



The Permanent Record

Opening the door to productivity

What is a Virtual Assistant?

The [Alliance for Virtual Businesses](#) defines a virtual assistant as "...independent entrepreneurs providing professional administrative, creative, managerial, technical, business office and/or personal support services. [Virtual Assistants] use the most advanced means of communication, and the newest and most efficient and time saving office products and work delivery, regardless of geographic boundaries. Virtual Assistants work from their own offices, on a contractual basis, and abide by an established Code of Ethics requiring integrity, honesty and due diligence." A Virtual Assistant usually has a background in administrative and/or executive assistance, office managerial or customer service.

Exactly how does this help your small to mid-sized business?

Virtual assistants come in many sizes and varieties just like in-office employees. Some of the tasks a Virtual Assistant can perform are: Accounting, bookkeeping, collections, marketing, research, word processing, letter preparation and word processing, transcription, creating reports, proofreading, designing manuals, newsletters, flyers or other direct or email mailings, data entry, scanning, and web design. These are just a few of the many things a VA can do for your business.

How does this benefit you and your company?

You'll experience a reduction in operating costs, for starters. Your Virtual Assistant doesn't get paid unless they work on your projects. No more employees sitting around with nothing to do yet still collecting a paycheck. Those days are over!

The average hourly rate for a Virtual Assistant varies greatly depending on the skills and the location of the Virtual Assistant. \$25.00 to \$75.00 per hour should be expected. While these hourly rates may seem high, you need to take into consideration what a full-time employee is really costing you and how much money you'll be saving.

You won't have to spend money on paid vacations, sick time, health insurance, taxes, unemployment insurance, office supplies and computers, holiday pay, or other associated costs. You only pay for the hours your Virtual Assistant works on your specific projects. Your Virtual Assistant should be an independent contractor, not an employee. Hiring him/her as an independent contractor will liberate you from all of the employee benefits you would normally have to pay if he/she worked directly for you.

As your Virtual Assistant becomes more familiar with your business, he/she will make recommendations concerning things he/she can take over, allowing you more time to grow your business, generate new business, and spend more time with family and/or friends. Your Virtual Assistant will provide your customers with consistent, skilled service and will keep your company's goals in mind all the time.

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How do I know if I need to hire a Virtual Assistant?

Before jumping on the Virtual Assistant bandwagon, there are several questions you need to ask yourself so that you'll be prepared when the times comes to search for the right Virtual Assistant for you and your business.

- Precisely what is it that I need help with?
- What does the Virtual Assistant need to excel or specialize in so that he/she will provide me with the best possible assistance?
- Am I comfortable using the most basic technologies (i.e. fax, email, instant messaging, etc.)?
- How much am I able to afford?
- Are there any software requirements that the Virtual Assistant must have?
- How does the Virtual Assistant need to be paid (PayPal, check, credit card)?

In addition to doing a self inventory, you also want to prepare yourself to interview Virtual Assistants. Here are some basic questions you will probably want to ask while going through the process of interviewing potential Virtual Assistants.

- What experience does he/she have?
- What services does he/she offer?
- In what areas does he/she specialize?
- How would he/she handle a situation where he/she is asked to do something but he/she is not familiar with how it's done?
- How does he/she prefer to be contacted?
- Exactly what is it that he/she can do for me and my company?
- If I request a daily reporting of all activities and time spent, will he/she have a problem with it?
- How does he/she handle critiques and/or requests for changes?

Michelle Schoen of [The Permanent Record](http://ThePermanentRecord.com) started her company and has been a Virtual Assistant since 1990. She is a certified Real Estate Administrative Assistant and Transaction Coordinator. She also designs and updates websites. In addition, she also has a 20+ year background in medical claim billing and collections, authorization acquisition and transcription. She can be reached at michelle.schoen@thepermanentrecord.net or (303) 733-0885.