

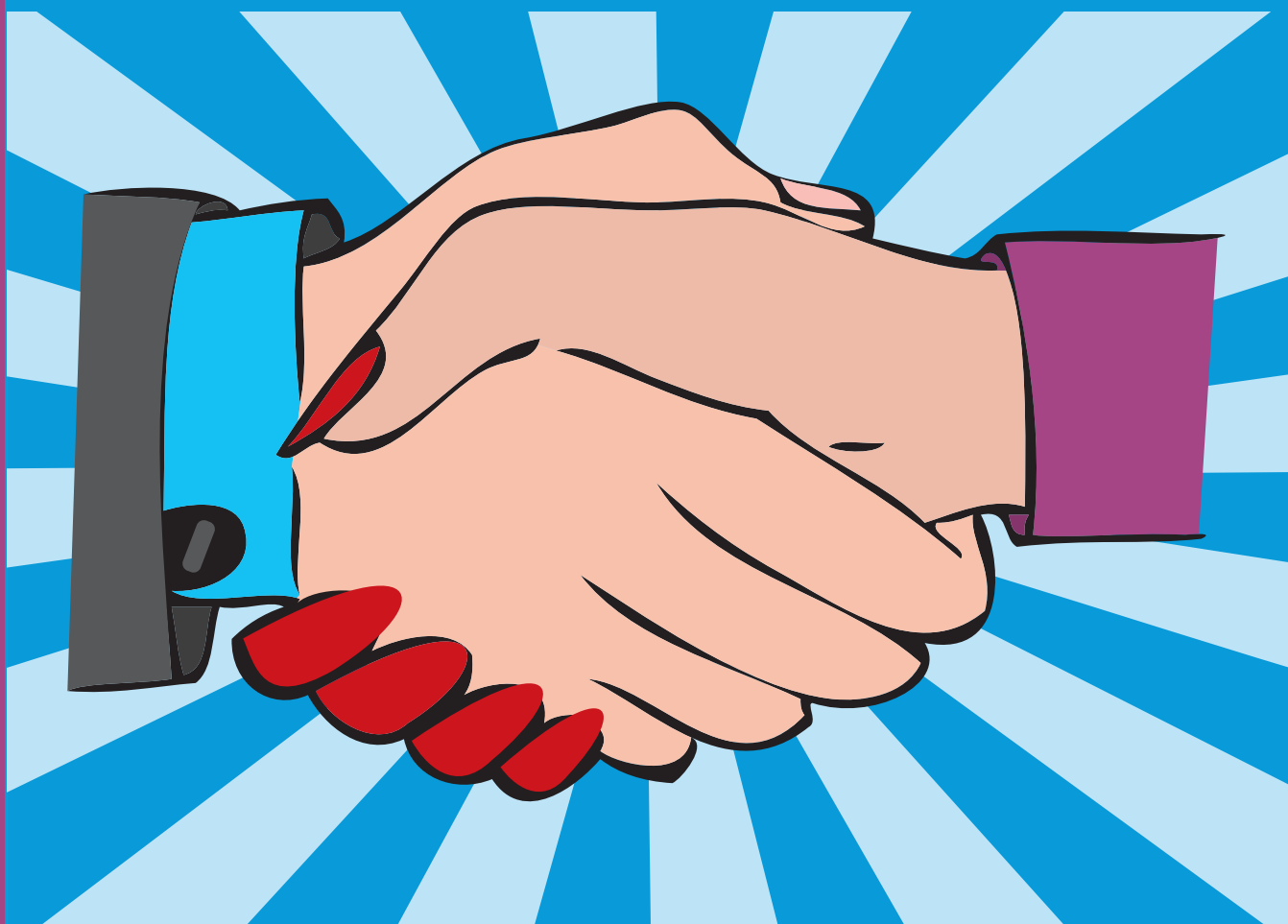


VIRTUAL ASSISTANT

MAGAZINE

THE ESSENTIAL GLOBAL TRAINING RESOURCE FOR VIRTUAL ASSISTANTS

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AFFILIATE MARKETING



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VISION KEEP
YOU FIRED UP?

THE ESSENTIAL
TOOLS TO
NETWORKING
SUCCESS

SELLING YOUR VA SERVICES DOESN'T
HAVE TO BE PAINFUL

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+44 1932 560974



lucy@thevamagazine.com

PUBLISHER/EDITOR

Lucy Brazier
lucy@thevomagazine.com
+ 44 1932 560974
Twitter @lucybrazier
Skype lucy-brazier

CO-FOUNDER

Carmen MacDougall
carmen@thevomagazine.com

EDITORIAL ASSISTANT

Matthew Want

SUB EDITOR

Vicki Harris

DESIGN

MAP Systems
prasad.rao@mapsystems.in

United States, Canada, South America & Caribbean
Bridget Wells
bridgetcwell@yahoo.com

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Head Office
17 Wood Road,
Shepperton, Middlesex,
United Kingdom,
TW17 0DH

+44 (0)1932 560 974

www.thevomagazine.com

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We all know that running your own business is exciting, fulfilling & inspiring. It is also at times scary, lonely and frustrating.

As your own boss, working on your own, when you encounter problems or come up against a situation you are unsure about, there is often nobody to bounce ideas off or run your solutions by.

The last two months have been a good example of this for me. When it's just you, other things in your life impact and where there is no back up in place, if you are not careful the house of cards can seem in danger of crashing down about your ears.

Four lessons learned

- 1) Don't take on too much. It can be tempting to say yes to every opportunity thrown at you and then find yourself overwhelmed and exhausted. There are only 24 hours a day and you do need to sleep sometimes
- 2) If you need help, ask for it. If you are not an expert in something or there is a task that you really don't enjoy, it is better to pay someone else to do it and get on with the bits that you love. Life is short and whilst you are busy doing the things you don't like, the things you excel at are passing you by.
- 3) Get backup in place so that if there is a family emergency or technological problem, you have someone else in place who can go into gear and get it done for you so you don't let your clients down.
- 4) Networking is king. Getting out and meeting groups of other business people both online and in person is a lifesaver both from the point of view of contacts but also for realising that everyone goes through the same issues and they are surmountable.

So in the end, the house of cards turned out to be solid and building on rock not sand. Equilibrium and sleep have been restored & I hope to meet lots of you at the many events taking place in the next few months.

Here's to all of you bravely running the gauntlet every day. The scary bits pass quickly and the excitement and inspiration return as you realise that whether it works or not is down to you. You are in control of your destiny.

L.B.

Lucy Brazier, Editor

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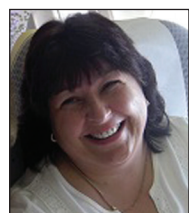
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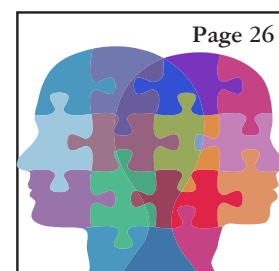
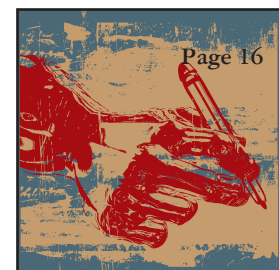
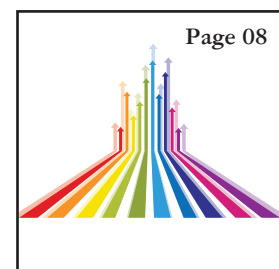
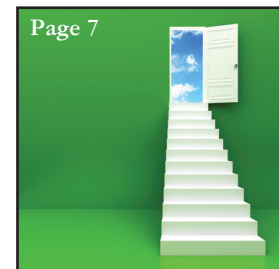
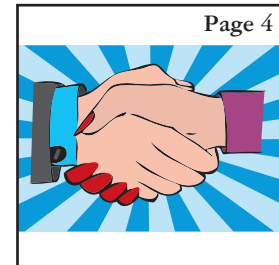


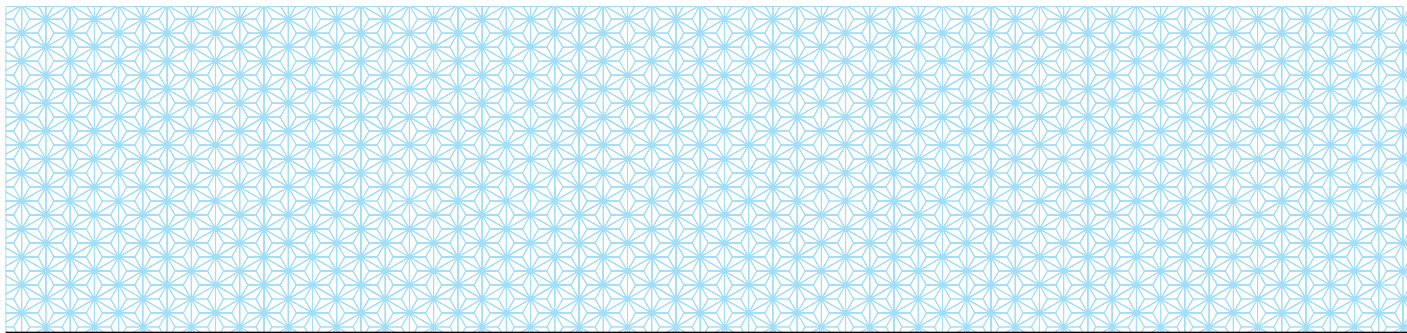
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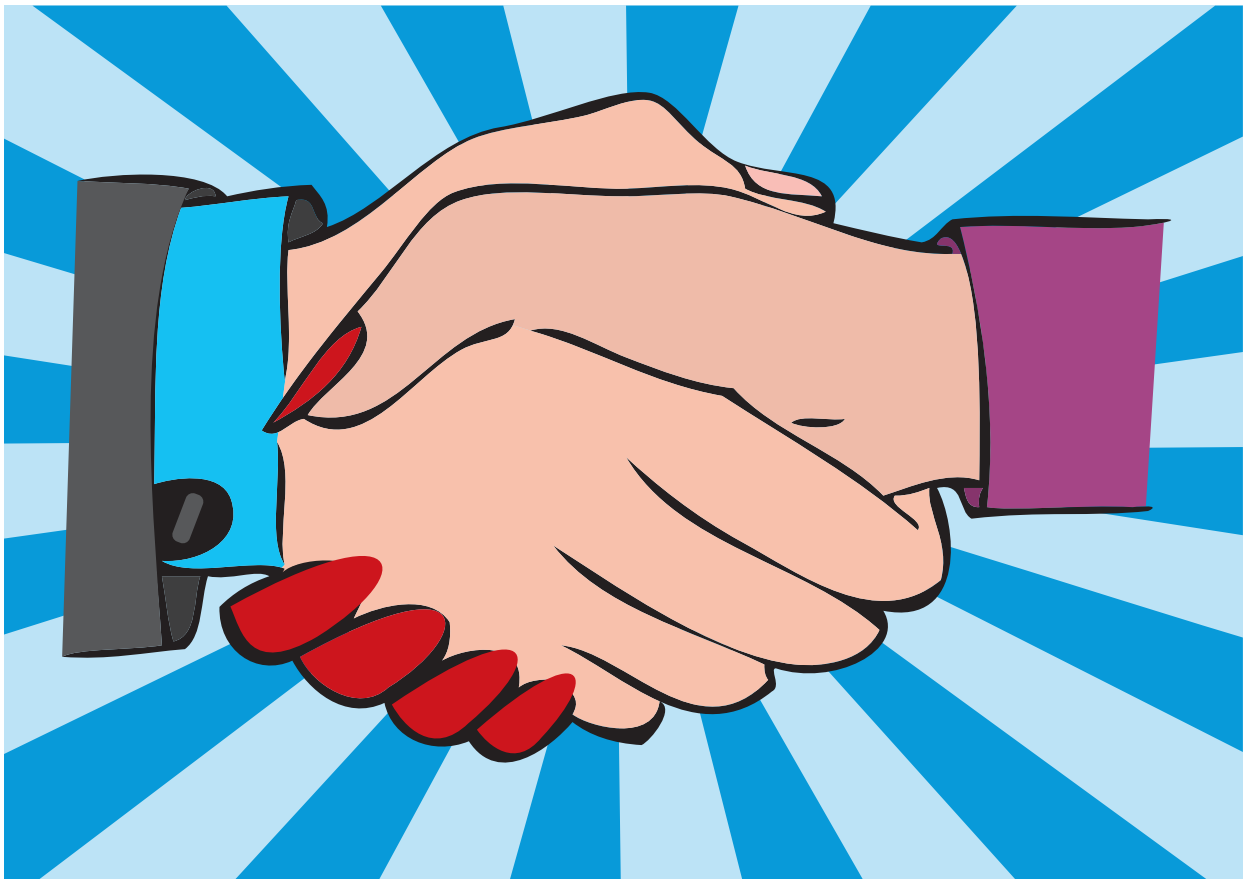
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How Selling Your VA Services Doesn't Have To Be Quite So Painful

WRITER
GARY
GORMAN

So, you've just set up your VA business. You know you're good. You know you're efficient. You know you can help lots of people become more efficient themselves. All you need to do now is tell people just how good you are.



You go out networking because that's what your local Chamber of Commerce contact said you should do. You get business cards and flyers printed, along with a glossy brochure. You set up your website.

And you are greeted with, let's face it, general indifference!

The world, contrary to what you thought, is not exactly beating a path to your door. People are sceptical about what you can do for them, they show some interest but this goes when they get back to their day job. They may say: 'I'll think about it,' leaving you waiting for them to call or fretting about when is the best time to call them because you don't want to seem too pushy or desperate.

Eventually things drift and you're frustrated because you know you can help them.

Have you ever considered that you might be selling too much to them? Selling to them so much that they back off because nobody likes being sold to and certainly not in an obvious way. People can smell desperation and nobody wants to buy from desperate people because desperate people can't have many clients and if they don't have many clients they can't be any good, can they?

Would a better way help you? A way that encourages more people to buy from you more often.

This article will help you to do just that. These are my top tips to make selling your VA services less painful for both you and your potential clients.

1. Don't tell people what you do, tell them why it matters.

I come across lots of VAs who say things like 'I'm a whizz at Wordpress' or 'I can help you manage your diary better' or 'I can set up a website for you.'

That's all well and good but all the client wants to know is what's in it for them, what is the benefit?

Typical benefits a VA may provide are:

- *Reassurance* that the job will get done on time
- They *free up* time enabling the client to get on with what they're good at
- *Speed* by completing tasks quicker than the client could do
- *Less hassle* by getting the job done right first time

I'm sure you can come up with many more benefits that you provide through your services (why not take a piece of paper and brainstorm them now?) That is what people will really be buying from you: what you help them achieve or avoid. How you do it is not particularly interesting to them.

2. Be consistent

Once you have clarified in your own mind why what you do really matters to the benefit seeking client, tell them all about it.

Plaster the top three benefits all over your business card, your website, your stationery - even get them on your invoices if you can!

Practice a punchy 40 seconds benefit statement that you can deliver convincingly at a networking meeting. Remember it's not what you do but why it matters at this stage.

Deliver the message over and over again. A confused customer will never buy from you so keep telling them your three key benefits in plain and simple language. A consistent message makes it easier for them to refer you to their contacts and the only way you'll get this is if it's clear what you help clients gain or avoid.

3. Don't sell, listen first.

In order for someone to want to buy your VA services from you they need to be convinced that you understand what they need. You won't get there by selling to them but you will get there by listening to them. And I mean really listening, without interruptions or jumping to conclusions.

The four things you are trying to find out initially are:

- **Where are they now?**

What is the issue holding them back or the next opportunity they want to take?

- **Where do they want to be?**

What is their goal? Where do they want to get to? How quickly do they want to get there?

- **Where are the gaps?**

In what way does their future objective differ from the current reality?

- **How can you help them?**

What skills, knowledge or expertise do you have that can help them get to where they want to be?

You will only ever get through these four questions by really listening to what they say without pre-judging the outcome. They may

soon be buying from you so they deserve to be listened to.

4. Approach networking in the same way

Go to networking meetings to listen not necessarily to sell. Be liked first, people tend to buy from those that they like and people like those that look them in the eye and listen to them.

Be liked, be trusted, be clear on the benefits you offer and the sale or onward referral will come.

5. Stand out from the crowd

The VA market is crowded isn't it? There are lots of people doing what you do. Maybe not in exactly the same way but ultimately delivering what you deliver.

So the challenge is to stand out. But how?

Well just by simply and clearly communicating the benefits you provide rather than the features you will stand out already. Believe me, there are so many VAs who get this wrong so you'll definitely stand out.

Get a distinctive business card using a different size or material from the norm, maybe using a quirky image or photo of you rather than a generic logo.

Maybe dress differently or have a colour theme. I know someone who always has something visible in pink, either a piece of her clothing or a pen or notebook. Always there and always in pink. It works. Try it.

I also know someone who goes to her business networking meetings carrying a shabby old Tesco shopping bag stuffed to overflowing with receipts. She stands up and says 'Does your book-keeping system look like this? If it does I can help you sort it out, leaving you time to get out and see more customers.' I've seen that work incredibly well as both an eye-catching visual prop and as a great way of standing out from other book-keepers.

Be brave, be different, stand out!

6. Turbo charge your testimonials

One of the biggest challenges you'll face when trying to get a new customer is their scepticism. At first they will be thinking 'Is this person as good as they seem - do I believe them?'

Testimonials from your current clients will really help you to overcome this natural scepticism. They must be specific, saying what a nice person you are may flatter the ego but it

won't make a great deal of difference to a new client. They want to know what life was like before you were hired and the impact afterwards (preferably with some figures to back it up). A great testimonial might be something like this:

'Before I worked with Susan I really felt unsure how to manage the mountain of e-mails I receive each week. Now Susan has helped me to organize my e-mail management efficiently I can get it all sorted out in ten minutes at the start of the day. This has gained me about three hours each week that I can put to better use.'

This works well because it's specific in terms of time saved, it's emotional ('I felt unsure') and it's based around a before and after comparison.

7. Make your sales copy really work

Every piece of writing you do to grow your business should have a sales objective. If not it's just a hobby and you're an unpaid author.

Let's think about your newsletter. How many newsletters do you receive that say: 'Read my latest newsletter' or 'Newsletter April edition'. Inspiring? I doubt you'll be rushing to read it?

So what about if you read: 'The five things you must do to get more customers' or 'I bet you're making this mistake in your business'. Both statements provoke a feeling of curiosity and are much more likely to get your newsletter read.

If you want to get your copy read more often have an attention grabbing headline. Then back up that interest with a few questions in the first paragraph, think about the reader and how they might be feeling:

'Are you frustrated at being constantly beaten down on price?'

'Do you wish you had more hours in the day to get through your workload?'

'Do you wonder how to get your website really generating ££££?'

This gets the reader engaged and in a state of agreement - maybe even nodding as they read. Once they are inquisitive they are more likely to read the rest of the copy.

After you've got them interested then you can deliver the sales promise. Use short sentences and simple words, remember that you're not trying to show off your extensive vocabulary or high level of grammar. Your purpose is to sell. Writing copy that sells and words that impress are two very different things.

Add your testimonials and then the call to action, by this I mean what exactly do you want them to do as a result of reading your copy: do you want them to subscribe to your newsletter? Do you want them to call you? Do you want them to download a report? Whatever it is tell them to do it in simple language.

8. Ask them to take the next step

I come across many VAs who don't want to appear too pushy when it comes to asking for the client's business so they either ask clumsily and obviously or not at all.

I think the best way to get a decision in a natural, conversational way is to ask:

'So, what do you see as the next step?'

At best they will say 'When can you start?' At the very least it will tell you what needs to happen before they are willing to go ahead. It gives them authority and ownership of the next stage and stops you feeling awkward about asking for the business. Try it. It works really well.

9. Stay positive

In any business, particularly when you work on your own, it can be very easy to get down

when business is slow but keeping a positive outlook is vital for ultimate success. To add a bit of 'confidence dust' maybe try to bear a few things in mind:

- Some people in this world will like you. Some people will not like you. That's simply just the way it is.
- Some days rubbish happens. It just does. Move on from it. Tomorrow will be better.
- Celebrate your successes, however small. It's what keeps you going and focused.
- Nothing happens by luck. It is almost always as a result of your previous hard work. You create your own good fortune and you deserve it.
- You can only control how you react to other people and events, not how others react. So only work on the bits you can control.
- Sometimes people won't buy no matter how good your offer is. They just won't. Move on to those that will.

I hope I've helped to show you that selling your VA services doesn't have to be painful or difficult. Listen more than you talk. Think ultimately of the benefits you provide rather than how you do it. Be different. Be brave. Ask them how they want to go forward.

Trust me...you can do it!

Good luck and once you get your sales going up, up, up maybe you could let me know if this article helped.

about the author



Gary Gorman is a leading sales mentor, trainer and business speaker. He helps businesses attract the right type of clients and then successfully sell to them and convert them into loyal customers. He is the author of two highly rated books: *The 30 Day Sales Challenge* and *Inside The Entrepreneur's Mind*.

For more information on how Gary could help your business grow visit www.GaryGorman.co.uk or call him on 01476 516282.



What Would I Do If I Were A New VA Today?

WRITER
KATHIE
THOMAS

In some ways I'm envious of VAs starting out today because there is so much more available than when I began nearly 19 years ago. But that choice can make it hard to focus and determine what really needs to be done.

So, what would I do if I were a new VA today? This was the question asked on a VA forum and my answers are based on my own experience and knowledge in running a Virtual Assistant business.

- Find an accountant who specialises in supporting small businesses and ensure that you meet the right legal requirements for your business. They need to be tax experts who can advise you on what is claimable in running an online business.
- Apply for whatever licenses or register whatever you need to do legally regarding the tax department for your region. Ask questions and do research. Ignorance is not bliss in this case and you need to know what you need to know.
- A business name can wait until you are trading – it is not necessary and you can legally operate under your own name if you wish. Having a business name is nice but too many people hold off getting started because they just can't come up with the right name. Mine came out of writing a brochure telling people about my new business. Yours might come unexpectedly too.
- Get your business cards made – you can just order a few hundred. You must have something to give to people you meet face-to-face. Include: your name, contact details and a bit about what you do. It's better than not having something to give out when meeting prospective clients.



- Purchase a domain name – these are low cost and one that reflects your name is fine for now. If you later decide on a business name you can buy a new domain and get that pointing to your website as well.
- Set up a website – there are easy low cost options for doing this such as using WordPress or Joomla. Make sure you can use it for business and steer away from sites that have advertising all over them. You need to look professional even if you have a low budget. Low cost web hosting will allow you to have WordPress set up on your own domain.
- Develop a signature block to use online – it's like your online business card. It doesn't have to be very long, two or three lines are sufficient but use the space!

Don't rush to choose your business name, logo or other things that could change six months

later when you have a better idea of what you want to do and where you're headed. I know that I changed my mind many times about the type of services I wanted to provide and the type of client I wanted to meet.

When you've been in business for a while you'll get a feel for what you like doing and what you don't and from there you might start deciding upon a niche or set of services you prefer to provide. At that point a business name may well come to you.

Finally, find business networks in your area so you can meet other local businesses. This will have two particular benefits:

1. You can learn from others who have been in business in your region for a while and they will know how things work locally.
2. You will meet potential clients. Most business owners need some sort of admin assistance. And many people will do business with people they've met and like.

You can also locate online business networks for the same reason. LinkedIn is great but there are many others. Some have email based forums, others have board type forums. Don't stick with one network – find a few. Peer/industry based forums, forums based on personal interests and hobbies, general business forums. It is the same with local networks, mix it up so that you get a variety of contacts and experiences. Networking has always been one of my main sources of finding clients – it can be yours too.

about the author



Kathie M. Thomas is a successful Virtual Assistant with an 18+ year old practice. She was a VA before the term 'Virtual Assistant' was in use. The founder of A Clayton's Secretary, established March 1994, she pioneered the Virtual Assistant industry in Australia. The network was formally established in April 1996. Prior to establishing her business she had a background of 23 years secretarial and administrative experience in the corporate world, working for CEOs and MDs as well as project groups. Kathie also has experience as a Trainer and Coach and began her business teaching others how to use Microsoft Office products in 1994. Kathie has two accreditations in the Virtual Assistant Industry as a Master Virtual Assistant and an Accredited Secretary Online. You can find her at <http://www.vadirectory.net>



Boost Your Sales With Affiliate Marketing

As a Virtual Assistant, your main revenue stream will be selling your services online to your prospective target market. Selling your services is hard work! It requires a constant marketing plan that you must always be working at to find new clients. Servicing clients makes up the bulk of our revenue and without it we would be out of business.



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Select A Custom Report

Commission Summary

Report Period: Everything

Start Date: Year: 2000 Month: Jan Date: 1

End Date: Year: 2012 Month: May Date: 14

Create Report

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5 - records found

| Program Name | IMP | IMP Commission | CLK | CLK Commission | Leads | Leads Commission | Tier 1 Referred Sales | Tier 2 Referred Sales | CRS | Sale Commissions | Paid Commissions | Retracted Commissions Outstanding | Payable Commissions |
|---|-------|----------------|------|----------------|-------|------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----|------------------|------------------|-----------------------------------|---------------------|
| VAvirtuosos Seminar Series For Speakers | 0 | \$0.00 | 43 | \$0.00 | 0 | \$0.00 | 0 | 0 | 0% | \$0.00 | \$0.00 | \$0.00 | \$0.00 |
| VAvirtuosos Seminar Series | 0 | \$0.00 | 295 | \$0.00 | 0 | \$0.00 | 4 | 4 | 1% | \$40.00 | \$40.00 | \$0.00 | \$0.00 |
| VAnetworking.com+RFP%2fJob+Referrals | 0 | \$0.00 | 94 | \$0.00 | 0 | \$0.00 | 0 | 0 | 0% | \$0.00 | \$0.00 | \$0.00 | \$0.00 |
| VAinsider Club | 8341 | \$0.00 | 452 | \$0.00 | 24 | \$0.00 | 1 | 0 | 0% | \$37.35 | \$37.35 | \$0.00 | \$0.00 |
| VBSS System Affiliate Program | 11390 | \$0.00 | 1206 | \$0.00 | 29 | \$0.00 | 19 | 17 | 2% | \$75.00 | \$75.00 | \$0.00 | \$0.00 |

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Or would we?

Working as a Virtual Assistant you will find that there will always be down times when clients just aren't steadily flowing into our sales funnel. So, what plan do you have in place for extra income during these phases when you find you have a lack of clients?

This is the time to bring affiliate marketing into your marketing arsenal and if you aren't having a down time, adding affiliate marketing to your online marketing plan can be an easy source of extra money.

What is affiliate marketing?

Affiliate marketing basically means selling other people's products for a commission online. It is similar to offline sales, where sales people earn a commission for selling a product, but the difference is that all selling is conducted online.

As an affiliate marketer you will research and find products to promote on your website that are targeted to your market. For example, if you have prospective online business entrepreneurs visiting your site to outsource work to your VA business, you might have a resources page of other people's products that would benefit them such as: accounting software, security products, newsletter services and marketing products

Each time you make a sale through a click on an affiliate link at your website you will earn a portion of that sale. The commissions can vary from as low as 7% to a generous 50%.

How are these sales tracked? The sales are tracked through your unique affiliate ID which is assigned to you at the time you sign up for a specific affiliate programme. Your unique affiliate ID is tracked and each time a sale is made through your link it is recorded.

Your main affiliate link will look something like this:

<http://www.vaffiliates.com/cmd.php?af=XXXXXX>

(with XXXXXX being your distinct affiliate ID so we can track your sales).

A good affiliate programme will give you plenty of tools for promoting their products from banner ads and sales copy, to Tweets and Facebook posts.

They will also give you a comprehensive member's area where you can track your affiliate sales and commissions. This allows you to watch which marketing campaigns are selling for you and gives you statistics on your payable commissions for sales from your website.

Affiliate marketing is a good way to start making extra money online and you can find programmes online by searching for topics such as "marketing" and adding the words "affiliate programme". You can be set up and ready to go within a few days and there is no need to spend any time creating your own products or purchasing inventory. You are simply promoting other people's products, the vendor

is responsible for order fulfillment, customer service and anything else related to the sale.

Once you have added the links and banners to your website don't just sit back and wait for the affiliate cheque to arrive – it does take a bit of time and effort to make sales. A good strategy is to provide quality information on your website and only link to affiliate products where appropriate. I never promote something that I haven't used.

Another tip is to review the products you promote so that you can accurately describe all the features – good and bad. Your customers will appreciate honest feedback and will be more likely to buy from you if you give them good quality information and honest reviews.

Don't forget about other traffic that visits your website, your competitors can be money in your inbox too!

Potential Clients make up about ½ your target market.
Virtual Assistants make up a good portion of the rest!

Check your website stats regularly to see what keywords people are searching for to visit your website and start marketing products to them. You'll find it's not just potential clients who visit your website. Other VAs, your competitors, will be checking out your website to compare rates, website design ideas or just to see what their competition is up to. You can take advantage of this unexpected traffic by offering products to these VAs. Why not

consider putting up a resources page of affiliate products for VAs?

Affiliate tip: If you are a member of an organisation and have their logo on your website, find out if they offer an affiliate programme and then you can add your affiliate link in the logo itself. My network, VAnetworking.com, offers an affiliate programme so if you have our member logo on your website, please sign-up to the affiliate programme at VAaffiliates.com. By adding your affiliate link to the member logo you can start making money today!

So how should you select an affiliate programme? There is a lot of choice out there and it can be difficult to know which are the best to promote. Here are a few tips to help you find the right affiliate programmes for you:

Lifetime cookies – A really good affiliate programme will offer life-time cookies. Unfortunately, some shopping cart systems don't allow the vendors this feature, which isn't so great for you as the affiliate. A life-time cookie means that you will get paid for referring a customer who makes a purchase through your affiliate link even if they buy at any point in the future.

When looking for a good programme, try to lookout for those which offer life-time cookies or at least a minimum of a year. Remember sometimes it takes customers months to actually make a purchase.

Training and Customer Service – A good programme will provide training tools and resources for their affiliates. Ideally, they should have a member's area where you can log in and grab promotional materials, your links and check your stats and commissions.

Good communication is important. If you email an affiliate programme with a question and don't hear back from them or get a reply two weeks later, what will it be like if you ever have an issue with payments or other important questions? A good affiliate programme will respond to your questions in a timely manner.

Sales Pages That Convert – Before promoting a specific product, have a look at their sales page. Does it look like it will convert into sales? If a sales page is sloppy, has grammar and spelling mistakes or just looks unprofessional then you may not make too many sales – no matter how good the product is.

Now that you know some of the things you should look for in a good programme, here are a few things you should be careful of!

Advertisements and Google AdSense – If you're promoting an eBook and sending customers to a sales page then be wary of sales pages with Google ads or other types of advertisement on the sales page. If you're working hard to send traffic to that page, it's not fair that your traffic will be used to make someone else money through their ads (without you getting paid anything in return).

If you see a sales page with tons of ads on the page, I say stay away. You work hard as an affiliate and you don't want to waste your traffic.

High Sales Minimum – Watch out for programmes that ask you to sell a certain amount before being paid. For example if the commission on a £20 eBook is 10% (£2 per sale) and you are asked to accumulate a minimum of £200 in commission before payment is sent then that's a lot of books you need to sell before getting paid – 100 books to be exact.

Some programmes operate on the basis that affiliates will not make many sales and so will never be paid. It's unfortunate but it does happen. Always check the payment terms before promoting a programme.

Affiliate marketing is not hard but it does need firm conviction and belief in the product.

If you're looking for products to promote to the VA industry or just want to learn more about affiliate marketing check out my blog at: <http://VAaffiliates.com>

So how do you implement affiliate marketing into your marketing? I'll give you a few examples below but don't forget to think of other ways you can entice people to click on your affiliate links and bring money into your email box 24/7.

1. **Write a Blog Post:** Writing a blog post to review the product you are promoting is an informative way to indirectly link to the affiliate product you recommend. So, if you are member of VAinsider.com, you could write a short one or two page summary on your blog about what you have learned. If you had gained ideas from Tawnya about how to market your business locally or how to create a contingency plan then you would write a review on how this knowledge affected your business and why it would help others.
Don't forget to add the banner ad or your affiliate text link to the end of the post to direct people to the product. Once you

have the blog post written then tell the world! Tweet about it, add it to Facebook or send it to your mailing list.

2. **Video Testimonials:** Video is a powerful medium for any type of internet marketing promotion. Think about buying an inexpensive video camcorder and make your own video testimonial about a product. It doesn't have to be in-depth or long, just make sure your personality comes through and that you are conveying the benefits of the product. Here's what you could say if you were promoting my VA startup system at www.VirtualBusinessStartups.com:

"After beginning my Virtual Assistant career I soon realised that there was so much more involved than just sitting at my computer typing documents. I was soon introduced to the Virtual Business Start Up System written by Tawnya Sutherland - founder of the largest social network online today for VAs. I couldn't believe how many resources were included in this product. I was immediately able to get my VA business up and running in less time than if I started from scratch. I'm all about not inventing the wheel so if you are looking at starting or moving your VA business to a different level then consider saving your time by purchasing the Virtual Business Start Up System, it will be the best investment you make."

3. **Signatures:** Put affiliate links in your email signatures as further promotion and don't forget to update your signature in any forums you belong to but do check out their rules first and make sure that they allow affiliate signatures.
4. **Social Networks:** Don't be afraid to promote affiliate programmes through your Tweets, Facebook and LinkedIn posts but don't overdo it or people will stop following you. Mix in these status updates with personal and business conversations. Remember social networking is all about engagement and no one wants to engage with a person selling all the time.
5. **Give something away at your website to encourage people to visit it.** The more traffic you have to your website then the better your chance of clicks to your affiliate links. You could entice people to your website by running a contest, offering a discount or just writing informative content.
6. **Promote to your list!** I find that conversions are highest when I promote to my list. If you've done any online marketing then you've probably heard

the phrase “The Money is in the List” and it’s absolutely true. It’s not uncommon for your customers to not buy from you the first time they land on your site. Most people think about things and have to have contact with you several times before they make the decision to buy. By building a list of targeted prospects you’re greatly improving your chances of affiliate sales.

Once you have a database of subscribers then your list will be like gold to you. Imagine power of sending one email with a product promotion to a few hundred or thousand people and then watching your sales come in. This is the power of a targeted list of subscribers.

However, it’s not just about building a list; you also need to take the time to establish a relationship with that list. If you never email your list and out of the blue send them a promotion email then the chances are you’ll have more “unsubscribes” from your list than sales.

Building a good relationship and rapport with your list will take a little time but it is worth it once you get the balance right. Try sending an email at least once a week (any longer and they may forget who you are) with content that balances providing information and promotions and you don’t need to promote a product with every mailing. Give your list members value: valuable tips, valuable information, case studies, and other tips to help them. Once your list members grow to trust you they will eagerly purchase items through you because they feel like you have taken the time to establish a relationship with them.

Now you know why you should build a list but how do you start building it? No matter which way you go about it, having a list of targeted customers is a great way to build your affiliate marketing business.

1. Create a report, e-course or eBook to give away free in return for signing up to the list. Make your offer impossible to resist.

Remember you want them to sign up so give away something of benefit.

2. Create a separate landing page for your newsletter subscribers. In a time of increasing SPAM, it’s getting harder and harder to get people to give you their email addresses. Even if you’re giving something away for free, you’ll still need to sell that “free gift”. Build a simple opt in page which clearly explains the benefits of subscribing to your list.
3. Write and distribute articles to the online article directories and in your author bio include a link back to your newsletter page. If you write good quality articles then you’re increasing the chances that the reader will want to click over and learn more.

And finally here are a few tips to help you avoid those dreaded mistakes many beginners make in affiliate marketing.

Banner Central – Banners don’t often work as well as text links. Of course, it does depend on your subject and you should test both individually to determine what works best but you’re often better off sticking to text links rather than turning your website into banner central.

Unrelated Products – You’d be surprised at the number of people who do this. Make sure all offers on your website are related to the context on your site - if you have a site about being a VA, don’t offer pet care products. You might be tempted to promote those products because you are a dog lover but stick to what your target market is looking for.

Missing your Target Market – Before starting any business venture (including affiliate marketing) you should always know who your target market is. To become a super affiliate you’ll need to build a website which speaks directly to the market you are trying to attract and you’ll need to understand the needs of that specific market.

Hype, Hype, Hype – Avoid it all costs. People can smell hype a mile away and will run away quick with their credit card clutched tightly in their hands. If you review products on your website make sure those reviews are honest. More importantly, try to take the time to actually use the product or at least look into it then you can genuinely speak about its features and benefits. Don’t forget to add the not so good sides of the product too. If the product is lacking in some way, say so. People will appreciate your honesty and grow to trust you.

Not Tracking Sales – In order to know whether an affiliate programme is worth promoting you need to track how well it converts. Try out different things in your promotions and track each one of them.

It was a great day today, do you know why?

I found an affiliate sale in my inbox! Now I may not retire on the income but this sales commission will pay to fill up my car with petrol. Not a bad return on investment.

For those of you interested in promoting products to VAs visit my website where you will find offers to an affiliate programme that includes many products marketed exclusively to the VA industry. You can earn commission from \$7 to \$250 per sale depending on the products you promote.

To learn more about affiliate marketing visit my blog at www.VAaffiliates.com

Make no mistake, when applied properly affiliate marketing works and is an easy way to make extra money online but whatever you choose to do remember to be genuine and authentic, affiliate marketing is all about creating conversations.

about the author



Tawnya Sutherland is a market leader for Virtual Assistants globally. She is also a Certified Internet Marketing Business Strategist from the University of British Columbia who runs MediaMage.com her own Internet marketing company. In 2003 her marketing skills founded VAnetworking.com the largest and most prolific Virtual Assistant Social Network online today. Tawnya has become the go to spokesperson for Virtual Assistants (VA) wanting to share, learn more, and grow their businesses. She is the outsourcing market leader within the VA world speaking at various engagements across the world.



Nine Management Lessons from the London 2012 Games

WRITER
KATHLEEN
DRUM

Reflecting on the process of putting together the greatest show in the world has revealed some very useful business insights.



Three months after the closing ceremony of the London 2012 Paralympic Games and the 70,000 volunteers are well and truly back in the routine of their daily lives. Many have written about their experiences being part of the Games, but few have considered the impact of that experience on their professional lives.

Kathleen Drum, a volunteer performer in the 'Pandemonium' section of the Olympic Games Opening Ceremony, lists the top nine management lessons that can be applied in the working environment:

1. There is only one Leader

The Opening Ceremony was the creative vision of Danny Boyle, and we were all there to help him turn that vision into a reality. We had dance captains, choreographers and producers to help us along the way, but at the end of the day what Danny said, we did.

2. Create trust within the team

Against advice from LOCOG, Danny showed the volunteers the model of the 'green and pleasant land' opening sequence of the show, and explained how that section would run and where we would come into it. He asked us not to use social media or give away the secret. Later on, during the final rehearsals, the Twitter hash-tag #save the surprise (started by a volunteer in response to leaked information) was adopted. Danny asked the audience at both rehearsals to 'save the surprise' and, in the majority, they did. By trusting people with a secret he created an atmosphere where no-one wanted to let him down.

3. Be clear on the vision

At our first rehearsal we were shown a short video of what Danny wanted to achieve for the Industrial Revolution section; it included CGI images of people marching and performing in time, chimneys rising from the ground, lots of grime and smoke and, surprisingly, the New Zealand All Blacks doing the haka before a rugby match. We were asked to think in terms of the strength and unison of the All Blacks team and their power when performing the haka. This served as a good reference point for our performance on the day.

4. Make sure everyone knows their place on the team

We spent a lot of time getting to know our place in the crowd – our 'home base'. We played a number of games running from one section to the next and returning to home base. We were encouraged to learn the names of those people in front, behind and to each side of our place to help orient us. When we were divided into 'counties' later in the rehearsal process, this continued – we had 'buddy lines' and learnt the roles associated with that place.

5. Use a common language

The great majority of the performers were not from theatre backgrounds so a lot of terms of reference were new. Our producer, Steve, would explain what they meant and we were expected to use the term and respond correctly – 'field of play (the stage)' 'IEM (in ear monitor)' and 'vom' (an exit from the field of play) soon become terms we were comfortable with. It was a useful reminder that speaking in acronyms and industry terms can alienate team members when used without explanation.

6. Communicate the plan

There were 15 weeks and approximately 150 hours of rehearsals, and we knew the dates (and most of the timings and locations) of the majority of these by the middle of January. That gave us six months to make our plans, arrange days off from work, and generally commit to the time required mentally, as well as in our calendars. Planning ahead meant that a seemingly impossible logistical task was able to go to plan.

7. Set expectations

At every rehearsal we were told the plan for the day, what we needed to achieve by the end, when our breaks would be and what time we would finish. We felt comfortable with the expectations that were set and a sense of achievement when they were met.

8. Reward commitment

We were asked to attend an additional rehearsal on the four-day Jubilee weekend, on the day of the Thames Pageant. This request came quite late in the proceedings when a number of the

team had already made plans. Those people who attended that rehearsal were presented with London 2012 'ceremonies' t-shirts. It was a great incentive, marked us all as 'special' and we wore them with pride at the following rehearsals. The rest of the team did not receive their t-shirts until a number of weeks later.

9. If things aren't working – fix them

The first time we arrived for a rehearsal at the stadium, we were told that the sets of stairs that exited the field of play were too narrow. The production team had arrived before us, realised there was an issue and immediately arranged for the carpenters to rebuild the stairs: one set had already been fixed by the time we arrived and the rest were replaced before our next rehearsal.

10. Don't be afraid of change!

Even with the end goal in sight, you can still adjust course to ensure you achieve it. At every rehearsal we received updated instructions on when to do our choreographed moves, how many sets to do and at what times. The instructions changed right up to, and during the Opening Ceremony itself. This final 'tweaking' made a better experience for the audience and for us. Because our trust in the leadership and its decision-making had been established early, we felt confident in our ability to deliver on the requested changes, and knew that we would be appreciated for our efforts.

There aren't many projects that would create the same logistical challenges (not to mention people management challenges) of the Opening Ceremony. But the lessons from this amazing event could definitely improve teamwork and project management, even in the smallest company.

about the author



Kathleen Drum has spent the last six years working on the London 2012 Olympic Games as the on-site PA and Office Manager for UK Power Networks – and also found the time to perform in the Opening Ceremony. Born in New Zealand, Kathleen has lived in London for over 15 years and has worked in a variety of industries including tourism, finance and recruitment. Kathleen is an advocate of self-development and life-long learning, and is the current vice-President of the New Zealand Society UK and a member of EUMA (European Management Assistants), a not-for-profit association for PAs.

www.nzociety.co.uk, www.uk.euma.org



WRITER
SHARON
WILLIAMS

Does Your Vision Keep You Fired Up?

When is the last time you had a dream?



When you launched your business, did you let your mind wander or allow your imagination to run wild? Did your brain explode with powerful thoughts, culminating in an unbounded enthusiasm to start your day and drive your business forward?

Developing a strategic vision statement can serve as the roadmap that propels your business forward 5, 10, 15 years. It represents what is most important to you and what you fully commit to. It inspires you!

A strategic vision is the roadmap of the company's future – the direction it is headed, the customer focus it should have, the market position it will occupy, business activities to be pursued and the capabilities you plan to develop. It outlines long-term direction of the business and provides a sense of purposeful action in everything you do. Ultimately, it describes your company's destination and how you will get there.

Sometimes it is difficult to write a strategic vision statement: new entrepreneurs aren't aware they should have one and experienced business owners are so caught up in running their business that they may have forgotten it.

Bold, Concise, Forethought

A strategic vision must be bold enough to inspire you. It is the dream which covers all aspects of your business as you look forward. It must be a concise summary of all your thoughts. For example, you may want to be considered as the go to person in your niche market. Another example may be that you want to expand your range of services to provide a complete turnkey operation. Keep in mind that your vision is the foundation to your true success.

The following are characteristics of a good strategic vision statement:

- The Strategic Vision Statement provides a picture of what your business will look like in 5 to 10 years from now.
- It represents a dream that is beyond what you think possible. Visioning takes you out beyond the present.
- The Strategic Vision Statement creates a vivid image in your head that provokes emotion and excitement. It poses a challenge that inspires and engages you and others you are associated with.

Some of the benefits of creating a Strategic Vision Statement include:

- It empowers you and focuses your efforts
- It forces energy for greater effectiveness
- It raises the standard of excellence
- It establishes meaning for today
- It gives hope for the future
- It brings unity to community
- It provides a sense of continuity
- It raises commitment level
- It brings positive change

Activity

Steps to take to achieve your strategic vision:

- A. **Be Specific** – goals should be straightforward and emphasise what you want to happen. Specifics help us to focus our efforts and clearly define what we are going to do. Specific is the What, Why, and How.

- B. **Be Measurable** – If you can't measure it, you can't manage it. In the broadest sense, the whole goal is a measurement for the final outcome. Usually, there are several short-term or small measurements that can be built into the long term vision.

- C. **Establish Concrete Criteria** – Measure progress towards attaining your goals and accomplishing your ultimate vision.

- D. **Be Attainable** – When you identify goals that are most important to you, you begin to figure out ways you can make them come true. You develop attitudes, abilities, skills and financial capacity to reach them.

- E. **Be Reachable** – This is not a synonym for "easy". Realistic in this case means do-able. It means the learning curve is not a vertical slope; the skills needed are available or attainable; and you are willing to break through barriers. Be sure to set goals that you can attain with some effort! Too difficult and you set the stage for failure, but too low sends the message that you aren't very capable. Set the bar high enough for a satisfying achievement.

- F. **Be Timely** – Set the 5-10 year timeline and then break that schedule down into year-to-year segments, month to month and week to week targets. If you don't set a time, the commitment is too vague. Without a timeframe, there's no sense of urgency to start taking action now.

Complete This Exercise

Here's an exercise I'd like you to do: visualise walking into a room three years from now and shaking hands with yourself. Who are you? What is your life like? What is your business like? Write down what you saw. Don't let yourself wake up in three years and say, "I'm three years older and I just happened to get here." Clarify your vision so that you can grow into it.

In a nutshell, keep in mind that your past shaped you to be who you are. It will help you build a solid foundation and avoid making common mistakes. Be clear and concise so as to not seem confusing. Your strategic vision statement should be concise and to the point. Always present a positive image as it impacts how you are perceived by others. Ensure that your vision inspires, as it will help you to maintain your momentum.

Be Bold and Take Charge

Remember, be bold! Take total charge of your vision. Let the world know that you mean business and that you are going places. Don't be afraid to use your imagination and showcase your level of skill. It shows you care about the way your company is perceived. Potential customers may feel that you will do the same for them.

Visualise the end product and its impact. This is important to the development of the vision statement as it sets a course for the vision. Take time to think things through from beginning to end. This will help you understand where you are going. You do not have to know all the steps at this point. However, you do need to know the direction in which you want to grow your business.

It is sometimes difficult to write a vision statement that truly encapsulates your vision for your company. When you write your vision statement, make sure that you have chosen the vision that is most important to you. If you don't fully believe in your vision statement, you won't be able to fully commit to it and writing a vision statement that you can't or won't fully commit to is a waste of time.

about the author



Sharon Williams is president of The 24 Hour Secretary, holds numerous Virtual Assistant certifications and designations, and is an industry pioneer, innovator and thought leader. She is a VA mentor and coach, specializing in business planning and marketing. Sharon is the author of *Nuts and Bolts of Branding*, *Marketing Your VA Business Without Breaking the Bank* and *24 Easy Ways to Create Your Amazing Authentic Brand Identity*.

Join her email list at <http://the24hoursecretary.com> for business development and marketing tips.



Write Successful And Persuasive Communications

WRITER
HEATHER
BAKER

Do you want to ensure people read your messages? Do you want to convince people to do what you want? Some emails we can't wait to read and we are excited by their content. Others, however, we start to read and immediately delete, or don't even open at all. What is it that makes the difference?



First of all, let's consider why writing skills are so important in business. It is essential to be able to communicate your message precisely and concisely to avoid misunderstandings and wasting time. The majority of business communication is now written and there are many examples of misinterpretations.

When we write to somebody we are establishing a relationship with that person. It is very easy, because of the lack of visual and vocal communication, to cause misunderstandings or even offence.

Conveying your ideas precisely and laying out your documents effectively gives an image of

you as a professional with high standards and this can impact on the general impression that colleagues and clients have of you. As well as improving your own career prospects, it can also improve the success of your business. Clients will often select a supplier based on the look of their correspondence and the ease of reading their documents or the tone of their emails.

There can be so many barriers to good written communication: incorrect grammar, spelling and punctuation; not considering your reader; misjudging relationships; not understanding the issue; tight deadlines; using an inappropriate tone or unsuitable words; being too emotional and lack of preparation.

Preparation is vital before sending any business communication. This may only take a few seconds for a simple email but *always stop before you send*.

The first thing you must do is establish the purpose of your communication; it is easy to say the objective is "to obtain information" or "to arrange a meeting" but if you keep asking yourself "why?" you will usually come to the answer that it is for the success of the organisation. Every communication you send in business can impact on your company's performance.

This doesn't just apply to emails, it is relevant to letters, reports, minutes, tenders, proposals, brochures and websites and social media.

Once you've established your purpose, the next part of your preparation is to think about the people who will be reading your correspondence. The more you know about

your reader(s), the better you can tailor your correspondence to make it more effective. It is always more difficult to tailor a message to more than one person.

What is their age, knowledge, language, culture, background, gender? How busy are they, how do they like to receive information, how important is your message to them? What is their personality type, where do they come in the organisation's hierarchy, what is your relationship with them? Are there any special needs to be considered? These are just some of the factors which may influence what and how you write.

To continue your preparation, ensure you have all the information you need, anticipate your reader's questions and provide answers in advance. Ensure you have a clear structure, particularly if your correspondence is complex. For emails, give your message an informative subject so your reader can easily prioritise.

When you have composed your correspondence, it is vital to proofread before you send. Preferably leave the communication for a short while and go back to it with 'fresh eyes'. Don't forget you are not just checking for spelling and punctuation, you are also checking for the tone, the content and whether it is written fittingly for the reader.

In most circumstances in business writing we are trying to persuade somebody to do something for us – give information, attend a meeting, send us money. It is, therefore, important to use techniques that will make your messages more persuasive. Here are some ways you could achieve this:

- Continually maintaining a high standard in your business writing is the basic rule of persuasive writing. If your correspondence looks unprofessional, people will not want to help you.
- Many people still write in a style more suited to the 1950s than the 2010s with phrases like 'If you have any queries, please do not hesitate to contact me' or 'please be informed that the documents you require will be despatched in due course'. These

sorts of phrases are known as business clichés and they are to be avoided. It is lazy, unimaginative and boring to rely on hackneyed business phrases. I am not suggesting we should use text-speak but nowadays a natural style is much more effective, whilst maintaining an appropriate formality or informality.

- What's In It For Me (WIIFM): Tell your reader why it is to their advantage to do what you want them to do.

When a Sales Manager wanted his reps to give him their monthly figures so he could write a report for his Director, they were all 'too busy'. When he reframed the question and asked for the figures so he could calculate their bonuses, you can imagine the very different response!

- Offer solutions rather than problems. This is particularly effective if you are trying to persuade senior management. They want their staff to assist them, not give them more problems. If you offer viable solutions you may also get the resolution you prefer.
- When we have to ask people something which we expect they won't like, we tend to write in a manner that anticipates their dissatisfaction. Our style becomes very apologetic and negative, which can actually exacerbate their displeasure. Where possible, try to turn bad news into good news. For example:

'We are sorry to tell you that the information you need will not be available for at least two hours. We apologise for the inconvenience this may cause you.' (cliché alert!).

Perhaps we could have written:

'We are pleased to confirm that the information you need will be available within three hours and, if we can get it to you sooner, we will do.'

This is called 'reframing' and is generally a good principle. It will ensure a better reaction from your reader.

- Use appropriate vocabulary. People build rapport initially through non-verbal

signals and tone of voice, but we also build rapport through the language we use. Obviously if two people speak the same language they have a rapport but we can take this a couple of steps further.

In the evening, do you have 'dinner', 'tea' or 'supper'? Do you have a 'lounge', 'living room', 'sitting room', 'front room', 'parlour' or 'drawing room'? All these words give away a great deal about our background and we automatically 'warm' to people who use the same words as we do. How much more effective then would it be to use the same words as your reader? How much more persuasive could you be? If you have good rapport with someone, they will go out of their way to help you.

We can take this a step further, Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) teaches about representational systems. We gather information through our senses and we all have preferences in the way we use these. Our preferences can be reflected in the vocabulary we use so, for example, a visual person may say 'I see what you mean' whereas an auditory person could say 'that sounds interesting'. By using similar words in correspondence, to those used by your reader, you can build rapport and be more persuasive.

Try and avoid negative words like 'just' ('I just work for the MD') and, where possible when giving feedback, replace 'but' with 'and'. If you say to someone 'you did a very good job organising the conference but there were problems with the car parking', the recipient may well feel rather deflated; everything before the 'but' is forgotten. Try rephrasing and say 'you did a very good job organising the conference and, when we sort out the car parking problems next year, it will be a terrific event'.

So, what is it that makes the difference? The five Ps – preparation, purpose, people, proofreading and persuasion. If what you're doing isn't working, do something else – choose to excel at business writing.

about the author



Heather had over 20 years' experience as a secretary and PA before setting up Baker Thompson Associates Limited in 2000 (www.bakerthompsonassoc.co.uk). The company specialises in the training and development of PAs and administrative staff. She travels around the world working with large and small organisations to enable their office staff and PAs to work more effectively. As well as PA/admin workshops, Heather facilitates sessions in business writing, proofreading, minute taking and much more.

Heather is the author of *Successful Minute Taking ; Meeting the Challenge* and *Successful Business Writing*, in which you learn even more about business writing. She is the creator of the BakerWrite speedwriting system and the author of *Speedwriting*. As well as tutor-led courses, BakerWrite speedwriting can also be learnt online at www.BakerWrite.com.

Heather presented at the Office* 2012 show in September.



Profile

Profile – Diana Ennen

Diana Ennen has been a leader in the Virtual Assistant industry since opening her business in 1985. She's the president of Virtual Word Publishing <http://www.virtualwordpublishing.com>, where she specialises in publicity and marketing and PR and VA Coaching. She's the author of numerous books on business start-ups including *Virtual Assistant – The Series: Become a Highly Successful, Sought After VA* (with Kelly Poelker) and *So You Want to be a Work-at-Home Mom: A Christians' Guide to Starting a Home-Based Business*. She has been featured on CBS4News, Fox News, CNN, USA Today, Wall Street Journal.

Can we start with a little background information? Where are you from?

I'm from sunny Florida. I've lived here for over 30 years with my husband (Greg) and three kids (Jeremy, Amanda, and Amber.)

What is your background?

I have been in business since 1985. I specialise in PR and marketing now but over the years I have done pretty much everything! Before owning my own business I was a medical and legal secretary. In the early days of my business I did a lot of legal transcription so I did get my Paralegal degree. Once I started selling my books I decided I loved the marketing aspect of it and that's when I focused on PR and marketing.

You are very active as an author both in the VA and the Christian arenas. How did you get involved in this?

I was very fortunate and worked with Jill Hart of Christian Work at Home Moms. We did radio shows together, wrote articles together and so much more. We loved working together for both the work-at-home moms and then Christian women as well. Then one day she asked me if I wanted to write a book with her. I was delighted to as I love co-authoring. It was so great writing it as we got to include some spiritual principles in the book. Then one of the top Christian publishers was interested in it and they published it. One of the joys of doing the book was our TV segment with Homekeepers (one of the leading Christian TV networks). You can see our interview on my website <http://www.virtualwordpublishing.com/media.htm>.

You also coach Virtual Assistants. What is the difference between training and coaching?

I love to coach Virtual Assistants. I think the main difference between training and coaching is that I work one-to-one with clients, walking them through the steps of starting and operating their business. Training is more structured and topic driven but both are important.

You have been in business for 24 years this year. What are the main changes you have seen in the time you have been in business?

Without doubt it's the changes in technology. When I started computers were the big thing but now it's all the latest toys and I have a hard time keeping up! I believe I'm still the only person on the planet with a Blackberry just because I love it.

Social media has been another big change - to be able to connect with others on Facebook and Twitter rocks. The personal connection with other Virtual Assistants and business owners allows me to not only grow my business but my skills as well.

What inspires and motivates you?

My VA friends and helping others be successful in their business.

PR seems to be a real passion of yours. What are your top tips for a VA wanting to do some PR for their business?

- 1) Be clear on what you can do and what you can accomplish. You often need to educate the clients on what can be done in the time provided.
- 2) Be the best. That includes having the best resources. I pay for services like Profnet and Cision.com so that I do have the best databases and resources for my clients.
- 3) Continue to learn. I attend a lot of classes so that I am constantly growing.
- 4) Get the most out of your PR efforts by combining several things together to get the most impact. So in a media kit I will write a press release that can be sent out as well as added to a pitch. The articles I write will contribute to my social media by forming the basis of Tweets and go into blog posts, newsletters, etc. When you combine your PR and go full circle with all you do you get more results.

What has been the highlight of your career so far and why?

It has to be writing and marketing my books with Kelly Poelker and Jill Hart. Kelly and I have become such good friends over the years and it's fun to have someone to share things with. We've accomplished so much including getting our books in many colleges today and that's just thrilling.

name

DIANA ENNEN



What are the main challenges facing the Virtual Assistant profession at the moment?

Fortunately, it's no longer telling others what a VA is. I would say helping Virtual Assistants charge what they are worth. Too many aren't these days.

What advice would you give someone just starting in the role?

To really know what you are doing and learn as much as you can. Decide what you want to do and make sure that you have the skills and passion to do it. Then just get out there and do it.

So what's next for Diana Ennen? Where do you want to be in 5 years time?

Lots of exciting things! I hope to continue coaching and training and offering more PR classes but I absolutely love my clients and know I will always continue working with them. I totally love providing PR services.

I also hope to do more training for Virtual Assistant Multi-VA Teams as well. I'd love to be able to work with different teams and train their subcontractors and team members on how to do PR.



How to get higher open rates for your email campaigns

WRITER
TAMARA
BARANOVA

Are your email open rates letting you down? You have such a brilliant offer, fantastic product or a superb business but your emails are not getting opened. How do you get the message across to your prospective customers or clients in the first instance so they open your mail and discover your product or service? In the same way as you assess your incoming emails.

that is open to communicating and forming a relationship with them.

'Subject' line

Subscribers consider many things before they open an email. How busy they are, what they expected when they subscribed or their past interactions with you. There isn't a magic formula but a compelling subject line can persuade them to read further. The following strategies may help you get a better open rate as, according to Marketing Sherpa's 2010 Email Marketing Benchmark Report, the three most compelling subject lines are:

- A discount offer – people sign up to mailing lists to obtain special deals so if your subject line contains information about a deal you can expect a higher response rate.
- A free product offer – use the subject line to tell subscribers about your offer.
- A familiar brand name – a legitimate association between you and a recognised brand can increase the open rate.

People like to know that others have used your product or service and are pleased with the results. Naming people and how they have benefited from your product, helps subscribers trust you.

Subject line best practice

- Be clear and straightforward with your offer, use words that people understand.
- Be helpful – your list exists because subscribers believe you can help them.
- Telling them that you have the 'how' gives them a good reason to open your email.
- Ask a question because this appeals to a reader's curiosity. Consider the content of

So, what makes you open an email?

- It's something you're expecting?
- You are a fan or follower of the sender and want to see what's new?
- The mail preview is entertaining, surprising/shocking or inspiring?

To increase your email open rates you need to think about the "From" and "Subject" lines, Snippets and Preview Panes.

'From' line

This is probably the first thing that your subscriber will see so get this right and your email will be opened. Remember that the amount of text displayed differs so you want to keep it at 20-32 characters – iPhone mail only displays 20 characters! So make it short, sharp

and to the point. Make the contact personal – use a person's name, especially if you have a representative that is easily recognised by your subscribers. Don't forget the name of your company will be instantly recognisable to your list and never use a @gmail, @hotmail or @yahoo account.

Your email should be a two-way conversation with your prospective customers and clients so using "Do Not Reply" will deter people opening the mail and stop the conversation. It is regarded as offensive and sends out the message that you do not want to communicate except to get your message across. Your company will benefit by building relationships with your subscribers as people want to be heard. If you are not open to listening you may well lose that prospect when they turn to someone



your email and what questions it answers and create a question as your subject line.

- You can create urgency in any part of your email but it is most effective in the subject line as if they don't open the email they won't see the deadline anywhere else.
- An expiry date on offers and discounts persuades subscribers to open before the deal is no longer available.

By split testing your email campaign with different clients you can see which email gets opened more. Do this by sending out two different versions of the same message but with different subject lines. Analyse the number of opens you get for each of the subject lines and this will give you a better understanding of your audience and what they respond to.

Snippets

Some email programs display a preview of the text at the top of your email. This snippet could provide an added incentive for subscribers to open your email. So choose the primary text carefully and again split test to determine which words are more successful.

Try moving the 'unsubscribe' or 'whitelist' request from the top of your email to the top of the sidebar. They are still easily accessed but you can add more compelling text.

Programmes in which the snippet pane will show in are:

- Gmail,
- Outlook,
- iPhone,
- iPad.

Getting Snippets to work in your campaign

If you have a logo, image or header at the top these can be included in your snippet by setting to 'alt' text so if the images don't display you will have text showing instead. Another tweak which will make the snippet disappear is to assign 'alt' text to a tiny image, then make it invisible by matching it to your background

colour. These both work in Gmail and Outlook. As always, split test to see which option gets a bigger response.

Be aware that different browsers will show different amounts of your email in the snippet area. A high percentage of your readers will be reading your email in Gmail or Outlook or on iPhones or iPads, so consider what amount of your text will appear.

Remember that what you have at the top of your email appears in the snippet so use keywords here. If it's at the top of your email a pre-header, a header or the 'alt' text from an image will be in your snippet.

Screen size will affect the amount of text shown, so remove any less urgent items to the sidebar.

It can take a little practice to write snippets that smoothly connect your subject line with your header but it's worth trying and making contact with more of your subscribers.

Preview Panes

When you send business to consumer (B2C) email marketing campaigns 53% of subscribers see your preview pane but with business to business (B2B) the percentage is closer to 80%. The preview pane lets users look at part of the email before deciding whether to open it. With some easy design changes you can encourage subscribers to open your email.

The space you have to work with varies between email clients

Yahoo shows a horizontal strip of the email but others including Outlook display a vertical column. To take advantage of this space (both horizontal and vertical) fill the top left of the email with items that grab attention. Including your logo, company name or any other recognisable branding that will strengthen a weak subject line by providing a known and trusted name.

Use the top space for a strong deal or for a table of contents so that what's in your email can be seen at a glance. Time is of the essence - some

may not have time to read all of your email - but your call to action might be just what they are looking for so placing this in the preview pane can lead to action.

Depending on your design it may be difficult to fit all this into that small space, cramming too much into a small space can be off-putting. Inserting a side column allows two items to exist near the top in harmony.

Make the Preview Pane compelling to open your campaign

Designing the preview panes so they work well may mean removing things that are less compelling. Large images and headers need assessing as to their efficiency.

Consider:

- When images are turned off they will appear as a blank space.
- If they are too large they will take forever to load.
- Do they create a need to find out more?

If they don't then more compelling content can replace them. Links that mirror the tabs on your website can be helpful for click backs to your site. They can get in the way of more important items so consider shrinking or reducing the amount you use. Better still, they could be displayed across the bottom of your email.

Ads – place these away from the preview pane (unless you want subscribers to click through to advertisers).

Wondering whether it's all worth the trouble?

Split-test your broadcast in your email marketing provider to find the answer and the most effective way to contact your subscribers. If you see that your results (opens, clicks, social sharing, comments and interactions) are steadily growing from campaign to campaign – you are on the right track, well done!

about the author



Tamara Baranova helps small business owners grow their business by delivering effective online marketing mentoring, support and training. It allows her clients to stop wasting valuable time and start seeing real results. She built her first Virtual Assistant business using social media and then did it again for the second venture. This year Tamara became a Finalist in the prestigious Outstanding VA of 2012 Award for the VAs in the UK.

You can find her on Twitter or Facebook as @TamaraBaranova.



Speakers and Coaches – A Perfect Niche for Virtual Assistants

WRITER
KELLY
POELKER

Ask a Virtual Assistant to name their greatest challenge and they will say it's finding their niche.

It's difficult.

First they had to identify their skills and talents and match those with their interests and experiences. Then they had to find the market that would allow them to best utilise those talents in an area that interests them. Many struggle to do this so they take the easy road by targeting anyone and everyone. They think the more they target the better their chances of landing clients. Unfortunately that's exactly what you don't want to do.

So what exactly is a niche?

Easy, a niche is a target market or industry whose needs fit well with a particular skill set. The great thing about the VA industry is that the opportunities for matching the right talents with the right niche are tremendous. Of the many niches you can target (including estate agents, authors, small businesses) the one that we have found works perfectly and is one of our favourites, is working with speakers and coaches. That is the focus of our business and why we know it works. So let's go into exactly what that looks like.

Speakers and coaches have very similar roles in their businesses and that is why you often see VAs target them both. More often than not, coaches are also speakers and vice versa. From routine tasks such as email and calendar maintenance to higher-level support like marketing and booking speaking engagements,

the versatile VA can handle a multitude of support tasks for these clients.

This match of VA and ideal client can prove to be very rewarding for both parties. It doesn't take the client long to realise that they can make more money and be more successful when they get the assistance they need and not try to do everything themselves. The VA can tap into their broad skillset and find variety in their everyday tasks.

Here are several services that can be offered to speakers and coaches:

- PR and marketing – article and press release marketing, building a brand, promoting events, pitching the media, list building
- Teleseminars – scheduling, promoting, recording, transcribing
- Book Speaking Events – research prospective venues, create pitches, lead follow up, send out speaker packets
- Shopping carts – maintenance, product additions, auto responders, broadcasts, affiliate programs
- Websites – design and maintenance, blog postings, membership sites, keyword research
- Document creation – develop courses, homework assignments, e-books, presentations
- SEO/web analysis – websites, blogs, videos, social media, sales pages, keyword research

- Social networking – enhance social media presence on Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn groups
- Research – target audience demographics, information for teleseminars, statistics, new places to market
- Brainstorming ideas – products, markets, alliances, JV partners

Now that might just seem like a shopping list of services but think about it this way.

You have a speaker who routinely speaks at large conferences or offers teleseminars. They also have a thriving practice with regular clients. You, as their virtual assistant, are able to step in and handle all the administrative tasks that then allows the client to speak more, coach more, market more—you get the picture. You can also be instrumental in managing travel for their speaking engagements, coordinating the contract process, gathering post-event reviews, providing customer service...

Can you see what a valuable asset to their team a VA can be?

So take the time to learn about the speaking industry to determine if working with speakers and coaches is a good fit for your VA business. You might want to link up with those who support speakers on social media and gain from the tips they share on Twitter and Facebook.

about the author



Kelly Poelker and Diana Ennen are the co-authors of numerous books including *Virtual Assistant - The Series: Become a Highly Successful, Sought After VA* and accompanying *Virtual Assistant - The Series Workbook*. Stop by their site for complete information on starting your own VA business <http://www.vatheseries.com>.

Connect with them online at: @kellypoelker @dianaennen and facebook.com/becomeava



10 Tips for Cashflow Management

WRITER
ANTONIA
CHITTY

‘Turnover is vanity, profit is sanity, cash is king’. Do you take this saying to heart in your business? Having enough cash in the business is critical for both your sanity and your success.

In the current economic climate, many businesses are struggling and this can affect a VA business too, as clients make cut backs. You can improve your business finances by learning some smart ways to manage your money. Here are ten tips to help your business cash flow:

1. Stay on top of invoicing and send out bills as quickly as you can so you get your income as soon as possible. Make sure that you have a system for invoicing, whether you set up a database of client details in Excel or use an accounts programme like Sage, QuickBooks or FreeAgent. Think about the terms for payment that you offer each client: do you need your bills paid on receipt of invoice, within 14 days or 30 days? If you have completed work it can be reasonable to ask for payment on receipt. If you will incur up-front costs on a project you may want to ask for a deposit.
2. Pay staff and freelancers promptly. Staff will rely on income from you, so be a great boss and pay on time at the end of each week or month. If you commission work out to freelancers and want to develop a good working relationship, so you can go back to them time after time, pay them promptly too!
3. Pay other bills only when they are due. Check each invoice for payment terms and pay on the last day possible for the money to get to the payee in time. This ensures that the money stays in your bank account for as long as possible, helping you to cover your costs while waiting for clients to pay you.
4. Deposit cheques promptly. This all helps ensure that there is as much money as possible IN your business account, rather than sitting on your desk!
5. If you don't have one already, look for an interest-paying business deposit account for your business reserve and sweep money into this account regularly. Even though interest rates are low, a few per cent interest is better than nothing. By doing this you will get even more benefit from invoicing promptly and paying in cheques as soon as you get them.
6. Check your bank charges and shop around for a better deal. You could save every month if you switch or you may find your existing bank improves their offer when you explain to them you want to move to cut costs.
7. Change the way you bill clients. If you have regular clients who want the same sort of work every month, set up subscription programmes. This works especially well for VAs who offer social media services. If clients pay by direct debit your business then has a reliable income that you don't have to chase each month. Incentivise clients by offering a small discount or bonus service. You'll save time on invoicing too.
8. Look for additional income sources. If you always recommend a particular product or programme to your clients, see if there is an affiliate scheme. If you review business books on your blog, embed an Amazon affiliate link within the title or image. If you have a popular website, allow a few relevant adverts. All these income streams can add up and improve your cash flow.
9. At times you may need to invest to grow your business. If you are expanding you may need an overdraft to allow you to pay bills. It can be hard to get credit if your business is in difficulties, so ask your bank manager about credit terms well before you need it. Check around for competitive rates.
10. Chase debts firmly. Ensure that one person is responsible for this and that they allocate time every week. Have a clear set of actions to follow from a first reminder to sending in debt collectors if necessary. By setting up the steps in advance it is easier to put them in to practice when you need.

Follow these ten steps and keep track of the money coming in and out of your business. You will soon find that you are on the way to having a healthy amount in your business bank account.

about the author



Antonia Chitty helps business owners succeed. She provides practical training and helpful tips at www.aceinspire.com. Her latest books include Blogging: *The Essential Guide (Need2Know)* and *Making Money Online (Hale Books)*.



An alternative to PowerPoint

Yes PowerPoint has its uses for presentations in events. But they are limited.



If you are a nervous speaker or presenter then you might use PowerPoint as a crutch to get you through your content. If you want to ruin a *live* presentation to communicate a pile of factual information then use lots of slides, charts and bullets in PowerPoint. If you have a lot more information to deliver than you can edit down to a few simple messages then use a deck of PowerPoint slides to make you feel like you have done your job. If you like to involve your audience through submission or if you think that talking at people is actually going to have any impact on what they do then go for it...PowerPoint will be your friend.

If, however, you would like to ensure your talk or presentation has an impact, creates change and enables people to work or think in different ways... if you want to inspire others,

enable them to understand ideas rather than details... then PowerPoint is your enemy. Having spent 20 years helping speakers with their presentations at events my advice is that you should use it as a last resort. Maybe as a way of structuring some simple headlines or images around which you will then talk with passion and conviction.

Sadly PowerPoint is the first port of call for 90% of the world's business leaders and managers. How many times do you see the familiar looking slide decks scroll up at a conference or meeting or on someone's laptop in the train or in a coffee shop? Many business managers use PowerPoint in the same way that your dulllest school teacher would have used an overhead projector or your least favourite uncle would present pictures of his canal holiday; slide after slide, lock gate after lock gate!

By talking at an audience from the front there is the deluded assumption that the information has now been *communicated* or even 'cascaded'. 'Surely now I have finished my 50+ slide presentation everyone understands it, believes it and is inspired as a result?' We all know this isn't true because most of us have been in that darkened conference room, maybe some of us have even been that PowerPoint soldier at the front too.

The reality is that slick doesn't make a presentation good, sexy doesn't make it credible and full doesn't make it complete. Our first advice when coaching or helping presenters is to step back from the slides and think about their communication as a 20 minute conversation. We advise them to try to have that conversation with a colleague or coach and get them to write the essence of it down on a bit of paper, on a

tablecloth, on the wall ... anywhere rather than into some slides.

The listener needs to probe into what exactly are the key things that the presenter wants their audience to remember, understand and change? Keep distilling, keep asking until you are sure that the essence is clear. Why not embrace some old school technology to do this. Write the presentation points down on a piece of A4, one page per thought. Lay the A4s out around the desk and then reshuffle them into a running order with a clear beginning, middle and end.



Using the boardroom table to lay out a presentation.

Once you've done this you have your key messages. There will be too many so reduce them again. Ideally by the time you are finished there will be no more than 12 pieces of paper on the table.

Now you can build and think about what ideas/examples/illustrations would help bring these to life. You may (only now) want to use some

PowerPoint slides to do this. Or alternatively you may want to use some boards, pictures, video clips or even an interview with (hold the front page) a human being. A combination of six to ten slides works quite well with other illustrations as long as they contain no more than headlines.

Don't be tempted to cram your slides with lots of information in a reduced text size. Just summarise in simple phrases the key message that you wrote down originally. If you need some prompts to present from then they are better on A5 cards than on your slides. Don't make the cardinal sin of using PowerPoint as your speaker notes as you will end up just reading them and the audience will wish that you'd stayed at home and just emailed them the deck.

Think of each of your 6-10 key points in terms of mini stories with beginnings, middles and ends. If possible, actually tell stories. Make those stories *real*, amusing and even self deprecating if it makes your point real. Certainly make them relevant to your audience. Think about your audience. Three times. The message is for them. How do they best receive information? Don't worry about the fact that there will be a bit of a rough edge in there. A PowerPoint saturated audience will lap up your reality.

The best presentations are not actually the slick ones. Unless you are a naturally gifted orator or stand up comedian they are also not side splittingly funny. It's hard to communicate business messages at the best of times, but making them into a stand up routine can backfire badly. However a dose of humour and the odd mistake enables the audience to relate to the natural delivery of your messages and for them to have meaning.

Unless you have a load of charts and figures the 6-10 slides you will use should just be a few images and some very simple statements. If your messages rely on charts then think again about presenting them in PowerPoint. Instead hand them out, use templates, break the audience into small groups at tables, get them to fill in the blanks and to interact with your

data and content, to have discussions. Why not make it a bit of a competitive task or test? Stay away from the complex charts on screen which your audience may be able to see (if you're lucky) but certainly can't get involved with.

Think of turning your content into a series of experiences or interactions which could be filmed (talking heads style) or even delivered live by colleagues or possibly actors. We all have the technology in our pockets through mobile devices to create video or audio content, which is certainly more engaging than PowerPoint slides. Use tools such as iMovie to build these clips into a meaningful story or get one of the more tech savvy types in the office to help you. Everyone loves to help make a movie, even if it's only about your new strategic direction. One of the benefits of 'YouTube' is that it has lowered audience expectations and helpfully reduced the need for high production values for film.

Use the physical space within which you are presenting to tell your stories. We've graffitied walls in warehouses and workshops, lined offices with paper and drawn the stories and ideas, walked delegates around A1 posters in a conference space, even filmed a set of post cards that were under the audiences seats and that, when put together, completed the narrative of the presentation. The trick is to get the audience involved, as all the best shows do.

The opening and closing ceremonies of the Olympics were great examples where the audience was actually involved in creating the experience and therefore felt very much part of it. This is memorable, this is lasting. I was lucky enough to be at the opening ceremony and I can remember how I *felt* and what I *thought* at every stage. What I can't remember, however, are the key points from the PowerPoint heavy, headline speech at an industry conference I went to last week.

But if you must use some form of slide technology some of the more formal alternatives to PowerPoint are as follows but remember they too come with the same health warning. A deck of slides, no matter how slick the format can never replace the simplicity of a few clear

messages and some well told/simply illustrated stories.

One of the best known PowerPoint alternatives is Keynote which can be bought as a stand-alone product, or as part of Apple's iWork productivity suite. Like PowerPoint it is intuitive and easy to use and creates nice looking presentations.

Another is the Google Docs presentations model recently updated to make it more compatible with Microsoft Office. Google Docs offers a wealth of templates and presentation creation tools that are easy to jump in and get started with; animations and slide transitions to make your presentation interesting to watch; and even collaborative presentation editing with other people on your team

And finally there is Prezi which is free and takes presentations in a different direction away from static slides on a screen or projector with text on them. Even the animations and transitions available in other slideshow applications pale in comparison to Prezi's "zooming user interface," which puts entire slides in motion and focuses heavily on images, graphics, and motion to draw attention to text.

But at the end of the day these options are still just flashy presentation formats that are no substitute for the rich and relevant reality of telling good stories, clearly with the minimum of aid and the maximum of power. None of the great speakers in history (or the present) from Mandela to Churchill, from Clinton to TED from JC to Dr ML King use(d) anything other than stories in our minds to make their messages understood. They didn't need to add the 'Power' to their Point and nor should you. Think again. Take out some paper. Map it out. Distill it. Rehearse and fly *PowerPoint free*. Be different. Be real.

about the author



Contact us if you need help, email me on lorne@ashdownacademy.com

Lorne Armstrong
Director, Ashdown Academy
www.eventcourse.com



Three Reasons Why Business Owners Are Not Hiring YOU as Their Virtual Assistant

WRITER
CINDY
GREENWAY

Ever wondered why you're not getting hired?

Have you had fabulous conversations with a potential client, who you knew desperately needed your help but they never called you and they never hired you? Or perhaps you've built a great relationship with a business owner but they hired someone else to help them in their business?

Over the years I've had the privilege of building strong relationships with all kinds of business owners. Through conversations with these entrepreneurs, I've been fortunate to speak candidly and listen to their opinions, wants, expectations and obstacles when it comes to working with a Virtual Assistant.

So this article is for you, the VA, to help you realise that the onus is on you to ask specific questions and share specific details with potential clients, so that then they can see clearly that you are the best VA for them.

The responsibility here lies with the VA because, quite honestly, business owners don't know what they don't know. This is not to discredit or disrespect business owners but they



have candidly shared with me that they don't know:

- what a VA can TRULY do for them
- how a VA can impact the growth and success of their business
- where to find the right VA
- why some of their expectations of a VA are unrealistic
- when is the right time to hire a VA
- what are the qualities of the right VA for them

These are the questions that you, the Virtual Assistant, must provide to a potential client.

Here are three reasons why business owners may not be hiring you, even after you have connected and built a relationship with them. You'll see that in each example, a very simple solution is available but it relies on your ability to provide the information, on your own.

(1) You haven't proven that you understand their business and their goals.

I tell VAs all the time about a 'secret ingredient' – it's called 'Business Mindset'. Business Mindset is the ability gather enough information so you can tell potential clients how you can help them with their specific business goals.

When you apply this secret ingredient to your day-to-day conversations with potential clients, you gain an incredible opportunity to share exactly how working with you will get them closer to achieving the goals they have for their business.

When a VA says things like "I provide administrative support to business owners so they save time and stress." or "I can help take care of all the little details in your business so you can do what you love most." it sounds great ... but they still really have no idea what you do or how you can help them.

When you can relate specifically to their business, their needs and their goals, the light bulb will turn on and they'll feel that you understand them. If you connect strongly specifically to the areas that will help them build and make more money, they will feel even more excited about working with you right away.

Think about your own work and business. When you feel someone understands you and your unique needs, don't you feel more strongly connected to them? You start to trust them more, you think "yes, you're the one I want."

That's the same feeling you want a potential client to feel about you.

(2) You haven't proven your value --- Are you an expense or an investment?

Being a business owner can be tough ... one of the first things we do when money gets tight, is look at our expenses and see where we can cut costs.

Some business owners will see their VA as an expense that can be cut. They rationalise: "I don't really have the extra time to take care of the admin pieces but I can save money here and do it myself."

Other business owners will cut costs in all areas before they even think about cutting back on their VA. Why? Because they know that they can't truly grow (or even function!) without the support of their VA.

What's the difference between these two situations?

When I started in 2003, business was somewhat uncomplicated compared to what it is today. A VA with solid administrative skills who managed the 'backend' of the business was of incredible value.

However, with all the new technology and advancements in business, the 'basics' are just not enough anymore. A business owner does not always recognise the value in basic administrative tasks anymore and therefore, because it's not supporting the growth of the business, they see it as an expense.

A VA who supports a business owner with strategies and activities directly connected to the growth of a business, will be viewed as a investment and not an expense.

(3) The business owner is simply nit ready to hire a VA

You will speak to many business owners who think they are ready to hire a Virtual Assistant

but many of them, regardless of what they think, are simply NOT ready.

The danger in this is that even though the pit-of-your-stomach is telling you that this client may not be the right one for you, you will still agree to work with them, if they ask you to.

One of the questions I encourage VAs to ask all potential clients is "Tell me about your business goals."

If a business owner answers this question with anything like, "I want to find more clients, make more money and be the go to person in my area of expertise." – they are probably not ready for a VA.

A business owner must have a clear vision of their business goals and how they're going to reach those goals. It's in the HOW that you provide value. Through discussion with them, you can brainstorm the strategies that will be implemented to move towards this goal and identify which tasks you will take on and which your client needs to take on.

If your potential client does not have a clear vision of their business goals, other than to simply find more clients and make more money, then they are not ready to have you join them.

Don't take on ownership in feeling it's your responsibility to determine HOW you will find more clients for them or HOW to help them make more money – as the VA this is not your role, this is a role of a Coach.

When I've run into this situation with a potential client, I've told them that in order for me to best support them and contribute to their growing business, I need more of HOW they want to accomplish finding more clients and making more money. I encourage them to speak with a Coach and, once they have clearly identified their goals, to reconnect with me so we can take next steps.

about the author



Cindy Greenway, author of *Virtually Successful: 8 Simple Ways for Virtual Assistants to Find (and Keep) Clients*, provides training and coaching to Virtual Assistants in-the-making as well as VAs who want to expand their current business. She is inspired to help others create a rewarding business with great clients! Since starting her own business in 2003, Cindy has worked with well known online based business owners in the area of online marketing management. She has also personally helped business owners identify their own needs and assisted them in finding virtual support team members to support them. Sign up for Cindy's FREE *Virtual Assistant Formula* 3-part video training series at www.VAFormula.com.



Planning for Profit

Why all businesses need financial management

WRITER
JOHN
PALMER



Now is a great time to start and grow a new Virtual Assistant's business. Cloud computing and virtual working are extinguishing major physical overheads like office space; entrepreneurs are looking to cut employment costs and so are more inclined to give work to contractors and freelancers; and last, but not least, businesses worldwide have realised the power of social media. This latter development has opened up a new revenue stream for VAs who are now regularly hired to write or proofread blog posts, update Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn pages and to comment on forums.

However, while it may seem like a good idea, starting a business is much easier than keeping it going and keeping it in profit. According to research from Harvard Business School, between 30% and 40% of all new US businesses fail before they reach their

fifth anniversary. The UK's failure figures are similarly pessimistic according to a new report from the Department for Business Innovation & Skills. This states that of the 400,000 new businesses that start in the UK every year, one-third fail before year three. The Office for National Statistics attributes start-up failure to widespread poor financial management: 44% of new businesses either run out of cash or come very close to doing so and more than 40% of new business owners say that knowing what records to keep and "staying on top of it all" is the biggest financial challenge they face.

Like many other business owners, VAs are strong on service delivery but often struggle when it comes to planning and managing financial matters and this can be the difference between your own success and failure. But what is financial management, exactly?

Financial management is a framework of set processes that a business uses to monitor, organise and direct its income (the fees earned from the services you provide), expenses (electricity, telephones, cost of training etc) and assets (the cash in your business bank account and the money that you are owed with the objectives of creating profit and ensuring long-term sustainability. It is accomplished through financial planning (especially before the business is launched), through setting up financial controls to monitor business performance and through making informed and effective financial decisions. In short, it is about managing your business finances in such a way that your business works towards making a profit.

If you think that financial management is for big companies only and has nothing to do

with starting and running a VA business then consider the results of recent VA industry surveys. These show that only a third of VAs have relevant business training or experience of running a business. Therefore, perhaps it is unsurprising that, as we have mentioned in a previous article, many who enter the profession each year leave it after only 12 to 24 months. In fact, our research at Be My VA shows that the population of professional VAs has fallen by almost 50% in the last two to three years, particularly in the USA and the UK. Many VAs appear to struggle to make it a long-term, viable business and weak financial planning and management skills are likely to be a significant part of that problem.

Financial planning

Planning is crucial before you launch your VA business – we all know the meaning of ‘If you fail to plan, you plan to fail.’ Start with your goals – what are they? For example, do you want to be a fee income of say £60,000 or £100,000 per year? If this is your goal, how do you get there?

Just like all new start-ups a VA will need to research the market and assess potential demand for their services. How many clients will you need and how will you price your services to reach the above figure and timescale? How many hours a week will you need to work? What is your financial outlay during this time? For example, will you need to buy software or enrol on a specific training course to develop one or more of your skills?

Consolidate all this research into a written business plan incorporating financial forecasts for say, two years ahead, if this is the timescale you choose to work to. It will help you see any gaps in your research and planning, and will act as a benchmark against which to measure the performance of your business after launch. It will also show you if or when you can afford to leave your day job and operate as a self-employed VA full-time, or if you need to be looking at finding additional finance to fund your start-up.

Be realistic when estimating your projected revenue income turnover over the first two years, especially if you will need to build up your client base from scratch. Also, before you leave your day job, ensure you have set aside an emergency fund that will allow you to pay your bills for a few months (6 months is recommended).

Your business plan should be backed up by a marketing plan - how will you get the clients that you need to achieve the projected turnover? Only then are you ready to implement both plans and monitor them making any adjustments if and when necessary.

Financial control

Hopefully you can now see that monitoring how your business is doing is only possible if you can measure this against something and this something is your business plan and your financial forecasts. But how do you know if you are on target to achieve your goals? And what should you be doing differently if you have steered off course?

The most important thing you can do to make sure you stay ‘on course’ is to manage your cash-flow in such a way that will allow you to stay in business - businesses fail when they run out of cash. So, you want to maximise your income and keep your business costs to a minimum. How do you do this, day-to-day? Do you bill your clients and chase unpaid invoices regularly? Have you established a procedure for dealing with late payments from clients? Are you claiming all the allowances you can against taxation? Do you budget for and keep track of all business related expenses?

One of the difficulties of being a ‘solopreneur’ is knowing how to live on an income that will fluctuate, at least until you are better established in business. It is therefore critical that you know exactly how much money you have coming in and going out (this includes personal expenses as well as business expenses) so that you can cut out any non-essential expenditure. Cutting out such extras does not

mean that you will have to do so forever, but you will probably have to make some sacrifices in the early days.

To know how much money you have coming in and going out, you will need to do some bookkeeping. This can be done in Excel or with an accounting software program. From this, financial statements can be produced, such as a balance sheet (a statement of your assets such as your cash in the bank and of your liabilities) and a profit and loss account (a statement of your fee income, expenses and profits/losses). It is by comparing the numbers on your original financial forecasts to the numbers in these financial statements that you will be able to determine whether your business is growing at the rate you had planned. You can then use this insight to make financial decisions such as whether you need to change your pricing structure to increase profits or if you should chase your debtors more vigorously to increase your cash levels.

Another aspect of financial control and cash management is keeping personal and business money separate. The best way to ensure this is to have a separate bank account for your business income and expenses.

Keeping track of time worked and of the invoices raised also comes under ‘financial control’ - how much time you have spent on each client, how much you are owed, which invoices are overdue. If you have a good system in place for this purpose (there are a number of web apps and reasonably priced software options), it will allow you to easily and quickly see where you are on client billing at any given point in time, which is not as easy if you manage invoicing manually.

In future articles I will write more about financial planning (business plan and cashflow forecasts; financing your VA business; pricing your services) and financial control (book-keeping and time-tracking; billing and getting paid; keeping track of business expenses).

about the author



John Palmer MA C.Dir is the founder and CEO of BeMyVA.com, a new innovative, international directory of Virtual Assistants. John is a Chartered Director and holds a Masters in Company Direction and is also founder and CEO of exec 4 – consultants and mentors to business leaders, based in London, UK since 1999. BeMyVA.com has been developed as an “independent, international directory” for locating professional Virtual Assistants worldwide. Our primary business mission is to actively promote the value, skills and resources of Virtual Assistants to the business community at large.



The Essential Tools to Networking Success: The Big Question: What do you do?

So many times people have said to me “Oh yes I have met a VA in the networking group but when I asked them what they do they said ‘I am a Virtual Assistant’. I didn’t quite understand.” When people don’t understand the concept then they don’t really listen to you or they make an assumption about you.

WRITER
CARMEN
MACDOUGALL



It is really important that you are making a good first impression in what you say because first impressions do count and you only get one opportunity to make a good first impression. So, create a clear introduction about who you are, what you do.

Now I am sure you have heard of the eight or ten second elevator pitch? This is when you imagine you are in an elevator or a lift with

somebody and you have eight seconds to tell them what you do. Eight seconds isn't very long is it? At a networking meeting you will probably have forty seconds or a minute to tell people. So think how much you can convey about you and what you do.

What I have heard quite a few times is: “I am a Virtual Assistant and I do your diary management for you. I can help you manage

your work so you have got more time and more money.” I have even heard: “I can help you manage your family!”

The response is: “Gosh! What is that?” or “What do you charge for that?”

If the VA does have the confidence to talk about their fees and says “£25 per hour” then the response will be: “To do my diary management you will charge me £25 per hour? Wow that’s expensive.”

This comes across as if you are selling and doesn't give people the opportunity to understand what you actually do.

So, what do you do? You are not aiming the answer to the person who has asked the question. You are not saying “I can do your diary management for you, I can do your document management, I can manage your emails for you” because that is making the assumption that these are the services they want and need and you must be very careful about making assumptions. To the person that said they could help to manage my family, I said: “Where on my badge does it say I have got children?”

When someone says “What do you do?” tell them what you do. Focus on who you work closely with, what solutions you provide and what outcomes your clients receive. It's simple because it's based on what you do: “I provide business and social media support. Helping my clients to raise their profile, so that they can focus on generating better relationships with their existing clients, which creates more business, which leads to increased income.”

Think about what's in it for them and talk about the benefits.

If you say that you can manage someone's diary, what does that actually mean? It's amazing how many people don't understand the value and say: "What's the point of having a VA to do that when I can do it myself?"

You need to be clear about your introduction and remember that people will ask questions to help them understand more. When you answer those questions you have the opportunity to expand on your introduction.

So if someone asks: "Well how can you help me?" then ask them questions to determine what support you can offer them and to establish what their pain factors are. I would be suggesting solutions and explaining the positive impact on their business. Here are some good examples to start you off:

- What is an hour of your time worth to your business?
- In the last week, what took up your valuable time and prevented you from actually achieving part of your 90 Day Plan?
- Is there anything in particular that you are working on?
- Have you found that there have been interruptions to working on that project?
- What were those interruptions?
- When you are in bed at night what makes you feel anxious about the business for the next day?
- What is keeping you awake at night?

When you have asked these questions you can be really clear about what you do in terms of delivering benefits to their business. A lot of VAs talk about the benefits being: "you don't have to employ somebody, you don't have any overheads or training or equipment, you only pay for the time that I do your work." These are features or standard benefits but these are not the benefits of working with you! Explain what it is about you that is individual and be very clear about what's in it for them by them working with YOU!

Be clear about who you support. If you work with a niche market - tell people that. Don't suddenly say "I work with everybody" out of fear that you are going to lose out on an opportunity. You might be talking to an accountant and have made a fantastic connection with them but your niche market are trainers in the pharmaceutical industry. If the accountant says: "Well I know I am not in the pharmaceutical industry but I would love to work with you because I love your energy, you are very clear about the benefits of working with you and that's what I want for my business." Then you can take that client on board because you have demonstrated those qualities.

When VAs have a clear niche market they are remembered. When you talk about who you support and you explain what sort of support you are seeking for yourself people will remember that. So by saying what you do, in a clear way, you will be seen as different. It's OK to talk about yourself, it's absolutely OK to talk about yourself. You are not selling unless you start saying "I can do this for you, I can do that for you."

All that the person wants to know is: What you do? Who do you do it for? How do you do it? What are the client's financial benefits? How do you have that positive impact on their income? How do you boost their income?

It's OK because you are there to tell people about your business. You are also there to listen and support others. So listen more than you talk, let the other person feel valued. Create an opportunity where you can offer support, show that you are really listening and you are not thinking "They are going to ask me what I do next and I don't know what to say!"

You are listening for an opportunity where you can make a connection for them. A referral that you can make for them or perhaps an introduction to someone in the room. Listen out for that opportunity. There might be someone, just that right person you are looking for, who could be that future strategic partner or the connector to your niche market.

Listen and ask good questions that will generate good responses. You can prepare these questions so think about some non-standard ideas, you want something that is going to get people to talk not just give "yes" or "no" responses. This will start to build their trust in you because you are taking an interest in them.

Active listening skills are worth their weight in gold. It is really important that you listen because then you will hear that opportunity and you are making that person feel they want to get to know you as well.

This is the tip of the iceberg and there is an awful lot more that I would love to share with you but these are the 3 key areas:

- You have worked on your strategy.
- You have worked on your confidence and you have worked on what you want to say.
- You have built all of this into your 90 Day Plan.

You are now going to experience far more impact and return on investment in your networking. I have coached and trained so many VAs who have followed these rules and have got their return on investment and so have been renewing their membership

Invest in your networking and give it time. If you are not seeing immediate results think about what you need to do differently. It is an ongoing process and you have to be consistent with it. The more people that you know and you build relationships with and make the effort to meet for one-to-ones and show your support for and get to know at a different level, then you are going to start seeing results.

I really do hope you are going to take action and make a commitment because if you don't see a return on your investment, I will eat my hat!

about the author



Carmen MacDougall came from a corporate background as a PA and Office Manager before establishing her VA business over 13 years ago after redundancy. She has since established herself as one of the leading trainers in how to launch and develop a successful Virtual Assistant business through The VA Coaching and Training Company www.vact.co.uk using a model which has helped many of her clients to become award winning VAs. Carmen is a qualified business coach and a Master in NLP, an author and regular motivational speaker for PA and business events. She founded The national Va Conference and awards in 2007 and has recently been appointed as Director of Training for The International Association of Virtual Assistants. Carmen was very proud to be chosen for the Spirit of the VA Industry award in 2011 due to her passion and support in putting the VA industry on the map.

Connect with Carmen on Twitter via @VATrainingpro or Facebook on CarmenMacDougall. To grab your free e-book on *The Essential Tools to Thrive and Get Results From Networking* please email va@vact.co.uk



From Assistant to CEO

Have you been in a situation where everything seems to be going well? Then BAM! The balance is upset and you have to face a change. How do you deal with it?

WRITER
RONA
CANT



Imagine a scenario where your job has disappeared, although the process will be the same in any situation, this is the moment when you need to stop, take a step back and look at the bigger picture. What is the worse that could happen? Is it life threatening? It may feel as though it is at that particular moment but it

probably isn't. It may well be challenging but you have met challenge before and know you can overcome it.

If you have been prudent you will have been putting some money into savings for just this sort of situation or you may get a redundancy

payment. You might have a month or so before your job disappears completely so you have extra time to work out a plan of action. Do you want the security of being employed by an organisation or is this the moment to provide your own security by running your own business?

It is an ideal time to take control and take on this challenge. With the present economic situation there has been a rise in the number of small businesses that have been created. They may start off as one person working from home but as they build their business they will need someone to help them and a Virtual Assistant is exactly what they need. So you will become a small business supporting maybe one or two slightly bigger businesses but that is how all businesses start. How far you want to take your business is entirely up to you. You could grow it as big as you want by organising other VAs to work for other businesses.

So how would you start? This is where you plan what you are going to do and how you are going to do it. Some of the questions you need to address will relate to the particular industry with whom you want to work, what you will charge, what equipment you will need if you are working from home, what effect will this decision make on other parts of your life? But the most important question is this one: what is your vision for the future? Where do you want your new business to take you? What will your life look like once you have accomplished that goal?

This is not a process that can happen quickly. You need to take time, put the idea into your head and let it take you wherever it decides to go, there are no boundaries. Once you have seen the bigger picture you can work out how you will achieve the goal. Do not allow your mind to be bound by unfounded preconceptions.

Let me explain exactly what I mean. I run my own business helping organisations with their leadership and teamwork or helping them overcome various obstacles and challenges by using the lessons I have learnt from various expeditions and from my life. So I always speak from those experiences.

After we successfully completed The Nordkapp Expedition I set up the Arctic Leadership Challenges working with the leader of the Expedition. We take groups or individuals into the Arctic Circle dog-sledding in the winter and sailing, kayaking, orienteering and rock-

climbing in the summer. The Arctic Leadership Challenges are my legacy. I set it up so that it can be run by my children in the future and it will provide another revenue stream for them or they can sell it to someone else.

So find yourself a comfortable place, turn off the telephone and with pad and pen in hand write down what you would like your life to look like in 5, 10, even 15 years. It may take some time to draw out exactly what you will be doing but stay with it. Once you have that vision it is time to turn your thoughts to what you will need to do to get you there.

You will have to decide where your office will be – it's a good idea to start with a room at home that you can close off at the end of the day. What equipment will you need for your office and to back up your business? What sort of telephone system will you install? What insurance will you need? The list goes on. When I started my business a friend suggested that I should read a very good book called *The E-Myth Revisited* by Michael E. Gerber which shows you how to set up a business that can be replicated over and over again but still keep the same model as the original.

There's lots of useful information on the internet and organisations such as Business Link, Chambers of Commerce and your bank who can advise you. Start going to networking events in your area, not only will this bring you into contact with possible future clients but also with people who can advise you on marketing your business. You will meet other business owners and one of them could become your mentor. We all need help and not only when we are starting up our business.

As an assistant you have been used to working for someone else and in the terms of the Belbin Team Roles you would most probably be a 'Completer Finisher'. You probably have very high standards that head towards perfection with details checked time and time again. You probably focus on the minor details and do not delegate tasks to others as you are not really sure that you trust them to work to your high standards.

That is admirable when you are working for someone else but not when you are working for yourself. Don't get me wrong, you still need to provide work of a high degree but there will only be you doing it at the beginning. However the most important phrase you need to know and understand is 'Cash is King'. I know it sounds wrong but, without it, you are not going to put food on the table or pay any of your bills.

You will need to hone your 'Plant' skills (another Belbin Team Role), the creative, unorthodox side of you. You may have to ignore incidentals and you cannot afford to concentrate on the detail because as the business owner you have now become, you have to be innovative to be able to solve the challenges that come your way. And there will be challenges but you have overcome them before and you will do again.

You will also have to look to your 'Shaper' skills where you pursue your goals with tremendous energy. So you need to focus on the money and as your business grows then you must provide the drive that will keep other VAs (if that is what you decide to do) focussed. As a Shaper it's up to you to challenge your team to improve, to stimulate them and find the best way to overcome those challenges. You will have to look at each problem from every angle to find the right solution and you will need to keep going when others want to quit.

It's really helpful to have a mastermind group to keep you focussed, to challenge you to achieve your goals and to provide advice if necessary.

The most important thing is to chase the money by doing a really good job and delivering what you say you will deliver on time, within budget and to a good standard.

Is it easy? No. Is it challenging? Yes. Is it rewarding? It certainly is. People are generous with their help and knowledge so don't be afraid to ask for help. Where will your business take you? That's for you to decide!

about the author



Rona Cant is an explorer, international speaker and author. Once an unexceptional, middle-aged single parent she became a round-the-world yachts woman by competing in the BT Global Challenge Round the World Yacht Race (the toughest yacht race in the world). For the last 10 years she has been putting together programmes on leadership and teamwork, and motivating businesses and individuals to get out of their comfort zone and reach their potential based on the lessons learnt on her expeditions. Her second book, *Snow, Sleds & Silence – the Story of the Nordkapp Expedition* describes the ups and downs of her epic adventure on this trail, which lead her to establish Arctic Leadership Challenges Ltd, which offers experiential training inside the Arctic Circle for individuals and teams.



Errors are not the Enemy!

WRITER
MARSHA
EGAN



If there's one thing most of us hate to admit to, that we try to hide and put a good deal of effort into trying to minimise, it's our errors. I've never really understood why. After all, we're all human. So, by that very fact, we're all imperfect and we all make mistakes. It's one of the things that binds us all together as the human race – the fact that we all make mistakes. When we make a mistake, the first thing most of us does is either pretend it didn't happen, blame someone else or seek to justify it. Some people go in the opposite direction and beat themselves up over it unmercifully, but the majority seeks to minimise the perception of the fault.

The thing about mistakes is that they don't exist until they have been made, which means that we're only aware of them by definition once they are already in the past. For this reason you can't change mistakes, which means that self-flagellation over an error is pointless – it achieves nothing except to make us feel worse by hitting us where it hurts – in pride and self-worth. However, while giving ourselves a hard time over mistakes made is pointless, pretending the mistake never happened or seeking to gloss over it is a missed opportunity.

You may think that sounds crazy but, our mistakes are one of the best personal development resources we have available! Being actively part of something which didn't work is a major learning experience if you allow it to be.

Firstly, these aren't just anyone's mistakes, they are ours. This means they are not just specific to your career or lifestyle, but also specific to our personal way of doing things and thought

processes. No-one else will make the same mistake in exactly the same way. I'll bet you won't do the same thing again, particularly if you pay attention to how the mistake came about in the first place – using it as a learning curve. We're all creatures of habit, and the same situation will almost certainly happen again, only with a wiser you at the helm.

Secondly, congratulations, you've just received a first-hand practical lesson in 'how not to do it'. There's something especially beneficial to learning by personal experience. It's like the difference between reading a book about how to change a car's oil and getting a one-on-one master class from a great mechanic. No book can better experience as an educator. And learning how to do something right by doing it wrong is a hard educational experience to top.

Thirdly and finally, you'll have had to fix your error. This cements the lesson. By participating in the recovery, you'll have analysed the error in detail, even if it was subconscious. In fact, you've done far more analysis than you would have done if you got it right the first time.

So, when we have such a strong case for the concept that our mistakes may be our best teachers, why do so many people ignore these outstanding learning opportunities?

1. **Unwillingness to accept fault:** We've all seen it – there are people who will simply refuse to admit that they were wrong, even in the face of overwhelming evidence. Whatever their reasoning, their refusal to admit that they were wrong is a barrier to learning from the situation.
2. **Reluctance to admit their failings:** A lot of people think that holding your hands up to making a mistake is a sign of weakness, when in reality it's quite the opposite. The fact is that people admire those who are secure and confident enough to admit their mistakes.
3. **Poor self image:** Some people are sadly so low in the self-image department that

another 'nail into the coffin' is too much to cope with.

4. **Bad attitude:** It's hard for those of us who take pride in our work to comprehend but some people just couldn't care. They aren't interested in learning from their mistakes – they move but they are unfortunately at risk of simply making the same mistake again and again as they haven't had the benefit of that personal master class.
5. **Lack of awareness:** They may be aware of their mistake but not aware of the benefits of experiential learning, which means they may not take advantage of that 'master class waiting to happen'.

Each person's reasons will be slightly different but they are still potentially very expensive excuses.

Mistakes are a master class with the finest teacher if we allow them to be and, far from their purely negative connotation, they can be a career and life-enhancing in the long-term.

In order to benefit from this opportunity, once you are aware of your error and after you've corrected it, ask yourself the following question:

- What have I learned from what I did wrong?
- What could I have done differently, and what would I do differently in future?
- What could I have done that would have maximised the result?

None of us are perfect and we all have and will continue to make mistakes. Nothing you can do will change this fact. The one thing you can change is how you respond to it and how it informs your future actions.

Just remember, those who maximise the value of their mistakes through learning from them are far less likely to repeat them, leading to less mistakes, and more success, in future!

about the author



Marsha Egan, CPCU, PCC, is CEO of the Egan Group, Inc., Reading PA. An ICF Certified Professional Coach, she is a leading authority on email productivity. She works with forward thinking organizations who want a profit-rich email culture.

Her recently released book, *Inbox Detox and the Habit of Email Excellence* can be found at <http://InboxDetox.com>



Technology Makes Success Possible for Today's Virtual Assistant

WRITER
ALICIA
RITTENHOUSE

The virtual assistance industry is contributing to changing the way business is conducted and the use of technology is one of the biggest contributions but many Virtual Assistants are struggling to keep up because there is no resource to teach them. VAs have strong research skills but without knowing exactly what to search for it is challenging to find the right resources.

Virtual Assistants are more than secretaries. Your clients expect you to know how to support every area of their business but you may feel that you are limited in the help you can offer as you do not have a degree in marketing or web design or communications. However by using the right technology you can actually do all three roles. Think of the advantages of being able to update a website without having to learn how to be a coder or developing your clients' profile through social media or helping them to gain press coverage on local, national and international levels.

All this is possible with technology. VAs are great at getting tasks done and enjoy handling a variety of tasks and responsibilities. However, to be a success you need to be proactive and ahead of the game in everything you do and knowledge of technology will give you the necessary edge in today's market.

The need for tech-savvy VAs is growing - in 2010 approximately half a million businesses were started every month. Not every one of those businesses could use a VA but there is an abundance of potential clients out there who do need our help. As well as great administrative skills it is essential to be able to set up a client's newsletter and web forms, maintain their website and market them through social media.

Successful business owners focus on what they are good at and what they sell and produce but



there is the other side to business that involves the ongoing marketing and buzz that is needed to attract new customers. To be successful as a VA you need to support the marketing of your clients' businesses.

Here are a few ways you can fuse technology with your role to make a marketing impact:

1. Online Payments – To be profitable, there must be a way to be paid and this could include setting up products, connecting payment buttons and customising a shopping cart. If your clients get paid then you get paid.
2. Email Marketing – This is the most effective way to market because it works! There are many email marketing services out there and they allow your clients to build a relationship with their prospects and support sales. You need to know how to integrate and segment using various services.

3. Product Launches – It is not enough to put up an offering on a website and expect it to sell. Successful launches bring in the money as they create sales, visibility and credibility. A VA can support much of the launch process.
4. Productivity – The more you learn the better you manage your time and the more work you can handle. Project management tools are very useful as businesses grow and the need for clear communication increases.
5. WordPress – Be your clients' webmaster. Teach them how to turn their website into a powerhouse using WordPress. Google loves WordPress and a growing number of websites use it as their platform. Here are some famous WordPress sites: Mashable, CNN, The New York Times, UPS, eBay, Sony and even Katy Perry.
6. Social Media – Everyone is doing it and it is not going away.

When you become the VA who can do all of this, your clients will be more likely to commit to a monthly retainer and you will quickly fill your business. Embrace technology by learning the skills prospective clients are looking for and then you can increase your hourly rate and the amount of time you work with each client which will increase your income.

Technology makes everything possible.

about the author



Alicia Rittenhouse, Digital Diva and Tech Cheerleader. Her Geek Labs is a high-inspiration playground for Virtual Assistants (brand new and experienced) to sharpen their skills -- and double their rates -- in just six weeks. Alicia has a talent for breaking down technical mysteries into simple steps that even non-geeks can master.

Geek out with Ali at vatrainingprogram.com and alrittenhouse.com.



What I Learned About Marketing From My Cats

WRITER
JEANNINE
CLONTZ



I share my work environment with my two cats, Zach and Zoe. They both have me very well trained. First thing in the morning, I turn on the computer and follow my talkative Siamese, Zoe, into the kitchen to give her a special treat. If it's a weekend and I'm thinking that I might like to sleep past 6:00 a.m., then Zach, the gray tabby, is sure to be rubbing against me in bed, licking my face and making sure that I know it's time for them to eat.

During the day, before the extended catnaps begin, they both take turns pacing back and forth in front of my computer screen or plopping down in front of my monitor making me all too aware of their need of a good scratching by using their irresistible purring. They really know how to make me aware of their presence and needs.

It dawned on me this morning that they're really presenting me with their marketing strategy. Just a few nudges, some cute kitty kisses, a calming purr or two and I'm ready to do their bidding. Their presentation is simply flawless. They've learned what it takes to get their desired results.

In the last few months I have been stepping up my social networking. I've included it in my marketing plan so that I not only have specific time designated for this type of marketing strategy but I also manage the time I spend in these networks.

I've connected with people who seem to have the same desires and passions as my own and have been able to begin to build relationships. It's been much harder to do this 'virtually' than it was to make face-to-face connections but I am seeing the light at the end of the tunnel.

So how do I get to the desired results? How do I convert these relationships into money? As with traditional marketing practices, it's all about getting people to know, like and trust you. When I did monthly marketing postcards I certainly didn't get an immediate stream of new business, so why would I think that with

just a few Tweets the business would start pouring in?

Since I started this marketing aspect several positive things have happened: I had a nice online radio interview to discuss my book; I have had several requests for interviews; I've been asked to contribute blog posts to groups that include my target market; I have found two service providers that I needed; I have been approached by two people to meet outside the social network to find out more about each other; I've signed two clients and I have found great resources and insights that have helped me to develop my new coaching practice and teleseminar series.

I've enjoyed the ride especially as it was FREE! Apart from the time I used by participating in these social networks, there has been no actual out-of-pocket expense. Why have I been waiting? If you've been participating in these social networks for several months and just don't get it or if you've considered it but don't know how – here are some of the things I've used successfully to develop and grow my social presence and build some great relationships and business resources that I know will transition into new business.

- Be a problem solver – if someone posts a question, needs a resource or just some positive feedback then be that problem solver.
- Make sure your profile is up-to-date and that you constantly change and develop it so people see the value in connecting with you.
- If you don't have a free-standing blog then use some of the online social networks that provide you with one and post articles and resources that will give people an idea of who you are, your level of expertise and how you work.
- Be selective about the groups you join and the friends you connect with – don't just 'connect' with everyone. Connect to

people who seem to have the same values and passions as you.

- Join groups within the network that will have people within your niche or target market.
- Be sure you designate a specific amount of time, daily or weekly, when you check in and do something – even if it's just adding a photo, blog or article, starting a discussion, asking for help. You have to be present in order to connect.
- Be yourself. Let your hair down a little – don't make it all about business, make it a little personal, too. Talk about family, kids, travel, hobbies, whatever makes you, you!
- Don't make it all about your business. The people I don't accept connections to are usually those whose sites say, 'buy me' and nothing more. Most people don't want to be sold to, they want to make the buying decision in their own way. Give them the information they need to make the right decision to fulfill that need.
- For sites like LinkedIn that offer you the option of adding recommendations – use them! This is a great way for people to get an idea of how valuable you and your products/services are to others. Prospects are much more likely to give you a try if they see someone else has fulfilled a need they have.
- Don't go to other's pages, blogs, or listings and just post your offerings, this is considered spam on just about every level.

Social networking really is the wave of the future and one that's not going to go away any time soon. So dip your toes in the water and give it a try. And please be sure to connect with me on: LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter, Plaxo, Google+ and growing.

about the author



Jeannine Clontz, provides professional business coaching to established and start-up Virtual Assistants (VAs). Learn more about Time Management for Virtual Assistants by downloading her FREE report *A Fresh Look at Time Management for Virtual Assistants*, or request her FREE audio CD *What's Holding Back my Business Success?*, and more by visiting: <http://www.VAbizcoach.com>; or contact her at: coach@VAbizcoach.com.



Are You On Your Lonesome?

WRITER
HELEN
JACOBI



One of the main attractions when considering a home-based business is the freedom and independence it will bring you. Once the decision is made and you're on your way the novelty of no longer having to commute is refreshing and you generally have more time in your day.

However, in my experience, the novelty lasts around 3 months. The initial driving factors remain but finding yourself on your own most days can begin to have a negative impact on your business. Feelings of loneliness and isolation start to kick in and we miss the camaraderie we had in a conventional office environment. The good news is it doesn't have to be this way – virtual businesses do not need to operate in isolation.

Whilst home working has plenty of upsides, if you don't create firm parameters then the blessing can turn into a curse. Being out and about networking is great but it doesn't fully compensate coming back home and being on your own again. Here are some thoughts and ideas on how to retain your independence whilst creating a working environment that keeps you motivated and sane.

A neighbour of mine recently left the city life and struck up in business as a brand communications consultant. Whilst the appeal of home working and having more flexibility were amongst her motivations to go it alone, she found it frustrating to work from home without a proper office.

Kitchen table working is great but it can lead to distraction as well as not being able to easily separate work life from home life. Likewise, having a desk in the corner of the bedroom isn't conducive on a long term basis. My neighbour didn't want the overhead of hiring office space at this stage, so I offered her the spare desk in my office. No extra cost to me and it helps her

have a work space to call her own. We agreed a trial period and haven't looked back.

Much to our surprise we didn't talk much at all. In fact, quite the opposite. We kept our heads down and got on with our own work. Both of us found it incredibly motivating to be in the company of another business owner, purely and simply by having someone else there.

Moving on from sharing a home office with someone, it can work out very competitively to hire desk-space off-site and share the cost, even for a day or two a week. Many serviced offices offer this arrangement because they realise businesses need a base, but not necessarily five days a week.

Equally, local companies often have spare desks either due to down sizing or extra space to expand into. Again, with a little savvy negotiation, bargains are to be had and both parties benefit. Plus you are likely to have access to their in-house facilities such as wifi, reception or meeting rooms. Be sure you have an agreement in place setting out the terms and the cost involved.

When I need to be creative I like to change my environment and get away from my home office. When we're running events in London, I utilise a spare desk in a friend's office to catch up with client work.

Another option to consider is joining a members club that offers not only hot-desk space and office facilities but also networking and learning opportunities. Quite a few of the more entrepreneurial clubs offer various levels of membership, many with flexible terms and no long term commitment. If you have a niche client market, finding a club in that particular industry is a fantastic place to meet potential clients and keep up with industry changes. It's

good value too – networking and office space, all under one roof.

And finally, if a regular commitment isn't your thing perhaps consider hiring a meeting room for a day every month or two and sharing the cost amongst the sharers. This works really well, particularly if you have a team that all work remotely. It's a great opportunity to get together, work under one roof and thrash out ideas.

And finally, a few guidelines on making an office buddy or shared work space work for you:

- Your businesses don't need to be the same.
- Commit to being there on a regular basis, even if it's easy to stay at home that day. It will help give you a focus and shape to your diary.
- Agree at the outset to be completely honest with each other if you find it isn't working.
- Establish the hours that you plan to share the office – and stick to them.
- If there's a cost involved, be up front and agree what's included and who pays for what.
- Resist the temptation to talk!

Of course all of this is enabled by the amazing amount of technology available that helps us work remotely from wherever we choose.

If you're feeling the pang of being too alone or isolated, consider who you could buddy up with and what work space solutions might work for you.

about the author



Helen Jacobi has been an Executive Assistant for over 20 years working alongside boards in large corporations and with successful entrepreneurs. In 2009 she took the plunge and started The Inspired PA, offering Virtual PA and association management solutions to clients globally. Working on the basis that flexibility and adaptability are critical in challenging economic times, the virtual business model struck a chord across various industries and types of businesses. Earlier this year Helen won Outstanding VA of the Year for over 2½ years in business.



What Morgan Freeman Taught Me About Goals

WRITER
ROSIE
GRAY



Last weekend I watched the film *The Bucket List* and it reminded me of the whole goal setting process and why it matters to us all. If you haven't seen the film - it stars Jack Nicholson & Morgan Freeman. Without spoiling the plot - two terminally ill cancer patients decide to leave hospital, go on a round the world trip and live their last days to the full. They're intent on experiencing as many things on their 'wish list' as possible before they 'kick the bucket'. They called this their 'bucket list'. (It's not as depressing as it sounds - I recommend it.)

Now at the moment, I'm fit, healthy and planning to stay that way and hope you are too. But none of us knows what life has in store and there are experiences I don't want to regret missing because I left it too late.

So I've been updating my own list of dreams this week. I first did this about 15 years ago and been adding to it ever since. As I experience the dream, I cross it off so there's always room for more.

If you haven't ever made such a list, I recommend that you do - it's very powerful. What you call your list is up to you - maybe it's a 'bucket list' or 'fifty things I want to do before I'm fifty' - call it whatever is meaningful for you. I've always simply called mine my 'dream list'.

But make it - it doesn't need to take long. Maybe you'll make your list on the train going home this evening or take 30 minutes on a quiet Sunday morning while enjoying a cup of good coffee.

What Might Be On Your List?

Your list will be unique to you. It reflects who you are, your interests, your values and what you've experienced to date. There is no 'perfect' or 'right' list. It will not be the same as mine or your best friend's, although there may be similarities.

Maybe you want to watch the sun rise while sitting at the top of a mountain, learn to play the saxophone or improve your golf handicap. Just capture those things you would absolutely love to do and would regret if you didn't.

Ask yourself:

- What have you always wanted to do and haven't yet?

- Are there any special events you want to attend?
- If time, money or resources were unlimited – what would you do?
- Who would you like to meet?
- Who would you like to have a better relationship with? Family? Friends?
- Where in the world might you want to visit?
- What hobbies, skills, sports would you like to learn or try out?
- What would mean a great deal to you?
- If you knew you would die tomorrow, what would you regret not having experienced?
- See the northern lights
- Visit the pyramids
- Learn pilates
- Listen to the absolute natural silence found in a really wild place – perhaps the Sahara or Antarctica?
- Pass on a skill I enjoy to a child
- Plant an orchard and one day enjoy the fruits
- Revisit some of the European cities I visited on a tight budget years ago
- Learn more about astronomy

What Difference Will Your List Make To You?

Write down as many ideas as you can. Keep adding to it.

There's no pressure to do everything this year. Your list will always be a 'work in progress' as you cross through items achieved and think of more.

Most of the things on my own list wouldn't necessarily take much money or even time. But all would give me tremendous pleasure. Here's a small selection to give you some ideas...

- Ride a horse through the waves along a sandy beach

By giving yourself time and space to think about the experiences you want to enjoy, you've already increased the chance of making those good things happen.

By capturing these thoughts you'll be more likely to remember, see opportunities and act on them. I believe many people (including myself) limit the scale of our achievements by aiming low, playing it safe. We set goals according to a 'world view' of what seems possible for us, what we can afford or have time to do.

Writing a 'bucket list' begins to turn the process around and leads to living life at its

fullest. We're asking instead what highlights we want to experience in our lives and then work out 'how' to make that happen.

I know from my experience that this results in setting very different goals. Goals and actions are aligned with what is needed to achieve these important experiences. Typically I'm much more motivated because completing the actions leads to something I really care about. I've been surprised and delighted by how many things I've experienced and crossed off my list.

And as you read this you might be thinking: "And when and how am I going to do all this, Rosie? I have no time."

Well, the first thing is to decide that you want to and to start capturing those ideas. You'll be surprised by the momentum and motivation it'll create. When you know why you're doing it (for example saving the money for your big trip) even the duller tasks become more tolerable.

So what will be on your list? I would love you to share your exciting dreams - You just might remind me of something else to add to my list!

'The greatest danger is not that we aim too high & miss. It's that we aim too low & reach it'

Michelangelo

'You are never too old to set a new goal or dream a new dream'

C.S. Lewis

'All our dreams can come true, if we have the courage to pursue them'

Walt Disney

'The world is your playground. Why aren't you playing?'

Ellie Katz

about the author



Rosie helps super busy people better manage their precious time, feel less stressed & achieve much more. As a result, productivity improves & 'life' returns to their 'Work/Life Balance' equation. After working at a senior level in fast-paced Fortune 100 organisations, Rosie founded her own consultancy Mosaic Learning Ltd. in 1997. She designs & delivers courses in the UK & Europe. Her webinars are accessed worldwide. She's worked successfully with organisations of all sizes – from household names to small, specialised companies, professional partnerships & the public/voluntary sectors. Her approach is practical, refreshing & highly effective. For more information, visit www.Mosaic-Learning.co.uk or call +44 (0) 1722 780072 To receive 'Time Management' tips from Rosie, download her free E-Book *Seize Back Your Time!* at www.SeizeBackYourTime.com



Tapping Into Your Customers' Tastes: How Chocolate Has the Answers...

WRITER
CLAIRE
LISTER



I've been a tad obsessed by Chocolate Week this year. Any excuse to eat chocolate is welcome and I enjoy exploring new tastes and flavours. What surprised me is that my indulgent month has led me to thinking about business in a different way. My varied chocolate experiences set me

thinking on broader topics and I thought I'd share the outcome.

Personal Taste

As my colleagues and I have been working our way through different boxes, there have been

many heated discussions about our favourites. This got me thinking about personal taste.

It reminded me of conversations I had with VAs at Office* recently, several people discussed concerns around how to know what clients really wanted. There were lots of questions

around how to cater for everyone's personal taste because if you are offering a broad range of services how do you know which to push? How do you make potential clients choose you?

The answer comes in understanding that you can't expect everyone to like the same things. People want different things for different reasons and in business we have to work with this. How you deal with this comes back to how you package yourself and where you price yourself in the market.

Consider your services as chocolates: a mixture of many shapes and sizes.

We All Have Our Favourites

Imagine your family sitting on the sofa after Christmas dinner and choosing their favourite Quality Street or Roses to indulge in.

Your Mum will probably go for the fruity cream centre, your brother the fudge, your Granny the Turkish delight, maybe your aunt will experiment and try something new ... They will all go through different thought processes before they pick out their chocolate and they all have different cravings to satisfy.

Consider how this is very much like a customer: you have separate customers with separate needs and they will all have an individual focus. You have to be prepared for that.

Your options are:

a) Be totally bespoke and flexible so you can provide services to anyone and everyone. In this case you are not just the entire box of chocolates but all the other boxes of chocolates on the shelf. This is a broad brush approach and requires a lot of one-to-one time to analyse each potential client and create something unique for them.

OR

b) Reduce the choice of chocolates (services) and focus on just selling to Mum, Granny or

brother. This way you know what they want and you know you can deliver it. You are much more focused and can easily communicate this to encourage them to hire you.

Either approach can be successful but you need to be clear which you are pursuing.

I would suggest that you'd make life easier by not trying to be the entire box of chocolates. I know it's tempting because you feel you'll miss out if you don't offer something that someone could potentially want but consider it from a different angle...

What if you were to hone in on certain key services that you know you are great at and work out who will love them – then focus on selling to them specifically?

This way:

- (i) You won't feel as bad when someone doesn't pick you because you were never compatible anyway
- (ii) You don't waste time and effort trying to attract the wrong people
- (iii) You get a lot of love from those who do really like what you offer
- (iv) You end up with a customer who really values you and is prepared to pay the right price

Creating Your Menu

Streamlining what you offer can help attract more clients because it's easier for them to match their needs with your services.

By packaging up your services you have a selection of ready-made options which makes the buying process so much easier. Potential clients can scan and see immediately you have what they want.

Whetting the Appetite

A key element in having success is costing and pricing. You must make sure that you sit at the right place in the market and that you communicate this clearly.

Packaging up your services ticks these boxes and also puts you much more in control of your profit.

It's so easy to under quote on a service based task – you underestimate the time it takes, then you throw a few extra hours in for 'good will' and before you know it you've spent more time than you're billing for, making your hourly rate much less profitable.

If you work out, based on a real example, how long each type of task takes on average and use that as a benchmark then you have a base rate to work with. This will save you hours as rather than quoting from scratch each time, you already have the basis of your pricing determined.

Once you're clear on your pricing you can then get on with confidently selling your services to potential clients knowing that it's easy for them to grasp what's on offer. If it suits them then it should be an easy sale. If it doesn't it will be quick to see and neither of you waste any more time.

Enjoy Sweet Success

Chocolate companies are as wide and varied as VAs. Chocolate brands offer a selection of options, with an easy to understand menu and so could VAs. Brands price themselves to attract a certain kind of customers, so could VAs.

To the ladies at Office* who were feeling a bit frustrated, I hope my musings might help you see things differently and help you find a sense of direction that removes some of the worry.

The life of a VA should be dynamic and diverse. The nature of the job means it will always be varied. But if you can be as clean cut as possible with the services you provide it will make it easier to attract the right clients...and if you need to work your way through a box of chocolates to make sense of it all, well, so be it and enjoy!

about the author



Claire Lister is MD at Pitman Training. Pitman Training run a range of courses around marketing and communications and has just recently launched a course on pricing, helping service providers understand the value of their time. For more information visit www.pitman-training.com



Don't Make Me Think!

WRITER
MARIE
ALLEN

Get Your Website Organised In A Way That Makes Sense To Your Potential Clients (So They Don't Have To Think!)

Don't Make Me Think is the title of one of the classic books on web design, written by Steve Krug in 2006. Its premise is that website visitors are in a hurry and don't want to have to spend time making choices and decisions.

Human beings are inherently lazy and if something seems difficult we are more than likely to ditch it and move on! Website visitors want to be taken by the hand and guided through a website to reach their desired outcome. They don't want to be left stranded, unable to figure out what they should do next.

How do you feel when you hit upon a website that's a bit of a muddle, where you can't work out where to go for the information you are looking for? Where you get stuck in a dead-end and can't find a way back to where you started? Annoyed? Frustrated? Websites like this are one reason why the 'Back' key is the most used key on the keyboard!

Within a few seconds you are off to the next website on your search results list.

So how do you ensure that this doesn't happen with your website?

The key, as with so many things, is good organisation. Organising your website so that it is easy for your website visitors to find their way around is not a quick and easy task but, if you do it successfully it will really pay dividends in terms of website conversions and happy clients.

When someone visits your website for the first time they are generally looking for a specific



product or service. You need to organise your information from your potential client's perspective, not yours, so they find what they want quickly.

You are an expert in what you do, living and breathing your business but your clients are not. You need to get inside their heads and work out how they think. Then you can get ahead of them so that they don't have to think when they visit your site. This theory of putting yourself in your clients' shoes applies across all of your marketing but it is particularly relevant for websites because it is so easy to bail out and move on to the next one.

How do your existing clients categorise the services you offer? What words do they use to describe the services they buy from you? Have a look at past emails and think about conversations you had with your clients when they first came to you. What were the areas of confusion? Think it through and work out

how you can make your website answer their questions, without them having to think!

Try to replicate your clients' language, as far as you can, on your website. If you use the same words that your potential clients use, not industry-speak or techno-babble, they will feel at home and are more likely to stick around and buy from you.

Getting your website to pass the "Don't Make Me Think" test

The best way to pass the "Don't Make Me Think" test is to get the structure that you come up with checked out by a variety of people who are not directly involved with your business. This can be done as a paper exercise, using a separate sheet of paper or index card for each web page.

Get your friends and neighbours and some existing clients to "test drive" your site structure. You will be amazed at the number of different ways in which different people's minds work. I can guarantee there will be some tweaks needed for things you would never have thought about! There will be some difficult decisions to make, but if you keep the client's perspective at the front of your mind you cannot go too far wrong.

The great news is that with a robust, client-friendly website structure in place, your website will convert more visitors and win you more business. Your website can be an oasis of calm in the busy world of your target audience – an ordered place where they don't have to think!

about the author



Marie Allen is Principal Consultant at Web Clarity, a company which helps small and medium-sized businesses get maximum benefit from their website. She specialises in writing for the web and in creating a great user experience for website visitors. Her e-book *25 Web Writing Hints and Tips to Win You More Customers!* is available from the Web Clarity website www.webclarity.co.uk

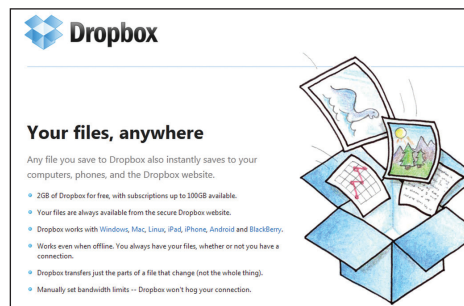


An A to Z of Virtual Assistant Tools – D is for Dropbox

WRITER
HELEN
STOTHARD

So that I can introduce you to more new ideas, I try to keep the tools I share in the VA Magazine different to those that appear in my book *A to Z of Virtual Assistant Tools*. However, there are just some tools that are so integral a part of my Virtual Assistant business that they have to be repeated here.

Dropbox is a file sharing service that allows you to store and share files and folders on the web for collaborating with clients. It works in the background, syncing files over the internet and allows you to log in and access files from any computer with an internet connection using your secure user name and password.



Dropbox can be used as a form of backup, especially if you pay a little extra for the ability to restore deleted files. I've previously used

various online back up and sync tools and found that they just slowed my machine down. Dropbox doesn't make getting a new laptop (I wear mine out roughly every 18 months) a chore. I just download the Dropbox application and off I go.

I first came across Dropbox when I started my Virtual Assistant business and I didn't like it. I wanted to specify where the files and folders were stored on my computer and not have all the shared files and folders in one main Dropbox folder. It's how I was taught to store my information after losing three years of work at an old employer's when a new software update deleted my user profile and therefore all the files I had stored in My Documents. Since then nothing was stored in My Documents on my computer. I created a file on my C: Drive and everything lived there so that if a user profile was corrupted all the files were still accessible from the hard drive.

But I had an epiphany when setting up a new laptop. I stored the Dropbox folder on my C Drive and now use that for everything. I store my files and folders exactly how I want, just under the Dropbox instead of a folder I created; it makes my life so much simpler.

You can have a mixture of shared and unshared folders in Dropbox. When working with a new client I create a Dropbox folder in their company name and share this with them. I then have sub-folders within their company folder where I can sub-divide the information. This is particularly useful as it means we can both access important information even if the other party is offline. I use this a lot when working with images and website content for clients. It is also an efficient way of sharing large files that would not fit into an email.

However, when you're sharing folders on Dropbox you must remember that you cannot share a subfolder with someone if you have shared the main folder with someone else. It might be the case that you are working on a project with a client who wants a third party to have access to just some of the information you are storing. If this is the case you need to share each sub folder individually or set up a new folder that you grant access to.

I think one of the most important lessons I learned is that you have to have clear guidelines on how you use your Dropbox when you share your folders. I found out the hard way that not everyone uses Dropbox for file storage, they just use it to share files on a temporary basis and

then delete the files when they have finished with them. And yes, unless you pay extra to be able to retrieve deleted files, once it's gone, it's gone. I now have a conversation when I share a Dropbox folder and explain how we will use it. If I am sending work to an associate I copy and paste it into the Dropbox folder, ensuring that my master copy remains in the client folder, then copy and paste the completed work back into the client folder.

A lot of clients think that they need a Virtual Assistant to work in their office as it's the only way the Virtual Assistant can access the files that they need. This isn't the case when you work with Dropbox. I have clients for whom I have set Dropbox up to use in the same way I do; it's the main storage for all their files and this means that we can both access the files we need, wherever we are in the world, as long as we have an internet connection.

I recently needed a couple of rather large files for a book interior and book cover from a client. His designer had been using a file sharing site which for some reason wasn't working properly on the day we urgently needed to complete the project; it showed the files as being available but refused to allow access to download them. The solution was to create a folder that I shared with the designer and the files were available on my laptop in a fraction of the time the file sharing application used to take. The project was completed to the deadline and the designers are now considering using Dropbox themselves.

I'm often told that I get all this functionality because I pay for it, and yes, I do. My personal Dropbox account costs me around £20 month, and you'd be amazed at just how much is stored in there. But let's put this into perspective. For £20 month all my files are backed up to the internet; for £20 month I can access my client's files as though I was sat in his office at his machine; for £20 month I had no hassle when I upgraded my laptop, and for that same £20 month I can access my files wherever I am and whenever I want! To me that's excellent value, and if you're going to run your Virtual Assistant business professionally then there are certain tools you should invest in. To me Dropbox is one of the main ones, and you may find you don't need as much storage as me and your investment will be less.

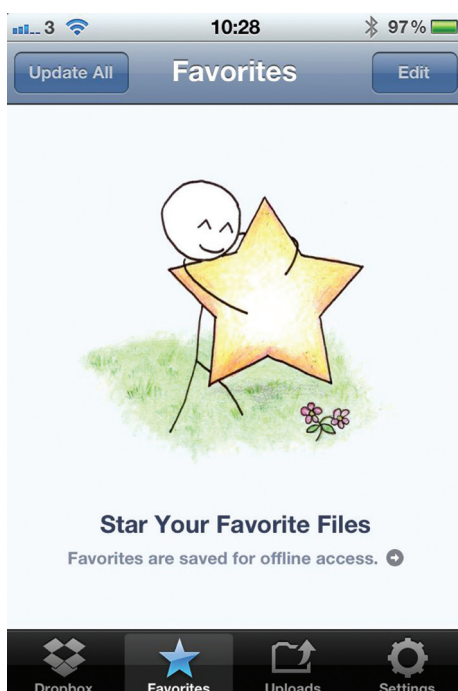
Dropbox is available in mobile applications, which means that I can access the information from my phone, tablet, netbook, laptop or indeed any machine with an internet connection. Even if I am out and about I can share files and information with clients, which

I couldn't do if they were only stored on one machine.

If I am out and about and need to send a client a file that isn't already shared with them then I simply open the Dropbox application on my phone, (it's password protected on the phone by the way), and locate the file which I can then email directly to them. It's like having your office with you all the time. It also makes you incredibly efficient being able to work in this manner.



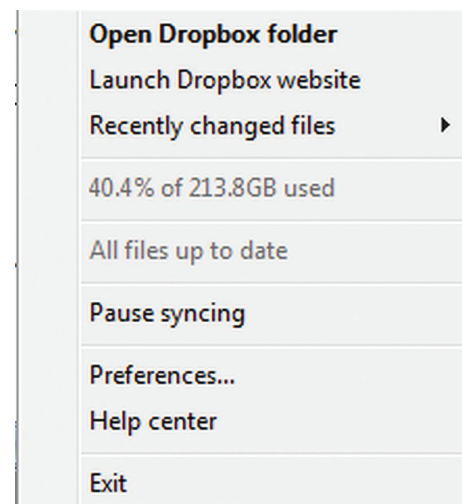
You can also save favourite files to your Dropbox phone application so that you can access them when you don't have an online connection.



One of the new features on the Dropbox phone application is the ability to sync photos and videos from your phone direct to your Dropbox. I don't know about you, but I very rarely carry a camera these days and use my phone if I need to take photos so it's great to have them automatically backed up.

Another option that those of you with WordPress websites will like is the WordPress plug in that allows you to back up your website direct to your Dropbox. If you've ever lost a website and found that your hosting company doesn't store backups then you'll really appreciate this feature.

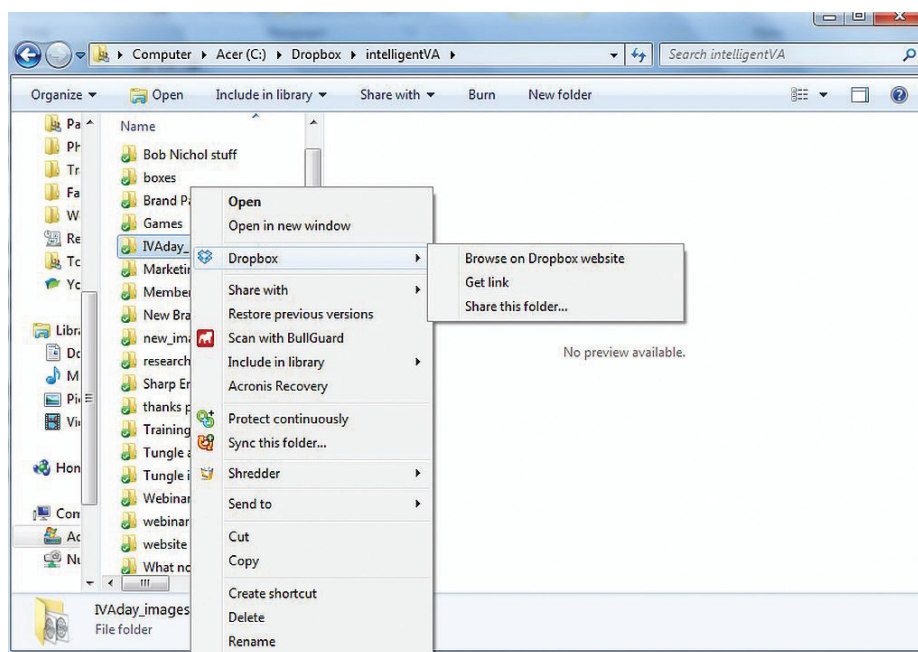
Dropbox just sits in the icon tray on your computer and works in the background, it checks to see what files you have amended or a client has amended and syncs them. There is a small pop up that will let you know when new files are being received but after you have been using it a while you don't always notice it's there, so it's advisable to ask clients to contact you if they add any urgent work to your Dropbox for you.



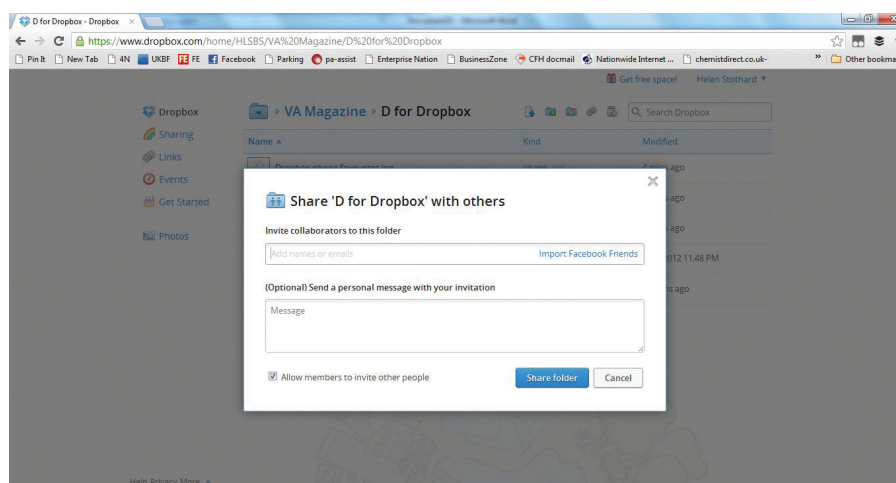
If you right click on the Dropbox icon in your system tray you can open your Dropbox folder, open the Dropbox website, view recently changed files, see how much storage space you have left, see how many files are currently syncing, pause syncing (I occasionally do this if I am doing a Skype video call to preserve as much of my wireless bandwidth as possible as I have a very poor Skype connection, just don't forget to switch it back on from this system tray dialogue again), amend your preferences or visit the Dropbox help centre.

I dragged a shortcut to the Dropbox folder, and even some of the sub folders, to the favourites in my Windows Explorer to make it even quicker to access the files that I access most often.

To share a folder with someone from your computer simply right click on the folder and select the Dropbox option, then the share this folder option.



This will open up the Dropbox website and prompt you for the email address of the person you would like to share with. You can also personalise the message that you send depending on how you wish to use the Dropbox with your Client.



Dropbox offers a free 2GB account for you to start off with, and offers lots of opportunities for you to increase your space at no cost to you, from linking it to your Facebook account to sharing it on Twitter or with friends. Signing up on <http://db.tt/KGePYoNe> will give you an extra 500MB of free space on top of the 2GB

you would normally get (and it gives me an extra 1GB as the referrer) or you can just sign up at <http://www.dropbox.com> for the standard 2GB free account.

Signing up for a free account is no risk, and I'd definitely advise you try it out. You may find

out that, as it did for me, it revolutionises the way you run your Virtual Assistant business, allowing you more flexibility in when and where you work, and how quickly you can access that important piece of information.

about the author



Helen Stothard has been running her own successful VA business, HLS Business Solutions <http://www.hlsbs.com>, for over three years. In 2011 she founded IntelligentVA, <http://www.trainingforvas.com> a website designed to help VAs start or move their businesses forward through training, knowledge sharing and collaboration. Helen is the author of the *A to Z of Virtual Assistant Tools* and *30 Day Setting up as a Virtual Assistant Challenge (without breaking the bank)* and lives in North Yorkshire with her husband, daughter and two cats.

Helen can be found on Twitter at <http://www.twitter.com/helenstothard>



EVENTS

ON TWITTER

EVERY THURSDAY

6pm GMT

#adminchat – weekly online training for administrative professionals, featuring a different world-class trainer every week.

For full schedule email lucy@thevomagazine.com

EVERY THURSDAY

3pm PST

#VAJot - At our VAJot Socials we come together as Virtual Assistants, business colleagues and as friends to connect, share and discuss our accomplishments the past week.

For full schedule visit <http://www.vanetworking.com/vatraining/seminars/>

EVERY MONTH

#IVAMeet – For full schedule email helen@blsbs.co.uk

NOV

VA MASTERY COURSE, GROUP 2-DAY

23 -24 Nov 2012

Liverpool - venue to be confirmed
United Kingdom

Speaker: Angela Dawson - VA Trainer

www.vact-north.co.uk

Contact angela.dawson@vact-north.co.uk

VA TASTER COURSE

28 Nov 2012

Location: ONLINE

Face2Face – Wednesday 28 Nov
10-1pm £37 at Wakefield, West Yorkshire
United Kingdom

Speaker: Michelle Poole

www.vact-yorks.co.uk

Contact michelle@vact-yorks.co.uk

DEC

NORTH LONDON VA CHRISTMAS LUNCH

07 Dec 2012

Wetherspoon Alfred Herring in Palmers Green.

For all you North London Virtual Assistants who would like to meet up over Christmas Lunch and celebrate together. United Kingdom

www.northlondonvachristmaslunch.eventbrite.co.uk/

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08 Dec 2012

Organises seminars, courses and workshops periodically for members' professional growth and personal development. Registration starts at 1.00pm. No fee will be charged.

Please RSVP your attendance via email to Daisy Fernandez

LDPersonal@mapsa-malaysia.com

www.mapsa-malaysia.com/train.htm

Contact LDPersonal@mapsa-malaysia.com

JAN

VA MASTERY COURSE

24 -25 Jan2013 – Wakefield

Speaker: Michelle Poole

www.vact-yorks.co.uk

Contact michelle@vact-yorks.co.uk

FEB

VA MASTERY COURSE

20 - 21 Feb 2013– Nottingham
United Kingdom

Speaker: Michelle Poole

www.vact-yorks.co.uk

Contact michelle@vact-yorks.co.uk

MAR

AUSTRALIAN VA CONFERENCE

22 - 23 Mar 2013

AVAC 2013, Sydney.

The event will be held at the Star Room, Level 6 the IMAX Theatre complex in Darling Harbour. We are now open for sponsorships and have 3 levels, plus trade tables can be booked or you can offer door prizes for the event. We are also accepting bookings for the event and look forward to seeing you in March 2013.

<http://australianvaconference.com/>

EXECUTIVE SECRETARY LIVE

22 - 24 Mar 2013

London, United Kingdom

Speakers: Julie Perrine, Marsha Egan, Monica Seeley, Bonnie Low Kramen, Doug Dickerson, Eth Lloyd, Susie Barron Stubley and just confirmed Laura Schwartz – former Assistant to Bill Clinton and Director of Events at The White House

Contact lbrazier@executivesecretary.com or see

<http://executivesecretarylive.eventbrite.co.uk/>

2013 IVAA LIVE SUMMIT

30 Apr - 03 May 2013

Where: ACE Conference Center, 800 Ridge Pike Lafayette Hill, PA
<http://live.ivaa.org/>

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