

THE SMART BUSINESS OWNER'S GUIDE TO VIRTUAL ASSISTANCE



**HOW TO FIND, HIRE, AND WORK WITH
A PROFESSIONAL VIRTUAL ASSISTANT**

COPYRIGHT and other LEGAL INFORMATION – This work is protected by United States copyright law. All contents copyright © 2012 by [Virtual Assistantville](#). All rights reserved.

No part of this document (in part or in whole) may be reproduced or transmitted in any form, by any means (electronic, photocopying, recording, or otherwise) without the prior written permission of the publisher except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical reviews and certain other noncommercial uses permitted by copyright law. For permission requests, e-mail the publisher legal@virtualassistantville.com.

Articles contained in this document may not be removed from the whole document for any purpose. Nor may the articles be resold under any circumstance, repackaged or redistributed in part from the original document. The work must remain intact and cannot be edited, or altered in any way. You may not sell, distribute, or rent this work out in part or whole, nor may you include it in any paid package.

Limit of Liability and Disclaimer of Warranty: Our best efforts have gone into preparing this guide to help you find, hire, and successfully work with a virtual assistant. The information presented here is provided "as is" - it's your responsibility to utilize the information in the way you see fit. The authoring company and/or parent company are not liable for any result of your use of this guide. No guarantee of success or profit is written or implied.

Trademarks: This guide may identify product names and services known to be trademarks, registered trademarks, or service marks of their respective holders. They may be used throughout this guide in an editorial fashion and for informational purposes only.

CONTENTS

[What is a Professional Virtual Assistant?](#)

[Where to Find a Professional Virtual Assistant](#)

[How to Submit an RFP that Gets Results](#)

[10 Questions to Ask a Prospective Virtual Assistant](#)

[How to Delegate to a Virtual Assistant](#)

[Do You Want it Done, or Do You Want it Done RIGHT?](#)

[50+ Tools for Business Owners Who Work with Virtual Assistants](#)

What is a Professional Virtual Assistant?

Before you can find and begin working with a professional virtual assistant it's important to have a clear understanding of what the terms virtual assistant and virtual assistance encompass.

Let's start with the official definition of 'virtual assistance' on [Wikipedia](#) – we've highlighted the key elements you need to be aware of in the definition below:

Virtual assistants utilize today's technology to deliver their services and communicate with clients by working remotely.

A virtual assistant's core practice consists of administrative or clerical tasks. However, many virtual assistants offer additional specialties that fall under various other categories, such as marketing, website development or maintenance, creative and technical services, etc. In addition, many VA's have target niches, and those include real estate, coaching, and writers to name a few prominent ones.

Virtual assistants come from a variety of business backgrounds, but most have several years administrative experience earned in the real (non-virtual) business world working in occupations such as administrative assistant, executive assistant, secretary, legal assistant, paralegal, legal secretary, real estate assistant, office manager, etc.

Virtual assistants are independent contractors, not employees, who structure their own rates and operating standards and policies, pay their own self-employment taxes, and control management of the work and how it is carried out. While many self-employed people specialize in one area—for example, they are bookkeepers or web development specialists who work from home—a true virtual assistant provides across-the-board administrative (and other)

services.

This definition gives a pretty good, although very basic, overview of what a VA is and does, as well as stipulating the literal (and legal) difference between a professional virtual assistant and an employee. Bear these differences in mind as you progress from reading this guide to seeking out a VA to work with.

Shedding the employer mindset is important for two main reasons. First, the IRS may penalize you and your VA if the virtual assistant is operating essentially as a remote employee. And secondly, you and your VA will approach the business relationship from a much different perspective if you treat the VA as the skilled service provider that they are, as opposed to an employee designated to do no more than follow your direction.

When you respect the fact that a virtual assistant is also a business owner, with his or her own policies, procedures, contracts, and business hours you'll be meeting this virtual partner at a higher, more effective level of communication.

"Never tell people how to do things. Tell them what to do & they will surprise you w/ their ingenuity."

-George S Patton

Based on this information, we've now established some defining features of virtual assistants:

- A virtual assistant is an independent contractor (not an employee)
- A virtual assistant sets their own business policies, procedures, and operating hours
- A virtual assistant works remotely, usually from a home office

- A virtual assistant communicates and delivers work via email, online services, instant messenger, phone, etc.
- A virtual assistant is experienced and skilled at business support
- Many virtual assistants offer highly specialized or industry-specific services
- A virtual assistant functions as a virtual support system for your business

Where to Find a Virtual Assistant

Aside from searching Google, sending out a hopeful Tweet (which can actually be a very effective platform for reaching out to VAs), or asking colleagues for referrals (an ideal method of locating a professional VA), there are also many online services and websites designed to help you find and hire a virtual assistant.

Some are directories where you can browse virtual assistants listed according to the services they provide, their location, or both. Some sites provide an RFP system (Request for Proposal) where you can submit the details of the type of work you need help with, your budget, and your expectations, specifying whether you're looking for a virtual assistant to complete a single project, or you need ongoing assistance and receive replies from interested service providers. (Later in this guide we'll discuss in detail **How to Submit an RFP that Gets Results.**)

We've provided a few excellent online resources where you can find and hire a qualified virtual assistant:

1. [Virtual Assistantville](#) has both a directory and an RFP system. Browse the directory by category to view detailed virtual assistant listings including information on services, rates, background, client testimonials, latest blog posts, company videos and more. Use the contact form in each listing to contact your preferred virtual assistant(s) directly. Or, [submit a free RFP](#) to receive proposals from prospective, interested virtual assistants.
2. [Virtual Assistant Forums](#) is an active online community for virtual assistants. The site has both a virtual assistant directory and a free RFP system. Browse the [virtual assistant directory](#) listings via specialty and location or [submit an RFP](#) with your details to receive responses from interested member VAs.
3. [AssistU](#) offers an extensive and thorough virtual assistant training

program and also provides a customized, premium virtual assistant referral service designed to help busy clients connect with an ideal virtual assistant match.

Whichever method you utilize to find and hire a virtual assistant, keep in mind that you're not looking for an employee. Asking for things like references or a resume betrays an employer mindset and lessens your chances of receiving replies from the very best virtual assistants (who prefer to work with clients that understand the value of a virtual assistant as a professional service provider.) Instead, ask for writing samples, portfolios, client testimonials, and the like when requesting information from a prospective virtual assistant.

How to Submit an RFP that Gets Results

No guide to the world of virtual assistance would be complete without a discussion on the importance of submitting an RFP (Request for Proposal) that gives the right amount of information to get the best results possible.

Many clients don't realize that when they submit an RFP they have a golden opportunity to carefully frame their expectations, needs, and more. Virtual assistants who read a well-written RFP can learn enough about a potential client and his or her business to draft a truly professional answer, and it also helps weed out virtual assistants who don't fit what you're looking for – saving you time and energy.

A motivated VA will do additional research into you and your company prior to submitting a reply to your RFP, but he or she can only do that if you provide enough information at the outset.

As a consumer, it's in your best interest to think carefully about how you see a virtual assistant fitting into your business operations and goals and give voice to those expectations in your RFP.

Below, we've included the fields of a standard RFP form along with suggestions for how to fill in each section for an RFP that really gets results:

- **Client name:**

This one is pretty straightforward. If you hesitate to share your name due to privacy concerns, check the RFP policy of the site you're submitting your RFP to. Most RFP sites only provide client information to their registered members.

- **Client email:**

Make sure you provide the correct email address and that your

account has room to receive replies. Double-check your email address before submitting the RFP. If you've provided enough information in the rest of the RFP, proactive virtual assistants may do the legwork necessary to track you down, but don't make responding to your RFP more difficult than it has to be.

Also, providing a company email address as the contact point is an optimal choice as it helps potential virtual assistants feel comfortable responding to the RFP, knowing it's a 'real' company.

soandso@freemail.com just doesn't command the same sense of legitimacy as you@yourcompanydomain.com.

- **Company name:**

Provide your full company name. Some clients, in the interest of privacy, will not divulge their full or real company name in an RFP, which is a mistake. The most professional virtual assistants will be motivated to research your company before reaching out to you, but they can't do so if you don't tell them which company that is.

- **Industry:**

What industry do you cater to or service? Whether it's law, medicine, photography, coaching, eCommerce, or widgets in a brick-and-mortar shop – defining your industry up front will help prospective virtual assistants tailor their response to your RFP, as well as their overall approach to your request for more information. Think about it, would you rather receive replies from VAs who understand what you do and may even bring related experience to the table, or those who have no clue and are reaching in the dark?

- **Job/project title:**

Give your RFP a descriptive title. Sure, you're looking for a virtual assistant, but just typing that in the field isn't going to do you or your prospective VAs any favors. Sum up the gist of what it is you're looking for. What type of VA? What sort of work are you looking for help with? Are you looking for a long-term contract or a one-off project?

If you're ready to have a virtual assistant install and customize a new WordPress theme on your website, "Seeking WordPress Virtual Assistant for Website Redesign" will bring the right kind of virtual assistants to your RFP in the first place. Whereas 'Virtual Assistant' or even 'Website Work' won't really help narrow down just what it is you're looking for. Write a solid title and spare yourself weeding through responses from the VAs who are responding to your RFP just because there's an open project.

- **Do you have a deadline?**

This is particularly important if you need something done quickly or are contracting with a virtual assistant to help you complete a project that you're on deadline for yourself. Letting VAs know up front what they have to contend with will again help weed out those who truly can't help. If a virtual assistant sees your deadline is next Friday, but knows she is booked until then and cannot help you, she'll spare herself and you the expense of time by passing over your RFP for one she can fulfill.

Of course, if you don't really have a deadline and it's not a rush job, don't arbitrarily fill this field out. For some clients, every project feels like an immediate concern, even emergent – but carefully weigh if this is truly the case before you note that on your RFP form as it may dissuade busy virtual assistants from responding.

- **Job description:**

This is where you get to wax eloquent about all the things you imagine your virtual assistant taking off your plate. Use the opportunity to clearly paint what you need done, what you want done, and what you're hoping to accomplish.

Note that truly professional virtual assistants will appreciate more detail and information about what you are looking for. The more information they have about what you think you need, the better they can tailor their specific offerings as solutions to those needs.

It's also important to realize that if you're looking to contract a

virtual assistant for the long term, as most clients are, you don't have to know all the details of everything you need right now. At this early stage you can't possibly be aware of all the ways in which a virtual assistant can positively impact your business. Once you've found your VA, you and he or she are bound to discover and create new directions and tasks. For now, start with the things that are getting in the way of what you need to be doing (like visiting with clients, making sales calls, writing, developing products, etcetera.)

If there are things you aren't sure about handing over, share them anyway – you may find that a particular respondent offers a solution or suggestion relative to those tasks that impresses you to no end.

- **Special skills required:**

If you have specific expectations of your virtual assistant's skill level, expertise, or experience, share them here. This is particularly important if you're in an industry that requires special knowledge or training and want a virtual assistant who has at least some understanding of the same.

Note that some clients actually prefer a virtual assistant with limited knowledge of or experience in a particular field so that they can teach and 'train' the virtual assistant to approach related business tasks in a certain way. Your own preferences and working style will be important to consider when entering this portion of the RFP.

- **Length of job:**

Are you looking for a long-term working relationship, or are you hiring a VA to complete a one-time project? The distinction is important to make because some virtual assistants will not take clients on outside of a long-term retainer. Specify what works best for you in your particular situation.

- **Preferred terms:**

Are you looking for a virtual assistant on retainer, where you pre-pay for a specific number of hours at a specific rate each month,

ongoing? This can be useful for clients who want to ensure their virtual assistant is readily available to them on a regular, ongoing basis. Retainer billing is also preferred by many virtual assistants, especially those in high demand. Another item to consider is that unused retainer hours generally do not roll over to the next month, and are rarely, if ever, refunded.

Are you looking for an hourly arrangement, sometimes called pay-as-you-go or PAYG, where you pay only for work you need, as you need it? This can be a simple arrangement and is often favored by clients who are new to working with a virtual assistant but it's important to realize that this can sometimes mean waiting for available time in a busy service provider's schedule. Note that virtual assistants who offer PAYG often require some form of deposit up front before beginning work.

- **Budget:**

How much money are you looking to invest in your virtual assistant? This is an important question, and while there's really no 'right' answer it should be noted that professional virtual assistants charge anywhere from \$25 hourly on the very low end, to \$75 hourly and up for highly specialized and technical services. With that in mind, it's also important to realize that an experienced virtual assistant will usually bill to the minute, and can often finish a task much faster, and with more accuracy than you or another less-skilled VA may be able to, ultimately saving you time and money.

If you are really uncertain how much you are able to spend, write 'Negotiable' or 'Market rate' in this field and compare rates as responses to your RFP come in.

Working with a virtual assistant truly is an investment. Smart business owners approach the RFP process with this firmly in mind.

- **Proposal submission requirements:**

This field is perhaps one of the most important in your RFP. This is where you can provide specific requirements or request certain

inclusions of those responding to your RFP.

This can be an excellent way to weed out candidates who can't, won't, or don't follow directions. To utilize this tactic, simply include a request for a specific subject line in all responses, ask for a certain piece of information to be included (a link to portfolio, or similar), or request the answer to a particular question ('How long have you been in business?' etc.).

Finding the best virtual assistant for you and your business is a process worth investing your time and attention in. All it takes is a little focus and clear communication on your part. [Submitting an RFP](#) is the first step – take that step with purpose and your RFP will get the results you need.

10 Questions to Ask a Prospective Virtual Assistant

When you're ready to contract with a professional virtual assistant, you're going to want to handle the entire process from an organized approach – as you would any other business investment. Doing so will save you time and money as well as potential frustration *and* will help ensure your working relationship with the virtual assistant of your choice gets off in the right direction.

Surely, you'll have your own questions relative to the project you have in mind, as well as your own immediate and long-term business goals – but the ten questions we'll share with you here will provide you with a solid start for gathering the information you need about each prospective virtual assistant you speak with.

Question # 1. What will you do to help me grow my business?

This may seem like a fairly vague question to ask someone at an initial consultation, but the virtual assistant's answer will provide ample insight into his or her approach to winning potential contracts. A virtual assistant who has prepared for their meeting with you will have immediate answers that relate directly to your business, your industry, and the products or services you offer.

Don't expect the virtual assistant to be able to wrap your business needs into a nutshell at this first meeting though – while they should provide an answer that shows serious insight, a virtual assistant who has had time to work with you in and on your business will obviously develop new perspectives and approaches as they learn how your business operates and what your goals are. At this stage, you're looking for a response that shows the virtual assistant has done some research prior to the call and takes a genuine interest in you and your company.

Question # 2. What are your fees?

It can be hard to avoid price-shopping when you're a business on a budget (and who isn't, really?). While it can make sense to do so when it comes to some business expenses, in this case, the answer to the question should not be the deciding factor in which virtual assistant you choose to work with. The fact is, you're going to need to know how much it will you each month to work with your virtual assistant but ultimately, the point of utilizing a virtual assistant is to make *more* money by freeing you up to spend more of your time on billable hours, and less time on the administrative, development and marketing aspects of your business. In the right circumstances, with the right VA, that's exactly what will happen.

As you gather pricing data from the various virtual assistants you speak with, bear in mind this famous quote: *"If you think it's expensive to hire a professional to do the job, wait until you hire an amateur."*

Price points can vary wildly in the virtual assistant industry, especially if you include the offshore 'virtual assistant call centers'. But it's important to realize that a truly professional virtual assistant, with the skills and experience you need to actually take your business to that next level, charge between \$25-\$40 hourly, and up. While a \$4 an hour "VA" may seem appealing, it could actually end up costing you a lot more than you realize.

Weigh your budget against the virtual assistant's experience, abilities, and professionalism. What could take an inexperienced VA an hour might take an experienced VA less than 10 minutes, depending on the situation of course. Oftentimes, when a choice is made based solely on price, you'll wind up back at square one, hiring the more expensive virtual assistant to redo the work or worse, to fix issues caused by going with the 'cheaper' option.

All of this is not to say that a virtual assistant has to be expensive to be good. Ask the question with all of this in mind, and use due diligence when making your final decision.

Question #3. Why are you interested in working with me / my company?

Similar to Question #1 (What will you do to help me grow my business?), this question will also help you separate the virtual assistants who are replying to your RFP simply because you're willing to pay for services, from those who are sincerely interested in partnering with you and working within your industry.

Virtual assistants go into business for many reasons, not the least of which is to focus their skills and talents on industries and projects that interest and appeal to them. Unless you're planning to delegate nothing more than data entry your virtual assistant, prospective VAs should have a notably enthusiastic response to this question.

In fairness to those virtual assistants who are responding to your RFP, they can only adequately answer this question if you've given enough information, so be generous with the details about you, your company, your industry, potential projects you have in mind that the virtual assistant will ideally be responsible for, and anything else you feel will help the very best potential VAs respond appropriately to your RFP and your subsequent questions.

Question #4. What is your level of experience (with X, Y, Z service[s])?

This question is designed to help you determine if the virtual assistant in question is experienced with and skilled at the particular tasks you're currently aware you need help with.

It's worth noting that we didn't phrase the question as 'How long have you been in business?', and that's because a virtual assistant who has only been in business a few months may bring decades of applicable experience to the table.

As was mentioned earlier, you and your virtual assistant will almost certainly come to discover new tasks and projects that can be delegated as you work together over time. For now, you'll need to be sure that the prospective virtual assistant can handle the tasks that are driving you to

find and hire a VA in the first place.

Your business and work is likely centered around a specific industry or industries and the tasks you have in mind may relate strongly to that particular field. If that's the case it will be important to find a virtual assistant who has relative and relevant education, experience or both.

For example, real estate agents commonly work with virtual assistants but necessarily will seek out VAs who have either worked in the real estate industry themselves (as an administrative assistant or even as an agent themselves), or who have completed an industry-relative training course.

Even if your needs are more general administrative support such as word processing, data entry, proofreading, communications management, customer service or research it will be important to have at least some tasks already in mind when you speak with prospective virtual assistants.

This question will naturally lead into further conversation about the virtual assistant's background, work experience, and current projects – which will ultimately help you learn more about his or her varied skills and service offerings. During your conversation you may together uncover additional tasks that could be delegated. Whatever your particular, immediate needs are, prepare ahead of time by examining and listing them so that you can clearly lay them out when you speaking with a prospective virtual assistant.

Question #5. What are your billing and payment policies?

It's important to have a clear understanding of how a prospective virtual assistant handles billing and payment processing.

Regarding billing: some virtual assistants bill by the minute, others in six, ten or fifteen-minute increments. Some charge an hour, minimum; others will invoice only for the exact time spent on your request. Most virtual assistants bill for phone calls made or received on behalf of you or your company, as well as for calls with you or with your clients and contacts. Many virtual assistants bill for time spent discussing projects with you, as

well as time spent communicating on your behalf, via IM or email.

Some virtual assistants require a retainer or deposit payment up front, others will accept a pay-as-you-go arrangement with or without a deposit. If the virtual assistant does work on retainer, find out what happens if you are unable to utilize all of the hours you've paid for or need additional hours above and beyond what you're purchased.

The way a virtual service provider has set up his or her billing system will vary so be sure to ask all prospective virtual assistants for complete information on their particular billing processes. Doing so will help you clarify what will work best for you, your business, and your budget and will also help avoid unnecessary surprises when the first invoice arrives from your new VA.

Note that a professional virtual assistant will provide you with a contract detailing all of this information (and more) in writing should you decide to hire them. Some virtual assistants will share their contract details prior to any binding commitment being made, to help clarify their business policies and procedures. Read the contract carefully and be sure that it stipulates billing processes fully.

Regarding payment processing: virtual assistants accept payment via varying methods and on various terms. Payment methods a particular VA accepts could include: PayPal, check, direct deposit, Intuit Payment Network or even money order. Payment terms will vary, depending on the VA and the project/circumstances, including: (partial or full) payment due in advance, Net 7, Net 10, Net 30 or payment due upon receipt. Some virtual assistants will even offer payment plans for larger projects.

Again, in order to ensure complete understanding of a prospective virtual assistant's business policies and procedures you'll want to ask on what terms they invoice and how you would be required to make payment.

When you do decide to hire a particular virtual assistant, check that these details are included in the VA's contract as well.

Question #6. Will you be handling my projects or do you contract work out?

If you're contracting with a qualified team of virtual assistants, this question may not be quite as applicable (although you may still wish to inquire if the firm sends work out to other or overseas service providers) but it's still necessary to consider how important the answer to the question is to you.

If you prefer to work closely with a single service provider with the understanding that he or she is the only person working on your projects and requests, a virtual assistant who does outsource work may not be a good fit for you.

In some cases though, just as a firm or team of virtual assistants can help cover a wider range of services – so too can a professional virtual assistant who has built a network of fellow VAs with various specialties to call on when a request comes in that she would ordinarily not be able to handle. In these situations your virtual assistant would either project manage or oversee the results of a request that needed to be outsourced; ensuring you get the quality product or service you need without having to spend the time or energy tracking down another service provider.

If a VA does outsource, don't be shy about asking deeper questions regarding who the virtual assistant sources work to. Find out if the virtual assistant sends work overseas or works with non-native English speaking service providers – this can be particularly important when tasks involving writing, editing, proofreading or preparation of written materials come into play.

Many well-established virtual assistants also have equally well-established colleagues within their network on whom they rely for specialty work or other requests they cannot fulfill for their clients. A professional virtual assistant who does outsource work to other professional virtual assistants will have no qualms about sharing this information with you up front.

If a prospective virtual assistant doesn't outsource, ask him or her how they would handle a request they're not qualified to complete.

Question #7. How do you communicate with your clients?

This is actually two questions in one. You're not only looking for information on a virtual assistant's preferred methods of communication with their clients (email, IM, VoIP, phone, etc.) but also clues to their communication *style*.

Answers to the first question are generally pretty easy to arrive at. Email is easily the preferred method of communication for nearly all virtual assistants because it helps create a 'paper trail' of project planning, requested deliverables, proposed and agreed deadlines, invoices and more but some virtual assistants also provide a company telephone number that clients can ring during business hours and expect to be greeted at the other end.

Other virtual assistants retrieve voice mail messages and return calls at specific times of the day. Some VAs only accept calls that have been arranged in advance, and still others do not accept calls as a general rule.

Some VAs may also set up an IM (Instant Messenger) account for use during business hours, usually with specific parameters in mind for how and when they will interact with clients. After all, being immediately available to every client at all times would allow too many interruptions in what should be a focused working day.

Your prospective virtual assistants should be able to articulate their own client communication policies, and in doing so will also give you some insight into their communication style. In actuality, just about any question you ask should give some insight into a virtual assistant's communication style.

If your questions are met with brief, vague, shallow or otherwise lacking responses and you (as most clients will) prefer working with someone who is communicative, forthcoming and transparent, make note of this issue and move on to another prospective virtual assistant.

A professional virtual assistant should be not only available to you via methods and during periods of time that will work well for you and your business, but should also communicate with you in a way that leaves you

satisfied, informed and ready to move forward – not lingering with yet more questions or uncertainty.

Question #8. What are your business hours?

This question doesn't have a 'right' or a 'wrong' answer, per se. Many virtual assistants use their incredible time management skills to run not only their own businesses as well as their clients' businesses – but all while caring for a family, attending school, or taking other educational courses to enhance their skills and service offerings, and more. There are also virtual assistants located the world over in various time zones. With all of this in mind, you can imagine that working hours, planned holidays, and schedules among virtual assistants are as many and varied as the virtual assistants themselves.

As a business owner investing in a service provider it's important for you to know when your virtual assistant is available to work on your projects, to collaborate with you, and to help manage your business.

If you anticipate needing assistance with time-sensitive projects or things that ordinarily must be accomplished on a particular schedule, be up front with prospective virtual assistants about this to ensure they can accommodate your needs and meet your expectations. (It's relatively important to note that virtual assistants are independent contractors, not employees – and as such, any scheduling of work or meetings ultimately must fall to the service provider, not the client.)

Question #9. What kinds of projects do you most enjoy?

If you want to get real insight into what a virtual assistant does best, find out what they most love to work on.

This question will help you uncover a prospective virtual assistant's greatest strengths, which will also ultimately be *your greatest assets*. Human nature dictates that we spend more time and effort to truly excel at doing that

which we love. When a service provider is enjoying what they're doing, they do a better job, provide better results, and take more care arriving at the end result (in this case, your company's white paper, bookkeeping, newsletter, marketing campaign or customer service, etc.)

Asking this question will also help you fine tune and expand the list of tasks you wish to delegate by bringing forth ideas for projects you may not have thought of yet.

Question #10. How do you stay up-to-date on new technology, software and resources?

Naturally, you're going to want to hire a virtual assistant who works to stay on top of the latest developments in technology, software, and small business resources.

A professional virtual assistant worth his or her fee will have an immediate and thorough response to this question. If he or she specializes in a particular industry or field the answer should include industry-specific sources.

The last thing you want is to hire an 'outdated' or 'outmoded' virtual assistant, so look for clues to active participation in the various social networking platforms, reference to industry-relevant feeds, blogs, forums and newsletters, as well as mention of recent or current applicable learning pursuits.

This is the final question in our series, but is by no means the last question you should ask. As you move through each of your questions with a prospective VA you'll naturally come up with new questions to ask and new tangents to explore. We've provided these 'Top Ten' as thinking points to help you get started.

You should ask as many questions as you need to during your initial consultation with a virtual assistant. (Most virtual assistants will offer a thirty or sixty minute consultation prior to engaging in a contract with a new client.) Remember, a professional virtual assistant is 'interviewing' you as much as you are interviewing them.

A professional virtual assistant is looking for a client who will be a good fit for his or her skills, business philosophy and work style, among other things. By being communicative about your own hopes and expectations and clearly discussing each of your questions and concerns, you'll help yourself and the virtual assistant in question determine if you'll be a good match for each other.

How to Delegate to a Virtual Assistant

Delegation is perhaps one of the most difficult things a small business owner will have to learn how to do. Simply, it can be very hard to let go, especially if you are a solopreneur and used to doing things for yourself, by yourself. On the one hand, it's quite rewarding to build something for yourself, from the ground up and the sheer satisfaction of do-it-yourself success is likely one of the reasons you went into business in the first place. But if the administrative management of your business is eating up all of your spare time, or cutting into time that could otherwise be spent on your own sales, clients, and/or billable hours; if you're suffering from stress or you feel like you're just spinning your wheels to try to get everything done, it's time to consider delegating to a virtual assistant.

Before we explore the process of effective delegation, it's necessary to dispel a common myth:

Delegation does not mean giving up control of your business

When you delegate, it can feel as if you're giving up control of your business – and it's true that on some level you are; you're relying on another person to effectively execute something for you. But practice and the right virtual assistant can help alleviate that fear of loss of control. When you're working with someone who knows what they're doing, and can consistently meet or even surpass your own results, delegating will no longer be a challenge, but a relief.

Andrew Carnegie may have said it best:

“The secret of success is not in doing your own work, but in recognising the right person to do it.”

Delegating gets the 'clutter' – the tasks that eat up time in your schedule –

out of your way; freeing you up to focus on other, more important tasks that make you money. When you delegate, you practice skills inherent to business success: forethought, organization, communication, management, and teamwork. Most successful business owners and executives would argue that learning to delegate effectively has further empowered them and actually helped facilitate reaching the greater heights of success.

Remember: delegation is the art of working smarter, not harder.

The Benefits of Effective Delegation

Effective delegation can be much more than just moving tedious administrative tasks off your plate – both literally and figuratively. In this article we'll look at the benefits of delegating to a virtual assistant.

There are a whole host of benefits enjoyed by small business owners, entrepreneurs, and busy executives who have learned to delegate to a virtual assistant, including:

- **Increased time available to work on other things** (or, not work at all, for a change). By delegating administrative tasks to a virtual assistant you'll have more time available to work on the things that make you money such as: making sales; connecting with existing, new and potential clients and customers; planning your next book/product/speaking engagement/event/sale, etc. Delegating to a virtual assistant means more time for the things that are important to you.

- **Decreased stress levels.** When you delegate tedious tasks, projects you're not skilled at or don't enjoy working on, or other items that keep you too busy and overworked you'll decrease the amount of stress in your life. In doing so you'll also find that non-work hours, weekends and holidays are more enjoyable because you'll be able to stop worrying so much. Delegating to a virtual assistant frees you from the vicious cycle of stress and worry that plagues many business owners who try to do it all on their

own.

- **Increased productivity.** With all of that extra, stress-free time available to you, you'll get more done, feel and be more creative, and approach the work you do enjoy doing with a new sense of commitment and enthusiasm. Delegating to a virtual assistant means increased productivity on a daily basis, but also in terms of those longer-term and future business goals.

- **Increased efficiency.** Imagine what it would be like to have a partner of sorts, a virtual assistant, committed to the growth and development of your business, even for just an hour a day. How much more work would get done? How many of those pending tasks that never seem to come to completion could you wipe off your to-do list? Delegating to a virtual assistant means increased efficiency in your day-to-day business operations.

You may be concerned that your business is too small to benefit from delegating tasks to a virtual assistant, or that you may not be able to find enough tasks to keep a VA busy. But the reality is that businesses of every size can benefit from delegation, when managed effectively. In the next few articles we'll discuss the key steps of effective delegation, including how to identify what should be delegated and how to ensure each task is handled and completed the way you expect.

"Surround yourself with the best people you can find, delegate authority, and don't interfere."

-Ronald Reagan

Determining Which Tasks to Delegate

We've already stated that *delegating is the art of working smarter, not harder* - but in order for that to prove true, delegation must be more than assigning random tasks or dumping lingering to-do's on a virtual assistant.

Before you can begin delegating aspects of your business administration you must determine which tasks you'll pass on to your virtual assistant to complete. When you're first beginning to work with a VA, you should plan to start small.

1. Plan to delegate tasks that will free up measurable time in your daily or weekly schedule. Routine tasks are ideal for this such as recording and managing new client data, recording and maintaining sales records, or researching and preparing content for the company news or sales letter.
2. Plan to delegate tasks that are not immediately time sensitive. By all means, delegate tasks with deadlines, but when you're first practicing the art of effective delegation spare yourself the worry of an immediately crucial timeline.
3. Plan to delegate tasks that don't require you to provide access to company information, files, or processes you are not yet comfortable sharing. The whole purpose of delegating is to alleviate stress in your life, not add to it. Allow yourself a reasonable amount of time to get accustomed to and comfortable with delegating to your virtual assistant. This will allow you to practice the art of delegating without putting a lot at stake. Assume that as time goes on and you and your virtual assistant come to know and understand each other and as a result you'll more easily think of tasks to delegate as well as more readily pass them off.

Of course, once the working relationship has matured and trust has developed, you'll more readily delegate more important, crucial and time sensitive tasks to your virtual assistant. Also, at that point, invite suggestions from your virtual assistant on what he or she sees as tasks that could be delegated to them. Your virtual assistant will have a unique perspective of your business and how it functions on a day-to-day basis and will undoubtedly be able to suggest numerous tasks that could be successfully delegated.

Eight Steps to Effective Delegation

By following a series of steps each time you delegate you'll achieve clarity in your requests and overall communication; avoiding unnecessary issues or misunderstandings. You'll also feel more secure in the process of handing work off to someone else, and most importantly you'll achieve better end results.

There are countless 'Top Tips' available online for effective delegation. We've put together our own list, relative to the unique nature of working with a professional virtual assistant.

1. Determine the task. Select a task that would ordinarily keep you busy, thus freeing you up to work on other, more important things. Or, choose to delegate something that will provide a launch pad or starting point for a larger, long-term project you've had brewing in the back of your mind but haven't found the time to orchestrate.

2. Clearly define desired results. Obviously, the more clarity you can offer regarding your expectations, the better the outcome will be. Give your virtual assistant more than just a task to complete, attach attainable goals to work toward.

3. Provide direction. In most cases, a professional virtual assistant who is familiar with your business and/or industry is not going to need direction, so to speak. But do freely share specific information you're able to provide and anticipate your VA will need to successfully complete the project.

4. Ask for feedback. Make sure your request and relative expectations are well-received. Also ask your virtual assistant for feedback or suggestions on how the project might be (better) executed, how he or she can help you achieve the results you're looking for, and any other input they might have to offer. Remember, your virtual assistant is an expert in their own right, picking their brain is one of the perks!

As Woodrow Wilson once said:

“I not only use all the brains that I have, but all that I can borrow.”

5. Determine a time frame. Before leaving the task in your virtual assistant’s hands, discuss the task’s projected time frame (be sure to clearly define any applicable deadlines). Allow for the fact that your virtual assistant likely has other clients to manage as well – don’t pressure for unrealistic turnaround times.

6. Recap. Once all of the information has been shared and thoroughly discussed, issue a brief recap of your understanding of what will be done, how it will be done, and when it will be done by. This will help bring up any lingering questions or items that still need to be addressed and ensure a smooth start to your project.

7. Let go. Congratulations! You’ve just delegated a task that was otherwise going to eat up your schedule, and created more time for yourself to focus on something else. Now, let your virtual assistant run with it. Assuming you’ve put all the correct and necessary pieces in place (competent service provider, clear task description and expectations) you can now anticipate a successfully completed project. It’s also a good idea to invite your virtual assistant to feel free to get in touch with any questions or issues that might crop up during the course of the project.

8. Show appreciation. All service providers enjoy positive feedback from their clients for a job well done. If the project is delivered as expected (or better) and on time (or sooner) let your virtual assistant know that you see it as a success.

Do You Want it Done Or Do You Want it Done RIGHT?

"If you think it's expensive to hire a professional to do the job, wait until you hire an amateur."

-Red Adair

Here's a little homework exercise for you:

Search one of the many online article directories for the keyword 'virtual assistant' and you'll be inundated by reading material.

Note as you browse through these articles, some of those in your search results will have been authored by professional virtual assistants who are truly partners and party to the success of their clients; sincerely invested in the businesses they support. The articles submitted by these VAs will be well-written, concise, informative, and generally presented with correct spelling and grammar. These are the articles worth reading, but they are few and far between.

You'll have to work to find the 'good articles' because they are sandwiched among a mudslide of poorly developed, keyword-stuffed pieces written and submitted by various virtual assistant 'factories' (for lack of a better word...). These offshore 'service centers' (and they're almost *always* offshore, even if they're backed by a U.S. based CEO or corporation, even if they're fronted with a U.S. address and phone) don't follow the same business model as a professional virtual assistant, and they don't provide the same level of service, but they operate under the title 'virtual assistant'.

The differences between **professional virtual assistants** and **offshore virtual service centers** are vast, and it's important to point out at least a few of the more glaring ones:

Professional virtual assistants are generally experienced as administrative experts or consultants, some specialize in fields they worked at in the brick-and-mortar business world for years, or even decades. Professional virtual assistants are usually solopreneurs, or members of small firms or teams, delivering high-quality, higher-end services to clients whose businesses they are interested in supporting for the long term.

A professional VA is going to work with you for the sole purpose of driving your success and supporting your goals. While a professional VA may schedule your appointments and handle data entry for you, they are also equipped and skilled to lend so much more than that to your business.

Because a professional virtual assistant is also a business owner, they are also equally as committed to their own success as yours. Given that your bottom line reflects the quality of the work they do, a professional VA is all the more motivated to deliver at 110% every time.

Virtual service centers or call centers have tens or even hundreds of employees manning phones and email – employees who may or may not have the real-world administrative or business experience you need to be able to rely on to see your business grow and flourish.

The operator who answers and handles your service request today is no more invested in the success of your business than the operator who sits across from him (amid rows of other ‘virtual assistants’) and will answer your call tomorrow. And the stark reality is that the education systems and language barriers in many of the countries that host these virtual service centers may not leave the virtual agents prepared to put together your marketing materials, execute your most important business communications and customer service interactions, or articulately draft your blog posts, much less further your business as a whole.

These ‘VAs’ only fit the definition of virtual assistant in that they’re located quite some distance from you. The similarity ends there.

Offshoring your business administration tasks to one of these service centers appears, at first glance, to be much less expensive than partnering

with a professional virtual assistant. Do the math and no one can argue that \$4 or \$7 per hour is much cheaper than the market rate \$35 hourly most established, skilled virtual assistants bill at. But factor that equation a bit further and your \$4 an hour 'investment' will very likely end up costing you much, much more in wasted time, poorly executed results, unfinished requests and projects that require 'fixing'.

Cheap and fast is not always cheap, or fast

It can cost quite a lot to revisit a project you thought was completed on deadline, only to have to fix mistakes, track down missing information, edit misspellings, rewrite unreadable turns of phrase, and more. It will ultimately cost you more time, and more money babysitting your \$4 an hour "virtual assistant" than it will to hand off a project to an established, professional VA who knows what they're doing (and charges accordingly). It's not just a cautionary tale – you really do get *exactly* what you pay for.

Think about your own business, you don't position yourself as the cheapest option in town – and why should you? You're a professional, you're good at what you do, and you charge accordingly. Why would you sacrifice the level of prestige, professionalism and quality you've worked to build around your business by outsourcing even the most mundane business tasks to an untrained call center employee for \$4 per hour?

When you're ready to make an *investment* in the growth and success of your business, you're ready to [hire a professional virtual assistant](#).

50+ Tools For Business Owners Who Work With Virtual Assistants

Even though your virtual assistant will most likely never set foot in your office or business, there are countless online resources that will make it seem as if your VA is right across the desk from you. The tools we've shared with you below, will leave wondering why you ever thought you needed an in-house employee in the first place!

General Online Business Resources

[EchoSign](#) EchoSign has revolutionized the way businesses get contracts, proposals, agreements and other important documents signed, sealed and delivered. With five free signatures per month in their free account, you can get started and take advantage of this forward-thinking service right away. Use the document library to store often-used agreements and other documents. It used to take days or even weeks to mail a contract to the client and wait for the signature and return of the document. EchoSign boasts an average time to signature of *42 minutes*.

[ScreenHunter](#) Screenhunter is a free, easy-to-use screen capture program that allows you to take a still snapshot of all or a portion of whatever is on your computer screen including open browser windows/websites, and your own desktop.

File Sharing and Storage

[Send This File](#) Send This File is a file sharing service that allows you to quickly and easily send and receive large files (attachments that would otherwise be too big to send via email). The free account allows for files up

to 2GB with unlimited transfers per month – perfectly adequate for sending large files to your virtual assistant.

[Dropbox](#) Dropbox is a secure file hosting service which utilizes cloud computing to enable users to store and share files and folders with others online using file synchronization. The free version makes up to 2GB of space available (paid accounts offer up to 100GB), with the ability to create permissions for specific folders in your Dropbox so that you can share the contents with users of your choice. Dropbox’s sharing feature supports multiple users working on the same document in real time. Dropbox’s synchronization feature also includes a month’s worth of history as well as an ‘undelete’ option to help you recover accidentally trashed files.

[Ubuntu One](#) Ubuntu One is a “personal cloud service” that does more than sync files. Offers a full-featured free account that lets you access your contacts, notes or bookmarks from any computer or the web as well as enjoy your favorite music from a cloud integrated store. You can also stream your entire music collection to iPhone and Android mobile phones. Also offers a mobile package.

[Google Docs](#) Google Docs allows you to upload and store files in the cloud. You can upload both files and folders, including an array of file types ranging from document types to image types to video formats. You can access your files and folders online from any computer, anywhere in the world by signing into Google Docs. Share files and folders, even photos and videos. Convert files to Google Docs format and collaboratively edit these files online.

[Apple iCloud](#) Apple’s new iCloud is essentially the same as Ubuntu One, but apparently comes with a ten device limit. iCloud stores your music, photos, apps, calendars, documents, and more. And wirelessly pushes them to all your devices automatically.

[SugarSync](#) SugarSync provides automatic online backup, remote file access, file and folder sharing as well as a small assortment of third-party [apps](#) designed to allow you to use SugarSync on various devices and platforms.

[Carbonite](#) Carbonite provides backup and syncing solutions for both home use / home offices, and small businesses. Affordable, at \$59 a year for smaller operations, and \$229 a year for small businesses, Carbonite provides secure automatic backup and syncing of files and folders as well as recovery of accidentally deleted data, and access to your files and folders from anywhere.

[Wuala](#) Wuala provides secure online file and folder storage, sharing, collaboration, syncing and backup. Accounts start out with a free 1GB but users are encouraged to ‘earn’ more storage space by *trading* idle storage space on their computers for ten times the amount of Wuala cloud storage. Additional storage can also be purchased.

[Amazon S3](#) Amazon S3 is designed to make web-scale computing easier for developers by providing a simple web services interface that can be used to store and retrieve any amount of data, at any time, from anywhere on the web. When you use S3 you have access to the same highly scalable, reliable, secure, fast, inexpensive infrastructure that Amazon uses to run its own global network of web sites. Example uses include: content storage and distribution, storage for data analysts, backup archiving and disaster recovery. [Amazon Cloud Front](#) is an extension service for content delivery. It integrates with s S3 to provide an easy way to distribute content. Amazon’s services are for true ‘power users’.

Communications

While most virtual assistants will utilize email for the majority of your communications, there are times when a quick instant messaging (IM) session or live phone call will better facilitate sharing information or planning a new project. In those instances, you may find one of the following resources useful:

[Skype](#) Skype is undeniably the leader in VoIP (Voice over Internet Protocol) services – with the ability to instant message and call other Skype users anywhere in the world for free, it’s a reliable communications solution.

Additional free features such as conference calling and file sharing allow you and your virtual assistant to collaborate in real time. Factor in the optional paid features such as a Skype number and voice mail and you may find yourself giving up your landline altogether.

[join.me](#) join.me is an app developed by LogMeIn. join.me is available for both the iPhone and iPad and allows you to view someone else's screen while collaborating in real time. Additional features include: VoIP calls, chatting (IM) with other callers, zoom, and the ability to see who is in attendance on the call.

[Viber](#) Viber is another iPhone app that allows for international free calls to other Viber users using 3G or Wi-Fi. Viber will use your existing iPhone contacts list to see which contacts are already using the service. Use of the service does utilize your iPhone's data plan it eliminates per-minute fees for international calls.

[Google Voice](#) Google Voice gives you a central phone number (and voice mail) from which to access and manage all of your other phone numbers (cell and landline). Also has the ability to automatically forward voicemail messages to email, and can also send a transcript of the voicemail. There's an excellent write-up of how to use and make the most of Google Voice [here](#). Google also offers [two additional communications options](#), albeit, more rudimentary: Google Chat, a video and voice plugin (works from within Gmail) and Google Talk a PC only instant messaging software that also allows for file sharing.

[ooVoo](#) ooVoo is a free video conferencing service that allows for up to six callers to participate at one time. Call from PC to PC, Mac to PC, mobile to PC, mobile to mobile, etc. Also provides the ability to record and send video messages, share files, record and store audio and video calls, and real-time desktop sharing (an invaluable resource for the times you need your virtual assistant to be able to see what you're working on, or vice versa).

[Facetime](#) Facetime is Apple's iPhone 4 video chat feature. With the click of a button on your iPhone 4 start a video conference with your virtual assistant on their iPhone 4. Also works with iPad 2, Mac over WiFi.

Online Fax Services

Using an online fax service not only serves as a convenient way to stay connected and a quick way to transfer information; it has eliminated the need for another piece of equipment – the old school fax machine.

Listed below are some of the most popular and respected online fax services on the market.

[RingCentral Fax](#) features a toll free or local number, dedicated fax number, receives faxes on your PC, via email, or with our mobile application, sends faxes by email and from your PC from any application. RingCentral's most popular pricing package is the Fax 500 which includes 500 free pages each month for \$7.99. Others packages ranges from \$19.99 to the Fax Pro rate of \$39.99.

[MyFax](#) allows you to send and receive faxes through your email, the web, or smart phone. It also features a local or toll free fax number, no software download required, saves sent and received faxes online for one year and personalize your faxes with your logo. MyFax provides the capability to fax from up to 5 different email addresses. Monthly pricing begins at \$10 for 100 sent and 200 received pages. A free 30-day trial is available. No contracts required so you can cancel at anytime.

[eXtremeFax](#) is an online fax service that uses technology developed by RingCentral, Inc. You can choose a toll-free or local number to send and receive faxes from around the world. eXtremeFax also allows you to send and receive faxes by email, either from your PC or your phone, receive notifications by SMS, email, and on your PC, whenever you get an incoming fax. eXtremeFax offers two reasonably pricing options at \$6.67 per month for 500 pages and \$14.99 per month for 1200 pages. A free trial is available.

[Nextiva Fax](#) highlights includes sending and receiving faxes by email, directly from Microsoft Apps and by cell phone. Nextiva also allows you to keep your fax machine for convenient sending of paper-based faxes. In many cases you can keep your current fax number. Pricing starts at \$4.95

for up to 500 faxes if you pay annually. Otherwise, the monthly fee is \$8.95. A free 30-day trial is available.

[eFax](#) is an internet fax solution offering the largest selection of local and toll-free fax numbers in over 3,500 cities and 48 countries around the world. It features lifetime storage, local and toll free numbers, enhanced security, to send or receive faxes as email attachments and fax from up to five email addresses. eFax Plus is \$16.95 per month with an one time set-up fee of \$10.00. This option allows you to send and receive 150 pages. eFax Pro is \$19.95 per month with an one time set-up fee of \$19.95 allowing you to send and receive 200 pages.

[TrustFax's](#) monthly plan includes a US local or toll free fax number, capability to send/receive 250 pages per month, free account setup, faxes sent to your email, digitized signatures tool, secure online fax storage and international faxing. A free 30 day trial is available. Monthly pricing is \$8.95 and discounted at \$7.46 if you buy an annual plan.

[FaxZero](#) Fax zero lets you send up to two free faxes daily over the internet to any fax machine, anywhere in the United States and Canada. No fax machine or number required for you to send, just an email address. Additional faxes and premium fax sending services are available for a small fee.

Screen Sharing

Screen sharing is another great method to easily communicate with your VA. Screen sharing allows you to share your desktop in real-time with others. This is ideal for an online meeting, training, demo or web conferencing.

Below is a list of popular tools used for screen sharing.

[Skype](#) allows you to share your screen with anyone on Skype for free. There is also group screen sharing but it is currently only available to Skype for Mac.

[Join.me](#) is a simple screen sharing tool perfect for impromptu meetings. This free tool gives you the ability to share your screen with up to 250 views. You may also share control, chat and send files. For additional features you can upgrade to Join.me Pro for \$19 per month.

[Vyew](#) (pronounced “view”) is a free and easy online collaboration and web conferencing service with unlimited use with up to 10 people. It is an ad supported service. Vyew allows you to meet and share content in real-time or anytime. You can also upload images, files, documents and videos into a room. Users can access and contribute at anytime. It is compatible with PC, Mac, and Linux users.

[CrossLoop](#) is a free easy-to-use software application for desktop sharing with unlimited sessions. It is also available in 21 languages. CrossLoop is simple, safe and quick.

[QuickScreenShare](#) is the simple and free way to share screens with anybody with no registration required. There is absolutely nothing to install. It is compatible with Windows, Mac, and Linux. It allows you remotely control the mouse and keyboard.

[FreeScreenSharing](#) is a free online meeting service designed for screen sharing, web conferencing, product demonstrations, webinars and more. FreeScreenSharing features free unlimited meetings with up to 96 participants, audio conferencing and your own lobby.

Social Media Management

As a business owner you understand the importance of marketing your brand online. You know that social media can be a valuable and inexpensive marketing option. What is often difficult is finding the time in your busy schedule to consistently monitor and manage your business profiles within your networks. A virtual assistant can easily assist in the management of your company brand on popular and quickly growing social networks like [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [LinkedIn](#) and [Google +](#) with one of the social media

management tools listed below.

[Seesmic Social](#) is a social media management application available on your mobile, desktop, and web. Seesmic Web supports multiple Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, and Salesforce Chatter accounts. Seesmic Desktop is compatible with both Windows and Mac OS. Seesmic is available free to users.

[Tweetdeck](#) is a personal real-time desktop browser, connecting you with your contacts across Twitter, Facebook, MySpace, LinkedIn, Foursquare, Google Buzz and others. You must have Adobe Air installed to run Tweetdeck; however, there is a limited beta of [TweetDeck Web](#) available. Feature highlights include scheduling messages, adding networks that use a compatible Twitter API, like WordPress or Tumblr, and managing Twitter lists. Tweetdeck is available free to users.

[CoTweet](#) is a web-based social media management solution that helps businesses on Twitter and Facebook. It offers two pricing plans: Standard and Enterprise. CoTweet Standard is free. It offers features including scheduling, email notifications containing your latest mentions, team collaboration tools; however, it does not include Facebook account access or have a native iPhone app. You must contact CoTweet directly for a Enterprise demo and pricing information.

[Hootsuite](#) is a social media management tool that updates Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, WordPress and other social networks via web, desktop or mobile platforms. It allows you to monitor multiple social networks, track results with analytics, create custom reports, and collaborate with team members. You can also download browser extensions, upload files and schedule messages. HootSuite offers a Pro account for \$5.99 per month as well as a free version.

[Sendible](#) is a social media management software for small business. It allows you to reach customers on multiple platforms, monitor your brand, track analytics, and schedule messages. Sendible is different from other social media tools mentioned because it also incorporates email and SMS technologies. Monthly pricing range from \$9.99 to \$99.99. It offers a free 30 day risk free trial and accounts can be upgraded, downgraded or

anceled at any time.

Survey Software

Whether your business is service-oriented or you sell tangible products (or both!) chances are you're going to want to find an easy way to gather customer or client feedback. This is the perfect project to pass on to your virtual assistant. Your VA can manage everything from creating the survey questions, to contacting your mailing list with the invitation to participate, and can even help analyze the data. Of course your VA can also help you develop and implement an action plan in response to the information you collect.

We've provided a list of the most popular survey tools available on the net, but don't hesitate to ask your virtual assistant which tool they may already have experience with.

[Survey Monkey](#) Survey Monkey is a free web-based survey tool designed to be "powerful enough for researchers, yet easy enough for a survey rookie." It is easy to use with no software to install. Survey Monkey features: formatable questions, survey templates, response management tools and reports. The Survey Monkey basic plan is free with upgraded plans starting at \$17 per month.

[Wufoo](#) Wufoo is an online HTML form builder tool. (Wufoo was recently [acquired](#) by Survey Monkey). One of the great benefits with Wufoo is that you do not need to know any code to create great contact forms, web surveys or invitations. Feature highlights include: easy to create colorful forms, payment integration, reports, notifications, and multi-user accounts. Wufoo offers a free plan allowing 1 user, 3 forms, 3 reports, 10 fields and 100 entries/month. Other plans start at \$14.95 a month.

[Poll Daddy](#) Poll Daddy is another online survey tool. It features templates, easy to use question editor, reports and multi-user accounts. Poll Daddy's free account boasts 200 survey responses per month, 10 questions per

survey, basic survey reports, 1 user account with Surveydaddy links. Poll Daddy offers a professional and corporate plan at \$19 per month and \$79 per month, respectively.

[Google Docs Forms](#) Google Docs has a built-in survey form available. Its feature include: easily gathering information from people without having to send and receive multiple emails, tracking of answers, and responses automatically added to your spreadsheet. It's fast, it's free and it provides all the basics you'll need to create and run a poll or survey.

[Survey Gizmo](#) Survey Gizmo is a web-based survey solution tool used to create online forms, surveys, and questionnaires. It offers a 14 day free trial on all accounts. Survey Gizmo features: reports, data collection, social media integration, and branding control. The basic plan for small yet professional survey start at \$19 per month.

Office Suites

As a business owner you will inevitably use some type of office suite in your day-to-day operations. Day to day tasks such as merging letters, updating a database or creating a brochure can be easily delegated to a professional virtual assistant to maintain within your desired office suite. Things to consider when selecting your office suite, also know as a productivity suite, include: cost, ease of use, licensing, programs, web or PC based.

Below is a list of commonly used office suites.

[OpenOffice](#) OpenOffice is a open-source office software suite for word processing, spreadsheets, presentations, databases and more. The most recent edition is OpenOffice.org 3. It is a free, easy to use software with components similar to other traditional office suites. You may download it free of any licence fees, install it on as many PCs as you like and use it for whatever you need.

[Microsoft Office](#) Microsoft Office is a desktop-based office suite that has been around for over 20 years. According to Wikipedia, some version of

Microsoft Office is used in 80% of enterprises. It offers Word, PowerPoint, Excel, Access, Publisher and Outlook. The most recent version is Microsoft Office 2010 released June 2010. There is also a Mac edition, [Office:Mac](#) available. The price ranges from \$99 to \$499 depending upon your desired Suite. (Academic, Professional, Home and Business, etc)

[Zoho](#) Zoho Office Suite is a web-based office suite that offers 22 applications including: word processing, spreadsheets, presentations, databases, customer relationship management, invoicing, project management and others. Their applications are separated into 3 different categories: business, productivity and collaboration. Zoho is free for personal use. Every one of the many Zoho services will have a free edition for individuals. Businesses may be [charged for services](#); however, they offer a discount for non-profit organizations.

[Google Apps](#) Google Apps is a web-based application similar to traditional office suites. Google Apps is free but you can upgrade to Google Apps for Business with additional features for a reasonable \$5 per user per month. Highlighted features of this suite are: Gmail, Google Calendar, and Docs. Google Apps' Gmail offers over 7,6500 MB of email storage space, 10 users within same domain and sending abilities of 500 external recipients per day per email account. There is also a Google Apps Marketplace where you can add more paid and free apps to further customized your Google experience.

Project Management and Collaboration

When working virtually, especially if you're working with a team of service providers, it's useful to have one central area online where you can access, manage, post and discuss new and ongoing projects. With the growing number of project management and collaboration services out there, you have a plethora of options to choose from. Note that your professional virtual assistant will likely have a preferred software they're experienced and familiar with. Or, they may have suggestions for which one will best help you work together to manage your own task and to-do lists.

For your information, we've detailed just a few of the project management options most-used by virtual assistants:

[LogMeIn](#) LogMeIn is the leading remote access software for small businesses. LogMeIn offers: remote control, file sharing, systems management, data backup, business collaboration and on-demand customer support of PCs, servers, Macintosh computers, smartphones and other connected devices. It makes it easy for your virtual assistant to manage your email, organize files, structure your accounting, and more – based on the permissions you set, of course.

[Basecamp](#) Basecamp is a web-based project management and collaboration tool designed for businesses of all sizes. Features include: to-do lists, file sharing and storage, team communications, scheduling, and milestones as well as wiki-style web-based text documents where you and your team can share ideas and collaborate, and time tracking. With even more options available through the various **[add-ons](#)** developed by the Basecamp community, the software is extremely versatile. For example, **[cloudHQ](#)** which lets you synchronize Basecamp projects with Google Docs and Dropbox storage and edit your Basecamp documents in-browser. Basecamp offers a thirty day free trial with paid plans starting at \$49 monthly for unlimited team members/users, and up to 15GB storage for up to 35 projects.

[ClientSpot](#) ClientSpot is a web-based service designed specifically for freelancers, virtual professionals, and small businesses in mind. The service facilitates collaboration and project management. ClientSpot features include everything needed to manage remote teams and clients, from project and task management to file sharing, time tracking, and calendaring. Offers a free 30-day trial with paid packages starting at \$15 monthly for a comprehensive 'Basic' plan.

[MyIntervals](#) The MyIntervals site describes the product as “web-based project management software that marries time tracking and task management in a collaborative online space with powerful reporting. Intervals is ideal for small businesses — including designers, web

developers, consultants, creative agencies, IT services firms, and communications companies that bill on an hourly or per project basis.” The free 30 day trial provides plenty of time to experiment with features like: milestone management, weekly timesheet submissions, drag and drop calendar, client and contact management and more. Paid plans start with ‘Basic’ at \$20/month and accommodates 15 active projects and up to 2GB storage. All MyIntervals plans allow for unlimited users, and unlimited tasks and milestones.

Looking for a truly comprehensive list of numerous project management software options? You’ll find [this chart](#), complete with comparison of basic features, on Wikipedia useful.

Newsletter and Email Marketing

When working with a professional virtual assistant, chances are you’ll delegate some or all of your marketing efforts to your VA, including newsletter and email marketing. There are numerous online services designed to help you get your marketing message out to your mailing list looking polished, and delivered more efficiently. An experienced virtual assistant will very likely already be familiar with at least one of the programs listed below:

[MailChimp](#) With no fees at all for sending a campaign to up to 500 contacts and up to 12,000 emails per month, MailChimp is a great place for a small business on a budget to get started with newsletter marketing. The simple user interface makes it easy for beginners to craft professional looking templates, including customizations to include your brand’s color scheme and logo. Also comes loaded with pre-designed templates ready to use. Offers RSS to email, reports and tracking for sent campaigns, integration with Google Analytics and Facebook, and autoresponders. [Click here](#) for a complete list of MailChimp features. Aside from their ‘Forever

Free' plan, MailChimp also offers monthly subscriptions, pay-as-you-go, and high-volume plans.

[Mad Mimi's list of features](#) includes the usuals: ready-made designer themes, autoresponders, tracking and reports, the ability to customize or code themes from scratch, full-featured list management options, campaign scheduling etc. It's the ease of use and intuitive user interface that keeps Mad Mimi's subscribers raving about the service. With a free plan that allows for up to 100 contacts, and an \$8 a month plan for up to 500, Mad Mimi is certainly an affordable option. Have a ton of contacts? \$36 a month allows for up to 10,000 – higher priced plans accommodate up to 350,000 contacts.

[Constant Contact](#) Constant Contact may be one of the better-known email marketing solutions available – with their huge advertising budget they're hard to miss. Touted as a plug-and-play email marketing solution Constant Contact boasts the usual list of features and also offers a free 60 day trial. Paid plans start as low as \$15 a month (allows for up to 500 contacts). While Constant Contact's user interface is perhaps a bit more 'clunky' than some of the other options it is also the most full-featured of the services on our list. With event promotion (including attendee registration), and the ability to host surveys Constant Contact is undeniably a great business solution. The site provides an extensive [Learning Center](#) to help users make the most of all the Constant Contact has to offer.

[iContact](#) provides from 500 to 10,000 contacts starting at \$10 a month and a 30-day free trial to help you get the hang of the system before you select a paid plan. The new 'free edition' account allows users with 500 or fewer contacts to take advantage of the iContact system for free, with some limitations to features. With integrated social tools, a survey feature, robust analytics and the ability to publish to the web as well as RSS to email iContact is a viable contender for small and large businesses. The site features webinars, an FAQ and tutorials and videos to help users leverage the power of iContact for their email marketing needs.

About the site behind this guide - Virtual Assistantville:



Virtual Assistantville Premium Virtual Assistant Directory is designed with you, the busy entrepreneur or small business owner, in mind. We offer two easy ways to find and get in touch with prospective virtual assistants who meet your unique business needs:

Directory Search: Browse [virtual assistant business listings](#) organized by specialty, industry, and location. Each listing offers information about a provider's services, specialty, rates, and more as well as a secure contact form you can use to get in touch with the Virtual Assistant(s) of your choice.

Submit an RFP: If you prefer not to sort through listings you can submit your information via our [free RFP system](#). Qualified Virtual Assistants will have access to the details of your RFP in a private area of the site and will respond to you directly.

[Virtual Assistantville](#) is your *first step* toward working smarter, not harder!