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## Get Organized by Hiring a Virtual Assistant

By Charles Peterson

Hopefully your business is growing so fast that if you don't already need an assistant you will need one in the near future. As a business owner you must be working on a myriad amount of projects at one time and may need some help with ordering office supplies, or updating your contact database, keeping in contact with customers and other business associates, planning your next business trip, or any of the other various tasks that you are expected to do in addition to managing the everyday operations of the business. In reality, most business owners do not like to spend time on tasks that don't have a direct affect on cash flow or profits. These tasks could easily be handled by an assistant that could free up your time to make money. With new technologies comes new ways to accomplish traditional administrative tasks such as the virtual assistant. The virtual assistant is the same as a traditional assistant except for the fact that you may not ever meet them face to face.

Although virtual assistants do the same tasks as their traditional counterpart, you may communicate with them in different ways using email, phone or web conference. Most of these virtual assistants provide specialized services, like bookkeeping or market research, on a contractual basis from their home office. Depending on their geographical location and skill set these virtual assistants can expect to earn anywhere between \$20 -\$75 per hour. Although these rates may seem high, you must remember that since they work on a contractual basis there is no need to pay for health insurance, FICA taxes, computer hardware, rent, or anything else necessary to do the job. Since they bill by the hour they tend to be more efficient because they need to account for all the hours that they bill for.

In many cases, virtual assistants may live great distance from where your company does business. In many cases these virtual assistants are less expensive than local employees because they are found in countries where English is a second language such as India or the Philippines. However, in most cases you get what you pay for. Virtual assistants that earn at the top of the pay scale are usually those with specialized skills that are not easily found in the marketplace. Most virtual assistants would be able to conduct most administrative tasks, while you may have to search for one that can perform more valuable jobs like writing or bookkeeping.

Finding a knowledgeable virtual assistant is easier than you may have originally thought. Many of these professionals have significant work histories and have their own web sites that allow you to find out more about them. Some of the questions you need to ask yourself when locating a virtual assistant are ones that you might not normally think of, like: Do I need my assistant to work in a specific time zone? Since virtual assistants could work in any location around the world you must decide how much direct communication you will need to have with them. If direct regular communication is important then finding an assistant that works in your same time zone may make sense. On the other hand you may want your assistant to be on the other side of the world working while you are asleep and delivering work that is available for you first thing every morning.

A really important consideration when selecting a virtual assistant is to find someone who can work within your management style. If you need a person that is a self starter and that doesn't need a lot of supervision, then it is important to make these your preferences when making a job posting. What might be even more important is someone who can accommodate your way of communicating which may mean owning and utilizing a cell phone with direct email access.

Depending on your needs you may also need to find someone who has some experience with your industry and can easily understand your company. In many cases these virtual assistants are people that used to have significant jobs in the corporate world and now have decided to work at home. They can do everything from administrating and writing your daily blog, updating your Facebook profile, managing your appointments, and purchasing office supplies.

Since you may never meet your virtual assistant in the flesh, it is very important that you explain in detail what your needs and expectations are before creating a job posting or making a hiring decision. If you are trying to resource a project you should be very clear about what the success factors are and other considerations like how many hours you expect your virtual assistant to work per day or for the project period. In some case you may bid out a project not to exceed a prescribed amount of hours so you can be certain about labor expenses.

One thing that many owners have difficulty with is that virtual assistants may be working for several clients simultaneously. If you have only contracted to buy a specific amount of hours per day or week you may not be able to monopolize your assistants time or decide that they must work on your project during a particular period of time.

These virtual assistants are allowing business owners that do not need a full time assistant to employ a gifted professional for short period of time or on a project to project basis. The internet and other technological advancements are giving business owners new and innovative ways to solve traditional business problems in a more efficient and cost effective way. Business owners need to think outside the walls of their local office and find ways that work can be done by people in different geographical locations. The ability to communicate and work over the internet is allowing business owners to find and employ people with specialized skills that can solve business problems that cannot be solved using local personnel.