

## Virtual Employees

When we say something is "virtual" in modern terminology, we are almost always talking about something related to the internet. So Virtual Dating is dating using the internet. "Virtual" does not mean something that does not exist. But it implies you are replacing a normal physical entity with a real but for the most part unseen entity that lives online.

The trend in strategic business planning is to incorporate an aggressive "virtual marketing" plan with your traditional plans. So it makes sense that eventually the move to virtual resources would reach human resources with the availability of virtual employees.

In the last two or three years, virtual employment has taken off and become a very real resource for businesses wishing to tap into valuable experience and subject matter expertise that cannot be found locally. Agencies such as Team Double Click and Rent-A-Coder provide an army of ready to work professionals that can step in and get a job done quickly and efficiently for an employer.

The obvious first application of virtual workers is to subcontract to an online employment agency certain task specific projects that have a short beginning, middle and end. Building a new function into a web page is a good example of a project that can be packaged into an understandable project and signed over to a virtual consultant to perform the work and return to the online employer. The handling agencies collect funds via escrow so neither the employer or the consultant are at risk and the handling company claims a percentage of the fee as part of their pay for facilitating the partnership. Everybody wins.

But the concept of virtual employment is going beyond providing another variation on outsourcing to a consultant. Many virtual employment agencies provide administrative assistants, sales support and many other functions normally associated with a full time employee but those services are done "virtually". A virtual office manager can have calls routed to his or her remote phone, emails redirected and conduct office meetings and negotiations with vendors via email or instant messaging. Using these modern tools, a virtual assistant can provide almost every function an on site assistant might be able to do but do so at a lower cost to the employer.

The virtual employment trend in business has obvious benefits for businesses that are in need of qualified help. It opens the door to recruitment sources that can supplement the local talent pool. Many times virtual staffing agencies may have on their "employee roles" people with a specialized background or skill. The agency is skilled at defining exactly what their client businesses need and matching up the right virtual employee to the job so the business has the right skill sets where they need them, when they need them and only for as long as they need them.

In addition to the benefits that virtual employment has for businesses to fill needs for skilled workers, it's an excellent resource for talented workers who

want to make a contribution to the business world on their own terms. Virtual workers almost universally work at home or where they chose to work. Often the work is task based with a deadline so the worker can select the hours that fits their family and personal schedules best. And, like working for a temp agency, the employee can build a resume with the agency that improves the quality of work they get over time.

Virtual staffing is a trend that has been a success for all involved as it has matured in the last few years. We can look for this twenty first century methodology for bringing in talented workers to continue to grow as more and more businesses get comfortable with staffing their employee ranks "virtually".

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