



So you want to be a Virtual Assistant?

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So you want to be a Virtual Assistant?

You want to be a Virtual Assistant, but what exactly do they do?

According to Wikipedia:

A virtual assistant (typically abbreviated to VA, also called a virtual office assistant) is generally self-employed and provides professional administrative, technical, or creative (social) assistance to clients remotely from a home office

My name is Michele Ibbs and when I started [I'm Your P.A.](#) in 2007, I had no idea what I was letting myself in for. In my case I had just lost my job because of divorce, therefore I had to make things work. I had to start and earn an income quickly. In my first 3 years I made so many mistakes, I trust my experience will prevent you from making the same mistakes.

Why do you want to be a Virtual Assistant?

Many people just want a job that they can work around their family life. This is fine, but it may restrict the clients you can work with. Others choose the profession to be their own boss and there is nothing wrong with that; remember that many of your clients will believe they are your boss as they are paying; also if you are your own boss - the buck stops here!

It is important that you decide the real reason you want to do this, there will be times as you embark on this journey that you will question "why am I doing this?" Make sure that you know, write it down!

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What sort of VA are you going to be?

Firstly it is important to decide on your specialty. Where is your passion? There is no point in doing this if you are not going to enjoy it. When I set up I knew that my best bet was taking calls for people as I have a good telephone manner and am good at managing diaries, typing for me at a 30 - 40 words a minute was not going to work!

- Do you want to work solely from home, or will you go to the clients site to work?
- Do you want clients to come and visit you at home?
- How many days a week do you want to work?
- How many hours a day do you want to work?
- Do you want to set this up whilst working full or part time in another job, with a view to becoming completely self employed?

Days of the week to work:

- Monday
- Tuesday
- Wednesday
- Thursday
- Friday
- Saturday
- Sunday

Hours to work:

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Restrictions that may affect working:

- Childcare
- School Holidays
- Family Holidays
- Family responsibilities

Strengths and passion:

There are many more you may wish to add - remember though it is better to specialise rather than be a Jack of all trades

Typing	<input type="checkbox"/>	Developing Procedures	<input type="checkbox"/>
Mail Merging	<input type="checkbox"/>	Book Keeping	<input type="checkbox"/>
Audio Typing	<input type="checkbox"/>	Raising Invoices	<input type="checkbox"/>
Copy Typing	<input type="checkbox"/>	Debt Management	<input type="checkbox"/>
Data Entry	<input type="checkbox"/>	Research	<input type="checkbox"/>
Reports Writing	<input type="checkbox"/>	Call Handling	<input type="checkbox"/>
Proposals	<input type="checkbox"/>	Customer Service Calls	<input type="checkbox"/>
Manual Configuration	<input type="checkbox"/>	Sales Calls	<input type="checkbox"/>
Tenders	<input type="checkbox"/>	Appointment Making	<input type="checkbox"/>
CVs	<input type="checkbox"/>	Proof Reading	<input type="checkbox"/>
Desktop Publishing	<input type="checkbox"/>	Web Design	<input type="checkbox"/>
Design	<input type="checkbox"/>	Website Maintenance	<input type="checkbox"/>
Flyers	<input type="checkbox"/>	Marketing	<input type="checkbox"/>
Brochures	<input type="checkbox"/>	CRM System Set Up	<input type="checkbox"/>
Newsletters	<input type="checkbox"/>	CRM System Management	<input type="checkbox"/>
Excel	<input type="checkbox"/>	Social Media Management	<input type="checkbox"/>
PowerPoint	<input type="checkbox"/>	Event Management	<input type="checkbox"/>
Diary Management	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Conference Organising	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Database Creation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Database Management	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Database Cleansing	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

A little more about what is involved and how to put it across to clients

Call Handling / Overflow Call Handling

BT research over 69% of callers reaching a voicemail will not leave a message – they will merely move on to the next person in yellow pages!

A VA can be set up to answer calls when they cannot be answered by the client, either because they are busy, on the phone, at lunch, start late or finish early – you do not have to be set up to take every call.

- It gives the client a more professional image
- A VA is available full time but only paid for the hours that their services are required
- Ask what is the cost of a missed call?
- A VA gives the client time to think – if a caller rings with an awkward question – you obviously cannot answer that question – but by giving the client details, they can prepare the answer and call at a time to suit them

In order to take calls you need to have a telephone system and decide what they will do when they are unable to answer the calls themselves. It is VERY restrictive to a VA working alone. It restricts networking time to find new clients and if you do get very busy they are unable to take more calls.

Call handling is a very easy way of starting to work with a client. Many VAs will offer this and work alongside a VA specialising in call handling, referring clients for the call handling and receiving an ongoing commission. I'm Your PA will work with other VAs on this basis, please contact me for more information and the commissions paid.

By using a dedicated VOIP system, all calls are timed and the billing system can be integrated

Aged Debt Chasing

Many companies cannot afford to dedicate the time to chase aged debts, even though it could drastically improve their cashflow. Unless a person is available 40 hours a week, the chances are that there will always be aged debtors that cannot be chased. E.g. employ someone mornings only – who chases the money from the customers whose accounts departments are only available on an afternoon? Employ someone Monday to Wednesday - who chases the money from the customers whose accounts departments are only available on a Thursday or Friday?

This can be done from a dedicated line on the VOIP system or just by withholding the number and timing the calls for charging purposes.

Customer Service Calls

These calls can often be made in the evening. Some VAs prefer to work a couple of hours in an evening, this is a cost effective way for the client to have the follow up calls made.

Many clients may carry out annual inspections, a courtesy call can be made to the customer a couple of days after the visit, check the customer is happy with the clients work, ask permission to call them in 12 months, diarise this call. In 12 months the second follow up call is made an appointment is booked – the client has repeat business

During the first follow up call it is also possible to ask for a written testimonial or a personal recommendation to a friend of the customer.

Report Writing

This can be offered to clients either by phoning in and dictating to you. This will need to be booked in advance, alternatively the client can dictate into a digital Dictaphone or call a dedicated VOIP dictation line. Some clients may choose to hand write notes and photo or scan them across for typing. The reports are typed and emailed back to the client

Letter Writing and Mail Shots

This can be offered either by a client phoning in and dictating to a VA – this will need to be booked in advance, alternatively the client can dictate into a digital Dictaphone or call a dedicated VOIP dictation line. The letter is typed and emailed back to the client, alternatively if the client is happy for you to keep a stock of their letterheads, it is possible to *pp* the letter and post it out on their behalf.

Often clients will ask for a mailshot, be careful to cost into the quote time for manipulating the database prior to mail merge, time for editing per letter, are envelopes included, the time for stuffing envelopes, is postage included, time for putting stamps on, taking them to post. This might sound trivial until you get your first 500 mail shot with three inserts!

Email mail shots

Some clients may wish to carry out an email mailshot, again you can create the newsletter and email these out. It is necessary to have the database to email to, and it is important that an email address is set up as the client, this way the email is perceived to have gone from their company – not you. Often clients will ask for a VA to manage their Mailchimp, Aweber or Constant Contact account – make sure that you understand the systems before agreeing to carry out the project, they are not all the same!

Quotes and Invoicing

You may or may not be able to carry out book keeping, however quotes and invoices can be prepared on behalf of the clients and emailed or posted to their customers. Always make sure that when preparing a quote or invoice that the client also receives a copy for their records. This can work well with an offering of following up on quotes and aged debt chasing.

Database Creation

Many clients may require a database creating for marketing purposes. A simple database can be created in Excel, which can later be exported into Mailchimp, Constant Contact or CapsuleCRM. When creating a database remember to put each piece of information in a different box. Clients wanting to have a database created should identify the customer sector and the area in which they are interested. It is important to identify whether mailing addresses are required, position of the contact, email addresses, and phone numbers.

Database Cleansing

The term database cleansing refers to a client database that is out of date, a VA can take the database and call round the customer contacts, updating the information. This can be done either by using a dedicated VOIP number that charges the client direct, but there will also be a time element to the cost as additional time other than time on the phone is required

Diary Management

Diary management is very useful for a number of clients, Google calendar is now used widely with iPads, iPhones and Blackberries. You sets up a “main” account that all her clients can share their calendars with – this allows you to see all clients together and move between clients diaries.

Organising suppliers / placing orders / chasing deliveries

Often clients find this very helpful – they can either call in from site or send emails of an evening, knowing that you will place the order and make notes to chase delivery – in exactly the same way a P.A. would working from their office

Personal Reminders

These should be diarised on a client diary page – in some instances the client may choose for their VA to carry out the tasks alternatively you can just remind them to buy the wife's birthday card, tax the car or whatever the reminder was for.

When offering a personal reminder service things that may be considered are:

- Family birthdays, anniversaries, school holidays, staff birthdays
- Personal tax reminders
- Vehicle tax
- Inspections for rental properties
- Subscription renewals

Personal Shopping

VAs can be requested to find all sorts of interesting things! Remember to charge for the research time, this may be ordering flowers, purchasing, wrapping and delivering presents, food shopping on-line – again there is no end to the list! You will need to decide how much of a personal shopping service they are prepared to offer, I have been known to purchase, assemble, wrap and deliver a giant Barbie house for a client – great fun!

Travel Arrangements / Holidays

Clients have asked me to make travel arrangements for them in the past, I will never pay for these and invoice, on occasion costs have been £25,000 in one go – make sure that the travel or holiday companies invoice the client direct.

Conference or Exhibition Organising / Project Management

When agreeing to carry out Conference or Exhibition Organisational work for a client, make sure there are clear guidelines as to who is doing what and when. If booking on behalf of the client ensure that the client always signs the paperwork – you does not want to be left with the bill if the client changes their mind.

You may receive commissions from venues or other suppliers, again make sure that there is no secret about this, I have seen a number of relationships go sour where you has received commissions that the client thought they should have had; often you may have priced to the client on the basis that they would receive commissions, or the commissions are there as a contingency “just in case”. Always be upfront.

Social Media Management

Many VAs are setting up to manage social media for clients, in order to carry this out successfully it is important that there is an understanding of the analytics side of Social Media to be able to report back.

So now we have the areas we are good at, now we need to identify your target market - again it is important that you have a passion here, there is no point in working with medical people if you have neither knowledge nor interest.

Every profession can work with a VA. It is up to you to show how you can take their pain away by working with you. Write down the key professions of interest for you, here are 30 to get you started, all professions I have worked with over the years before I specialised:

Accountants	
Architects	
Beauty Therapists	
Builders	
Business Consultants	
Cleaning Companies	
Coaches	
Debt Management Companies	
Electricians	
Employment Law Solicitors	
Export Companies	
Gas Engineers	
Health and Safety Companies	
HR Consultants	
Hypnotherapists	
Insurance Companies	
IT Companies	
Manufacturing Companies	
Marketing Companies	
Mobile Telecom companies	
Mortgage Advisors	
Photographers	
Physiotherapists	
Printing Companies	
Property Agents	
Recruitment Companies	
Roofers	
Solicitors	
Telecom Companies	
Website Designers	

It is probable that you can work with more than one type of business, but again, don't try and be all things, to all people, it doesn't work!

Either look at offering the same service to multiple professions or multiple services to the same profession.

When I started I offered everything to everyone! Using this approach it is not possible to become a specialist at anything.

So why should you want to become a specialist?

- Job satisfaction
- Visibility
- Credibility
- Money!

When picking the areas you want to work in and what you want to do, it is important that you ask yourself:

- What will happen to my clients if I am ill or on holiday or the children are off school and I cannot work?
- Can your client cope without you?
- Can your client wait for their work?
- Will you be able to give the work to another VA to do on your behalf?

Setting up

OK you have decided you can do this – now we have to set up a business!

Business name

This is up to you, just check it out on Google and make sure that no one already has the same name, it is also worth checking out at Companies House. Decide are you going to be a Sole Trader or a Limited Company? I registered as a Limited Company from day 1, however if I was starting again I would consult an accountant first (I can always recommend one if you need one). Unless you are a book keeper with accountancy knowledge, I would always recommend you get an accountant to help you with your on-going books.

Logo, website and stationary

I recommend speaking to someone who specialises in creating good logos, this is to be your branding for years to come, it's important that you like it from the start. Your website is a big business tool, it is your office front, it is worth investing in this, but do shop around – again I can always recommend cost effective website designers.

I have seen VAs over the years with very poor websites and logos, yet they offer website design and management – please do think carefully about your website!

Bank Account

Make sure that you have a separate bank account, if you are running a business, you need to make sure you act like a business.

Insurance

So important, yet so often forgotten. The type of insurance you need will depend on whether or not you are planning on having clients attending your premises. There are special insurances for working from home. Make sure that all your computer equipment is insured and your business insurance covers you in the event a client claim.

Terms and Conditions

It is important that your clients know your terms and conditions, the costs, the delivery, payment terms. There are many available on line – don't leave yourself wide open.

Office set up

Ideally you have identified a spare room to convert into an office where you will not be distracted. The office needs to be free of children and animals and their related noises, it is beneficial if it is bright and airy - you may be spending quite a lot of time in there!

I have often called a small business and tried to have a conversation whilst the children are shouting in the background, or the dog is barking, this does not create the professional image to present to a prospective client. If the client is planning to ask you to make any calls on their behalf, they are going to want to be sure that the call will be professional with no distractions.

Equipment and Furniture

I have listed some of the basics here but there may be many more, depending on your chosen specialties

Good broadband

You will be reliant on your broadband for so much. Downloading and uploading files, emails, internet research, maybe VOIP phones.

Please note that BT Home Hub will “knock out” any VOIP phone that is not BT's own, every two to five minutes. I run my home office with two broadband facilities in case of failure. Unless you are totally dependent on broadband for VOIP phones this is not essential. Broadbands that we have good experience with are Utility Warehouse (very cost effective and stable), Plusnet and Virgin. Sky and Orange seems to have issues with VOIP phones. Having two WiFi settings at home is also highly recommended, one for guests and one to keep all your work data secure. Most routers will allow this setting.

Desk and chair

I never realised the importance of this until I ended up having physio because I had been sitting incorrectly at my desk. Make sure that your chair is ergonomically correct and the screen is set at the right height.

Filing cabinet

A number of clients ask us to file on their behalf and return the paperwork once a year – this may not be necessary from the start. Office Furniture shops often offer good second hand filing cabinets, remember if you do have client information on paper, it is important to be able to file this in a lockable cabinet for security and to comply with GDPR.

Book shelves

These are not essential – but they are very useful. I seem to have collected more reference books than ever! Often I will set up A4 files for clients, again to return to them on an annual or bi-annual basis.

Space

For laying out papers when working on more than one project – I think most VAs have used their office floor as a second and third desk on more than one occasion!

Computer and back-up

Please make sure that your computer is properly backed up, so in the event of a complete computer failure it is possible to reload everything quickly on to a new computer.

I have seen a VA set up with just an old laptop and then go into complete meltdown when the laptop packed up and all the clients work was lost. I have had a computer company looking after all my hardware and software from the very early days - it has saved my bacon on more than one occasion. A good computer company can also be a valuable source of referrals for you too – look after them and they will look after you!

Windows

Most PCs and laptops will come with Windows home as standard, this does not allow for encryption and needs to be updated to Windows Professional. Windows Professional does not have encryption enabled as standard, it does need to be activated. Please note that an unencrypted, password protected laptop / PC can be used by an unauthorized user within 3 minutes and all data accessed within 7 minutes – I have seen this done!

Office 365

Typically most VAs will use Office 365 as their Office software. It must be noted that Office 365 Home / Personal once again it is exactly that! It is not licensed for commercial use, you are about to become a professional VA – invest in the correct tools.

Anti-virus software

This is absolutely essential and should not be compromised. You will be working closely with other businesses and cannot afford to be the cause of them becoming infected with a virus. Your computer company should be able to advise you of the most up to date anti-virus software that is of a reasonable charge, remember the free of charge anti-virus software is not suitable for business use. Any problems please contact me and I will put you in touch with my IT company.

Printer

I started with two printers, one is a cheap and cheerful which I still use for office printing, the second printer I rent (it was cheaper than leasing) this one is for printing customer work and is a far superior quality. When deciding on a printer, make sure that you check out the cost of printing cartridges – I was once given a fabulous printer, fast, fantastic quality, then I ordered a set of replacement cartridges at £168 – needless to say I stopped using it very quickly. There are many websites offering low cost printer cartridges – I recommend Quality Office Supplies and have found them very cost effective and efficient.

Speakers for computer and sound card

If clients are sending you audio recordings for transcription, these will be essential – we have had to transcribe a number of CDs over the years

Scanner

Often clients will want work scanned on their behalf. I have also found it useful when sending handwritten notes to a fellow VA for typing up. Recently I have taken to using my iPad to photograph the document and email it – this has been much quicker.

CD/DVD burner

I have been asked to send large volumes of work on a CD – however this is becoming less and less.

Flash drive

For transporting electronic information to and from clients. Five years ago I used these all the time – now I often use Dropbox instead. I still believe they are useful to have around, but not an essential item.

Skype account

Free to open, free to use and so useful. Skype calls with clients mean you can have face to face meetings. I also have Skype calls with my business coach.

Dropbox / One Drive

These are a Godsend. It is possible to share documents with clients, work on them with clients and not end up with multiple copies of the same document. They are both free to start and only cost when you have to upgrade to larger storage capacity. One Drive is included with Office 365

Mobile phone

You may choose to have a separate mobile to your personal number – I started with two separate phones, now my family and friends know not to call me in works hours and clients know the guidelines to call me. I am aware of VAs getting client calls on their mobiles at 10pm at night – just make sure that you are running a business and not giving up your life!

Phone

I recommend a VOIP system, no set up fee, dedicated line, operates on broadband, very low running costs and gives a number that you can keep even if you move premises. It is also useful to have this number to advertise on your website. Businesses with a landline number are assumed to be larger than those with just a mobile number – it is all an illusion, but a useful one, you want to stand above your competitor. It also allows you to keep your business and private life separate.

Depending on your chosen speciality you may require different types of software, dictaphone, fax machine or fax to email.

How will you charge clients?

Firstly it is important to understand how you can benefit a client

- VA's are available as required. There is no contract and they can be let go whenever the time is right for the client.
- Clients have the flexibility of using their VA as and when they need them depending on the workload.
- VA's charge purely on hours worked. There's no paying for gossiping around the water cooler, powdering the nose or making the coffee.
- VA's pay their own benefits. The client does not have to pay for sick pay, holiday pay or national insurance .
- VA's free up valuable time for their clients, saving their clients not only money, but TIME. A very precious commodity in our fast paced world.
- No need to provide office space, equipment or furniture.
- No extra electricity, water, tea and coffee costs!
- No need to provide supervision or training. You are qualified for the work they pass on.
- The client's day is not disrupted by having someone in their office – especially important if they work from home themselves.
- VA's have a genuine interest in helping clients expand their businesses.
- VA's will often work outside of normal business hours to assist with last minute deadlines.
- VA's work from their own offices. The client doesn't need to provide a PC or a desk.
- A VA only charges for the work done, so if it takes two hours, that is all clients have to pay.
- Clients need only to engage the services of a VA when something needs to be done.

Inevitably there will be clients who do not want to pay anywhere near your rate. They will probably be comparing to the average pay for secretarial staff and may be looking to pay you the same rate. The client needs to be aware that a VA is not an employee who receives benefits, sick pay, and holiday pay, on top of a basic hourly rate. Employees also get paid for all the hours they are present in the office, even if they are not working. The 'real' cost of an employee is far higher than most clients appreciate. Remember you are saving the client money in the long term as a VA is only paid for the actual hours worked.

Be prepared to showcase your skills, experience and the benefits of working with a VA.

You are an independent business owner, and therefore should charge two to three times the going rate for a secretarial employee.

You have to:

- Provide for your own retirement
- Fund your own holiday pay
- Fund your own pay when sick
- Provide your own equipment
- Cover various overheads such as office space, electricity, lighting, phone, internet costs
- Cover marketing costs
- Cover your own training costs
- Unlike a typical employee/employer relationship, the client has no hassles of having to terminate contracts if they want to 'let the employee go'.

Think of the client's value of time – if they can earn £60 in one hour and they spend an hour typing at 15 words per minute – the average speed for a two finger typist, a VA could probably complete the work in 15 minutes, costing approximately £6.50 – whilst the client earns £60.

When a potential client queries the rate, be prepared to politely explain some of the benefits of working with a VA and emphasise the value of their time. They may view you as 'just another cost', explain this is not just another cost, this is an investment into their business, enabling them to expand. To match the experience of a good VA with an employee, the client would need to be paying around £30,000+ per year – not £13,000 as for a secretary.

A client might say they cannot afford your services. A good argument would be that they cannot afford NOT to use your services if they want to grow their business.

A client might say that a temp is cheaper. Be ready to explain the differences between a temp and a Virtual Assistant.

Firstly, there is no guarantee that they will get the same temp every time. So precious time is wasted explaining systems and requirements to each temp.

Clients don't usually screen or interview temps, they just get whoever is available at the time. Skill sets and experience vary greatly, so one week they get a fantastic temp. Then next time, they may get someone who doesn't have the right skills or attitude.

Clients may be concerned that the end result of work may not be what they want. Explain that all your work is guaranteed and you until they are satisfied.

Do not be upset if the potential client still wants to go away and think about it.

Be willing to walk away. By not being prepared to walk away, and lowering the rate just to get the business, value of VAs drops and you are on the rocky downhill road!

Quoting for projects

Simply spend time breaking the job down into smaller component parts, guess how long each part will take, add them together and multiply this by the hourly rate charged for the service.

Try and get a sample of the project, ask how long the overall document is, to get a good idea of how much work is involved, before quoting. If the work takes longer, don't worry; sooner or later a mistake will be made – learn from it! Don't spend too long on quotes, as there is no a guarantee that the work will follow.

Setting the ground rules with clients

It is important that you and your client know what you expect from each other from the outset. Here are a few of the pitfalls that I have either encountered personally or heard from other VAs.

Clients don't want to be paying someone to learn on the job, if you really want to move into another field, be prepared to learn in your own time. However it may be that the client is prepared to work with you at a reduced rate whilst you learn together. This is another good reason to decide on your specialty to start with.

How often does the client want to be in contact with you? When do they need updates? How do they want updates? By email? By telephone call? By meetings? What are the charges for the calls with them and meetings?

Some VAs are taught that they should be a "partner" with the client in their business. On the surface, this sounds great. However, I have heard too many horror stories about VAs who did things without asking permission, from modifying website text to changing bookings. Make sure you are clear about the boundaries of what you can do without permission. Many self-employed people are not looking for someone to "take over" running their company; instead they want a professional who can assist them with specific tasks and projects.

How much should you charge as a VA?

VAs have a wide range of fee structures. Some charge by the hour, some work on a monthly retainer basis (a certain number of guaranteed hours per month). Some charge a sliding scale: a lower hourly rate for common administrative work and a higher hourly rate for high-end skills, like website maintenance or database management.

A VA who prices themselves too cheaply may be a sign of lower skill set, lack of self worth, or just plain poor business strategy. When a business owner prices their services too low, they automatically set themselves up for cash flow problems, the leading cause of businesses failing. You want to make sure that you are around for a long time to serve your clients.

Clients may also consider hiring multiple VAs with specific skill sets. For example, one who focuses on your bookkeeping and another who focuses on implementing marketing campaigns, it is always worth looking for other VAs that may complement what you offer.

Many set up as VAs charging £20 per hour - this is not a VA business, this is more like temp work. Remember you decided to be your own boss, so there are a number of things that you need to take into consideration when charging clients.

Based on a 30 hour week:

20 hours charged to clients @ £20 per hour	= £ 400
10 hours marketing - no income	= £ 0
2 wks holiday inc. public holidays = 50 wks worked	= £20,000 p.a.

Now for some very conservative costs:

Take off the cost of any marketing / advertising	= £	500
Stationary / printing / printer cartridges	= £	200
Mobile phone / phone / broadband	= £	600
IT Support	= £	450
Networking	= £	1000
Accountancy	= £	500
Insurances	= £	300
Other incidentals	= £	1000
Total	= £	4550

After costs the annual income is down to £15,450 p.a. an average of £1287.50 per month, £297 per week - out of this you will need to find your tax and any pension contributions. You will not be paid holiday pay if you are not working, you are not earning.

A VA should be charging at least £30 per hour. 20 hours work per week for a client should earn around £30,000 per year take off costs – these do not vary dramatically until staff are employed, you are now earning on average £489 per week before tax. Now there is money for pensions and savings.

Retainers and packages

These are a great way to ensure payment is made up front, offering a retainer or a package for a set number of hours at a discounted rate. It is important that the conditions are laid out:

- What discounts are available?
- Is the time allowed to be carried forward if not used?
- What exactly can the package or retainer be used for?
- What happens if more time is required?

The simpler the pricing structure, the easier it is for your clients to understand.

Billing

There are many different billing systems available, the key thing is to ensure that whatever work is carried out is logged and billed – you don't want to be a busy fool. Are there charges for initial visits to clients?
Is time on the phone to clients billed?

Marketing your VA business

On-Line Networking / Marketing

When setting up as a VA it is useful to register with as many on-line directories & networking groups as possible – the following list is not extensive but may be useful – and they are all FREE!

Local On-Line	MoreUK.com
Women's networking groups	Kyotee.co.uk
WBDA	Fastfinders.co.uk
Enterprising Women	The National Pages
Every Woman	Business Internet Directory
Free Index	Uksmallbusinessdirectory.co.uk
Hot Frog	http://www.virtualassistants.co.uk/Become.aspx
Kelly Search	http://www.businessgalore.co.uk/add-email.asp
Yell.com	Facebook
Thomson Local	Altavista
VA4U	HotBot
Touch Local	Yahoo
Town Pages	All the WebMSN
Smile Local	Lycos
Ask.com	Twitter
Dogpile	Instagram

Go to the sites and look for the link that says "Add your website" or "Add your URL" or "Register here" and follow the instructions.

The website can be linked to Google Adwords – in order to do this you will need to open a Google Adwords account using a credit card or company bank direct debit feature, I recommend that you discuss the Adwords campaign with an SEO consultant to find the campaign that best suits your budget requirements.

Newsletters

You may choose to look at facilities to send out regular newsletters to existing and potential clients – you may find it useful to prepare a database of email addresses for a potential industry class of clients e.g. builders, hypnotherapists, driving instructors etc. A specifically designed email newsletter can then be sent out to attract them. Do remember to comply with GDPR regulations when adding people to email marketing databases.

Business Networking

A large number of clients can be gained from business networking and for this purpose I recommend that VAs join BNI, however it is also useful to join the Chamber and you may want to investigate the numerous other options of business networking. My experience of BNI is I currently invoice £64,000 per year to BNI referrals. Networking as a whole brings us 65% of all our business.

When attending networking meetings it is important to have a focused “pitch” to gain the most out of the networking event and ensure that the pitch is specific – please note that if you ask for “Anybody” the chances are that you will actually get “Nobody”!

Check who is likely to be in attendance, decide who to speak to and why. I highly recommend that people attending networking events should never sell to the room – everyone hates being sold at!

When introducing yourself – create a picture, think of the benefit for the client working with a virtual assistant, so when asked “What do you do?” instead of replying “I’m a virtual assistant” give the enquirer something to think about and something to remember!

Examples:

- *I save businesses time and money* (by creating the client time to focus on the parts of the business that make money)
- *I save marriages* (by dealing with the work the client tries to get their already over worked partner to do!)
- *I'm a juggler* (juggling everyone else's business problems)
- *I'm not really here – I'm virtual!*

Always have a story ready to tell them about how you have helped someone – in the beginning use other people's stories – "I know a VA who helped by....."

Before embarking on networking, I recommend that reading up about it, it really helps to get results quicker. There are many books available on Networking, one of the most fun books is "Business Networking and Sex – not what you think! by Hazel Walker, Ivan Misner and Frank de Raffe". For a really quick, easy reading guide to networking and business referral try Iain Whyte's "Life, Business and Speedboats"

For more information on networking check out the networking tips section on www.TheNetworkingQueen.co.uk or like @YourNetworkingQueen Facebook page.

The Clients

You have decided to become a VA, chosen your specialty, set up your business, started marketing and now you have a potential client who is interested – now what?

There are certain clients where we know the type of service that will probably benefit them. When visiting a client for the first time it is essential to go with an open mind, the job of you is to take on work from the client to give them more of a work / life balance. The client is the best person to identify exactly what would benefit them so ask the client:

“In an ideal world, what would you get someone else to do to free up your time?”

Invoicing and Quotations

Builders / Aerial Fitters / Roofers / Washing Machine Repairs / Gas fitters / Plumbers / Electricians / Carpet Fitters / Carpet Cleaners / Gardeners / Double Glazing Contractors / IT repair staff / Painters & Decorators / Sole Traders

Often the work carried out by all these trades can be set up on a template, a simple call or photo of hand written notes can lead to a professionally drawn up quote. The quote is then sent out AND followed up with a telephone call. I remember the first builder I approached as a potential client, he told me he did all his own quotes – they only took him an hour or so each. I smiled and looked at his fabulous block paving, I told him I too could do block paving – he was impressed! I calculated that the area of block paving would take me about a month to complete – he laughed and said there was only about 8 hours work. Interesting he would charge £500 for the block paving or spend 8 hours doing 8 quotes – the quotes took me 2 hours - £50 – I got all his admin work!

Personal Reminders and Personal Shopping

This service may be beneficial to private individuals, or any of the other previously listed clients, and it covers a multitude of options from purchasing the weekly shopping on-line, reminding clients of the school holidays or booking hotels, restaurants, theatre tickets, taxis – whatever they need. It is always useful to build up a supplier database of people to contact to be able to achieve the clients needs.

Report Writing

Personal Coaches / Business Coaches

Many coaches will attend a customer site, discuss the future goals and leave in time to travel to the next appointment – you can offer a service whereby they can actually ring in to a dedicated dictation line in between clients, dictate their report, which can then be typed and emailed to them before they reach home later in the day.

Alternatively people in this scenario may prefer to use a digital dictation machine and email the information to you for typing.

Coaches are a valuable source of referrals as they will often advise their clients that by having their paperwork dealt with or their calls answered, it is likely to free their time to carry out work that actually makes them money.

Call Handling and Diary Management

Builders / Aerial Fitters / Roofers

These people, unless they have a member of staff in an office, will undoubtedly benefit from call handling. When a client is on a roof, a ladder or scaffolding, they cannot take calls safely on their mobile – they should not be disturbed. Therefore it is a cost effective option for them to redirect the calls to a VA, where their calls will be answered in a professional and helpful manner. Remind them that according to BT research over 69% of callers reaching a voicemail will not leave a message – they will merely move on to the next person in yellow pages!

If these people also allow you to book their diaries, the calls can be booked straight in to appointments on their behalf.

Customer Care Calls and Diary Management

Washing Machine Repairs / Gas Fitters / Plumbers / Electricians / Carpet Fitters / Carpet Cleaners / Gardeners / Double Glazing Contractors / IT Repair Staff / Painters & Decorators / Sole Traders

These people can answer their calls without risking their health and safety, however they will undoubtedly put themselves under an enormous amount of pressure whilst trying to focus on the job in hand and answer their phone.

Put yourself in the position of the customer – you are probably paying by the hour for a service, and the technician has just taken the fifth telephone call – this is what you have to point out. Invariably the client will tell you that they allow their mobile to go to voicemail - remind them that according to BT research over 69% of callers reaching a voicemail will not leave a message – they will merely move on to the next person in yellow pages!

Many trades people have cause to do a follow up service call in 12 months time. Offer to make a courtesy call to the customer a couple of days after the

call – checking that the customer is happy with the clients work, and asking permission to call them in 12 months to carry out the next service, this is then diarised so that in 12 months time the second follow up call is made and another appointment is made – this helps the client to add value to their customer – it is helping you to add value to their client!

Hypnotherapists / Physiotherapists / Chiropractors / Beauticians / Healers / Driving Instructors / Health Practitioners

These potential clients have to spend uninterrupted time with their clients, it is totally unacceptable for them to take calls when they are working with their clients again remind them that according to BT research over 69% of callers reaching a voicemail will not leave a message – they will merely move on to the next person in yellow pages!

Holiday Cover

A good way of building a relationship with a client is to offer holiday cover, this might be covering for a receptionist or secretary who is going on holiday, once they have used a VA service it is unlikely they will want to use a temp!

What Should You Consider When Hiring A VA?

There are many points that I recommend clients to consider when choosing a VA – I thought it would be useful for you, the prospective VA to know these.

- **Click.** Almost every person who has used a VA says that the first thing they looked at was the personality: was there a "click" between them? The client wants someone who is friendly, enthusiastic, and detail-oriented, with extraordinary customer service and follow-up skills. You should be confident without being arrogant, articulate, a good listener, and comfortable to speak with.

- **Professionalism.**

Do they answer their voicemails and emails in a timely manner?

Do they answer their phone professionally?

If they promise to send you something, do they follow-up quickly?

Do they treat you with respect?

If you treat the client well in the initial conversations, then it's likely they will treat the clients customers well, too. (After a VA is hired, it never hurts to follow up with customers and ask them how you treated them.)

- **Project Management.** It also helps if you have good project management skills. Over time, the client is going to be giving you a huge number of tasks and the client needs to know that you can juggle all these tasks, understanding priorities and deadlines, while also juggling other clients' needs.

- **Skill Set.** There are many, many tasks that can be delegate to a VA. It helps if the client has a list of tasks they want you to perform, and make sure during the interview process that the list is reviewed with a potential VA to determine if they can do all those tasks. Do they have the skills you need to do the work required?
- **Technology Skills.** Most self-employed people rely upon technology to help run their business, from QuickBooks, to websites, to Microsoft Word. Using technology can help the office run efficiently and save time and money. With this in mind, it's critical that a new VA has excellent technical skills. The client should ask them what software products they know how to use, and how well they know them. The client should make sure the new VA uses the same software that the client is using, so that files can be shared. If the client has a website, they should ask you if they know how to do website maintenance (and ask how many websites they currently maintain). If there is technology associated with the clients website, like an online shopping cart, the client should ask you if they knows how to maintain the specific shopping cart. Finally, if you need new software to be compatible with the clients own systems, determine who is responsible for paying for this specialised software.
- **Image.** Take a look at their website. Are all the words spelled correctly? Is the grammar acceptable? Does it have a consistent and neat look? A VA who doesn't pay attention to her own website probably won't pay attention to your work either.
- **Availability.**

Do they work full-time or part-time?

Are they available evenings and weekends (if that's when you work)?

- **Experience.** It's important to determine how long you has been doing this type of work. While it's helpful to know how long they have been a VA or an administrative assistant, it's more important to learn how long they have done the tasks that the client wants them to do. You may have done them for a previous employer for many years. There's always a bit of a learning curve as a VA learns the clients particular business, but the client shouldn't be paying for you to learn new skills unless the skills are unique to the client and their business.
- **References.** Can you give you a list of people the client can contact for experiences of working with you?

And Finally.....

So you wanted to become a VA and you have decided to go for it! Well done and welcome to the world of VAs.

Some other websites and reading that you may find useful – well I did!

Coaching

Doug D'Aubrey - My great business mentor the reason I grew my turnover by 112% in 12 months

<http://www.exec-tc.com>

Accountancy

James Ellwood – you need to know how to set the business up and not get charged a fortune for the privilege

<http://wilkestranter.co.uk>

IT Support

Tristan Martin – Supports all our IT and Telecoms – every VA needs a Tristan!

<http://www.TLMartin.Ltd.uk>

Tristan also offers a free IT health check, this is very worthwhile and I strongly recommend that every VA takes up this offer. Remember there are very few IT companies who will be prepared to support you as a sole trader or independent, so connect with Tristan.

<https://www.tlmartin.ltd.uk/services/it-health-check/>

I hope you found this useful as you plan to set yourself up as a VA and I wish you very success in your new venture. If you would like individual support as you create your new business, I provide a two-hour “Create Your Own VA Business” strategy session which will help you avoid costly mistakes, save you time, and ultimately hit the ground running to make the most of this fantastic opportunity you are considering”. Email me at or call 01902 585 222 to find out more.

Chele x

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