business prosper and avoid one who could potentially be detrimental to your business? I have outlined a few tips to simplify the process of choosing your ideal VA:

Task List

First and foremost, write down your tasks. Spend a few days doing this as everything you do won't automatically come to you straight away. Keep the list to hand. When you think of something or when you're doing a particular task, write it down.

Now, we all know delegation doesn't come easy to anyone who owns or runs a business. You've nurtured your business from start-up and it's natural that you don't want to relinquish control of what you do. However, you need to let go of those tasks that are taking up too much of your valuable time.

When you've completed your task list, mark those tasks that can be outsourced to your VA. Be open-minded and brutal...you'll thank yourself for it further down the line. **And beware!** Don't fall into the trap of thinking "*I can do this much quicker and better myself.*" It's never about whether you *can* do a particular task; it's whether you *should* be the one to *do* the task. Just think how you will use all the time that you free up by not dealing with your admin tasks yourself. Think of the extra income flooding in because you're able to focus more on your core business activities.



Budget

Now look at your budget. How much can you afford to spend? Remember to add into your calculations the fact that you will be generating more income for your business now that you're hiring a VA.

Personality ‘Click’ or ‘Clash’

Have you ever been in a work situation where you’ve just ‘clicked’ with a person? This is how it should be with your VA. Your personalities should complement each other. You want someone who is friendly, personable, and enthusiastic with fantastic customer service and follow-up skills. You want your VA to have a keen eye for detail, to be confident, articulate, a good listener and easy to communicate with. You want a stress-free, tension-free and co-operative environment. You’re putting your ‘back-office’ in this person’s hands; you have to feel comfortable with your VA or the business relationship will fail.

Professionalism

As the saying goes ‘first impressions last’. Let’s imagine you’ve started looking for your ideal VA. When you spoke to that person, what was your first impression? Did the VA answer your call professionally? Were you put on hold so that he/she could take another call? Were you treated with respect? If you are well-treated in your early conversations, it is safe to assume that your customers will be too.

Image

You’ve looked at the VA’s website. Is it professional? Is it clear and easy to follow? Remember, if a VA doesn’t pay much attention to his/her website, it’s possible that he/she won’t pay much attention to your workload either.

Skill Set

All VAs are not equal and the services offered by one VA could be different to those offered by another. For example, one VA might offer typing and diary management services whereas another may offer typing and PR services. Some VAs specialise in supporting a niche market. Is there a VA out there who is skilled in your industry? Working with a ‘niche-market’ VA has many benefits, including understanding your industry, how it operates and its peaks/troughs.

Refer to your task list. What services do you require of your VA? Also bear in mind that many VAs work with Associate VAs and outsource work in order to offer multiple services to their clients. So, if your VA doesn’t have the skills to deal with a particular task, he/she will know of another VA who can. The benefit to you is you only have to liaise with one VA.



Technological Skills

Technology plays a huge part in a VA’s work environment. Enquire what software skills your VA has that are relevant to your needs. Make sure your VA uses the same software as you to facilitate file sharing. Using technology can help your business run efficiently and with this in mind it is important that your VA has the right technological skills to suit your business.

Organisational Skills

It is advisable to ask if your VA has good organisational skills. You will need to know that he/she can juggle all the tasks you’re going to assign, that he/she has a good understanding of deadlines and priorities, whilst also juggling his/her other client commitments.

Availability

Does your VA work full-time or part-time? Is your VA available evenings and weekends (if that's appropriate to your business operation)? It is important to check what hours your VA works so that his/her availability fits in with your business.

Testimonials

Any reputable VA will be more than happy to provide details of clients that he/she has worked for. The information may even be on the VA's website.

Experience

It is important that you determine how long your VA has been operating in this capacity. However, it is more important to determine how long he/she has been doing the tasks that you are likely to assign. It may be that your VA has been doing this sort of work for a previous employer for many years. Bear in mind that there's always a learning curve when a VA is learning your business. However you shouldn't be paying for someone to learn new skills in your time unless the skills needed are unique to your business.

How much should you pay for a VA?

Virtual Assistants offer a variety of fee structures. Some charge by the hour, some work on a monthly retainer basis (a certain number of guaranteed hours per month), some offer both.

VA rates can vary considerably from £25.00 to £50.00, depending on the service provided. So, for example, diary management might cost you £30.00 an hour, whereas copyrighting or PR services might cost you £50.00.

Remember, cheapest isn't always best and as the old saying goes 'you get what you pay for'. If you require a high-level VA because your business demands that level of service, then it is worth paying the money and getting the best, especially if you work with a niche-market VA. A VA who prices too cheaply may be a sign of lower skills set, lack of self-worth or simply poor business strategy. You want to make sure your VA is around for a long time to ensure continuity of service. Remember, this is a person who will save you time so that you can spend that time earning more income for your business.



How to find a VA

I would first recommend that you ask for referrals from other small business owners. Secondly, there are online directories. Here are links to some of them:

Be My VA - www.bemyva.com

The Society of Virtual Assistants - www.societyofvirtualassistants.co.uk

You could also try Yellow Pages or seek recommendations from local networking groups.

Conclusion

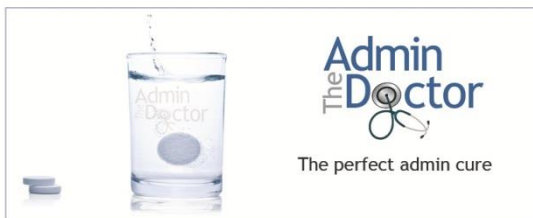
Finding the right Virtual Assistant for your business is an important task; dedicate the time and give it the attention it deserves - you will reap the rewards of your research if you do.

Make sure you get everything in writing; how many hours a week or month the VA will work for you, how much you are expected to pay, when you will be invoiced and how you are expected to pay that invoice, confidentiality agreement, etc.

Remember that all VAs are not equal; no size fits all. Choosing your VA is a personal decision and one that you have to be comfortable with. When you do find the right VA, you'll never look back.

Good luck with your search and get started on that task list! If I can be of any further assistance, please do not hesitate to contact me.

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More about Angela Dawson

Angela has worked in the PA/Secretarial field since the age of 16, starting out as Office Junior to the MD at Dutton-Forsshaw and ending her employed career as PA to the owner of Hodson Associates, gaining 12 valuable years' experience in the people development sector.

Since the business inception in May 2007, Angela continues to support busy training consultants, business coaches/mentors, speakers and after-dinner entertainers and specialises in diary management, travel arrangements, hotel accommodation, PowerPoint presentations and typing.

Now also a trainer and mentor herself, Angela coaches PAs, Secretaries and Administrators to successfully set up and run their own VA business.

