



Working with a Virtual PA

What you need to know in advance

Following are some of the most frequently asked questions from business owners who express interest in working with a Virtual PA.

1. What is a Virtual PA?

A Virtual PA is someone who is in the business of providing administrative support to clients in an ongoing, collaborative relationship. Many people are under the mistaken idea that a Virtual PA is anyone who "assists" "virtually." That is not the case. The definition and concept of virtual assistance is not based on the literal translation of those two words. Virtual Assistance is a profession providing administrative support in a very similar way to the professional support provided to an executive in a corporate environment. In the same way that you call a doctor when you're unwell, an accountant when you want to file your tax return or a lawyer when you need legal advice, a Virtual PA is the professional you call when you need skilled experience to carry out administrative support.

2. What is the "virtual relationship" and how does it work?

Administration is not an event. It's not something that is carried out once and never needs addressing again. It's ongoing work which must be carried out on a regular basis and accomplished throughout the life of your business in order for the business to grow, generate revenue and run smoothly and profitably.

By working in an ongoing relationship with a Virtual PA, you know you can rely on someone who has an understanding of you, what's important to you, how you go about achieving your goals, and how your business operates. Of course you can utilise the services of a Virtual PA on an ad hoc basis, as and when you need support, for example to cover your regular PA's holidays, but the longer you work together with a Virtual PA, the more value you will gain in terms of cost-effectiveness.



When you hire a Virtual PA, you are working with a professional, not an employee. As a business owner, your Virtual PA is going to have her or his own systems and processes for starting the relationship and will help you to determine what can be delegated by talking things through in detail.

3. What kind of work does a Virtual PA take on?

Virtual PAs focus on taking care of some or all of your administrative tasks, whether these are business or home-related. They carry out the administrative work which normally takes up your time and energy, and, often, which takes your attention away from generating revenue. The really fantastic benefit to you when you take on a Virtual PA is that by default you are gaining a higher calibre of administrative knowledge, expertise and experience than you would usually find in a temp, or even in many circumstances, an employee.

Our industry surveys over the past two years indicate that the majority of Virtual PAs have an average of 20 years real-world business experience and training before setting up on their own.

4. Do Virtual PAs take on other tasks besides administrative support?

Yes. Whilst some may have their own employees and contractors, Virtual PA businesses are usually solo businesses. This gives their client the added advantage of knowing that who they hire is the person who actually carries out their work. Every Virtual PA has their own unique talents and experience. Many Virtual PAs offer additional services which complement their core administrative support services. Do keep in mind though that not all Virtual PAs are able to take on what is offered by [Virtually 24/7](#) i.e., your web design, bookkeeping, copywriting, logo design, etc. These are considered separate professional skills which require additional training and expertise.

For these reasons, if you do happen to find a Virtual PA who is able to offer complementary services in addition to their administrative support services, expect to be charged separately and / or at a higher rate.



5. What does a Virtual PA charge?

Professional fees vary from one Virtual PA to the next, but as with most things in life, you get what you pay for. Keep in mind that a Virtual PA's support is strategic; you won't be working with a Virtual PA for the same number of hours that you would a full-time or part-time employee. Some Virtual PAs offer value-added packages which you pay for on a monthly basis. Virtual PAs offer a convenient and cost-effective alternative to in-house employees, and offer their clients access to a higher level of skills and knowledge than they might ever be able to afford in an employee.

6. What types of people work with Virtual PAs?

Many different types of people but all of whom have something in common. They require additional support and aren't afraid to delegate! Two of the most common reasons business owners choose to work with Virtual PAs are:

1. They have a need for skilled, professional administrative support, but don't have either the budget, space or equipment for an in-house PA
2. Their administrative workload isn't large enough to justify the expense (and often accompanied hassles) of an in-house PA or secretary

7. Where does a Virtual PA work?

From their own business premises. As Virtual PAs are running their own businesses, they purchase their own IT equipment, software, printers, scanners and other relevant tools required for the job. Working together virtually is far more energy efficient and cost-effective than working together within an office. Most of the time, nothing more complex than sending an e-mail or making a phone call and being clear in your instruction is required from you as the client. There is a vast amount of technology available which makes it very easy for a virtual relationship to thrive. Virtual PAs are experts when it comes to setting up new systems, and will be happy to share information and offer advice should you require it.



8. Are Virtual PAs like employees?

No. There is a common misconception among many business owners which those of us within our profession are working hard to dispel. Virtual PAs are independent professionals who are committed to often more than one client. For these reasons, they are not employees. There are going to be differences in how you work together and in the type of tasks a Virtual PA carries out for you. For example, a Virtual PA is not going to be instantly available to you eight hours a day, five days a week, in the way an employee who works only for you would be. Each Virtual PA has her or his own business policies, standards and procedures for working with clients and these are usually contained in their terms and conditions, as with any professional business.

9. Are there certain tasks which are inappropriate to ask a Virtual PA to carry out?

When you consult with a Virtual PA, she or he will outline the type of services they offer. Together, you will come up with a bespoke plan designed to support you which is unique to your business needs. The main thing to remember is that a Virtual PA is a service provider, not an employee. The services your Virtual PA provides are independent of your immediate day-to-day business operations. There are some tasks in particular that are typically not provided by Virtual PAs:

- Virtual PAs are not receptionists or call centres. Their time is spent concentrating on client work and focusing on projects. They have their own phone lines and businesses to take care of. If you have a need in this area and can't afford an employee, [Virtually 24/7](#) can make a couple of recommendations.
- Virtual PAs do not usually run errands. What you may need is a concierge service. You might even look at hiring a student.
- Virtual PAs do not work onsite. Virtual PAs are not temps. They are business owners who work from their own offices. Their work is virtual and performed remotely from their own place of business – think of them in a similar way to how you think of your accountant or lawyer.



10. How do I know I can trust someone enough to give them access to my personal information and count on them to be competent enough to handle my work?

Much of this is going to depend on how *you* go about your selection process. Each Virtual PA is an independent business owner. That means you are going to need to conduct your research based on a set of qualifying criteria, review websites and then consult with those Virtual PAs who interest you and seem like they are qualified to best meet your needs.

One of the best ways to find out about a level of service is to ask whether your potential Virtual PA is able to put you in touch with any previous or existing clients. [Testimonials](#) speak volumes.

There is never a 100% guarantee that we won't have any problems with a service provider we select. As consumers, all any of us can do is try to make the most educated decision possible based on value, quality, competence, and fit. And that requires us to do our homework. Beyond that, there simply will need to be a minimum level of trust extended or there is no basis for the business relationship.

Trust needs to be earned and do remember that Virtual Assistance is an ongoing, collaborative relationship. As you continue to work together, you build upon that initial trust. If, at some point in the relationship, it makes sense to give your Virtual PA access to that information in order to conduct work on your behalf, that's something you can decide then.

Author: Sara Cheston

©Saving you time ... [Virtually 24/7](#)