

Virtual Help Is On The Way

Inside Tucson Business June, 2006



You might say that virtual assistance - hiring an assistant that may not even live in your state or country - is like having your cake and eating it too.

For entrepreneurs who start their own small company, few things are as annoying as

having an assistant underfoot asking questions and generally slowing down the natural breakneck style of the independent driving entrepreneur. On the other hand, the small business can grow much faster with the help of a highly trained professional administrative assistant.

Is having access to a pre-screened, highly trained professional administrative assistant when you need them important to your business? One who knows your business, your preferences, your style, is not in your office and is available only as many hours as you need? If you answer yes to these questions, you may be a candidate for a hot growing professional service – virtual assistance.

Unlike the outsourcing trend sweeping the globe, virtual assistance is not necessarily designed to provide a cost saving advantage – although the argument can be successfully demonstrated that paying only for the hours you need and not carrying employee overhead is cost effective. The main advantages are the flexibility and quality of prescreened well trained virtual assistants.

“Flexibility for my clients as well as myself is important in my business,” said Tonya Thomas, owner of The Small Office Assistant. Thomas’s office is currently in Birmingham, Alabama but in the early days of her business, it was all over the country. Tonya got into the virtual assistant business because her husband worked construction and they were constantly moving from site to site. She was attracted to virtual assistance because she could live anywhere and do her business.

Thomas worked for years in industry as an administrative professional and then received additional training from Assist U, one of the leading Virtual Assistant’s Registries. She notes that the following best practices lend themselves to success using a Virtual Assistant:

1. Avoid being a micro-manager. If you are a person who has to call the assistant many times a day to “follow-up” or manage, you will be hard pressed

to keep a highly trained Virtual Assistant.

2. Think of your virtual assistant as a partner – an equal player on your team working for your success.
3. Let the assistant into your business. The more responsibility you are willing to delegate and the more the assistant learns about your business, the more valuable the partnership will be.
4. Understand that your assistant has other clients. While most assistants will be willing to respond quickly to an emergency, don’t let every assignment be driven by tight deadlines. Think ahead and give your assistant the flexibility to plan his/her work.
5. Choose your assistant carefully. Most registries have detailed applications that allow you to spell out the type of assistance you need. You will then receive inquiries from assistants who have the capabilities you are looking for.

Virtual assistants came into being to serve the small company but many larger firms are hiring them as well to handle a variety of support functions. These online experts have a variety of skills and below are a few typical tasks performed.

- Make travel arrangements
- Write articles, newsletters, etc.
- Manage databases
- Handle appointments, telephones
- Arrange and maintain electronic files
- Editing
- Manage calendars
- Manage article publications
- Arrange events

Sharon Youngblood is a Certified Management Consultant, Executive Coach and Speaker. She works with companies and individuals to improve performance and profitability. Contact her at say@youngbloodconsulting.com or (520) 795-7498. Additional articles are available: www.youngbloodconsulting.com