

Title:

The Value of Virtual

Word Count:

471

Summary:

Virtual assistants, the online equivalent of office administrative assistants, are becoming more popular as affordable staffing solutions.

Keywords:

virtual assistant, independent contractor, virtual

Article Body:

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While secretaries and administrative assistants have been around for years, the term "virtual assistant" is a relatively new term that has become popular along side the Internet. What is a virtual assistant? Also called a VA, a virtual assistant is the online equivalent of an office administrative assistant.

As independent contractors, virtual assistants work for their clients off-site, performing a variety of administrative tasks. Common duties include data entry, web design and maintenance, bookkeeping, word processing and transcription. While many virtual assistants offer basic office skills like these, others specialize in areas like accounting, research, mailings, marketing and public relations.

Because virtual assistants work off-site, often from their own home offices, businesses that hire them do not incur additional overhead expenses, payroll taxes or benefit payments. Instead, the business gains the experience and expertise of the virtual assistant while only paying for the services performed. This set-up can be particularly valuable to the small business owner or nonprofit that can't afford to hire additional staff. It can also be ideal for firms that need to fill employment gaps during peak times, maternity leaves and vacations.

How does it work? Once a virtual assistant has been selected, the hiring firm and the VA outline their terms. This is typically done via e-mail or telephone (e.g., virtually). The hiring firm spells out the work to be performed, standards of performance and the needed deadline. The virtual assistant quotes a

price, or an hourly rate, for the work and her payment terms. Prices and rates vary based on the type of work, level of expertise required and the deadline. More complex projects or those that are needed right away will likely be more costly than simple tasks. Once an agreement has been made, the VA gets to work, contacting the hiring firm as needed with questions. Once the project has been submitted and approved by the hiring firm, the virtual assistant paid. This can also be done virtually through online payment systems like PayPal.

How can you find a virtual assistant? There are a number of professional virtual assistant associations accessible online including the International Virtual Assistants Association (IVAA), the International Association of Virtual Office Assistants (IAVOA) and the International Association of Virtual Assistants (IAVA). In addition to offering certification programs for virtual assistants, these associations often include online directories where you can search for virtual assistants. A simple Google search of the term "virtual assistant" will also yield millions of results.

The key is finding someone:

- (1) who can perform the needed tasks on time;
- (2) who will communicate clearly and on a timely basis;
- (3) that will maintain your privacy and confidentiality; and
- (4) with whom you will enjoy working.

If you can accomplish these four goals with a virtual assistant, she can become a valuable part of your virtual team.