



**- 2nd EDITION -**

**The Virtual Assistant's  
Guide  
To Marketing**

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*The V.A Approach to Marketing  
Your Services*

**Michelle Jamison, Virtual Assistant**



"This book has literally helped me find my target market. Michelle has laid out the marketing process in an easy to read and understandable format. She takes you step-by-step in guiding you to open your mind and get creative about your virtual assistant business. Whether you are in the start-up phase of your business, or are already established, this book is essential for your marketing process. Don't plan without it."

Nancy Beaton  
Student, Red Deer College  
Virtual Assistant

"Michelle has been very generous in sharing of her knowledge and experiences as a VA. Her book is clear and concise paving the way for anyone to write a successful marketing plan."

Lori Fraser  
SAVY Business Solutions  
[www.savybusinessolutions.com](http://www.savybusinessolutions.com)

"The VA's Guide to Marketing is a highly recommended must-read Marketing Manual for any and all past, present and future Virtual Assistant's. Michelle Jamison and her team put together a practical, informative and knowledgeable manual to ensure marketing successes in your VA business.

The best advice I received from this Manual was. "Your greatest marketing tool is YOURSELF!" If you believe in yourself and your VA business it is easier to promote from your heart."

Hope Martin  
Hope's On-line Professional E-Services  
[www.hopesva.com](http://www.hopesva.com)

"Michelle Jamison's book is a comprehensive and easy-to-understand guide to marketing a Virtual Assistant business that every new VA should read. Promoting a home-based Virtual Assistant business is no easy task, but Michelle's book covers every aspect of that challenge and teaches her readers exactly what they need to know in order to successfully market their business. Michelle is a leader in this industry and her experience and expertise shine through in this excellent resource."

Alexandra Amor, Web Copy Specialist  
[www.SalesPageSolutions.com](http://www.SalesPageSolutions.com)

"The Virtual Assistant's Guide to Marketing is a wonderfully simple, yet powerful approach to marketing your business. It's an essential read for any virtual assistant."

Deanne McAndrews  
eLegal Services  
[www.elegalservices.ca](http://www.elegalservices.ca)

"I believe so much in the marketing information found between the covers in this book that I have included in my own Virtual Business Startup System as a reference book. Michelle has written a marketing gem. It has what you need to know written in a format that is easy to read, and more importantly, easy to understand. A must read for any Virtual Assistant looking for marketing help in attracting new clients."

Tawnya Sutherland, Certified Internet Marketing Specialist and Founder of VANetworking.com  
[www.vanetworking.com](http://www.vanetworking.com)

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## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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Although it has been four years since the original edition of this book was published, my acknowledgements remain essentially the same, with a few additions.

I am extremely proud of this book; not only because I am the author or because of the time I have spent feverishly writing, but because it is specifically for Virtual Assistants.

Being a Virtual Assistant is not only my profession – it is my passion. I am passionate about everything it means to be a Virtual Assistant: the professionalism it takes, the independence it creates and, above all else, the feeling of finding my place.

The world of Virtual Assistance is a unique and special place; beyond the technology lies a very heart-centered, supportive group of extraordinary individuals. It is to those VAs that I dedicate this book.

Among this group are some very special individuals who deserve my thanks. To Mary-Lou, who introduced me to the profession. If she had not, I would not be writing this today. To my special VA friends who have always been very supportive: Carol, Barb, Alexandra, Pam, and Jill. To Laura, the best thing that has happened to my business. To my dear friend and confidant, Amy, who inspired me to be all that I can be and to never look back.

A special thank-you to the two men in my life, my husband Bruce and my son Jacob, who supportively put up with the long hours, late nights, and lost time. I love you both! This would not be complete if I did not also mention the newest addition to our family Hannah, born April 2006.

Lastly...Thank you Mom & Dad.

## **ABOUT THIS BOOK**

I have been extremely fortunate that the original copy of this book was such a success. It has been included in the curriculum of various VA Training Schools and VA Starter Kits and far surpassed my expectations. However, there is always room for improvement and the reason for this 2<sup>nd</sup> edition.

Over the past four years I have written considerably more and have created different tools and resources. I believe these will increase the value of this book. The primary focus is, as the original text was; on the VA approach to marketing. To sum it up: building relationships by providing superior customer service, building trust and confidence and, by doing so, generating word-of-mouth and referrals. You will read about this approach, as well as other traditional marketing initiatives, such as advertising, networking, marketing plans and how to integrate the various approaches into your virtual practice. This 2<sup>nd</sup> edition will include two new chapters, clearer definitions, assessments and resources to support you with your marketing initiatives. So let's begin...we have a lot to cover!

## **An Introduction to Marketing**

*Your ability to set goals and to make plans for their accomplishment  
is the master skill of success.*

**-- Brian Tracy**

You will find numerous definitions of the term “marketing”. Every textbook, workbook or article you read may have a different definition of marketing. One popular definition and one which is fitting when marketing a VA practice is “*Marketing is anything you do to get or keep a customer.*” This definition, from Harvard professor Michael Porter is simple but very true. It is the process of reaching out to new clients and providing superior customer service to keep current clients content with you and your services.

Many people confuse the terms “marketing” and “sales”, presuming that marketing is a fancy word for “sales”. However, selling your service is not the “be all and end all” of marketing. A sale is the point at which the service is offered, it is an important part of the marketing process - but it is not a replacement.

The same confusion occurs over the term “advertising”. Although advertising is an important part of the marketing process, it is just that – only a part. Advertising is the way in which you get the “word out” about your services.

Marketing is a process; it is not about just one thing that you do, rather it is about everything that you do. Marketing does not simply refer to sales, advertising, promotions; it is an external and internal element. What lies at the center of this is customer service.

Marketing does not stop when a client hires you; it is simply just the beginning!

## Major Marketing Categories

Let's explore marketing in terms of categories. Figure 1.0 shows the seven major types or categories to marketing.

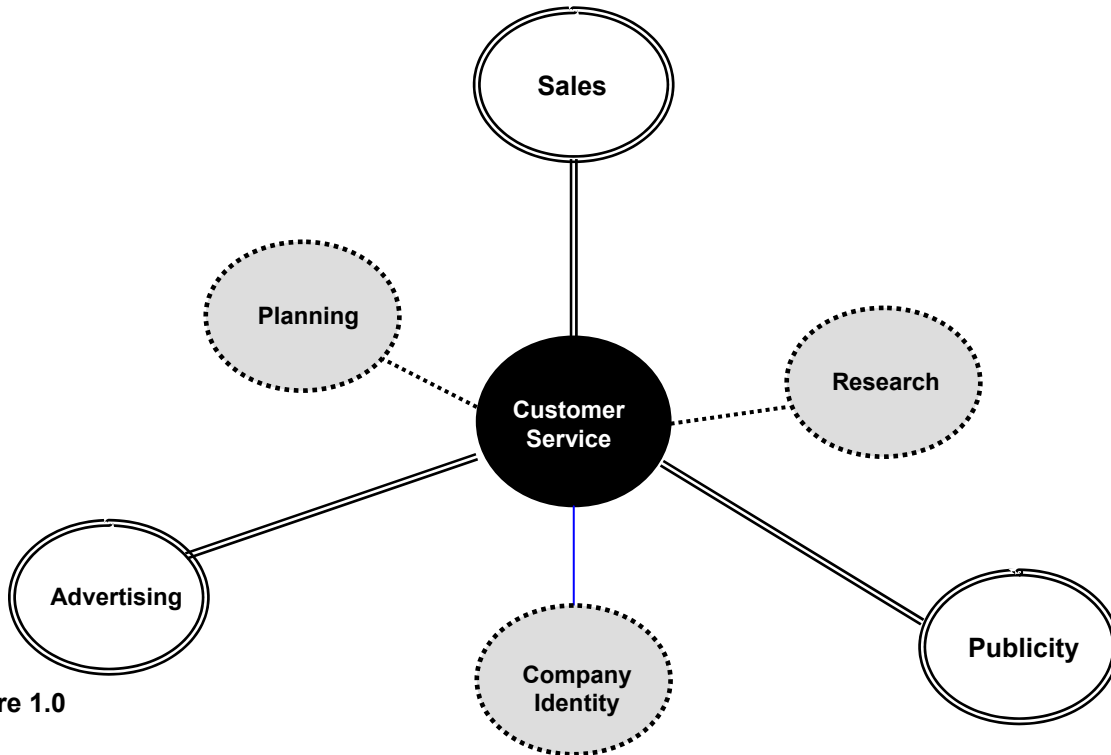


Figure 1.0

### Customer Service

The center of Figure 1.0 represents the most important part of marketing a VA practice, customer service. This is what you *do* to *keep* your clients happy and get referrals. Customer service should receive the majority of your marketing attention.

### Internal Categories

#### **Research and Planning**

Research and Planning is the basis for all your marketing efforts. With research you will gather information about your target market, what advertising works, what does not, what services people need and how much they are willing to pay.

Planning will give you focus on what it is you want to achieve; all of us need some sort of a plan.

## **Company Identity**

People are hiring you and your company; therefore you need to look the part. Your company identity is comprised of the various characteristics by which you and your service are recognized and known.

## **External Categories**

### **Advertising**

Advertising is bringing your service to the attention of potential and current clients. Brochures, direct mailings, e-mail messages and placing an ad in a publication are all forms of advertising.

### **Publicity**

Publicity is mention in the media. It is a traditional form of exposure that you do not have to pay for and is very effective. If you are mentioned in an article or story, or if you write a column that is published, you will find that it will generate more interest than advertising and it costs much less.

### **Sales**

Sales deliver the personal touch; Virtual Assistants usually sell their service primarily by phone or in some cases face-to-face. This gives you a chance to receive client feedback and potentially change how you sell your services by people's reaction.



## The VA Approach to Marketing

The VA approach to marketing is not all about personal selling or advertising. The VA approach to marketing focuses on relationship-based marketing. Relationship-based marketing includes networking, referral-based marketing, niche identification and research, it is customer service driven, and applies the continuous value-added approach. Also important are more traditional forms of marketing and promotions (market identification, advertising, and public relations).

Think of the VA approach to marketing (relationship-based marketing) as a continuous cycle.

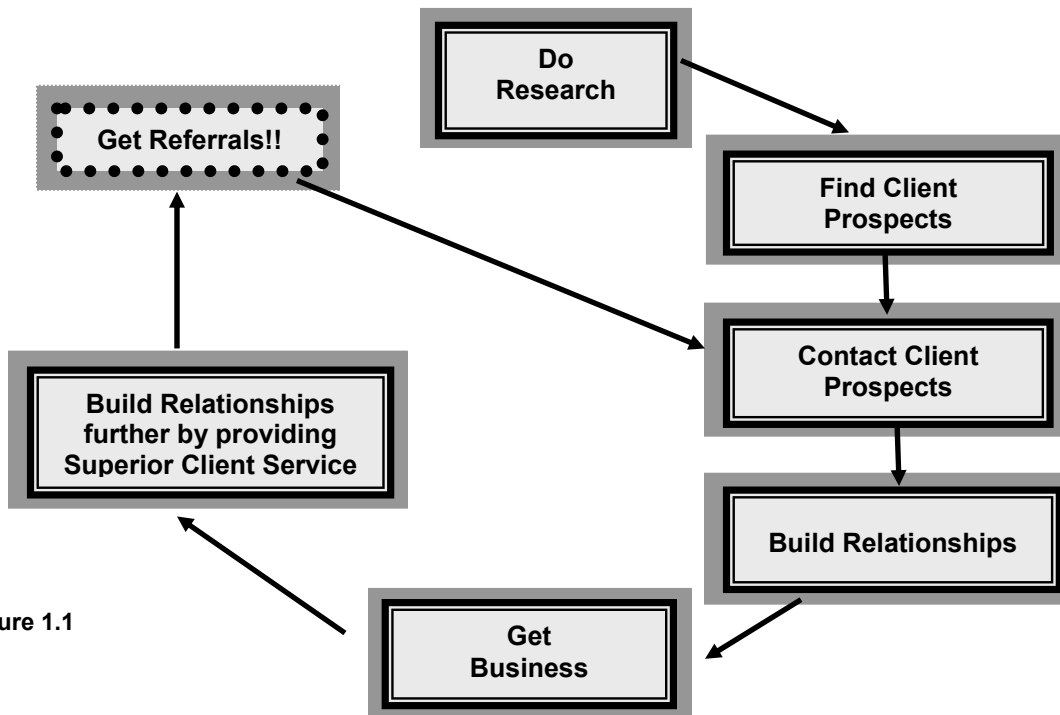


Figure 1.1

As you follow the marketing cycle, you will encounter these steps:

1. The marketing cycle begins with research. Research will help you acquire the knowledge and information to find your prospective clients.
2. When you have found your prospective clients, it is time to get the “word out” about what you are offering and how it will benefit them.
3. The moment you connect with a prospective client, relationship building begins.
4. If they are impressed with what they are being offered and have a need for that service, it will result in business for you.
5. When you are providing services to your clients, solid relationships are formed. If you are providing superior customer service to your current clients and they are content, they will feel comfortable giving you referrals and, ultimately, the cycle will repeat with each new client.

As a Virtual Assistant, you will find that your long-term clients are based more on relationships than about the services you are offering. Ultimately your goal is to provide high-quality services, but equally important is to build solid working relationships. In order to build these relationships you must be clear about a few points:

- Who are you
- Who is your ideal client
- What benefits does your service bring to the relationship

**Who are you?** This may seem like a simple question to answer but is it? What are some of your personal traits that you feel will help you to excel in this field? What is it about who you are that will make you the ideal Virtual Assistant?

When we are marketing our services, we are in fact marketing ourselves; it is very different than marketing a tangible, unemotional product. Marketing the VA services you provide is a much more personal transaction, and can result in a feeling of rejection when people do not hire you. In order to be attractive to others, and gain their trust, you need to project precisely the person to whom they are entering into a relationship with.

A simple way to help you start the process is to be clear about your uniqueness and how you differ from others in the VA profession. These differences can be personality traits, technical skills, the types of clients you serve, or other factors that exemplify who you are.

**Who is your ideal client?** There is no better feeling than being hired by a new client, the excitement of someone new to work with, the anticipation of possibilities and the added finances. However, is this new client your ideal client? Do you know who your ideal client is?

It is important very early in your VA practice to determine the characteristics you deem necessary in your “ideal client”. Remember we are talking about relationship-based marketing. In order to have an effective client/VA relationship, you have to be just as comfortable with your client as they need to be with you; a mutual respect and admiration needs to be present.

As individuals, we are not likely to marry or be committed to someone who is not our ideal mate, someone who we could not picture spending the rest of our lives with. So why develop a working relationship with someone who instinctively you know is not a match?

How will you know if this person is not a match? At the end of a 15 minute conversation with a prospective client, you will know whether or not that person is someone who you would like to work with. Your “gut instinct” will tell you...listen to it.

In order to clearly define your ideal client, start by writing a list of all the qualities and characteristics you are looking for in an ideal client. These can be personal and/or professional characteristics. For example, your ideal client may be someone who communicates effectively, is Internet savvy, pays on time, has a sense of humor, and respects that you have a life outside of work. Use the tools available to you on page 15 to help you start this process.

Keep in mind that between 70% and 90%, of a VAs business comes from referrals and word-of-mouth. Hold true to the picture of your ideal client. Financial gain is never a good reason to start a relationship that is destined to fail and could inevitably come back to haunt you.

**What benefits does your service bring to the relationship?** The number one question that your prospects will want to know is “What can you do for me?” You need to be clear on the benefits that you bring to this working relationship. How can you assist a prospective client?

Knowing the benefits that your services provide will both attract more clients and help you to serve them better.

### **Features vs. Benefits**

One of the more basic principles of marketing, and an important distinction to make, is the difference between features versus benefits. Features are the aspects of your service, whereas **benefits** are what people get from using your service.

Generally most business owners decide to start a business based on two things:

- 1) What service they can provide that they are good at
- 2) What they assume customers will buy.

Often these assumptions are correct. However some small business marketers believe that prospects will understand why they should buy the product or use the service just because they have been told about it. Therefore, business owners only communicate the features of their product or service to prospective customers and neglect to mention the benefits.

## Examples of Features and Benefits for VA Services:

### Feature:

### Benefit:

Document Preparation

Clients will look good to their clients with professional looking documents.

Travel Arrangements

Clients do not have to deal with the aggravation of booking a flight.

Reminder Services

Clients look like the hero when they remember their families' or clients' birthdays.

Bookkeeping

They have freedom from fear of maintaining accurate books when the "tax man" comes around.

Features do not entice people to hire you; benefits do. They answer the question "What is in it for me?"

In order to begin marketing your service, it is important that you clearly define what the benefits are and to do so in a way that your client can relate. We will cover more on the benefits of services in the next chapter.

*"An important piece of marketing is building relationships. You can do all the advertising and promoting you like but when it comes right down to it, it's your relationships and the value they provide will be what makes the sale. In order to build any relationship you need to find out who the person is, who they want to become, what they are facing, what are their challenges, what they don't have or what is missing, what they need most right now, and what they value. You can then offer support and/or solutions that fit the client and begin building trust, and the relationship! When you make it about the client it makes you very attractive to them and they immediately see the value of the relationship."*

Mary-Lou Ashton  
Creator, Virtual Assistant Training Program  
<http://www.vatp.ca>

## **Marketing on a Budget**

There is a big difference in big business versus small business marketing; although the process may be the same, the similarities end there. You are obviously not going to be able to market your VA service the same way as a huge corporation such as Nike.

Here's why:

### **Dollars...need I say more?**

As an owner of a VA practice, you can already guess one big difference between your marketing strategy and those at Nike headquarters. You guessed it. The big guys have the big budgets. When they talk marketing, they talk hundreds of thousands of dollars. As a VA when we talk marketing budget, we are talking a couple hundred dollars.

### **Staffing...what staff?**

Nike has a marketing vice president. As a VA you have...well, just you! Big businesses have a team of marketing experts at their disposal from advertising directors, sales managers, research directors, customer service specialists and more. In a VA practice you are responsible for all aspects of marketing.

### **Strategy...what is that?**

Each employee in a big business is given a copy of the company's business plan the moment they are hired. Small businesses hear the term "business plan" and run in fear.

Although you may envy the dollars, people and strategic determination of big business, small business does have some advantages. A majority of large corporations spend millions of dollars to fund research to get to know and understand their customers. Meanwhile, a small business owner can pick up the phone and simply talk to their clients at no cost.

Because marketing is to build and maintain customer relationships, for this reason alone small business has the edge.

### **Budgeting your money and time**

The most important thing that you can do in terms of marketing is to establish a realistic budget for your practice.

Businesses such as VA practices normally market to other businesses – such as consultants and real estate agents – and tend to allocate a lower percentage of their monthly revenues to marketing.

There is no set amount that is customary for a VA to set aside for marketing, keeping in mind that most of your clients will be coming from referrals and word-of-mouth. As a VA, you do not need to spend thousands of dollars on a marketing campaign. Be very selective how and to whom you market your services. Who you market your services to will directly affect your marketing budget.

A step to help you figure out your budget is to look at what you expect your business to accomplish over the upcoming year and what level of marketing is necessary to accomplish the task.

Just as important as budgeting money is the budgeting of time to spend on marketing. You want marketing to become something that you do naturally and comfortably. It should be woven throughout your day. You should start by budgeting a little time on a regular basis for your marketing initiatives. Whether it is researching potential clients, writing a letter, or finding cost-effective advertising, take an hour or two out of your day.

## **Chapter 1 - Summary**

By now you should have an understanding of the basics of marketing and the VA approach to marketing your business. We have covered key relationship-building concepts that will help you get the referrals you need to grow your business. By understanding the general ideas behind marketing in terms of concept, approach, categories, and budgeting you have developed a framework which will help you begin your marketing initiatives.

*“Marketing is not an event, but a process . . . It has a beginning, a middle, but never an end, for it is a process. You improve it, perfect it, change it, even pause it. But you never stop it completely. “*

**- Jay Conrad Levinson**

## Target Marketing

*“Customers buy for their reasons, not yours.”*  
**--Orvel Ray Wilson**

Target Market is defined as the group to which you aim your marketing efforts. The more you understand and define your market, the better you can market directly to those individuals.

There are three specific steps to successful target marketing:

- 1) **Identifying your target market.** First you must identify who it is you want to work for, and have a clear understanding of those individuals and their needs.
- 2) **Reach out to your target market.** Once you have identified the individuals who you would like to work for, then you need to figure out where they are and how to attract their attention.
- 3) **Research your competitive market.** A competitive market refers to those individuals with whom you share a market, who you are competing with for clients. It is important for you to know who your competitors are and what they are offering.

When deciding on a target market you will want to think about these three items:

1. **Geographic.** Geographics are individuals who live in a certain area. For other non-virtual service professions, geographic location refers to the physical location of clients. In the virtual world, which is without boundaries, geographics does not necessarily refer to physical location as much as possible, on-line locations, websites, associations, forum, directories where these individuals may be found. However if you are a VA who does, or is considering offering on-site work, then the physical location does need to be taken into account.
2. **Demographics.** Demographics are the qualities and characteristics of your target market. They may include age, gender, culture, employment, industry, income level, marital status, etc. As a Virtual Assistant, you will want to consider all of these items when selecting and reaching out to your target market. However many of these items will become clearer as you begin determining your ideal client.
3. **Psychographics.** Psychographics makes up the emotional and behaviour of your target market. They include the emotion, reasoning, logic and thought processes behind your target market's needs and decision for hiring you.



These three items mentioned will become the foundation of your target market initiatives and will need to be considered when working on the following:

Step One: Identify your target market

Step Two: Reach out to your target market

Step Three: Research your competitive market

Let's take a look at all three steps of target marketing in greater detail.

## **Step One: Identifying your Target Market**

In order to effectively market your Virtual Assistant practice, it is important first to identify your target market or, in other words, those individuals who you want to work for...your clients.

Knowing your target market just makes good business sense. It will help you to reveal and identify potential problems and help you recognize opportunities in the marketplace that you could potentially have missed. Identifying your target market will save you energy, time and money by focusing your efforts on those individuals who are more apt to hire your services.

How will you find clients unless you first figure out who will need your service?

It is important that you establish some parameters to help you identify your target market. Begin by asking yourself some questions:

1. Who is my ideal client? (demographics)
2. How well do I know them? (demographics)
3. What are the needs/challenges of my target market? (psychographics)
4. What service benefits are they looking for? (psychographics)
5. What is their concern about the type of service I am offering? (psychographics)

Let's examine each individual question.

## Your Ideal Client

It was mentioned earlier in this chapter, within the context of the VA approach to marketing, the importance of understanding who your ideal client is. Not only is this important to ensure you are working for someone you truly enjoy working for, but also from a marketing perspective. Your ideal client will be your focus for target marketing. Again, keep in mind that 70%-90% of your clients will come from referrals and word-of-mouth. By working with someone you really want to and enjoy working with, you will:

- Be more productive
- Want to do your best
- Appreciate your client
- Solidify trust
- Have more energy
- Be content and not resent the relationship
- Build solid relationships

To help you determine who your ideal client is, use the graph below to begin the process:

My Ideal client is:

|                                 |  |
|---------------------------------|--|
| <b>Gender</b>                   |  |
| <b>Age</b>                      |  |
| <b>Occupation</b>               |  |
| <b>Salary</b>                   |  |
| <b>Education</b>                |  |
| <b>Lifestyle</b>                |  |
| <b>Dreams/<br/>Aspirations</b>  |  |
| <b>Challenges/<br/>Stresses</b> |  |

## Ideal Client Characteristic, Traits and Attributes Inventory

Check off the top 10 characteristics, traits and attributes you are looking for in an ideal client.

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Adaptable      | <input type="checkbox"/> Interpersonal Skills     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Approachable   | <input type="checkbox"/> Kind                     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Balance        | <input type="checkbox"/> Knowledge                |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Building trust | <input type="checkbox"/> Lead by example          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Calmness       | <input type="checkbox"/> Loyalty                  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Caring         | <input type="checkbox"/> Motivated                |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Candid         | <input type="checkbox"/> Open-Minded              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cheerful       | <input type="checkbox"/> Organized                |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Compassion     | <input type="checkbox"/> Passionate               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Compatibility  | <input type="checkbox"/> Patience                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Communication  | <input type="checkbox"/> Pays on time             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Community      | <input type="checkbox"/> Perseverance             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Confidence     | <input type="checkbox"/> Perfectionist            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Considerate    | <input type="checkbox"/> Positive                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Courtesy       | <input type="checkbox"/> Prepared                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Creative       | <input type="checkbox"/> Productive               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Dedication     | <input type="checkbox"/> Purpose-driven           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Decisiveness   | <input type="checkbox"/> Realistic                |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Drive          | <input type="checkbox"/> Reliable                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Empathy        | <input type="checkbox"/> Respect                  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Enthusiasm     | <input type="checkbox"/> Respectful of boundaries |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Ethics         | <input type="checkbox"/> Responsible              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Flexible       | <input type="checkbox"/> Role Model               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Focused        | <input type="checkbox"/> Self Control             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Forgiving      | <input type="checkbox"/> Selflessness             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Friendly       | <input type="checkbox"/> Sense of Humour          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Honesty        | <input type="checkbox"/> Stability                |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Influential    | <input type="checkbox"/> Supportive               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Initiative     | <input type="checkbox"/> Teamwork (appreciates)   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Inspiring      | <input type="checkbox"/> Wisdom                   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Integrity      | <input type="checkbox"/> Works well with others   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Internet savvy |   |

### Note about Ideal Clients:

No where is it written that a prospective client must have ALL of the criteria you have established for your ideal client, before agreeing to work with them. The idea of identifying your ideal client is done to establish parameters on the type of person you want to work with, and the type of person who you would not match well with - in essence identifying your target market. However, common sense also dictates that not everyone who approaches you will meet every item you have checked off above. Some individuals could turn out to be wonderful long-term clients and may only meet half of your criteria. Listen to your "gut instinct" and be open to all possibilities.

## **How well do you know your target market?**

Knowing your target market is essential in order to successfully market to them. You need to be familiar with the demographics and psychographics of your target market. However you also need to be flexible with these items, so you are not limiting yourself.

In order to start this process, think about the following questions:

### **What kind of association do I have to this market so I know it well?**

Am I now, or have I in the past, been a part of this market? Do I have friends, relatives, acquaintances that are part of it?

### **Do I know the language that this market uses?**

Knowing the vocabulary of my market gives me more credibility.

### **Do I know what attracts this group?**

How do I let this group know about my service? What will get their attention?

### **Do I know who inspires this group?**

Who influences this group? What are they advocating and can I align my product or service in some way with them?

## **Something to think about:**

### **Target Marketing: Rifle vs. Shotgun**

When talking about target marketing, it is important that we touch on the concept of rifle versus shotgun.

*Rifle marketing: You are clear on whom it is you are aiming your marketing message. You have a particular type of client to whom you are marketing your services.*

*Shotgun marketing: You are spraying your message all over the place hoping that some of it will hit. You are unclear of the type of client that would use your services so you bombard everyone with your marketing message.*

Accuracy is better and more cost-effective.

## What are the needs/challenges of my target market?

**What are the psychographics of my market?** What are the challenges they are facing, that they would need your services? What emotions are they currently feeling?

When a client hires a Virtual Assistant, what is this telling you?

- They are overwhelmed, frustrated and need support with their business.
- They have no time and details are being missed.
- They do not have the time to grow their business, because all their time is being focused on daily admin duties.
- Their business is growing and they are struggling to handle the details.
- They have a list of contacts to follow up with regarding new business and do not have the space to do this.
- They are experiencing time management issues and are spending majority of their time working and less time with family.
- They are feeling ineffective since they need certain items completed, but do not have the skills to do these themselves.
- They need to project an image of professionalism and want to achieve this by having an assistant to take messages, return calls, answer e-mails, make appointments etc.
- Their invoicing is falling behind, because they do not have the space or experience to handle this aspect.
- They are spending most of their days answering e-mail and do not have an efficient method of doing this.
- They do not have the space to hire an on-site assistance.
- Current staff is overwhelmed and need additional assistance.
- They are looking to have a “partner” to share the wins, challenges of growing a business.

By understanding the challenges and their needs you will be in a better position to support them. For each of your clients needs/challenges you should be prepared to answer that need with a service.

## **What service benefits are they looking for?**

As described earlier in this chapter, all prospective clients are going to ask “What can you do for me?” As a Virtual Assistant you are going to need to know what your client’s needs and challenges are, and how your services will benefit them.

This is a great opportunity for you to ask prospective clients questions:

“What are the items you dislike doing?”

“How do you currently manage your admin tasks (e-mail, correspondence, etc)”

“If you could remove one item from your plate, what would it be?”

This assessment of services can be done over the phone, by e-mail or as part of your client information package, which we will review in greater detail in Chapter Seven.

By assessing the services your clients need, you will then be able to clarify the benefits of these services to the clients.

Example: “You dislike managing your e-mail? Well I can support you with that by accessing your e-mail on a daily basis, sorting and prioritizing which in turn will free up your time to attend to more important items in your business.”

By practicing various scenarios that prospective clients may come to you about will allow you to be better prepared to address their challenges/needs with a service and their benefits.

To start this process use the Service/Benefit Practice Worksheet on the next page and address the challenge/needs with a solution.

*“Always put yourself in the potential client’s shoes. Think about what you would need to hear in order for you to explore the possibility further. What situations do potential clients find themselves in that makes them consider hiring a VA? What is going on for them? Make your marketing about the client not about your business. Target your market.”*

Mary-Lou Ashton  
Creator, Virtual Assistant Training Program  
<http://www.vatp.ca>

## Service/Benefit Practice Worksheet

Use the practice worksheet below to outline the service and benefit that will support the needs/challenges the best:

**Need/Challenge:** They do not have the time to grow their business, because all their time is being focused on daily admin duties.

Service & Benefits:

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**Need/Challenge:** They have a list of contacts to follow up with regarding new business and do not have the space to do this.

Service & Benefits

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**Need/Challenge:** They need professional looking documents and manuals completed, but do not have the skills to do these themselves.

Service & Benefits

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**Need/Challenge:** They have no time and important details are being missed or forgotten.

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**Need/Challenge:** Their customers are not being invoiced on time and bills are not being paid.

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Do not stop here; come up with your own scenarios!!



## **What is their concern about the type of service I am offering?**

One of the best things about being a Virtual Assistant can also be one of the biggest challenges in terms of obtaining clients.....working virtually. This means that most of the time your clients may never see you “up close and personal”. To someone who has not worked in this type of environment, it can be a little challenging, for others it may be an easier transition.

Client concerns/issues regarding working virtually:

- No face to face interaction.
- Confidentiality issues.
- Ensuring time is being spent on work.
- Ensuring they are being billed for the work appropriately.
- Effective management of work if a VA has more than one client.
- Their lack of technical skills therefore may prohibit an effective relationship with a VA.
- Clients need to micro-manage and unwilling to give up control.
- Clients have difficulty delegating work in a virtual environment.

In order to ease concerns, you need to have a plan in place for identifying the concerns and then meeting them head on by providing ways to alleviate those concerns.

If a prospective is unsure about working virtually its important to educate them on what working virtually means. Although you are not physically there with them, by meeting regularly by phone and answering e-mails in a timely manner, their concerns will soon dissipate.

As well as educating them, offer them a sample of what it is like to work with someone who is not physically there. A trial period is a great way to get to know the prospective client without too much investment. It will also give you an opportunity to really show the client how easy it can be to work with someone virtually.

You may not be able to win everyone over to the “virtual side”; some individuals are simply not ready to make that leap, no matter how much you educate, or reassure. Do not take this personally, in most cases it is the prospective client who fears the unknown and is not yet ready to make that commitment.

Do your best to educate prospective clients and find creative ways to show the client how simple it can be to work virtually. You will find that in most cases prospective clients are open-minded and willing to try new ways of working.

## **Step Two: Reach out to your Target Market**

The wonderful thing about being a Virtual Assistant and working virtually is that your clients can be anywhere. However, this does not really help you much when determining how to target your market. Some Virtual Assistants prefer to do work within their own town, city, even province or state, while others prefer specific countries. In most cases Virtual Assistants choose to work with individuals from all different walks of life. This is one of the perks about this profession; you get to experience so many different cultures.

Now when we are talking about the geographics of a target market for Virtual Assistants, this does not need to take on the form of physical mortar and brick locations. We are talking about any place physical or virtual where you can target your market.

**Where is my target market located?** Where do they do business?

Again, the location of your target could be anywhere globally. However, depending on if you choose a particular niche market or specialty, or if you decide to do on-site work, this must be considered.

Some other items you may want to consider are:

- Time zones
- Currency difference
- Communication
- Costs associated with distance

Most of your clients will do business from an office, whether it is a home office or a business office. This provides a physical location for you to target.

For example if you have decided to focus your marketing efforts on a niche market such as Real Estate agents, you may choose to focus on local Real Estate offices.

**What are the professional organizations, clubs, or activities that my target market is involved with?** Are there networking opportunities available?

Are there ways that you can target your market by attending events? This does not just include in person events, this could also include, virtual networking groups, organizations and forums.

There are quite a few on-line meeting places for small businesses and home based businesses. Do a search on the Internet, and join a few. Keep in mind that, in most cases, small businesses and home based businesses will be your target.

Make yourself known by participating at the highest level, if there is a bulletin board post regularly, if there is an e-group do the same. Ensure that you always include your website and e-mail signature. If someone has a challenge, do your best to try to find them a solution, before long you will be know as the resident expert!

**What publications (newspapers, magazines) or websites does my market use?**

Are there advertising opportunities? Can I understand my market better by reading what they are reading?

Everyone has a publication or trade paper that they enjoy reading. It is up to you to do your research and figure out which of these your target would add to their library. Do your best guessing, check out demographics of publications and see who is included in that audience.

For example: If your target market is small businesses, check out small business publications. If your niche market is Professional Coaches, you will most likely find plenty of on-line newsletters and publications that Coaches will subscribe to.

Another way in which to find out what your target is reading is to simply ask them!

As well as using this as a target marketing tool, reap the benefits of these publications by subscribing to a few yourself. How better to understand your target market than to read what they are reading. You will not only be able to stay on top of what is current in their "world" but it will also provide you with the language that will add to your credibility.

## **Step Three: Research Your Competitive Market**

Who else out there provides the same or a similar service to you? If you do not know, then you should be doing your research to find out.

A “competitive market” are those individuals with whom you share a market, and with whom you are competing for clients. As a Virtual Assistant your main competitors will be other Virtual Assistants however you may also want to take in account temp and employment agencies. It may be hard to believe, but technology can also be a competitor.

### **Virtual Assistants**

The VA profession is growing in leaps and bounds, which is wonderful. I firmly believe there is enough work to go around for everyone and even more so when the public at large really catches on to the benefits of hiring a VA. However having said that, it is still important for you to know who your competition is, what your competition is offering, and how it compares to what you are offering.

This is even more important if you are targeting the same clientele or have similar niche markets.

Some questions to think about during your research:

- 1) How does your competition promote their business?
- 2) What services or incentives do they offer clients?
- 3) How do you differ from your competition?
- 4) What image do they project? And what can you learn from this?
- 5) What are their fees? And are they comparable to yours?

A great place to start with your research is simply doing a search on the Internet - check out some websites and visit a few organizations.

### **Temp Agencies**

Temporary Agencies are designed to provide business owners with admin support on an “as needed” basis. Being such, these admin assistants are often being hired at a much lower rate, than a Virtual Assistant. They are, for the most part, highly qualified individuals; however what is lacking is the relationship they have with the client. In most cases they are aware that these positions are temporary, therefore the desire to build trusting, long-term relationships with clients is not a necessity.

This is indeed a competitive advantage for Virtual Assistants.

## **On-line Outsourcing Sites**

There are more and more websites now that offer individuals the opportunity to post projects and receive bids from service providers. These sites such as elance.com have members who are graphic designers, web designers and even administrative professionals offering their services and bidding on projects at very competitive prices. Although great for the consumer who is looking for support on a project basis, not so great for us VAs who can possibly turn project based clients into long-term clients. Again, similar with temp agencies, it is the ongoing support and the VA/client relationship that is missing from here.

## **Technology**

It is hard to believe that something which has enabled us to work from home can be our competition as well. This is the case when we are dealing with technology.

Technology has allowed us the tools to efficiently and effectively work from home providing administrative services in a virtual environment. However as software technologies become more cost effective and simplified to use, so does the knowledge needed.

With the introduction of voice-to-text software, it allows you to talk to your computer and watch words appear in documents, e-mails, and even surf the web, enabling someone, your clients, with minimal typing experience to quickly create documents.

Bookkeeping software is becoming easier to use, and much quicker. Easy to understand tutorials makes learning applications much more effortless.

Integrated spelling and grammar checks make editing documents a breeze. And the list goes on.

Each year we are seeing an increase in the ease of use, availability and cost-effectiveness of software applications.

However, for all the benefits technology brings to our clients, it also has its downfalls.

As Virtual Assistants, we rarely freeze up, stall or need to be rebooted. Software applications, although easy to use lack the creativity needed for the final result. Software does not provide the emotional or personal interaction that our clients need. It definitely does not have the ability to brainstorm ideas, provide suggestions and encourage the client to move forward with their "next big idea". – Again your competitive advantage.

## **Developing a Niche Market**

Finding a niche market could be one of the most important things you do for your business. As a Virtual Assistant you will find that there are many specific professions that would benefit from hiring a VA.

Developing a niche market takes target marketing a step further. If your target market is small business or home-based businesses, you will be working harder and spending a lot of money promoting your business. Think of the rifle versus shotgun methods. Developing a niche market will ensure that you are targeting those individuals who CAN and NEED your services. Also by developing your niche market, you will be working with those individuals you WANT to work with.

A niche market is a defined group that includes the following characteristics:

1. They have the same specialized interests and needs
2. They have a need for your service
3. They can be easily reached within this group
4. The group is large enough to produce the volume of business you need.

The more narrowly you define your niche market, the easier it is to cater to those individuals.

### **Niches for Virtual Assistants**

As a relatively new profession, more and more Virtual Assistants are finding unique and different niche markets to work with:

- Real Estate Agents
- Lawyers
- Doctors
- Artists
- Professional Coaches
- Consultants
- Professional Speakers
- Dentists
- Web Designers
- And even other VAs

For further help on selecting a niche market, use the Niche Market Identification Worksheet on page 29.

## **Finding your own niche**

One way to find your niche is to evaluate your existing clientele. If you are finding that the majority of your clients are from a particular profession, you may have already found your niche.

However, if you are a new VA and have not yet developed your clientele, you could base your niche on the following:

- a particular profession you have worked for in the past
- the people who you want to work with
- the type of services that you offer
- how you provide these services
- your problem-solving ability

### **Is there a particular profession you have worked for in the past?**

Some Virtual Assistants have years of administrative experience working for a particular profession. Real Estate is one profession that is common among VA niches. Take a look at the individuals or professions that you have worked for in the past; could you assist that profession virtually?

### **The people who you want to work with**

Is there a particular type of person whom you enjoy working for or would like to work for? Some individuals do not necessarily make their niche a profession but a type of person. For some VAs they prefer more creative types such as artists, writers and actors/actresses. Other VAs prefer more extroverted individuals such as real estate agents, sales representatives and professional speakers.

### **The type of services you offer**

Do you have a service that would attract a certain niche market? For instance, real estate agents have many, many contacts that they try to juggle. A VA who is fluent with a number of contact databases and management software could be just what they need.

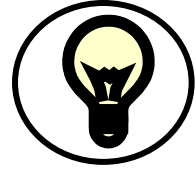
### **How you provide these services**

By offering services virtually, all VAs have developed this niche. However, a niche could be to offer on-site assistance once a month to locally-based clients.

### **Your problem solving ability**

Do you have an understanding of certain types of problems – is it viable to make that ability a niche? For example, a Virtual Assistant who works primarily with Associations has the ability and experience to deal with and solve problems that go along with association management. Another example is a VA who has worked in the Human Resources field, who would be able to support his/her clients with the problem of hiring skilled individuals.

## Tips on Finding Your Niche



### 1. **Brainstorm**

Look around you: opportunities may be closer than you think.

### 2. **Know yourself**

Realistically assess your strengths and weaknesses, both professionally and personally. Consider what you enjoy doing and those individuals who you like working for.

### 3. **Research**

Talk to other VAs and find out why they like a particular niche.

### 4. **Focus**

Focus on the goals for your company and what you hope to accomplish and how a niche may help with these goals.

### 5. **Prepare**

Play the “devil’s advocate” and anticipate questions from your prospective niche. How would you handle them?

### 6. **Educate Others**

Talk to everyone about your niche and be able to project your ideas. Look for feedback.

### 7. **Plan Ahead**

Anticipate challenges. If your preferred niche does not work, do you have a contingency plan?

### 8. **Evaluate**

Once decided and implemented, step back and assess your niche. Is it all that you thought it would be?



## Niche Market Identification Worksheet

Below is a list of possible niche markets, select the professions which interest you.

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Accountant              | <input type="checkbox"/> Financial Management |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Alternative Health Care | <input type="checkbox"/> Graphic Artist       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Associations            | <input type="checkbox"/> Health Care Industry |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Architect               | <input type="checkbox"/> Human Resources      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Artist                  | <input type="checkbox"/> Inventor             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Athlete                 | <input type="checkbox"/> Manager              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Attorney                | <input type="checkbox"/> Massage Therapist    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Author                  | <input type="checkbox"/> Oil Industry         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bookkeeper              | <input type="checkbox"/> Pastor               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Builder                 | <input type="checkbox"/> Physician            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> CEO                     | <input type="checkbox"/> Programmer           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Chiropractor            | <input type="checkbox"/> Project Manager      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Coach                   | <input type="checkbox"/> Real Estate          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Consultant              | <input type="checkbox"/> Sales Manager        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Corporation             | <input type="checkbox"/> Small Business Owner |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Craftsmen               | <input type="checkbox"/> Speaker              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Dentist                 | <input type="checkbox"/> Therapist            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Educator                | <input type="checkbox"/> Trainer              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Entertainment Industry  | <input type="checkbox"/> Virtual Assistants   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Entrepreneur            | <input type="checkbox"/> Web designer         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Executive               | <input type="checkbox"/> Writer               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Farmer                  |   |

From the list above choose your top 3 niche markets

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Which of your skills/experience past or present would benefit these niche markets?

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Why do you think they would need your services?

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What may be some challenges associated with this profession?

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**From your three selections, choose one niche market that you feel the most excited about.**

How can you target this niche market?

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Where would you find this niche market?

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What marketing strategies can you use for marketing your business to this niche market?

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## Customer Service

As a Virtual Assistant, providing great customer service is the most effective and least expensive way of marketing. The majority of your marketing time and budget should be spent on building solid relationships with clients.

You can spend thousands of dollars marketing your service but if you are not good at what you do, your clients will not come back. Worst of all, they will tell others that your services are not up to par. Word-of-mouth travels fast.

Even if you are a new VA starting your practice, you should still be thinking of the value that you will be bringing your potential clients. As a VA, at least 70%-90% of your business will be and should be from past clients and their referrals.

Some things to think about:

1. It is more expensive to get a new client than to keep an existing client.
2. You work more efficiently with existing clients since you are already familiar with their situations.
3. In order to produce superior customer service you must love what it is you are doing.

### Three L's of Superior Customer Service

**L**isten

Listen to your clients, make them feel heard. Superior customer service starts with listening to your clients' wants, needs, concerns and ideas. When you are distracted from conversations, clients will feel your disinterest and not feel looked after.

**L**earn

Even if you are unsure of something, your clients will appreciate the fact that you are taking the initiative to learn about their problem, their product, their service, or about what is important to them. It makes them feel that you are sincerely interested in what it is that they are doing.

**L**ove

Most of all love what you are doing. If you are not happy doing your job, it will reflect in your productivity, your personality and, above all else, the quality of your work.

## **Adding Client Value**

Having loyal clients can culminate in a high volume of repeat business for you over their lifetime. In order to receive that loyalty, you need to add value to the client/VA relationship. Providing value to the client can be as simple as answering the phone in a genuinely, warm and inviting way.

Given the nature in which a VAs work is primarily done, via phone and e-mail, it is important to add those personal touches to all aspects of your customer service; especially when it relates to the telephone.

Some items to consider are:

### **Answering the phone**

- When answering the phone sound glad that your client is calling you.
- Always be professional, however, clients will appreciate warmth in your voice. Try answering the phone like you know it is a friend.
- Develop an appropriate greeting, for example, “Mary Wilson, how can I help you?”

### **Returning Calls**

- When a client calls you, try to return the call within two hours.
- If your client is unreachable when you call back, try again and leave specific hours when you can be reached.
- E-mail your client as well and let them know that you received their message and are available to speak with them.

### **E-mail**

- Be concise and to the point. Your clients will appreciate a short direct e-mail.
- E-mail them updates on particular projects to keep them “in the loop”.
- Check your e-mail at least every 20 minutes in order to return urgent client enquires.
- Do not get too carried away with “emoticons” however a well placed smiley face ☺ periodically may lighten up the day for your client.

## Service and Value Added Assessment

Little things really do make a big difference. The smallest gestures made on your part can make your clients feel special and coming back for more. Deliver an “above and beyond the call of duty” service to all your clients. By doing this you will be adding value to the relationship and intensifying that customer loyalty.

**Step One:** check off all the items you are currently doing in your business.

**Step Two:** make a plan to implement the items you did not check off.

- I conduct weekly meetings with my clients in order to stay connected.
- During meetings, I am attentive and free of distractions.
- I have a process in place to ensure my clients are satisfied with my service.
- My work is always complete and error free before sending to my client.
- When I make a mistake, I learn from it and change whatever needs to be changed in order for it not to happen again.
- I have set my standards very high.
- I am honest communicating deadlines to clients and ensure those are met.
- I only offer services I do exceptionally well.
- If I am asked to provide a service for a client that I normally do not offer, I am honest about it.
- I often send my client resources, articles that I know they would find helpful. However am conscious of his/her time commitments and regulate the information I send.
- I promote my clients services/products whenever I can.
- For large projects I give my clients a discount (an hour or two on the final bill).
- When I am away from office, I always let my clients know, so they feel taken care of and informed.
- I provide opportunities for my clients to use me as a sounding board.
- I never over promise.
- For special occasions I always send my client a card or small gift.
- I offer a free hour a week for strategic planning sessions.

\*\* A note on value added, ensure that your client would appreciate items such as sending resources, tips etc. In some cases your client may not view this as a value added but a distraction. If unsure ask if they would like this as a complimentary service.

## **Chapter 2 - Summary**

How are you to market your business, if you are not sure who you are marketing to? By following the three steps listed in this chapter:

- 1) Identify your target market
- 2) Reach out to your target market
- 3) Research your competitive market

You will begin the foundation necessary for all of your marketing initiatives.

By taking target marketing a step further and identifying a niche market you will be able to market your services to a select group of individuals. Individuals who appreciate what you do, the services you provide and the way in which you deliver those services. This will enable you the opportunity to make money doing what you love by providing superior customer service.

## **Company Identity**

*"It is a pretty recognizable brand name.*

*Originally it was "Jerry's Guide to the World Wide Web" but we settled on "Yahoo."*

*- Jerry Yang*

Creating a company identity is an important part of every business; your company identity presents an image of how the rest of the world, including potential clients, will recognize you and your services.

This chapter will examine the importance of your company's identity and will explain how you can create and project an image that will help you sell your services.

### **Company Identity vs. Company Image**

Although very similar in meaning, company identity and company image are two separate things. Your company identity can be defined as the various characteristics by which you and your service are recognized and known. Therefore, your company image is how your business identity is perceived by customers, associated professionals, the media, and the public at large.

McDonalds, for example, is known for pioneering the fast food industry. Most consumers are familiar with the "golden arches." The production of hamburgers and soft drinks is one aspect of their identity. But how is McDonalds perceived? What image does it project?

There are many characteristics that go into creating your company identity: your service, logo, tag line, Vision, Mission, Core Value statements, advertisements, and website are obvious features that tell your potential customers who you are.

You may be thinking "If my service is good, that is all that counts."; not so. While it is essential to have a quality service, the reality is that in today's business world, image sells. You want to project yourself and your company as being reliable, professional and dependable.

For example: You have determined that your target audience is corporate HR consultants. You want to project an image that is professional, straight-laced and confident. Your website should not be plastered with little pink butterfly images and rainbows, the corporate world is not interested in how "pretty" your site looks. They want to see a very professional, direct and well written website that appeals to them.

## **Creating Your Identity**

There are three stages in creating your company's identity:

- 1) determine your company identity
- 2) design your company identity
- 3) communicate your company identity

### **Determine your Company Identity**

Start by asking yourself, "what do I want my customers to say and think about my service and company?" Answering this question will help you determine what kind of identity you want to establish.

When determining your identity, you must understand three important factors:

- a. **Type of Business and Service**  
If you are reading this book, you have already established that your business is that of a Virtual Assistant. The services you provide will be administrative services. Your image must make sense and match what you do.
- b. **Target Market**  
When developing your identity, a rule of thumb to follow is that your identity should match the identity of your clients and potential clients.
- c. **Your Competitors**  
You must also determine the image of your competitors. There are two thoughts on this issue: Some say your own business identity should come close to your competitors and others say that you should stand out from your competition. For the greatest impact, you will want an appropriate blend of the two. You will want to project the image of being reliable and dependable like your competition but you will need an image that gives you a competitive advantage, for example, being new and innovative.

### **Design your Company Identity**

In order to communicate the identity that is right for your business and your target market, you must design it. You will want to establish a consistent look and feel to all your materials. A good place to start is to create your Vision, Mission and Core Values for your company.



## **Mission, Vision and Core Values**

One of the most challenging aspects of creating your company identity is designing the core of your business...your Mission, Vision and Core Value statements.

They define the path your company will follow and act as a guiding principle by which your company functions.

One of the questions I am asked most, is how long do these statements need to be? You will find that all marketing professionals will have varying opinions on this; some suggest that mission statements should be a one liner, while others will say these statements should be at least 4 to 5 lines.

My belief is that you cannot put a line total to what could be one of the most important items in defining who you are, what you stand for, what you plan to achieve and how you intend on getting there. The length is less important than the power of the statements. The only requirement I instill on Vision/Mission and Core Value statements, is that you are passionate about what you are writing and are delighted with the end result.

### **The Vision Statement**

According to the Cambridge International Dictionary of English: "*vision: noun [U] the ability to imagine how a country, society, industry, etc. will develop in the future and to plan in a suitable way.*"

A vision statement can paint a picture that creates a sense of desire and builds commitment to reaching the vision. It is what you see possible. Your vision statement is about the impact you want to have on the world. Your VISION defines your long-term dream.

### ***Sample Vision Statements:***

"To be a leading entity to provide training, knowledge and consulting services all over the world in the fields of self development and human resources development for individuals and business societies."

#### **- the vision – to be a leading entity**

"By forging new standards in therapy and establishing new industry benchmarks that improve the health of Canadians, AstraZeneca Canada Inc. will be the pre-eminent pharma company."

#### **- the vision – be the pre-eminent pharma company**

## **The Mission Statement**

The Cambridge International Dictionary of English's definition follows: "*mission statement: noun [U] A mission statement is a short written description of the aims of a business, charity, government department or public organization.*"

A mission statement provides the action needed to your Vision Statement. Your MISSION is what you intend to accomplish. A well-written mission statement demonstrates that you understand your business, have defined your unique focus, and can articulate your objectives concisely to yourself and others.

### ***Sample Mission Statements:***

"To provide continued customer satisfaction by maintaining value driven and positive work attitude employees, and become the leading furniture maker, supplier in the market today".

- **Purpose** – to provide continued customer satisfaction
- **How** – by maintaining value driven and positive work attitudes
- **By doing the “how” I will achieve** – become the leading furniture maker

"To be a profitable provider of high quality software solutions and services that provide strategic value to our customers and create a company that can attract, recruit and retain smart and talented employees."

- **Purpose** – to be a profitable provider of high quality software...
- **How** - providing strategic value
- **By doing the “how” I will achieve** – to attract, recruit and retain smart talented employees.

## **The Core Values Statement**

Core Values are rather simple; they outline the ethics and values of the company, creating a pledge to its clients and the world at large. These statements demonstrate a company's commitment to success.

### ***Sample Core Values:***

#### **SEARS:**

- Customer-focused
- Results-oriented
- Partnerships/Teamwork
- Pro-active and innovative
- Risk-taking
- Open, honest communications
- Accountability
- Respected
- Diversity

#### **NEW YORK TIMES**

- Content of the highest quality and integrity - This is the basis for our reputation and the means by which we fulfill the public trust and our customers' expectations.
- Fair treatment of employees based on respect, accountability and standards of
- Creating long-term shareholder value through investment and constancy of purpose.
- Good corporate citizenship.

To help you begin the process of creating your statements use the Mission, Vision and Core Values Worksheet on the next page.

## Mission, Vision and Core Values Worksheet

### Creating your Vision Statement

To help clarify what direction you should take with your Vision statement imagine the future three to five years from now. Imagine that your business is everything you want it to be.

Now...

1. What does this picture look like?
2. What are you doing?
3. Who are you doing this for?
4. Who is in it?
5. What are people saying?

From this image write down key words that represent this scenario:

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Use these words in a few sentences to describe the vision for your company:

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**Now put it all together!**

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## **Creating Your Mission Statement**

When creating your Mission Statement, you are looking at the PURPOSE of your business, HOW you are going to accomplish your Purpose, and what the ultimate ACHIEVEMENT will be.

**Purpose:** What is the objective of your business?

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**How:** How are you going to do this?

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**Achievement:** Once you have defined the purpose and how you are going to do this, what will be the ultimate achievement? By doing the “How” what do you hope to achieve?

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**Now...put it all together!**

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## Creating Your Core Value Statements

Values are traits or qualities that are considered meaningful and represent someone's highest priorities and deeply held driving forces.

Value statements define how people want to behave with others within and outside their business.

Below is a list of values, check off five that represent you and your business.

- |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Accomplishment   | <input type="checkbox"/> Empathy        | <input type="checkbox"/> Loyalty        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Accountability   | <input type="checkbox"/> Empowerment    | <input type="checkbox"/> Mastery        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Accuracy         | <input type="checkbox"/> Enjoyment/fun  | <input type="checkbox"/> Optimism       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Ambition         | <input type="checkbox"/> Equality       | <input type="checkbox"/> Persistence    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Challenge        | <input type="checkbox"/> Excellence     | <input type="checkbox"/> Quality        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Collaboration    | <input type="checkbox"/> Flexibility    | <input type="checkbox"/> Respect        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Compassion       | <input type="checkbox"/> Friendliness   | <input type="checkbox"/> Responsibility |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Competency       | <input type="checkbox"/> Generosity     | <input type="checkbox"/> Security       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Courage          | <input type="checkbox"/> Honesty        | <input type="checkbox"/> Service        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Credibility      | <input type="checkbox"/> Improvement    | <input type="checkbox"/> Stewardship    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Dedication       | <input type="checkbox"/> Independence   | <input type="checkbox"/> Superior       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Dependability    | <input type="checkbox"/> Individuality  | <input type="checkbox"/> Support        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Dignity          | <input type="checkbox"/> Influence      | <input type="checkbox"/> Teamwork       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Discipline/order | <input type="checkbox"/> Innovativeness | <input type="checkbox"/> Wisdom         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Diversity        | <input type="checkbox"/> Integrity      |   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Efficiency       | <input type="checkbox"/> Learning       |   |

Now...use each word that you have chosen from the list above in a sentence that represents your business core values. One word per sentence!

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## Company Name

Choosing a company name is one of the most exciting parts of starting a business. It adds a sense of reality to the process. A clever business name can be an effective marketing tool, however, coming up with one can also be frustrating. Do not let the search for a perfect business name deter you from starting your business.

A successful business name must contain two components:

- 1) Descriptive
- 2) Distinctive

The descriptive component tells your clients what it is you do. You want to ensure that your market does not have to guess at what you do.

Secondly and just as important is the distinctive component. The distinctive component is what sets your company apart from everyone else in your industry.

A good business name accomplishes a number of goals:

- **It is direct.** You do not want anything in your business name that could potentially confuse a potential client about what it is you do.
- **It is not trendy.** Stay away from names that are too closely identified to current trends. Trends come and go.
- **It conveys the right feeling.** You want to choose a name that triggers a positive association.
- **It is easy to spell and pronounce.** Make it simple; a name which is easily spelled is easily remembered. People have a hard time remembering names they cannot pronounce.
- **It is memorable.** It is hard enough choosing a name not to mention one that is memorable. Of course this is not always possible.
- **It is pleasing to the ear.** Whether something is pleasing or not has a lot to do with your market.

Once you have a list of prospective names, share these with family, friends and colleagues.

### **OOPS!!**

Larger companies spend thousands of dollars researching potential names for products and services and sometimes they even fail.

General Motors introduced the Chevy Nova into Latin America and it was a total disaster. You see, in Spanish, “No va” means “doesn’t go”.

## **Company Logo**

When establishing your identity, there is nothing more critical than your logo. A logo is an image that is associated with your company and gives the public another way to remember you. Your logo appears on all of your correspondence, your business card, letterhead, flyers and advertisements. The purpose of a logo is to convey the essence of your company's identity.

Some individuals are auditory, some are visual; a visual image makes your company more memorable. People use more of their brains when they associate you with both words and image.

The word "logo" means a name, symbols or trademark designed for easy recognition. Logos date back to Greece in ancient times. Many early Greek and Roman coins bear the monograms or logos of rulers or towns. These ciphers consisted of a single letter, and later a design or mark consisting of two or more letters entwined.

In the thirteenth century, logo design evolved from simple ciphers to trademarks for traders and merchants. These early examples of logo design include mason marks, goldsmith marks and watermarks of nobility.

With the emergence of the information age, logo and logo design changed. Today the general public has become increasingly aware of visual symbols, especially trademarks. Logos have now become the front line of a company.

A good logo will convey something about your company, even a feeling. The Nike "swoosh" represents speed and movement. A logo does not have to be a drawing or illustration. Think of Coca Cola – the words themselves are an illustration. This is called a "logotype," and can be very effective.

When thinking of your logo design, consider these items:

- Make an effort to notice other company logos, especially within the VA profession.
- Graphics: Try to avoid using a lot of graphics. The simpler your design, the more impact it will have. Remember that the purpose of your logo is to quickly make a statement about your company.
- Typestyle: Bold blocks of text invoke the image that the company is strong and large. Italic type can convey a classic image. Whatever typestyle you choose, it needs to be easy to read.
- Tagline: The short and snappy sentence or words that appear underneath a logo is a tagline.



## Logo Colour

The colour of your logo is an important element. Bright colours will be strong attention getters and excite people; blues and grays have a conservative theme. To convey the image that you are hot and innovative, use red, yellow and orange.

Here are some common colour and shape associations:

Blue – reliable, intelligent, secure, business-like, leadership, depressing

Pink – feminine, calm, relaxing, therapeutic

Black – rich, sensuous

White – pure, clean

Red – danger, bargain, excitement, warm, intimate

Yellow – sun, outdoors

Brown – rich, earthy

Green – money, leisure

Orange – healthful, warm

Gray – security



Feminine, soft, weak, tender, loving, warm



Mysterious, exciting, powerful, forceful, danger



Solid, predictable, sure, brittle, hard, abrasive



Secure, pleasurable, experiences

A great example of a company that is consistent with colour is American Express. They use the same shade of the colour green throughout all of their marketing materials involving their credit card. The colour green is significant and an inseparable aspect of their logo.

**Tip:** If budget allows, we highly recommend that you hire a designer to create your logo. A designer will understand the differences between print and web use and will provide you with both. You want to maintain a professional company identity and a well designed logo will help you achieve this.

## Tagline

One of the key pieces of your company's identity is your tagline. A tagline is used to better explain what your business does and to create an impression about your company and/or service.

A tagline is one of the most important ways to market your business; it can become the basis of your advertising and marketing pieces. Tag lines do not have to be "catchy" but they should be memorable to your target audience. A general rule is the shorter the better. Most taglines are just a few words. It is not just how short you make it; it is about *how* you make it short.

Here is an easy method to help you create your tagline.

1. Try to express what your business does in one sentence or less. Trim it right down. This is not a mission statement; it is a plain statement of what you do. For example: If you provide administrative support to real estate agents, your sentence would be: Providing Administrative Support to Real Estate Agents.
2. List some of the benefits of your service.
3. Put the information from step one and two together and develop several taglines. Remember, your taglines should carry some feeling or emotion as well as convey the benefits of your service.
4. Try these out on your friends or family and pick the best tagline. Pick the one which most aligns with how you see your business.

Use your tagline on all of your materials in conjunction with your logo.

### Some well known taglines are:

**Epson:** "The power to create"

**De Beer's:** "Diamonds are forever"

**Timex:** "It takes a licking and keeps on ticking."

**Nike:** "Just do it!"

## **Branding**

A book about marketing would not be complete without a few words about branding. Branding is a name, term, design, symbol, feature or identity which distinguishes your service or services from others. Strong brands can deliver incredible customer loyalty and your service could become synonymous with price, quality or some other feature.

A brand is the combined set of impressions and expectations that a client has as a result of the interactions with the company, its products and services over time. Everything you say and do establishes your brand.

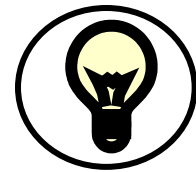
Branding is a concept that has received a lot of attention. Many firms have created brands that are well known, from Coca Cola to BMW. BMW is a premium brand of car which conveys the image of prestige and quality, however BMW would not be perceived like this if they did not continue to build high quality cars for which people are willing to pay more than other car “brands”.

Do you need to have a “brand”? Not necessarily, some individuals feel that branding is just a new word to give consultants something new to sell and that it is very similar to positioning. If branding appeals to you, use it; but make sure it is consistent with who you are and that it helps you build those very important client and prospective client relationships.

A good brand will contain three elements, or the three “C’s” as they are known as.

- 1) **Clarity:** Strong brands immediately tell you what they do and do not stand for.
- 2) **Consistency:** For a brand to be effective, the message surrounding it must be consistently delivered over time. They offer a consistent experience from beginning to end.
- 3) **Constancy:** Strong brands are constantly in front of their target audiences.

## Understanding branding – things you should know:



1. Your brand needs to be always represented.  
Every time a client or prospective client has contact with you, your brand should support a positive image.
2. Branding is a long-term commitment.  
In order for a brand to be effective, it must be in the minds of your clients for a very long time. Consider this when establishing your brand.
3. You can brand anything.  
Anything and everything you offer can be branded.
4. Knowing yourself is important.  
Understanding yourself and your company is important when determining your brand. What are the advantages and disadvantages associated with your brand? To help you with this, ask current clients, friends and family.
5. Your brand is always a work in progress.  
You will never be able to perfect your brand as your clients' needs and emotional responses will change – just grow with them.
6. Be consistent with your design and message.  
Everything from your company should have the same look, feel and message.
7. Your brand should be appropriate to your clients.

## **Communicate Your Company Identity**

Once you have first determined your company identity, then put in the work to create your company identity. Now it is time to communicate your company identity.

Your company identity includes:

- Business Name
- Logo
- Tagline
- Vision, Mission, Core Values

Other items to think about are:

- Company Colours
- Graphics other than logos

These may not be specific to your company identity however when communicating your identity consistency and repetition is key.

Your company identity must be integrated into all of your communication and marketing materials:

### **Communication Materials:**

- Letterhead (also a marketing material)
- Envelopes
- Fax cover sheets
- Invoices
- E-mail Signature (also a marketing material)

### **Marketing Materials:**

- Letterhead
- Business Cards
- Sales Letters
- Brochures
- Flyers
- Newsletters, etc.

All of these items should contain the image that you have established. Every bit of correspondence that allows you the opportunity to display your identity should be taken advantage of.

The marketing materials mentioned above will become part of your “marketing kit” which will be discussed in subsequent chapters.

## **Chapter 3 - Summary**

Creating your company identity is a critical step in the development of any business, especially a virtual business. You want your company identity to tell clients and prospective clients who you are, what you offer, what you value, and most of all, to project an identity that attracts those clients that are best suited for your business.

Although creating your company identity can be somewhat challenging at times, it can also serve as an outlet for your creativity and help you become clearer on what it is you want your business to be. Have fun and put as much of yourself into your business, after all you are selling your services, so in essence you are selling YOURSELF.

## **Your Marketing Kit**

***Things to know before you begin.***

*Start from wherever you are and with whatever you've got.*

**-Jim Rohn**

In Chapters Two and Three, we addressed items such as target market, company identity and communicating your identity. Now it is time we put it all together. The next few chapters will be devoted solely to the development of your Marketing Kit (*Marketing Kit is a term we will be using throughout this book to describe your marketing materials as a whole.*) However, before you can create your marketing kit, there are a few things you should know before you begin.

Step 1: You will need to understand a little more about what goes in a marketing kit.

Step 2: You will need to know how to write your message, in a way that sells.

## **Contents of a Virtual Assistant Marketing Kit**

### **Business Cards**

Business cards are a necessity for any marketing kit. You must ensure that you have professional, high-quality business cards that shout PROFESSIONALISM. It is important that your company name and logo be included on your business card to create a streamlined company identity. We highly recommend that you have your cards professionally printed – a networking must!

### **Letterhead**

Your logo should be incorporated on your letterhead and in all correspondence; again to create a streamlined look to your company and stay true to your company identity. The more your logo gets out there, the more it will be recognized.

### **Brochure**

Brochures are an effective way to get the message out about your business. Brochures offer you the opportunity to list your services, benefits, and other information important to your target. Brochures are great for direct mailings.

### **Flyer**

A flyer is a very cost-effective solution to marketing your services. A flyer is simply a one page summary of who you are, what you do, and what you are offering. Similar to the brochure, you can create this yourself. It is perfect for direct mailing or posting.

## **Advertisement**

One great way of marketing your practice is by advertising. However, this does come at a price: advertising is not cheap. If you have the creative ability to create your own ad, you are one step ahead of the game.

## **Sales Letter**

Sales letters are a way to communicate with prospective clients in a personal way, at their convenience. Whether by direct mail or e-mail, this is a cost-effective way to introduce yourself and your services.

## **Press Release**

Press Releases have never been easier to distribute than they are now. In the past press releases were reserved for editors, journalists and reporters. Now with fast and easy press release submission sites, press releases can be distributed to everyone looking for something newsworthy to present.

## **Monthly newsletter**

Whether you create an ezine (e-mail newsletter) or a hardcopy version with tips and interesting articles, this is a really great marketing piece for you and your business. By creating a newsletter, you are creating value for those who subscribe, not to mention getting your name out there.

## **Client Information Package**

A client information package is a vital marketing piece for a Virtual Assistant practice. This package incorporates all the information a client will need to make the decision to hire you.

It is entirely up to you what you want to include in your Company Marketing Kit: it is dependent on budget, time and skill. In subsequent chapters, we will look at each piece in greater detail and show you how to create the most effective marketing kit for your VA practice.

## **A Website**

This formidable marketing tool allows you to offer your services to clients world-wide. The majority of individuals who work virtually have a website: this is considered to be the best company brochure and one of the best marketing solutions for any business.

With a website, you can incorporate information about you, your company and your services, and communicate your company identity. It is imperative that you hire a professional and experienced web designer, unless of course you have the skills to design it yourself. Always keep in that you want your website to represent you in the best possible light: *there is nothing worse than a website that does not function properly and has no aesthetic value.*



## Writing Content That Sells

An important starting point when determining what to include in your marketing kit is to decide what it is you want to communicate. In earlier chapters we discussed things such as who you are and your niche. Now it is time to finalize this in written format. In order to create effective marketing materials you need to be clear yourself before you can communicate this to prospective clients.

Write down the answers to the following questions and make sure you have them in front of you before you try to write any of your marketing materials. This will be a constant reminder of who you are, who your clients are and the message you are trying to project.

1. Who is your target audience? (prospective clients)
2. What do you stand for? (good time to look at your mission statement)
3. What is your company identity?
4. What is different about you?
5. Why should people use your services? (list benefits)

When writing your content, tell your audience in the very first sentence why they should read any further. Get to the point of how they will benefit from what you have to say.

### Exercise: Fill in the blanks

|  |
|--|
| I am _____ because I am/do/provide _____ |
|--|

|  |
|--|
| My written material needs to project the image of _____<br>(company identity) to convince _____ (target audience) that my<br>services such as _____ would provide _____<br>(benefits) because _____ (why?) |
|--|

These statements not only provide you with the basis of your marketing content, they can also be further developed into your 30-second elevator speech which we will address in Chapter Twelve.

## **Guideline for Effective Writing**

**Show your personality.** Remember when someone is hiring your services they are hiring you. Make sure that your personality is reflected in all the material that you write. Prospective clients will get a feel for the type of individual you are through the words that you write. If you have a healthy sense of humor show this, if you are a caring, considerate person – do not hide it, flaunt it. By putting as much of yourself into your marketing materials as possible, you will attract those clients who relate well to your material, and could potentially be your ideal client. Use your unique personality traits to win clients.

**Only write when you feel like it.** Writing is an evolutionary process and cannot be forced. The words flow easier when you are in that creative mood. Do not write for the sake of writing, as you will find it will end up in frustration and dissatisfaction of the final outcome. Write when you have something to say.

**Where you write is as important as what you write.** Some people write better tucked away in seclusion with nothing but a pen and paper. Others enjoy all that technology has to offer, a personal computer with the latest word processing software. Wherever the place, make sure that it is the one place that you are free of interruptions, comfortable and that will allow those creative juices to flow.

**Write the words as if you were speaking them.** It is amazing how bold you can get when you are writing words. Some people have a tendency to exaggerate about their business, services and skills when it is down on paper. That face-to-face connection is not valid with written materials. When writing your marketing material, make sure that you are as comfortable speaking the words as you are writing them.

**Think of your audience.** When writing, keep your audience in your mind at all times. Your readers are busy people so do not overcrowd your materials with unnecessary fluff. Be direct with your intentions and offerings. Get right to the meat of your material – what it is that you can do for them. Remember busy people have better things to do than decipher your material.

**Bigger is not better.** Use short words, short sentences and short paragraphs. You do not need to use big complicated words to get your point across. Using large words does not make you look any smarter; it just makes the reader with the average I.Q. become irritable. Break up your paragraphs to be short and manageable; paragraphs that seem to go on and on, with no breaks, will make the reader lose interest quickly.

**Mistakes look bad.** Your material should be error free when viewed by prospective clients. One spelling error can cost you a potential client. VAs are in the business of professional document preparation; if it has a typo, what is that telling the reader? Make sure that all your material is edited and proofed not only by you but also by someone else. Two sets of eyes are better than one and could result in a new client.

## **Make Your Business Sound Irresistible**

Writing your marketing content can seem overwhelming; you want to start out by introducing yourself and your offerings. However, when writing your marketing text it is not just who you are and what you do that will grab the reader's attention; it is *how* you sound to the reader.

By using key descriptive words and phrases, you can make your business sound irresistible to the reader. Even if you are a new VA just starting your practice and do not have much experience, you can use descriptive words to take the spotlight off of being "new" and focus on other attributes, such as talented, qualified and accomplished. Rather than describing your business as new, you might say you are innovative. When creating your material, be truthful about who you are and what you do. Making false promises can lead to business ruin. It can be very easy to exaggerate your skills or knowledge in written format, be truthful in what you are communicating...simply provide an alternative way to say things.

Some phrases and words to consider:

1. For new VAs who are just starting out and do not have years of experience as a VA, try these words:

- Talented
- Qualified
- Mastery of...
- Talent for
- Flair for
- Skilled
- Well-versed in...
- Imaginative
- Capable
- Accomplished
- Competent
- Gifted

2. Do not say you are new in business, say this:

- Innovative
- Groundbreaking
- Bold
- Revolutionary
- A Fresh Approach
- Designed for today's...
- A novel approach
- Taking it to a new level

3. Being a new VA, you cannot say that your service appeals to many but you might say:

- Unforgettable
- Inviting
- One of kind
- Unique
- Memorable
- Pleasing
- Satisfying

4. Instead of older or established, try:

- Genuine
- True
- Original
- Actual

5. Even if your business is not big does not mean your scope of services or your commitment to customer service is not big. Try these suggestions:

- A host of
- Substantial
- Unlimited
- A multitude of
- Boundless

6. Being a Virtual Assistant you will obviously not have offices in every state but that does not make you any less convenient. To describe your availability, use these words:

- Fits your schedule
- Flexible
- Accessible
- Wherever you need it
- Whenever you need it
- Virtually anywhere

7. Instead of saying “better known”, try:

- Distinguished
- Respected
- Notable
- Accomplished
- Outstanding
- High Reputation
- More and more...are discovering
- Recommended
- In demand
- Flourishing

8. Instead of saying “long-standing” try these:

- Practical
- Reliable
- Dependable
- Valid
- Trusted
- High Standards
- Secure
- A leader in...
- Competitive
- Quality-oriented

When creating your marketing material, use descriptive phrases that will enhance your image, help build a solid reputation and set you apart from your competition.

Suggestions are:

- We are dedicated to
- Devoted to
- We believe in
- We value
- We provide excellence
- We offer the added advantage of
- You will benefit
- Providing competitive services
- Here is why....
- Our dedication to....
- We serve

*"The best marketing ploy I have always used is to find a catch phrase that people will start to remember me by. Accordingly I add the following sentence at the end of every introduction that I use "I can do anything an in-house assistant can do except make your morning coffee".*

*I tie this into everything:*

*My door prizes for speaking events are baskets of coffees and the such - my business card is attached with a note "I can do anything an in-house assistant can do except make your morning coffee so tomorrow the coffee is on me"*

*At Christmas I sent my clients Tim Horton's gift certificates with a note in their Christmas cards "By now you know that I truly can do anything an in-house assistant can do except make your morning coffee so tomorrow the coffee is on me".*

*I also remind people that the next time they are having their morning coffee to remember that this was the only thing I couldn't assist them with in a day and to keep an eye on those things that were slipping between the cracks and I could help with. Hopefully every time they are drinking their morning coffee they are thinking of this.*

*I have even had several people introduce me as the assistant that can do anything except make your morning coffee so it is working."*

Yvonne Weld,  
ABLE Virtual Assistant Services  
[www.ableva.com](http://www.ableva.com)

## **Chapter 4 – Summary**

As you move forward through the next chapters and start creating the individual pieces for your marketing kit, remember that the written content is just as important as the overall look of your materials. Be clear on the message that you want to get across.

There are always different and alternative ways of communicating your message, however be truthful and never exaggerate what it is you are offering. Do not focus on what you cannot offer rather, focus on what you can!

## **Your Marketing Kit - Part I**

### ***Brochures, Flyers, Letterhead and a Sales Letter***

*Life is trying things to see if they work.*

**-Ray Bradbury**

When creating your marketing kit, we suggest that you start with the most cost-effective and least time consuming items first. Above all else, enjoy yourself. Have fun with your creativity: experiment and be open to new things.

The first three items to consider for your marketing kit are three items that can be used in direct mailings to help promote your business: a brochure, flyer and sales letter.

Are these items effective in getting clients? Some individuals feel that these direct mailings are not as effective as advertising, other businesses that have used direct mailings are very happy with the end result. However, you will not know what works for YOU unless you try it.

Direct mailings will bring you a return rate of 1%, this does not seem like much. Think of it this way, if you send out 100 mailings and are hired by one client, this marketing method has paid for itself.

Before starting to create your brochure, flyer and sales letter, there are few items that you will need:

1. Desktop publishing software
2. Word processing software
3. Colour printer
4. Quality paper (preferably bond)
5. Envelopes
6. Stamps

As a Virtual Assistant you probably already have the software requirements for this project and, if not, you should be looking into it. Desktop publishing and word processing software are widely used for clients. A good colour printer is also a necessity - not only for your projects, but for your clients as well.

Bond paper is a higher quality, and more expensive, paper than your everyday printer paper and will provide a superior final product. You want to make sure that you use a higher gauge (thickness) paper for your brochure than you would for your sales letter.



Stamps and envelopes are a given for direct mailings. A #10 envelope will work fine for your mailings; if you want to be creative, try putting your logo on the envelope to give it more appeal. Stamps will be one of the more expensive items for this project but you cannot mail a letter without one.

For the highest success rate, more is better. If you can mail a minimum of 100 envelopes a month and increase this as your budget allows, your chances of someone who needs your service reading your material will increase as well.

## Brochures

Brochures are an easy, cost-effective way to market your company. For professions such as Virtual Assistants where our clients are not easily contacted in person or by phone, a brochure provides a printed piece of material to grab the reader's attention.

Many small businesses believe that they need to get their brochure professionally printed – not so. You can create your brochure by using any of a number of desktop publishing programs available. The most common desktop program is MS Publisher™. Programs such as MS Publisher™ make creating a brochure simple and offer many different templates to get you started. We recommend that you use these templates for the overall structure and then modify to suit your company identity.

The tri-fold style brochure is the most common style of brochure and the style that we will be focusing on. This brochure easily fits into a standard #10 envelope and can be easily distributed by mass mailing. Tri-fold style brochures are also great when attending tradeshow and networking events.

*Always make sure your content is proofread and there are no typographical or grammatical errors.*

There are three important steps when creating a brochure:

1. Creating the content
2. Creating the design
3. Printing the brochure

### Creating the Content

When creating the content for your brochure keep in mind you have six panels that need information. Selectively choose the content for each panel; we have made a few suggestions below:

#### Inside brochure – Panel 1

Include information on “What is a VA?” Be sure to include information on how VAs work.

#### Inside brochure – Panel 2

Include information about your company, how long you have been in business, what your company can provide and why they should hire you! You may want to considering adding a bio, qualifications and even including a picture of yourself.

|   |   |   |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 |
|---|---|---|

### **Inside brochure – Panel 3**

Include benefits to working with a VA, brief yet concise points on the benefits of hiring a VA. Let the reader know how they will benefit by hiring you.

### **Outside brochure – Panel 4**

This panel will be the “cover” of your brochure. You should always include your logo, company name and tagline to stay consistent with your company identity.

### **Outside brochure – Panel 5**

This is the “back” of your brochure. You should include a list of your services, along with your contact information or include your services on panel 6 and include only your logo and contact information on the back.

|   |   |   |
|---|---|---|
| 6 | 5 | 4 |
|---|---|---|

\*Your contact information should include the mailing address, telephone and fax numbers, e-mail and website addresses and cell phone (if applicable).

### **Outside brochure – Panel 6**

This panel is the first page that your reader will see when opening the brochure. You may wish to summarize the reasons why the reader needs assistance – a lead-in to the concept of working virtually or include your services!

Other content you may wish to include in the brochure:

- Discount on Services
- Testimonials
- Coupon
- References

## **Creating the Design**

When designing a brochure, keep in mind there are plenty of software programs available that have brochure templates included in them. These software programs are very easy to use and normally have “drag and drop” elements.

MS Publisher™ is an easy and effective program to use when creating your brochure and other marketing materials. If you do not already have MS Publisher™ installed on your computer, you can purchase it at your local retailer. It retails for approximately \$100.00-\$149.00 depending where you purchase it. This is a great program to have and will not only help you with your marketing materials but, as stated earlier, is a great service to provide to clients.

When designing your brochure, it is extremely important to maintain a consistent theme with the rest of your marketing materials. This directly establishes your company identity. Design elements to consider:

- Company Colours
- Logo
- Tagline
- Typeface (use the same style font)
- Use appropriate images (try not to use too many graphics; you want the focus to be on the content.)

**Design Tip:** Be very selective when using graphics or images. You do not want to overcrowd your brochure with inappropriate images. When considering images use more professionally geared graphics. Graphic suggestions: computers, clocks, a businessperson, diskette, telephone, calculator (bookkeeping), computer mouse, keyboard etc. Stay away from images such as animals, trees, insects, waterfalls etc. they are pretty to look at but have nothing to do with your services.

## Printing the Brochure

The visual appearance of your brochure is extremely important so you want to ensure that you use high quality paper that presents your design and content well. Using the heaviest weight paper that you can find will give it a solid look: you do not want your brochure to be on flimsy light paper. Experiment with different coloured paper to give it a fresh look.

Printing your brochure in MS Publisher™ on your home printer can be a little tricky and you may have to do quite a few tests before you get it right. While testing, use your normal printer paper, do not waste your quality paper until you are ready. Once you have printed the front side, you will need to quickly flip over and insert the page so the back half will print. Try to ensure you do not have paper in your printer's paper tray or you will find that the other side will begin printing before you have a chance to flip over and insert the first half of the brochure.

Depending on the type of printer and the number of colours you are using, you may have to change your printer cartridge often. Keep this in mind when designing your brochure. If you do not have the budget for replacing printer cartridges often, keep your colours to a minimum. Use just enough colour to stay consistent with your company identity.

**A few basic samples of Brochure designs can be found on page 193 – 196.**

## **Flyer**

Perhaps the least expensive form of written marketing material is a flyer. A flyer is simply a brochure...simplified. Flyers are great for direct mailings or to market your services locally. A flyer is usually a single sheet of paper that you can distribute to local businesses or even hang up in your local grocery store. You will even find that many companies will distribute your flyer to households for a small fee. Obviously you are not guaranteed that there will be a return on this. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, even if you are able to get one client from this, your investment is returned.

The objective of a flyer is to get the word out about you and your business. By targeting businesses in your area, you are introducing them to what you do and the services you provide. Even if this is the only thing that you achieve...it is a great start. Word travels fast!

### **Creating the Content**

You want to create content that is immediately going to entice the reader to read more. Use "hot words" that will grab the reader's attention: VIRTUAL is always an attention grabber so try to use that in your flyer.

#### ***Other hot words include:***

- Cost-effective
- Efficient
- Effective
- Innovative
- Cutting Edge
- Discount
- Solutions
- Grow your business
- Support Services
- Make More Money
- Freedom
- Save Time

## **Creating the Design**

Again, it is important that you are consistent with your company image: your logo, tagline and company name must be present on your flyer to create your company identity. Use the same colours and fonts that you have used for your other marketing material and again have fun when creating this piece. Use appropriate images: computers, telephone, diskette, and a business person, anything that will spark the reader's attention.

You can use either desktop publishing or word processing software to design your flyer. Either will provide the design elements for you to create an impressive flyer. When printing your flyer, try to use a variety of coloured paper. Bright colours such as pink, yellow and blue will stand out.

Because you are working with limited space, you need to use a very simple and direct message. For example, on your flyer use the entire top half of the flyer for a one or two word headline to get the reader's attention so when they stop to look more closely, they will read the smaller print.

### **Your flyer should include:**

- Your company name and logo
- Your tagline
- Company colours
- Contact Information
- What it is you do
- What you are offering
- What they will get from hiring you (benefits)
- A testimonial (if possible, not necessary)

**A few basic samples of Flyer designs can be found on page 197 and 198.**

## **Letterhead**

Your letterhead is the core of all your marketing material. For all correspondence you should be using your letterhead. If you used a graphic designer to create your logo, they will have provided you with the logo for your letterhead. If you have created your own logo, you can just insert it into a blank document.

It is extremely important that you stay consistent with your letterhead. Your sales letters and any other marketing correspondence should be sent on letterhead. Using letterhead gives you a professional look and when corresponding with potential clients, this is precisely the image you want to reflect.

Your letterhead should be created in a word processor and be saved for future use.

## **Letterhead Content**

It is imperative that your letterhead include correct contact information; this goes for all of your marketing material. If you move or change your number, make sure to update all of your material.

Your letterhead should include:

- Company Name
- Your Name
- Title
- Address
- Phone
- Fax
- Mobile (if applicable)
- E-mail
- Website

## Designing your Letterhead

To help you decide on the overall design of your letterhead ask yourself these questions:

1. Where will the logo go: top, left, bottom, right?
2. Do I want my information to appear vertically or horizontally? (i.e. across the top/bottom or down the side)
3. What quality of paper stock?
4. What colour of paper?
5. What colour of text?

By answering these questions you will have the foundation for your letterhead. Creating your letterhead is a simple project and should not take you very long. Again, you want to be consistent in your design and be happy with the end result.

If you are not comfortable designing your own letterhead and want to have this professionally created, there are a number of printers available to assist you. However, keep in mind that this service can be costly.

**Design Tip:** To ensure document stability, insert all design elements into the header and footer of your document. This will prevent images from shifting during transfer via e-mail and ensure that the images show up on all pages of your document.

**A few basic samples of Letterhead designs can be found on page 199 and 200.**



## **Sales Letter**

A sales letter is a way to introduce yourself and your services to prospective clients in a personal way. The wonderful thing about writing a sales letter is your ability to think about it, control it and edit it. The opposite happens when you are speaking to someone in person or by telephone; you do not have total control over the communication. When you put something in writing, the reader has time to study and understand the message you are trying to communicate.

Written communication allows for:

- Reviewing tangible, physical information
- Using images, diagrams and other visual aids that may be helpful in getting your message out
- Representing your position when you are not there
- Opening the door for further conversation
- Viewing samples of your work

Sales letters are a way to communicate with prospective clients at their convenience and yours. You want to approach your sales letter in the same manner that you would if you were writing a personal letter; you want to convey a real interest in the person to whom you are writing.

When creating your letter you need to decide how you will be delivering it. There are two ways in which to send:

1. Direct mail – An addressed envelope and stamp and it is on its way.
2. E-mail – They are cheaper and faster than direct mailings and you can write them any time of the day or night.

Either way is ideal, however with e-mail, you must be especially aware of issues such as SPAM (unwanted e-mails). SPAM laws are very serious and it is important that you get permission before sending any e-mail selling your services. More information on SPAM is located on page 127.

One suggested method is to simply ask someone if they would be interested in learning more about your services, then e-mailing them the sales letter, with an attached info package. Also include a way for visitors viewing your website to sign up for more information.

Whether you plan to send your sales letter via e-mail or direct mailing, we highly recommend that you use word processing software to draft your letter. Word processors have wonderful features to help you compose your letter such as letter templates, grammar and spelling checks and even a thesaurus to help you find that “perfect word”.

If sending an e-mail, just copy and paste your text into a blank e-mail and it is set to go; some basic formatting may be required to complete the look. When addressing your e-mail, use the person's name to give the e-mail that all important personal touch.

## **Creating the Content**

When composing your letter you want it to be as personal as possible. You want to be direct with your message and stay away from space fillers. Keep in mind that you are writing to introduce the reader to the benefits of using a Virtual Assistant and that YOU are the Virtual Assistant they should be hiring.

Items to consider when composing your sales letter:

- Include a personal greeting, that wishes them long continued business success
- Introduce yourself to the reader
- Let the reader know you understand their challenges (identify with them)
- Tell the reader how you can help them and the benefits they will receive
- Provide proof (testimonials, client references)
- Persuade the reader, offer a discount on services

There is an old saying around the concept of writing letters, say what you will say, say it, and then say what you said. This is not a bad approach: give people an overview of what is coming, then say it and then summarize what you have said.

One thing to remember is that we are talking about relationship-based marketing. We want to build relationships not only with existing clients but with prospective clients as well. The reader will want to feel as though you are talking specifically to him/her. Customize your letters for the individual. For instance, if the individual is a consultant, include something in your letter regarding their consulting business. This approach is much more time consuming, however it is much more effective.

### **Useful Key Phrases:**

- Are you having trouble ...
- This is why it is important to have ...
- At X, we have the skills and experience to ...
- Do you want to have more time to spend doing the things you love?
- Do you want to start running your business instead of it running you?

## Designing your Sales Letter

Being a Virtual Assistant - the administrative professional that you are, designing a sales letter will be a piece of cake. Remember: for consistency, use your letterhead with logo, company name and contact information.

There are two common styles of letters: a block letter and a modified block letter.

**A block letter** is the most widely used form for business letters and the easiest to prepare. You simply line up everything at the left margin, and type it single spaced with a double space between paragraphs. Do not indent.

The date line is typed two to six spaces below your letterhead and the address is below the date. The salutation is typed below the address and the letter will start two lines below the salutation. Very simple!

**A modified block letter** follows all the same rules as the block style except for a few modifications. The date is right aligned as opposed to the left and if you wish, you can right align the closing as well.

When deciding on the style of font to use, make sure it is easy to read and matches with your letterhead. Times New Roman and Arial fonts are the easiest of all fonts to read. Try to stay away from coloured text when designing your letter, it can be very distracting and not very professional looking.

Make the design of your letter aesthetically pleasing but simple – stay away from graphics other than your logo.

**A basic sample of a Sales Letter design can be found on page 201.**

## **E-mail Letters**

With the variety of e-mail software and Internet Providers out there, it is imperative to keep your e-mail letter simple. You do not want complications with downloading graphics and file size interfering with your marketing efforts.

We recommend that you do not use attachments when sending your e-mail letter. People become very nervous opening attachments from people that they do not know. With so many unknown viruses, there is becoming an increasing apprehension surrounding attachments.

Copy and paste your letter into the body of an e-mail; use HTML or plain text. With HTML you can customize the look a bit by adding a little colour to your headings or even using a background image or colour.

If you do not have the time to personally address each e-mail and plan to send out a large quantity, make sure to use a distribution list or the BCC column (Blind Carbon Copy) to hide the e-mail addresses and protect the privacy of your recipients.

**Please remember:** As we mentioned earlier if sending any information by e-mail, you must ensure that the recipient is interested in receiving this information; otherwise it could be considered SPAM. You may also want to research opt-in e-mail services, where you can purchase the usage of opt-in or permission based e-mail lists, and have your letter sent for you. It is extremely IMPORTANT that you research these companies thoroughly and make sure they abide by the CAN-SPAM Act. These companies should also provide an information intake session, where they will assess your target market and the best individuals to send your information to. For more information on SPAM review page 127.

## Sample Sales Letter Content

*For the completed design view the sample on page 201*

Friday January 24, 2003

Jonathon Smith  
123 XYZ Street  
Toronto, Ontario  
M2K 4Y5

Dear Mr. Smith,

We hope your business is flourishing and you are achieving business success. We would like to take a moment of your time to acquaint you with our organization and the services we provide.

Virtually Anytime is the one-stop source for virtual assistance. We offer a wide range of services:

- Bookkeeping, Client Invoicing, Accounts Receivable, Accounts Payable
- Desktop Publishing
- Document Preparation
- And all around general administrative support

As a principal in a growing company, you are taking care of all aspects of your business: client billing to accounting to scheduling and finally marketing. What percentage of your time are you actually actively growing your business? Wouldn't you like to spend more of your time doing the work you love?

We understand the challenges you are facing and have the answers you are looking for. We have a staff of fully qualified professionals to meet all your administrative needs.

*"Virtually Anytime have been a delight to work with: they are professional, reliable and wonderfully supportive.-Susan Liptchitz*

Contact us for a free personalized consultation with one of our client representatives to discuss how we can assist you in growing your practice!

We look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Smith  
President  
Virtually Anytime

PS: As a gift to you, here is a certificate for 2 free hours towards any project!

## **Chapter 5 – Summary**

As you begin to develop the material for your marketing kit, remember to include as much of you into your material as possible; let your personality shine through all your materials. Be consistent with design in order to preserve your company identity.

If using e-mail to distribute your materials, be aware of what you can and cannot do. SPAM laws are taken very seriously and if you send an unwanted e-mail to the wrong person or company you can be fined. For more information on SPAM review page 127.

Brochures, letterhead, flyers and sales letters are just the tip of the iceberg. There are so many ways for you to get your message out to your target audience. We will continue to work on these in the next chapters.

## **Your Marketing Kit - Part II**

### ***Business Cards, Advertisements, Press Release, Newsletter***

*A creative mind is like a parachute - it only works when it's open.*

***-Merrill J. Oster***

The next items to consider for your marketing kit are business cards, advertisements, a press release and a newsletter. These are not in any particular order, meaning if you want to start with creating a business card as your first piece of marketing material for your marketing kit, by all means do so.

You can create all of these items yourself for half the price of having them produced for you. However, we would recommend that, if budget allows, at least have your business cards produced professionally.

If you decide to create your own business card, you will need a few items:

1. desktop publishing software
2. business card stock
3. colour printer

When creating your press release or a newsletter, a word processor will be sufficient. As for your advertisement, read on.

All of these items are distributed differently as opposed to Chapter Five where most of the items can be used for direct mailing. Each item in this chapter may be circulated either by hand, print, e-mail or on-line.

## **Business Cards**

Your business card will be the smallest piece of written material included in your marketing kit, yet it is one of the most important pieces. Your card conveys your identity.

Business cards are available in a number of styles to choose from, from the very boring to the more artistic. You may be surprised at the variety to choose from, more than you probably ever considered.

If you visit a printer you will find the selection overwhelming, and we do recommend that you have your cards professionally done. The cost is not as expensive as you may think. On average, you will be required to pay around \$100.00 for 500 high quality business cards; 500 business cards will last you a very long time, unless of course, you intend to send a business card along with any of your direct mailings. In this case, you may want to order more. There are also quite a few on-line self-serve design studios, who will print your cards and ship them to you at a reasonable cost.

If your budget does not allow for your business cards to be done by a professional printer, we highly recommend using a desktop publishing program such as MS Publisher™. As with brochure creation, MS Publisher™ provides a variety of templates for you to choose from and you can modify them as desired.

### **Creating the Content**

As with all your marketing materials, make sure you include your company name, logo, tagline and all contact information:

- logo
- tagline
- company name
- your name
- title
- address
- phone
- fax
- mobile (if applicable)
- e-mail
- website

Other content that may appeal to you:

- Print your services on the back of your card.
- You can include an inspirational quote or message on the back of your card.
- Include a discount on services.



## Creating the Design

The possibilities for creativity are endless, experiment with designs and choose the one that best fits your company identity. Your printer will be able to help you with the selection process. If you decide to design your own cards, ask yourself these questions:

1. Where will the logo go: top left bottom right?
2. Do I want my card to be vertical or horizontal?
3. What quality of paper stock?
4. What colour of paper?
5. Do I want a photo or image?
6. What colour of text?

Other design options that you may want to consider:

- Use a folded business card
- Have your card printed on coloured background stock
- Ask your printer for raised lettering

**Design Tip:** Although vertical business cards are unique, try to stay with a horizontal design. It will fit better in most business card storage systems. As well, choose an ink colour that will photocopy or fax well.

## Business Card Checklist

**Use the checklist below to help plan the content and design of your card.**

- Presents an upbeat, interesting and professional image.
- Features an attention grabbing and professionally designed logo that is unique to your business
- The typeface and text size is easy to read
- No more than two typefaces are used in the design
- Good use of color to present the image of your business
- Color design is consistent with other marketing materials
- Phone, e-mail and website address are featured
- Back of card is used for additional information such as services, etc.
- You act upon every opportunity to present your business card

## **Printing your business cards**

Depending on your budget hiring a professional printer to print your business cards may not be an option; therefore you may want to consider doing them yourself or opt to use an on-line printing company.

### **At home:**

If you have decided to create your own business cards, make sure to check the printing options in your desktop publishing software. Normally these software programs will give you the stock number that you will need in order to print effortlessly.

You will most likely end up paying approximately \$20.00 for the business card stock at your local business supply center. There will be a large selection so if you can, purchase a couple of favourites and try them.

Keep in mind that if you are using an ink jet colour printer, you may find that your text may bleed a bit; it may not have that crisp look that a professional printer can provide you.

### **On-line:**

There are a variety of on-line printers that allow you to design your card on-line. When you are finished, you can then submit to be printed with your specifications and have your business cards delivered to your door. These on-line printing companies are becoming more and more popular due to the ease of use and convenience of being accessible 24 hours. You have the choice of creating your own templates or choosing a ready made template. The cost is extremely reasonable and comparable to a local office supply store.

A great on-line printing company is [www.vistaprint.ca](http://www.vistaprint.ca). They have a variety of different templates you can use and it is extremely easy to create your business card. Prices at vistaprint.ca are also very reasonable and depending on your style and stock preference you can purchase around 250 cards for \$30.00.

**A few basic samples of Business Cards can be found on page 202 and 203**

## Advertisements

If you are advertising your services in the newspapers, Yellow Pages or any other print media, you are buying space. Normally your ads will be designed for you by the advertising publication. However, if you know what you want and can design your own ad, you are more likely to attract your ideal client. If you have decided on print advertising, have an ad already created that you can show the ad designer at the publication – it will make the experience easier for you and the designer.

Remember to include your logo, business name and tagline for consistency.

### Creating the Content

Unlike your flyer and brochure, you have limited space when creating an advertisement. Your ad is not effective if it does not grab the attention of the reader. You want to make sure that, regardless of the size of your ad, you include a standout headline.

When you are creating an ad, the headline is the most important element. It must entice the reader to read the ad. Most of the time, people will glance through ads only stopping to read the ones whose headlines captivate their interest.

When writing the content for your ad you need to speak to people's interests or needs. Headlines should convey the benefits of your service, rather than highlight you.

Hot words to use in your headline include:

|             |                |              |
|-------------|----------------|--------------|
| • new       | • avoid        | • announcing |
| • now       | • at last      | • 100%       |
| • free      | • finally      | • unique     |
| • amazing   | • breakthrough | • save       |
| • guarantee | • stop         | • discount   |

It is much easier to create your ad if you have some sort of model to start from. This requires you to do research. Buy a copy of the publication you plan to advertise in and review all the ads that are in the publication. Find at least five ads that grabbed your interest. Pay close attention to the words in the ad that you found attracted you to the ad.

There are so many different ways you can approach headlines:

- Direct - tell the reader what you offer right away
- Indirect - trigger curiosity
- Demand - tell the reader to act now
- Testimonial - share benefits experienced by others
- Reason - list the reasons why they should read further

## **Designing your advertisement**

Depending on your budget and the advertising rate of the publication, your ad may measure 2X2, 3X3, 4X5, 5X5, etc. Contact the publication to confirm the dimensions of the ad. You will also need to ask about the submission format; some publications require your ad to be in an image format such as .jpg, .gif or .tif files.

You can create these image files by using a variety of software programs available such as MS Publisher™, PaintShop Pro, Adobe™ Illustrator, Adobe™ PhotoShop, etc. Keep in mind that some of these programs can be costly and in some cases, without training, may be difficult to use. Remember what you do for yourself, you can do for potential clients.

Whatever the size of your ad, you want to ensure that your headline stands out. For larger ads your headline should take up at least one-quarter to one-half of your ad. For smaller ads, use a larger font and differentiate by making it bold.

Do not try to cram in a lot of information, it will be difficult to read and not very pleasing to the eye. Again, MS Publisher™ offers ad templates that can help you get started.

As a low cost alternative to purchasing a new program, print out a high resolution paper copy of your ad, scan it into your computer and save it as a jpg, or tif file!

**A basic sample of advertisements can be found on page 204**

## Press Release

A press release is the main tool used to generate publicity, and is a great way to announce the launch of your practice. A press release summarizes important points of your story that may be of interest to the press. The objective of a press release is to receive coverage in the media. However the new approach to press releases is not merely to get media attention but to also attract clients. These clients may come across your press release on-line and within the text be directed to your website.

When writing a press release, keep in mind not only the reporters, journalists, media that you may be targeting but also the individuals who will use your services. The Internet now makes it possible for you to distribute your press release all over the world. You can do this by posting your press release to your website or for even more exposure, distributing by way of on-line press release distribution services. If someone is using a search engine to find specific information and depending on if your press release contains those specific keywords, they may come across it during their search.

By creating an effective press release and submitting it to a variety of sources, you may find this will lead to newspaper, magazine and even some media features such as radio or television and possibly even a new client. There is never any guarantee that your press release will be picked up, but if it is, it could turn out to be a once in a lifetime opportunity for you.

## Creating the Content

In order to write a good press release, there are some common features that you will want to include:

1. **Contact information** - it sounds simple enough but make sure that it is featured at the top of your release.
2. **Immediate Release** - at the top of your release include instructions for when the news can be released to the news. Most often you will want to simply notify the media that the news is "For Immediate Release."
3. **Headline** - make sure to include a headline in capital letters. Your headline should include a verb. This makes the headline appear "active."
4. **Dateline** - the very first sentence in your press release should include the date the release was sent, and the city/state or province where the release originated.
5. **5 W's plus how** - who, what, where, when, why and how must be used.
6. **Use one or more quotes** - present meaningful comments.
7. **Three pages or less** - ideally one page is preferred, however if your release runs over, do not print on both sides.

Some topics for your press release include:

- Launching of your practice
- New services you are offering
- Major clients you have obtained
- A new certification you have earned
- A seminar you are giving
- Anniversary of your company
- Client success stories
- Awards you were given
- Memberships into associations

### **Designing your Press Release**

All you need is a word processor and you are ready to go. Make sure your press release is on 8 ½ x 11 inch white paper. Use 1½ inch margins and if possible use 1½ inch spacing.

### **Sending Your Press Release**

There are three main ways to distribute your press release:

1. Distribute it yourself - mail, e-mail or fax your press release to media outlets.
2. Use a press release submission service - an electronic service that distributes press releases to the media
3. Hire a PR professional - can distribute your press release for you.

#### **1. Distributing it yourself**

The most cost-effective method of sending your press release is to distribute it yourself. Although the most cost-effective method, it may have the least impact.

If you choose this method start by researching publications you want to target. Consider starting locally as a test and if you are happy with the results, start sending your press release to other publications that you feel would be suitable. Contact the editor of your local paper and introduce yourself and tell them about your business. As a Virtual Assistant, many local papers will be interested in the way in which you do work...virtually.

As well, the Internet is a fountain of information, just do a search on business magazines, business publications, small business magazines, etc., and you will find the contact information readily available.

Once you have found the publications you wish to target, consider e-mailing your press release or faxing your information directly to them. Faxing and e-mailing will get the information to them more quickly than mailing.

If you do not hear back within a few weeks, follow up to see if they received your information and if they have any questions that you could answer.

## **2. Submit to press release submission sites.**

There are a variety of companies who will submit your press release to the media on your behalf. They range in price from very expensive to free. Larger companies who have the budget will use companies such as PRNewswire or Businesswire. These two press release companies offer the widest range of services and target the widest distribution area. Being the case, they are also the most expensive press release submission service available and could cost you several hundred dollars for one press release.

Another well known press release submission company is PRWeb, which caters to more medium and small businesses. Depending on the package you choose you could be looking at fees from \$80.00- upwards of \$250.00.

And lastly if none of these are within budget, you can use a free press release distribution services such as free-press-release.com, prfree.com. However keep in mind you get what you pay for. In some cases these free distribution services are not distribution services at all but simply parking lots for press releases waiting for search engines to find them.

### **Press release submission sites:**

<http://www.prweb.com>  
<http://express-press-release.com>  
<http://www.free-news-release.com>  
<http://www.1888pressrelease.com>  
<http://www.press411.com>  
<http://www.press-base.com>  
<http://www.press-world.com>  
<http://www.prleap.com>

## **3. Hire a PR professional**

Probably the most costly of all the ways to submit press releases would be to hire a PR professional. These individuals are highly skilled in the world of public relations but their service comes at a price. If interested in hiring a PR professional, do on-line searches for PR Services or visit the Canadian Public Relations Society (CPRS) [www.cprstoronto.com](http://www.cprstoronto.com).

**A basic sample of a VA Press Release can be found on page 205**

## **Newsletter**

Creating a newsletter is a great way to get the word out about what you do. Newsletters are casual, friend-to-friend communications that deliver useful information to your recipients and build relationships.

By creating a newsletter you will be:

- Building credibility and reputation
- Having frequent communication
- Providing useful tips that build client confidence and loyalty
- Delivering news about your business
- Sharing success stories
- Providing industry information

Be prepared that newsletters only work when they are distributed consistently. Writing a newsletter is a commitment to your readers which means you will be writing your newsletter for a very long time.

One of the first things to consider is how often you plan to distribute your newsletter, weekly, bi-weekly, monthly, quarterly, etc. We suggest that you start with a monthly newsletter; this gives you plenty of time to prepare each newsletter, without getting overwhelmed.

### **Creating the Content**

In order to begin creating the content you must ask yourself what is the purpose of your newsletter. Is it to communicate with clients, enhance your reputation, or to share tips on productivity?

Whatever the reason you need to be clear before you can offer it to readers.

Your newsletter will need to contain valuable information for the recipient, not just promotional information about your services.

Some tips to keep your readers...reading:

- Keep your stories short
- Show your personality
- Always include your contact information
- Include a brief table of contents
- Newsletter title, date and edition for easy filing
- Funny anecdotes to lighten up the newsletter
- Invite reader responses



## **Designing Your Newsletter**

As well as being the cheapest to send, an e-mail newsletter is also the easiest to design. Preferred by most Virtual Assistants, e-newsletters are easy to format and distribute to readers.

You have two format choices when sending an e-newsletter:

1. Plain text - Simple, but not aesthetically pleasing
2. HTML - Offers more creativity

If you choose to use plain text, you can create your newsletter in a word processor and then copy and paste into a blank e-mail. Add some minor formatting and your newsletter is ready to be sent.

For a more creative newsletter, we suggest you use an HTML-based newsletter. These HTML newsletters can be created by using your e-mail program and having the mail format set to HTML or you can use a web developing program such as MS FrontPage™ to create a professional looking newsletter. On-line companies such as Constant Contact ([constantcontact.com](http://constantcontact.com)) and Vertical Response ([verticalresponse.com](http://verticalresponse.com)) offer newsletter tools from creating the newsletter, building subscribers and distribution. They offer easy to use templates that you can use to create an attractive newsletter at a cost of approximately \$15.00 US a month. The wonderful thing about a service such as this is they will also offer list management, such as automatic unsubscribe and subscribes, and manage the bounce back messages.

## **Hard copy newsletters**

Some individuals prefer a paper-copy; by far, however, this is the most time consuming and expensive way to produce a newsletter.

Again when designing a hard copy newsletter, do not try to create one from scratch – use templates available in a desk top publishing program. There are a variety of styles and themes to choose from and will allow for modification to suit individual needs.

## **Distributing your newsletter**

Building a newsletter subscription list will take time, in fact it may even take years to build your subscriber base to 100-200 people, but it will happen.

Make it easy for people to subscribe to your newsletter.

- Add a link to your website and have available information about what your newsletter is all about.
- Find e-newsletter directories on the Internet, where you can list your newsletter for free.
- Sign up friends and family, they would appreciate hearing from you.
- Ask existing subscribers to forward onto friends who may be interested.

## **Chapter 6- Summary**

Both business cards and advertisements are considered common elements when marketing, however, not everyone starting a VA practice is aware of the marketing potential of press releases and newsletters.

When creating your marketing kit, remember that it is solely up to you what you want to include in your kit. The items you include will be directly affected by time, money and your interest.

## **Marketing Kit - Part III**

### ***Client Information Package***

*Forget everything except what you're going to do now, and do it.*  
**-Will Durant**

Your client information package will be one of the most important pieces of your marketing kit. How you represent yourself and your ability to produce top-quality services will directly affect whether or not your business will be successful.

A client information package incorporates all the information a prospective client would need to know about you before they hire you. All packaged neatly and conveniently for the prospective client, a well-designed package will include an introduction letter, company profile or biography, services offered, fee schedule and more.

You will be able to create your client information package using a word processing program but there will be other items you will need:

- Your letterhead
- Adobe Acrobat™ or a PDF generator (for e-version)
- Quality paper and portfolio (for hard-copy version)
- Colour printer
- 10x13 mailing envelopes (for hard-copy version)
- Stamps (for hard-copy version)

It is not necessary for you to have an electronic (e-version) and a hard-copy version of your client package. If cost allows, we suggest that you try to have both available. You may have a prospect that would prefer to receive your information via standard mail.

If you are a new VA or even an established VA, it is very important that the materials you give your clients represent yourself in the best possible way. By providing your prospective clients with professional, attractive documents with intelligent and flowing text, you are already showing the prospective client what you are able to do.

#### **Reasons to use a Client Information Package:**

##### **1. Marketing tool**

We have already established this is a unique and vital piece for any VAs marketing kit. The reason is that your client information package has the same effect as word-of-mouth. If you pass on your information to a prospective client and they like what you have done, they will pass it on and the next person will pass it on, and so on and so on. You get the idea.

## **2. Establishes identity**

By having a client package, you are establishing your company identity and helping it get noticed. By placing your information package on your company letterhead, it adds credibility to you and your company.

## **3. Offers something tangible**

By having an e-copy or hard-copy version of your client information package it offers the clients something tangible. When working in a virtual environment, it is nice to have materials that a client can print out and look at or be sent via standard mail.

## **4. Gives clients an Idea of your skills and personality**

Believe it or not, your prospective clients will learn a lot about you and your skills by viewing your information package. You will want to put as much of you in the package as possible.

## **Creating the Content**

There is no right or wrong to creating the content for your client information package. You can include the information that you deem important to your business.

Here is a guideline to help you get started.

Your client information package may include the following:

### **1. Letter of Introduction**

- Initial piece of the information package
- Introduces you and your services to the potential client

### **2. Services Offered**

- Includes all the services you are offering

### **3. Fee Schedule**

- Covers your rate, payment options, etc.

### **4. History of the Organization/Your Biography**

- Includes information about you, your experience, skills, etc.

### **5. Testimonials/Reasons to Use a VA**

- Testimonials from past employers or benefits of using a VA for general interest.

### **6. Client Questionnaire**

- This piece will assess your prospective client's needs.

## **Letter of Introduction**

The letter of introduction offers a personal greeting to the client, it allows for the personal touch. This letter will give you the opportunity to thank the prospective client for his/her interest in you and your services.

Your letter of introduction should include:

- 1. The name and address of the prospective client**  
If possible, always address your introduction letter to the prospective client by using their full name. Some clients may contact you via e-mail – in this case you may not have their mailing address but you should have their name. Use it in your introduction letter to achieve a personal touch.
- 2. Start with a friendly greeting**  
Do not be too informal here – “Hello” or “Dear” are always appropriate.
- 3. Provide an introduction to the issue of why they may need your services.**  
Ask yourself why clients are contacting you, why is it that they need your services, what you can provide them and touch on this in your letter.
- 4. Explain why a VA is the answer for them.**  
Use “hot words”: efficient, effective, no payroll, no taxes, no space, self-starter, highly-skilled, dependable, and committed.
- 5. Explain why YOU would make the perfect VA for them.**  
Draw on your past work experiences, your unique abilities, personality traits.
- 6. Ask them to complete your Client Questionnaire.**  
It is important that they complete this form; explain to them in your letter that it will help facilitate the relationship, give a deeper understanding to their needs.
- 7. Close with a positive note for follow-up.**  
I look forward to working with you, if you have any questions please feel free to contact me.

## Sample Letter of Introduction

Mr. John Smith  
At- Home Consultants  
123 Villages Way  
Ville, ON J0J 0J0

Dear Mr. Smith:

Thank you for contacting VAs R US for more information on our services.

Running a small business can be a challenge and often paperwork becomes a chore. You are trying to build a business – who has time for paperwork?

You probably do not have space for a desk and certainly cannot afford to hire a full time assistant: - that is where Virtual Assistants comes in. We work from our offices and provide all the support you need to clear the paperwork off your desk.

Having worked as a personal secretary for a number of vice presidents at Canada's Fortune 500 companies, my experience is invaluable. Consider me YOUR personal secretary – but also a partner: we will work together to build your business while providing you with more freedom.

Please take a moment to complete the Client Questionnaire, the last page of this document. It will help me to understand where I can help you!

Please do not hesitate to call me if you have any questions.

Sincerely,



Sue Sams  
President

## **Company Profile/Biography**

By including background information about you and your company, you are providing necessary information regarding your skills, work history and accomplishments to the prospective client. Be honest about your credentials, skills and accomplishments; do not over-exaggerate anything.

It may contain but not limited to:

### **1. Your Vision Statement**

Example:

***VAs R US** is Canada's pre-eminent provider of virtual assistance, dedicated to excellence in administrative services.*

### **2. Your Mission Statement**

Example:

***VAs R US** provides total customer satisfaction through reliable, efficient and cost-effective services.*

### **3. Your Core Values**

Example:

*At **VAs R US**, we will be:*

- *accountable and efficient*
- *proactive and progressive*
- *respectful*
- *customer-focused*

### **4. Your competitive advantage**

Example:

***VAs R US** professionals have more than 25 years of experience providing administrative solutions to businesses in the GTA.*

Writing a company profile or biography seems simple, but most people find it difficult writing about our own successes. To help organize your information, use the questions below as a starting point.

1. How long have you been in business?
2. Why have you started the business?
3. What special skills do you possess?
4. List your major accomplishments.
5. Why are you the perfect VA?

## Sample Company Profile/Biography

### *About VAs R US*

I started VAs R US in 2000, after many years in the corporate world, providing secretarial support to the vice-presidents of some of the top Fortune 500 companies in Canada. When downsizing affected one company, I was asked to continue to provide support to the ex-vice presidents/entrepreneurs from my home office – a perfect solution for a bad situation.

Working in the corporate world provided me with training and experience in the latest applications of Microsoft Office; Word, Excel, and PowerPoint are my specialties. I am strategically driven and love to partner with my clients to help them grow their business.

Professionalism and accuracy are my credo. I am a perfectionist at heart and take great pride in my work and, therefore, in yours. Who could ask for anything more?

VAs R US provides total customer satisfaction through reliable, efficient and cost-efficient services.



## Services Offered

The description of services will list the services that you offer and offer a brief description of what each service entails. When listing your services, it is important that you only list those services that you do well. You have to be 100% confident in your services before you can offer them to a client. Make sure that you not only list the services but the subsections of the services so that the prospective client understands all that it entails.

If you have a niche market, list the services that would cater to them.

Some services you may include (but not limited to) on your service list are:

### **BOOKKEEPING**

- Invoice clients
- Track expenses
- Monthly financial reports
- Budget preparation
- Cash flow projection

### **CONTACT MANAGEMENT**

- Manage client base
- Schedule meetings and appointments

### **DATABASE MANAGEMENT**

- Customized structure
- Personalized reports
- Bulk mailings
- Mass e-mails
- Purchase mailing lists

### **DESKTOP PUBLISHING**

- Flyers
- Brochures
- Newsletters
- Letterhead
- Logo Design

### **DOCUMENT PREPARATION**

- Excel
- Word/WordPerfect
- PowerPoint
- Letters
- Reports
- Training manuals
- Proposals

### **E-MAIL/VOICE MAIL SERVICE**

- Standardized responses
- Screening
- Timely follow-up

### **MARKET RESEARCH**

- Mailing lists
- Web Links
- Publishers
- Associations

### **MEETING MANAGEMENT**

- Conferences
- Trade Shows
- Video Conferences
- Audio Visuals

## Sample Service Description

*At VAs R Us we provide customized solutions for all your administrative needs!*

### **BOOKKEEPING**

- Invoice clients
- Track expenses
- Monthly financial reports
- Budget preparation
- Cash flow projection

### **CONTACT MANAGEMENT**

- Manage client base
- Schedule meetings
- Schedule appointments

### **DATABASE MANAGEMENT**

- Customized structure
- Personalized reports
- Bulk mailings
- Mass e-mails
- Purchase mailing lists

### **DESKTOP PUBLISHING**

- Flyers
- Brochures
- Newsletters
- Letterhead
- Logo Design

### **DOCUMENT PREPARATION**

- Excel
- Word/WordPerfect
- PowerPoint
- Letters
- Reports
- Training manuals
- Proposals

## **Fee Schedule**

The fee schedule will provide the reader with information on your fees and payment options. Rather than simply listing a rate, you should provide a rationale as to why the rate is reasonable.

- 1. Goal is to provide a reliable and effective service.**  
Make sure your prospective clients are feeling that by hiring you they would get their money's worth.
- 2. Consider making the rate negotiable.**  
This is very important – always be flexible with your fees. Make sure that you are available to all clients of every budget. You do not want to take a huge loss but keep in mind that if their budget is a little tight now, once their business grows, so will yours. You may wish to incorporate a three or six month allowance of reduced rates and then review these rates again at this time.
- 3. Consider offering a discount to ongoing clients.**  
For clients who will be using your services for more than 15-20 hours a month, offer a reduced rate. Deducting \$5.00 from your standard rate will give them a feeling of value. As you know, a feeling of value adds to client loyalty.
- 4. Be SURE to include what the rate does NOT include.**  
Make sure that you list the extras such as couriers, faxes, postage, long distance telephone calls, stationery, etc. that your rate does not include.

In addition to listing your fees, the fee schedule should include additional information. It should contain:

- 1. Billing schedule**  
By providing your billing schedule, your prospective client will get an idea from the start when your invoices are issued. We suggest that you consider billing some of your clients in the middle of the month and some at the end, so you have money coming in twice a month.
- 2. Payment options**  
It is important that you list your payment options: credit card, cheque or cash. If you want to accept credit cards, you will need to contact your bank and open a merchant account.
- 3. Fee structure**  
Have a clear fee structure for your practice; decide early on how you will be charging for your services.

## Sample Fee Schedule

### *Fee Schedule*

#### **Hourly Plan**

This plan is for those who need short-term or occasional support, or who prefer to be billed by the hour.

\$40.00 per hour for all services

Invoice will be supplied with accurate accounts of all hours billed. Expenses will be charged separately.



#### **Retainer Plan**

For our clients who require services on a regular basis, we offer a lower hourly rate of \$35.00.

#### ***Fee Structure- Retainer Services***

20 hours per month at \$35.00 per hour = \$700.00 per month  
(5 hours a week)

40 hours per month at \$35.00 per hour = \$1,400.00 per month  
(10 hours a week)

Additional expenses incurred such as couriers, facsimiles, postage, long distance telephone calls, will be charged separately.



#### **Billing Schedule**

Payment is due upon receipt of invoice. Invoices are sent on the 15<sup>th</sup> and the 30<sup>th</sup> of each month. We accept payments by cheque, VISA and MasterCard only.

## Testimonials

Providing testimonials gives potential clients a sense of your legitimacy. If you do not have any clients, consider contacting former employers and asking for a written reference.

The testimonial should be:

- 1. Brief**

Your testimonials should be one paragraph if possible. If you receive a testimonial from a client, ask if you may edit the content if it is too long.

- 2. Specific**

When you request a testimonial, ask if they could be specific in what it is that they are really happy about, a specific service, personality trait, etc.

- 3. Signed**

If your client is unable to sign it, ask if you can use their name and website address in your testimonials.

### **As you get more clients, ask them for testimonials.**

The six month mark is a good time to ask a client for a testimonial.

### **Do not get carried away.**

Provide only a few testimonials in your information package. Remember, you do not want to the reader to be overwhelmed with too much information. If you have a website, incorporate all of them on it.

*“Make it as easy as possible for clients; craft some simple questions for them to answer. This also allows you to somewhat tailor what the testimonial will say. Ask the client if they would be willing to provide a testimonial and then create three questions for them to answer.*

*For instance if you wanted a general testimonial you could ask: What challenges were you facing in your business? What made you decide to hire a VA? What difference has working with a VA made? If you wanted a testimonial on a specific issue you could ask: Describe a specific challenge you were facing. How did your VA support you in overcoming this challenge? What was the result of the support? Ask them to answer the questions and return to you to edit and you will forward to them the final draft for approval. Do the majority of the work for them.”*

Mary-Lou Ashton  
Creator, Virtual Assistant Training Program  
<http://www.vatp.ca>

## Sample Testimonials

*Here is what our clients are saying!!!*

*“Working with VAs R US has been wonderful – it is like having another me around!  
We work together on projects and they help to keep me organized.”*

**Jane Smith**  
**Coaches Corner**



*“The staff at VAs R US have been very professional and responsive to my needs.  
Their attention to detail has helped me to grow my business and provide  
satisfaction to my clients.”*

**Joe Anyone**  
**On the Top Consulting**



*“The best business decision I’ve made was hiring VAs R US. They have become a  
valuable member of my team and provide insight and feedback that has proved  
invaluable. My success is a tribute to their great service.”*

**Olivia Newbrook**  
**MOMS R US**



*“Marie of VAs R US has been a dream come true! I never thought I could be this  
organized. Thank you so much for your professionalism and support!”*

**George Jones**  
**Realty Matters**

## **Reasons to Use a Virtual Assistant**

If you do not have testimonials, another item to consider is a general interest piece on the reasons to use a Virtual Assistant. Not every client who comes to you will know exactly what they are looking for, so help them along by offering a list of benefits or reasons to use a VA.

They can include:

- No need to purchase equipment or furniture
- No need to provide a physical space
- No need to worry about payroll, deductions, etc.
- Minimal training
- Pay for project time as opposed to “office time”
- Access to administrative professionals

## Sample Reasons to Hire

### *Top Ten Reasons to Hire VAs R US*

1. You no longer need to spend valuable time on tasks you do not have time for.
2. You do not need to provide a physical workspace.
3. You do not need to provide costly equipment for your VA to use.
4. You do not need to deal with payroll, taxes or benefits.
5. You can have the time to focus on the more important issues of your business.
6. You have the freedom to work on growing and improving your business skills, knowledge, and relationships.
7. You have a partner to share or “bounce” ideas.
8. You have the flexibility to assume new, challenging opportunities.
9. You have a peace of mind knowing that the details are being handled.
10. You are finally able to run your business instead of it running you.



## **Client Questionnaire**

A Client Questionnaire will help you to better assess the needs of the potential client. The well-designed questionnaire will focus the client on exactly what functions the VA will perform.

Questions should include:

**1. Basic contact information**

Name  
Company  
Address  
Telephone number  
Fax number  
E-mail address  
Website (if applicable)

**2. A brief description of the current administrative support being utilized.**

This question will give you an idea if a prospective client has used a VA in the past or is presently using another means of administrative support.

**3. Current administrative challenges**

This will give you a clear picture of the problems he/she may be facing and allows you the opportunity to find solutions to the problems.

**4. What would the perfect VA do for the client?**

This question is specifically asking them to picture their ideal VA.

**5. Current hardware/software being used**

This is very important for compatibility issues. Because you are working virtually, it is important that you have all the information in order to work together effectively.

### **Additional tips to help you create a Client Questionnaire:**

- a. Keep it short – one page only
- b. Be sure to include your return contact information
- c. Make it user friendly
- d. Consider using “check boxes” or Yes/No responses

**Sample Questionnaire**

*Client Questionnaire*

**CONTACT INFORMATION**

Name, Address, Tel, Fax, Email

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**ABOUT YOU**

Tell me a little about your business.

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**WHY A VA?**

Tell me about a typical workday and how I can help. \_\_\_\_\_

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**WORKING TOGETHER**

Tell me about where you would like to be in 5 years.

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**PLEASE CHECK THE SERVICES YOU ARE CONSIDERING:**

- Appointment Scheduling
- Bookkeeping
- Contact Management
- Database Management
- Document Preparation
- Email Support
- Internet Research
- Marketing Support
- PowerPoint Presentations
- Special Project Support
- Voicemail/Email Response

Other \_\_\_\_\_

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**PLEASE RETURN BY FAX TO: 590-590-5905**

## **Designing Your Client Information Package**

Once you have created the content, the final step will be the overall design of your client information package.

- Use a word processor to create your client information package; keep it simple in design.
- Be sure to put your letter on your company letterhead (your letterhead should incorporate your logo, company name, tagline and contact information).
- Be consistent with the font style throughout the document. Select a font that is easy to read (Times and Arial are the easiest on the eye).
- If possible, have your signature scanned in so you can electronically sign your introduction letter (adds a personal touch).
- Stay away from too many graphics – not only will it clutter the content, it will increase the document size and, if delivered by e-mail, will increase download time.

## **Closing the Sale**

### **Statement of General Terms and Conditions**

Another sub-section of your client information package is a statement of general terms and conditions, otherwise known as a contract. Once a client has hired your service, you would then discuss the terms of the working relationship. A contract will outline the items such as confidentiality, payment policy and ownership.

*When creating any contract, it is always a smart business decision to have a lawyer review your contract.*

#### **It should contain:**

- 1. Statement of Confidentiality**  
Be clear that you offer 100% confidentiality. You will be viewing various documents and information regarding your client's business, and he/she will want to know that their information is safe with you.
- 2. Independent Contract Status**  
Outline the relationship of the parties.
- 3. Pricing and Payment Policy**  
Include your agreed upon rate as well as the date of the month they will be billed as well as any penalties for late payments.
- 4. Reimbursement of Expenses**  
State what your rate does not include. This is the same information that you included in your fee schedule.
- 5. Ownership of work**  
Any work that is not accepted by the client is yours.
- 6. Statement of Acceptance by Client**  
Have your client sign your agreement and fax it back to you.
- 7. Line for Name of Client, Signature and Date**
- 8. Billing Information**  
Include a space for your client to provide full contact information. You will need this for your billing records.

## Sample General Terms and Conditions

### General Terms and Conditions

#### Confidentiality

It is understood that in the performance of duties by VAs R US we will obtain information about both the client and their customers/clients, and that such information is confidential. We provide a 100% confidentiality policy to all our clients.

#### Independent Contractor

VAs R US are hired as independent contractors and are not eligible for any benefits programs or tax withholding obligations on the part of the client.

#### Payment and Pricing Policy

You will be billed an hourly rate of \$30.00. Invoices will be submitted once a month and payment is due upon receipt of invoice. A 2% per month late penalty charge will apply to all delinquent accounts.

#### Reimbursable Expenses

The following expenses incurred on behalf of the client will be billed at direct cost:

- a) Long distance charges
- b) Courier charges
- c) Mailing costs
- d) Travel time
- e) Travel expenses if site visit is requested
- f) Specialty paper
- g) Specialty software

#### Ownership

Any rejected plans, ideas or designs remain exclusive property of VAs R Us.

#### Acceptance by Client

By signing below, client hereby agrees to these general terms and conditions.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Client

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Client

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date Signed

Please provide full contact information below for billing purposes:

Full Name:

Mailing Address

Phone:

Fax:

E-mail:

**\*\*This contract is simply an example and is not intended to replace proper legal advice. Please ensure that you contact the appropriate professional with regards to any legal advice and/or services.**

## **Distributing your Client Information Package**

### **Hard copy version**

When sending your materials via standard mail you will need the following:

- Presentation Portfolios (these can be purchased at any office supply store)
- Bond paper (use high quality paper when printing out your information package)
- 10" x 13" envelopes for mailing
- Avery Mailing Labels (we suggest 02163 shipping labels)

Make sure your package represents you well!

### **E-mail Version**

When sending your materials via e-mail you will need the following:

- Adobe Acrobat 7.0 or later software program or PDF capabilities such as on-line creation of PDFs at Adobe's website. Adobe enables you to create PDF documents (Portable Document Format) which will ensure that your package will retain the formatting. This software is a program that you will use on client work as well so it is worth the investment.
- An e-mail program

**REMEMBER:** When creating your welcome package with the intention of sending an e-mail version, make sure that the size of your file is not too large for people to download.

## **Chapter 7 - Summary**

Your client information package should represent you well. A properly crafted package will not only provide important information to prospective clients about you and your services, it will also provide them with a sample of your work. Your package will give them a clear indication of your writing, editing and design skills.

Creating a client information package is an asset for the content basis of your company website. The biography, service description and testimonials can now be incorporated into a website, which will be the focus of our next chapter.

## Marketing Kit Part IV

### A Website

*What is now proved was once only imagined.*  
**-William Blake**

The last item for your marketing kit cannot only be one of the most expensive but the most complicated. We do not mean complicated in terms of creating content and design, but more so in understanding the behind the scenes items that go into building a website.

Domain names, search engines and web hosting are all items that directly relate to the production of your website, and in creating a formidable marketing tool for your business.

You will find that not all Virtual Assistants have a website and some VAs do not feel the need for an on-line presence. However, a majority of the VA community recognizes the potential a website can offer. A website offers you an opportunity to market your practice globally.

In order to begin your website, it is important that you plan for it. Be aware of what you like and do not like when it comes to design and content elements. Begin by researching other websites; make a list of all the sites that you like and the reasons why they appeal to you.

Another point to consider is hiring a web designer. We highly recommend that if you do not have the skills to create a functional, professional looking website that you hire someone to build it for you. As with all your marketing materials, you want to convey the image of your professionalism. By hiring an experienced web designer, you will be introduced to a whole new world of web elements which you might not have even contemplated.

This chapter is filled with useful information to help you plan and build your website and ultimately, your on-line marketing presence.



## **Getting Started - Things you need to know**

There is plenty to do when building a website. One of the first steps is to decide on your domain name.

### **Acquiring a Domain Name**

Practically speaking, your domain name (web address) is the core of your Internet identity, your on-line brand. Your customers will remember this name and use it to find your website and your services. Since no two parties can ever hold the same domain name (web address) simultaneously, your Internet identity is totally unique.

Technically, a domain name (web address) is an address used for identifying and locating computers on the Internet. While computers use Internet Protocol (IP) numbers to locate each other on the Internet, people find them hard to remember. Therefore, domain names (web addresses) were developed to permit the use of easily remembered words and phrases to identify Internet addresses.

For example, the domain name (web address) microsoft.com represents Microsoft's website. When you type microsoft.com into a web browser or send e-mail to someone at microsoft.com, the Domain Name System (DNS) translates microsoft.com into the IP numbers used by the Internet and connects you to microsoft.com.

### **What are the Components of a Domain Name?**

#### ***Top-Level domains***

A top-level domain (TLD) refers to the suffix attached to Internet domain names. The most common top-level domains used on the Internet are .com, .net and .org.

#### ***Country Code Top-Level Domains***

Two letter top-level domains, such as .ca .uk, .de and .jp, are called country code top level domains (ccTLDs) and correspond to a country, territory or other geographic location. The rules and policies for registering domain names in the ccTLDs vary significantly from country to country and may be reserved for use by citizens of the corresponding country.

## How to Choose a Domain Name

When first setting up a business, most people will register a domain name that mirrors exactly the name of their company. It is important that your domain name incorporates what you are doing. This becomes a large factor when you are submitting to search engines. For example, as a Virtual Assistant you may want a domain name like the following (these domain names are samples only):

<http://www.virtualexecutiveassistant.ca>

<http://www.virtualofficeassistant.com>

<http://www.myvirtualassistant.com>

<http://www.GinaVA.com>

Another important piece is choosing the extension that goes along with it. Below is a list of commonly used domain name extensions and what they mean:

- .com – commercial business
- .ca – Canada
- .net – network organizations
- .org – non-profit organizations (in most cases)
- .gov – government agencies
- .edu – educational institutions

Other available domain extensions are .tv, .biz, .name, .pro and .info.

## Registering Your Domain Name

There are many sites on the web where you can register your domain name. You must first do a search on their site to see if the domain name you want is available. Domain names are given on the first come first serve basis and will cost you approximately anywhere from \$20-30/ year.

Go to any search engine and do a search for Domain Name Registration and hundreds of companies will be located.

## Web Hosting

Every website needs a host; this is the company that provides the server where your site will sit. There are plenty of web hosts available to help you select the right hosting package for you. Depending on the packages available, the cost can start anywhere from \$15.00 CDN a month to \$100.00 CDN per month.

## When choosing a hosting company, keep these points in mind:

1. **Look to the future** – As your customer base and revenue grows, your site may require the addition of server-side scripting, eCommerce and database support. Make sure your host is big enough to accommodate your future needs, as well as your present ones.
2. **Know what you need** – do not empty your bank account paying for services you do not need.
3. **Prompt service and performance** – The popularity of your site will be directly affected by your host's level of service. Slow load times due to an overburdened server will send your customers elsewhere. No matter how renowned your host, technical problems will occur. As such, demand 24-hour, 7 days-a-week technical support for all your applications.
4. **Security** – Ask for a detailed description of the hosting company's security protocols. They should provide adequate protection from everyday denial-of-service attacks and the various hacks and cracks that will be attempted on your server. Make sure that your host is responsible for upgrading and maintaining these measures.
5. **Get what you pay for** – When shopping for a host, you will find that they vary widely in terms of target and pricing. Some hosts skew their servers to accommodate many small sites, while others prefer to take on fewer, high-volume sites. Be sure to strike a good balance between price and volume flexibility.
6. **Do not commit right away** – Treat your web host like you would treat any other supplier for your business. If they cannot provide the service and reliability you need, why keep them? Their competitors will be happy to have your business.

## **Creating the Design**

When you surf through the World Wide Web, you occasionally find a web page that grabs your interest and causes you to examine it further. You may even bookmark a really good site so you can return to it quickly and easily. However, if you come across a website that is poorly designed, unattractive or does not work properly, you find yourself quickly moving on.

There are many design factors at work that influence our perceptions of web design. We can look at a page for the first time and form an impression in less than five seconds. If it is a good impression, we may venture to look closer, if not we will move on.

Creating and designing an effective web page primarily begins with what appeals to you. Some of us may not even know what we like or what appeals to us. That is why every great website starts out by doing a lot of research.

***You want to convey your company identity – include your logo, tagline and business name.***

## **Understanding Your On-line Presence**

1. Target audience – what may appeal to one group may be totally inappropriate for another. If you do not understand your target audience, there is no way you can effectively prepare to create a website.
2. Purpose – the three basic purposes of web pages are to provide information, to entertain and to enable exchange. Decide the purpose of your site.
3. Style – essential to good web design. Well-designed websites project a look and feel that helps to convey a positive image of the person, business, organization or product being represented.

## Website Organization

When organizing your website, it is important that you have a clear picture of the outcome. You will want to structure your site for easy navigation, flowing content and an overall pleasing look. Have a clear idea of the number of pages you want, the content of those pages and how they connect to one another.

### Site Navigation

Since a website is a collection of related documents, you need a navigation system that allows visitors to find the information they are seeking. Visitors want to easily navigate to find the necessary information, document, service, product or entertainment.

Before we can successfully accomplish this, we need to know how all the pieces fit.

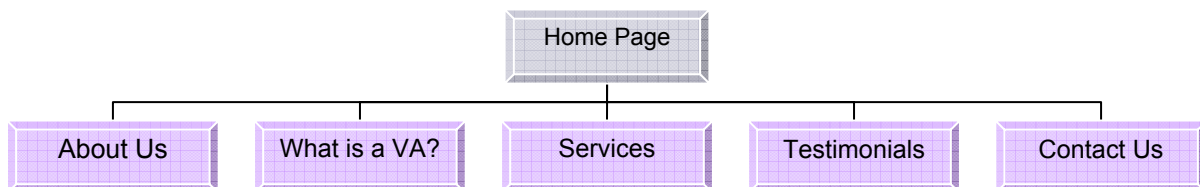
### Your Home Page

A homepage is the gateway to the site. Its first priority is to clearly communicate the name and subject matter. On the home page, there must be a clearly defined way to access the other content on the site. These other pages should have hyperlinks that take the user directly to them.

Once beyond the home page, there are several models for organizing navigation; we will focus on only one, the simplest to understand.

The hierarchical navigational model is an easy model to use when creating a simple and effective website. This model will help you become clearer on the pages that you would like to include in your site and how your navigational buttons or hyperlinks will link to each existing page. There is no limit to the number of pages that a site can have – this is an individual preference.

**Here is a basic model to start you on your way:**



**About Us**

This page tells the visitor about you and who you are

**What is a VA?**

Explains more about the VA profession to visitors who are unfamiliar with the term.

**Services**

You may want to include a detailed list of the services you provide and the benefits of your service.

**Testimonials**

This is an optional page. A testimonial page is a great way to display comments from happy clients.

**Contact Us**

Include a page that includes all your contact information: address, telephone, fax, cell phone numbers and e-mail address.

**Design Tip: Using Images**

You want to use images sparingly on your site. The number of images and size of image files directly affect the download time of your page. If someone has to wait five minutes to view your site, they will quickly move on. Discuss images with your web designer to ensure your images will not affect a speedy download.

## **Creating the Content**

### **Home Page**

Your home page is the introduction to the rest of your site. You want to make the content easy to read, appealing to look at and not in the least bit overwhelming. Use “hot words” when creating the content for your home page such as “efficient”, “cost effective” and “innovative” to really grab your visitor’s interest. Try to stay away from unnecessary multimedia add-ons such as music.

Some content you may want to include:

- Welcome your visitor
- Introduction to your company
- One or two nice graphics (you do not want to overdo it)
- Easy to use navigation links to the other pages of your site
- Contact information at the bottom of the page

### **About Us**

This is the page where you want to tell all your visitors and potential clients about you, your skills, education, and credentials – any information you feel would interest those visiting the site. Keep in mind these visitors are also potential clients.

- Why are you in the profession
- What qualifies you
- Why they should hire you now
- What skills you possess, any niches
- How long you have been in the profession
- Any affiliations
- For the personal touch, include a picture of yourself.

### **What is a VA?**

Not only for the VA profession but for any newer profession, it is important that your visitors understand what it is you do and are able to provide them. Not everyone who visits your site will know what a Virtual Assistant is or does. Explain to them as clearly as possible:

- Brief introduction to the profession
- Benefits of using a VA
- Reasons to use a VA
- How VAs work
- Include an appropriate image

## **Services Page**

This page allows your visitors the opportunity to find out exactly what services are available to them if they hire you. This page would be a great place to include the benefits.

- List your services
- Provide a brief description of each service
- Explain the benefits
- Provide an e-mail link on the page so they can contact you quickly and conveniently with any questions
- Include an appropriate image

## **Testimonials (optional)**

Your testimonial page should include brief comments of praise from existing or past clients. Your testimonial page should include:

- Brief comments
- Clients' name
- Clients' company name
- Clients' website (if applicable)

## **Contact Us**

This page should include all contact information. You want to make it as easy as possible for potential clients to contact you with questions or comments. Remember to include your country as well. Because we work virtually, it is important that potential clients know where we are located.

- Include name, phone and fax numbers
- E-mail addresses
- Mailing address (your preference)
- Office hours



## **Hiring a Web Designer**

We strongly encourage you to seek out a web designer when making the decision to create a site. Any reputable designer will take the time to listen to what you want and offer advice and suggestions on how to make your site a success.

We suggest that you research and interview at least three different web designers and get quotes.

Some questions you may wish to ask a prospective web designer are:

1. How long have you been designing websites?
2. Can I see your portfolio?
3. Do you work hourly or flat rate per project?
4. Do you also provide maintenance and at what charge?
5. What is your turnaround time?
6. Can you provide flash, java, java script?
7. Can I contact past clients as references?

## **Chapter 8 - Summary**

Your website will be the global marketing tool in your marketing kit. You want your site to reflect your professionalism, creativity, innovation and skill as a competent writer. It is important that you also understand how other elements work such as domain names, search engines and web hosting so you can effectively market yourself through your website.

## On-line Marketing

*The Internet allows information to be distributed worldwide at basically zero cost.*

**-Bill Gates**

The World Wide Web is a very powerful marketing medium. Nobody knows this better than Virtual Assistants. As VAs, we are accustomed to the ongoing marketing messages delivered to us in the form of websites, pop-up ads and e-mail messages.

Although the web is just one marketing method, it is the one medium where we can incorporate all of the major marketing categories from Chapter One. Customer service, sales, advertising, research and much more can be integrated on-line.

There are three main types of on-line marketing:

### 1. **Your web presence**

Your website is an interactive brochure that provides useful information to your clients, the press and the casual visitor. However, your website will not market for you until you get people to visit it. Search Engine optimization and driving people to your site through items such as article marketing, blogging are other forms of supporting your on-line marketing efforts.

### 2. **Other people's web presence (their website)**

Placing reciprocal links to directories or association directories will help to get people to visit your site. Placing links on larger, better-known sites will increase the traffic to your site.

### 3. **Your e-mail**

E-mail is an outgoing form of communication and, therefore, considered to be marketing. E-mail marketing can consist of your company newsletter, a sales letter or even a personal note to an existing client.

**Note:** You can use the web to gather information and demographics about your prospective clients and your competition. On-line searches allow you to find important information regarding individuals and their companies. As you know, the web is a fantastic research tool.

## Why On-line Marketing?

Very simply, doing business on-line allows for communication and relationship building, and is a cost-effective way to get your marketing message to your target market.

### Nine Advantages and One disadvantage to On-line Marketing

1. **Cost-effectiveness** – In some cases, on-line marketing can cost you nothing except time. You can get information to your customers without paying the cost of printing or postage.
2. **Speed** – You can send or post updated information to your clients and prospects immediately.
3. **Self service** – Prospective clients can visit your website and help themselves to the information as opposed to waiting for you to send it to them.
4. **Interactive** – On-line marketing allows prospective clients to leave feedback.
5. **Abundant information** – The use of graphics, video, sound and text provide an information-rich marketing medium.
6. **Exposure** – On-line marketing exposes you to a large and diverse audience that otherwise you may not have been able to target.
7. **Global** – On-line marketing is international, and you have immediate access to the global market.
8. **Open 24/7** – Prospective clients can find you 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.
9. **Community** – On-line marketing creates a sense of community and by using newsletters, e-mails and your website, you can strengthen relationships.

### Disadvantage

1. Sometimes people assume that all they need to market their service is a website – this is not so. The VA approach to marketing is about building relationships with others. You can use on-line methods to enhance your relationships with clients and prospective clients, however, your website cannot do it all for you.

## Marketing Your Services On-line

Your website is a very large part of marketing your services on-line, however, you can do other things to enhance your website's marketability, and much smaller things aside from your website.

1. **Website Links:** There are a variety of sites that you can "team up" with and offer reciprocal links. This means that you will put a link on their site and vice versa. This not only provides you with more traffic to your site, it also tells the visitor that the site endorses your site and thinks that it is worthwhile for them to visit it. Do a search for "link exchange" and you will notice exchange sources from many countries.

When you have found the right person or company with whom to exchange links, consider having their site directed to a new window as opposed to them leaving your site completely. The objective is to keep your visitors on your site.

2. **Discussion lists and forums:** Discussion lists and forums provide an opportunity for you to build relationships and provide free advice. There are a variety of on-line forums devoted to small business; join one and offer your expertise.
3. **Advertising on Other Sites:** You will find plenty of advertising space available on the web. Research some professional directories that target your specific audience. For example: if you want to market your services to real estate agents, do a search for real estate directories; you will find that most directories will offer banner ads. Of course, as with all advertising, it does not come for free. Before spending a lot of money, make sure it is worthwhile. Ask for website statistics such as the number of visitors during a specific period of time.
4. **Encourage Referrals:** An innovative way to encourage referrals is to create a way for visitors to easily refer you to others. Have a link on your site that enables a visitor to e-mail your website link with a message that says "Check this out". If you want to get really creative, have a post card or image that a visitor can send just by filling out their e-mail address.
5. **Web Pages:** Presentation goes a long way, as discussed in Chapter Seven. There is definite value in a well-designed and aesthetically pleasing web page.
6. **Content:** Try always to have fresh content. Add new features, links, articles and other items to your site to keep it interesting to the visitor. The more frequently you update your material, the more often repeat visitors will come by to see what is new.
7. **Search Engines:** Being listed on some of the top search engines is one of the best ways to be found. Search engines are one of the primary ways that Internet users find websites. A website with good search engine listings may see a dramatic increase in traffic. We will discuss search engines in greater detail later in this chapter.

8. **Meta Tags:** Meta tags define your web page and website to the outside world. You can declare the title, keywords and description which will help your placement in search engines. This is very important for all websites and you should pick your meta tags wisely. Do not repeat your keywords too much.

*Sample Keywords for a VA site*

Virtual Assistant, VA, Virtual Assisting, office support, administrative assistant, executive assistant, word processing, database management, outsourcing, word processing, bookkeeping," Your Name".

*Sample Description for a VA site:*

VAs R Us provides professional, high-quality virtual assistant services to clients world-wide.

9. **E-mails:** Sending your sales letter or client information via e-mail is another great way to market on-line. Make sure to keep them as individual as possible. However you want to be sure that before you send anything by e-mail that the person has requested that information. SPAM is a huge issue for anyone who uses e-mail regularly, be sure that you are not adding to it.
10. **E-mail Signature:** Just as if you were writing a letter and signing it, use the same concept with e-mail. Create a signature which includes your name, company name, title, contact information and website address. Make sure to include this signature on all correspondence. Depending on the e-mail program that you use, a signature template may be built in and you can program it so it automatically appears every time you send a new message.

**Article Submissions and Blogging:** For more information read Chapter Eleven.

## **Search Engines**

Search engines are one of the primary ways that Internet users find websites. A website with good search engine listings may see a dramatic increase in traffic. Yahoo, Google.com, Google.ca (Canada), MSN.com are all well-known search engines.

### **How Search Engines Work**

There are two types of search engines that gather their listings in extremely different ways.

#### **1. Crawler-Based Search Engines**

Crawler-based search engines, such as Google, HotBot, Lycos create their listings automatically. They "crawl" or "spider" the web and people search through what they have found. If you change your web pages, crawler-based search engines eventually find these changes, and that can affect how you are listed. Page titles, body text and other elements all play a role.

#### **2. Human-Powered Directories**

A human-powered directory, such as Yahoo, depends on people for its listings. You submit a short description to the directory for your entire site or editors write a description for sites they review. A search looks for matches only in the submitted descriptions. Changing your web pages has no effect on your listing.

When creating your site, it is important that you speak to your web designer or, if doing it yourself, do some research on site placement among search engines. There is never any guarantee that you will be listed on a search engine, but by learning more about search engines and optimizing your placement, you will stand a better chance of being listed.

### **Search Engine Submission**

There are many companies that will submit your site to 3,000+ search engines for a fee. Keep in mind there is no guarantee for placement. You may pay your fees and find that it does absolutely nothing to boost your placement or you may be the rare individual that benefits from this process. Of the 3,000 search engines that most of these companies submit to, there is only a handful that people actually use.

### **Manual Submissions**

If you are on a budget, you may consider manually submitting your site to search engines. This is free although very time consuming. There are some places that you can submit to 20 sites at a time for free. Please be aware that by using these sites, they will ask you for an e-mail address before they will submit for free. Five minutes later, you seem to be bombarded by e-mails from various companies. So user beware.

### **Fee-Based Submissions**

There are certain search engines such as Yahoo and Looksmart that you can manually submit to, however, you will be charged a fee from \$49.00 to \$200.00 US. This fee is only for them to review your site and does not guarantee submission.

### **Pay-Per-Click and Bidding on Keywords**

Some search engines, such as Google and overture.com, let you create your own listing and keywords. You are ranked depending upon the amount of your bid for that particular keyword. Highest bidder wins! This can be beneficial because depending what your budget is, you can be ranked within the top 10 listings on that particular search engine.

Example: If you bid \$0.25 on the keyword “Virtual Assistant” and that is the highest bid you will be ranked #1. Now you only pay 25 cents each time someone clicks on your link.

### **What Search Engines Look For When Ranking Your Site**

Every search engine is different. However, there are a few key points to remember when creating your site. Implementing these factors may help the ranking of your site with the major search engines:

- Search engines often change their requirements. Updating your site and resubmitting it periodically (no more than once a week) will help to maintain your position.
- A website’s rank in search engines will increase as it obtains more html links pointing back to it from other websites.

Although some search engine requirements conflict with others, following these guidelines may help you improve your overall rankings:

- Choose a domain name with your main keyword in it.
- List keywords and descriptions for EVERY page, however overuse of your keywords may have a negative impact on your rankings.
- Incorporate your keywords into the title of the page.
- Have your keywords in the top section of the body of text on your page.
- Use keywords as links, e.g. if your keyword is “virtual assisting”, link those words to another appropriate page on your site.



- Use ALT tags over graphics with your keyword in it. Alt tags are alternative text the browser may show if an image cannot be displayed or disabled by the user.
- Do not fill your entire page with the same keyword; use it only when appropriate.
- Some search engines take into account how many links to your site are on other sites, so consider a link page. You can add related links to your page in return for the same on someone else's site.
- When possible, manually submit your site to the search engines. Some do not accept auto submissions so if that is all you use, you may miss out on some important search engines.
- Some search engines rank you on how long the visitor stays on your site. So if you are listed fourth and you can keep most visitors on your site for a long time, you may move up in rank.
- Consider fee-based and pay per click search engine listings if your budget allows.
- Although some search engines tell you only to submit your home page, try submitting other pages as well. This could increase the number of listings that come up for your site.
- Do not submit more than your home page to Human Powered Directories, (Open Directory, Yahoo, etc.), and do not submit your site more than once a month. They generally have strict rules about SPAMMING and can reject your site for that reason alone.

Be patient when submitting your site to the search engines; it can take months to even show up and moving up in rank can be even more difficult. Your best chance is to submit regularly and to update your site with new content periodically.

### **Search Engine Optimization Specialists**

There are many professionals out there who deal directly with assisting businesses, get the best possible ranking on search engines. These SEO specialists know all the "rules" and will be able to assist you in obtaining the best ranking possible for your site. Do a search on "Search Engine Optimization" and you are bound to find quite a few specialists in this area.

## **Successful On-line Marketing**

In order to be successful at on-line marketing, you need to be open to new ways to get your message in front of your audience. Always keep in mind that the VA approach to marketing is based on relationship building.

It is very easy to get caught up in the convenience of sending a generic mass e-mail to a distribution list but before you do this, ask yourself if you are building relationships. Also you need to be conscious of SPAMMING regulations.

### **Trial and Error**

With all forms of marketing, whether it is via the Internet or more traditional methods, success comes by testing to see what works. It is all about trial and error. With all the options available to you on the web, it is a great place to see what works and what does not.

### **Tips for testing:**

- Start with the cheapest and work up. Try all the free methods of advertising on the web before paying.
- Do not be afraid to try new things. Be confident with what you are offering and explore new ways to get your message out such as article marketing and blogging.
- Build an on-line community. Start an e-group or discussion list that is directed to office productivity, tips or advice.
- Track the results. You need to know what is working and what is not, to prevent you from focusing your energy on a dead end.
- Research and more research. Do not sign up for anything until you are quite confident that you will reach your target market.
- Before advertising on any site, ask for a full rate card. Find out the number of visitors on a daily basis and ask for any demographics before you sign up.

If you are going to exchange links, make sure that the site that you are exchanging with will represent you well.

## **SPAM!**

A chapter about on-line marketing would not be complete without also including information about SPAM. So what exactly is SPAM? Well SPAM is simply unsolicited commercial e-mail.

To on-line marketers, SPAM can be a temptation. How else can you get your product or service in full view of 100s, even thousands of people without much, or no cost to you?

Sending SPAM is never, ever a good idea. Even if you feel you have good intentions, one unsolicited e-mail can open yourself up to some very angry replies and even have your Internet domain blacklisted (blocked from sending e-mail to customers of ISPs). Think of SPAMMING as the equivalent to telemarketing. Many people see this as an intrusion that costs them time. It takes time to decipher the wanted from the unwanted e-mail. Also people consider e-mail a much more personal way of communicating and view SPAM as a violation of that personal space.

So how do you know if you are SPAMMING? Before sending out any mass e-mail consider the following:

- 1) **Did the recipient request the information?** If the information you are sending was not requested, then it is SPAM. If the recipient requested the information, it is not SPAM.
  
- 2) **Do you already have an existing business relationship with this person?** If the recipient is a past or current client then your message is most likely not SPAM.

## **Avoid being a SPAMMER**

Use the e-mail checklist to ensure you do not get the unwanted attention of being a SPAMMER.

- Do you have a valid FROM address?
- Is the SUBJECT line clear and not misleading?
- Were the e-mails gathered appropriately? (They requested info, in person or website form, subscribe function and e-mails were not "harvested" or randomly generated)
- Is your message relevant to the target audience?
- Is your return address functioning?
- Do you have a unsubscribe function?
- Is a physical mailing address included?
- Names are NOT pasted in the TO: field?
- If a recipient requests to be unsubscribed, are you quick to ensure this is done?
- Is your e-mail in good taste and does not include any offensive materials? (Even if you mean it as a joke)

## **Chapter 9 - Summary**

Bill Gates summed it up best when he said, "The Internet allows information to be distributed worldwide at basically zero cost".

There are so many ways to market your practice on-line, being open and experimenting with new methods is the key to success. Remember that regardless of the method, the outcome should be focused on relationship building.

## **Advertising and Free Publicity**

*In order to sell a product or a service, a company must establish a relationship with the consumer. It must build trust and rapport. It must understand the customer's needs, and it must provide a product that delivers the promised benefits.*

**-Jay Levinson**

With each ad you buy, you take your chances. Advertising is the mass media, paid approach to marketing, and in most cases the least effective way to market your services. It is the least personal and the most expensive and does not build relationships.

### **Is advertising worth it?**

The first thing people think of when marketing their services is to advertise. For well-known service professions such as dentists, accountants or plumbing, advertising offers a service that most people recognize. This is not always the case with Virtual Assistants, the majority of the readers are not going to fully grasp the concept....yet.

We are not trying to discourage you from advertising; it is your dollar. However, before you do, it is important that you research your choice of advertising and stick to your budget. It is very easy to get blinded by the thought of more business.

### **Types of Advertising**

There are so many ways to advertise and plenty of people who will sell ads to you:

- Newspapers
- Magazines
- On-line
- Yellow Pages
- Newsletters
- Radio
- Television
- Billboards

Even your own vehicle can be a means of advertising your services.

## Newspaper Ads

For most small businesses, advertising in a local paper is their medium of choice. If you talk to a variety of small business owners who advertise their services in the newspaper, you will find that there are many differing opinions on what works.

Some people will tell you to place small, witty ads on a regular basis, while others are firm believers that larger ads placed less frequently is the way to go.

Again, it is trial and error. Unfortunately, with advertising it is your hard earned money that may be spent with no return. So how do you proceed?

1. Understand your target market and try to make an educated guess about the days and sections of the paper they are most likely to read.
2. Create an ad that presents what the prospect wants – refer to Chapter Five for creating your ad.
3. Research how advertising works by talking with ad sales people at the paper. This will allow you to prepare the best schedule possible for ad placement.

Advantages of newspaper advertising:

- **Wide coverage:** Newspapers reach many readers within certain areas or regions.
- **Targeted segments:** Advertisers can place ads in the travel, lifestyle, sports or other segments which better match target market profile.
- **Absorb readers:** Readers expect to see ads and spend time reading them.
- **Predictable timing:** Most readers will read the newspaper promptly upon its delivery.
- **Minimal planning:** You normally do not need to give much advance notice when placing an ad.
- **Flexibility:** There is plenty of flexibility when placing an ad. Most newspapers sell ad space by the column inch, so you can buy as small or as large a space as you want.
- **Cost:** Not extremely cost-effective, however, it is among the lowest of all mass media (\$500 and up).

Now the disadvantages:

- **Read quickly:** Most papers are usually read quickly and then discarded.
- **Limited targeting:** You will pay to reach the full circulation even if a small portion of the readership fits your target profile.
- **Cluttered environment:** Although newspapers try to balance news versus ads, the clutter of stories, images and ads is unavoidable.
- **Print limitations:** You may be limited to black and white images and line illustrations.

## **Scheduling your ad**

When to schedule your ad is as important as the information within your ad. The fact is, however, only about three percent of people open their papers from Monday through Friday. You will find that Tuesday will have the most readers being this is normally when the grocery and department store flyers are inserted.

For best results, consider these two tips:

- Place your ad on the day that you feel makes the most sense for your market and your message.
- Advertising in the Sunday paper does cost more. However, it is widely distributed. Sunday papers usually sell 10%-50% more than weekday papers. The reason for this is the reader has more time to read the paper on a Sunday than during the week.

## **Ad placement**

Where your ad is placed does not attract readers, your ad itself will attract readers. You will find that some people adamantly believe that the right-hand page of a newspaper is the most desired placement. It may be the most desired but not necessarily the most effective. There has been no confirmed proof that ads on the right hand side get more attention than those on the left hand side of a newspaper.

Instead of worrying about where your ad is being placed, focus on the content and the overall look of your ad. Ask yourself if your ad is carrying the message you want it to carry and is it an attractive design that will pull in the reader.

Think about the following when deciding on ad placement:

- If you are determined to have a specific placement, make a request. Most newspapers will do their best to help you.
- Ask about special rates for ads in specific sections of the paper that may target your specific market. For example, if you plan to assist Real Estate agents, ask if there is a special rate for the real estate section.

## **Classified Ads**

In terms of cost, advertising in the classified section is the cheapest. There are two types of classified ads:

**Display ads:** Larger ads featuring headlines, images and logos, these are available in all sizes and have a better chance of standing out than a small print classified ad.

**Small print:** These are the tiny ads you see that are normally arranged in categories and do not stand out as well as the display ads.

## **Print Guidelines**

Whether you plan on advertising on the front page of the business section or in a small print classified ad, the guidelines are the same:

- Always use a headline. You can accomplish this even with a small classified ad. Have your headline in capitals and bolded so it stands out.
- Make sure your ad talks to your target market.
- If placing an ad in the classified section, place it in a variety of categories if you feel it will attract more than one interest area.
- Include your contact information. Regardless of size, you need to make it very easy for prospects to contact you.



## Magazine Ads

If you have a big budget, magazine advertising is for you. For most of us who have limited advertising budgets, magazine ads are sometime unreachable. To place a full page ad in a magazine such as Time, it would cost close to \$200,000 – you could buy a house for that much money.

Magazine ads such as Time, Entrepreneur and Canadian Business cater to companies such as IBM, Microsoft, HP, etc. These companies have advertising budgets in the millions of dollars, it is no wonder that small businesses cannot compete.

However, there are smaller publications that serve particular business or interest groups where you can place an ad for a fraction of the price of larger, more well-known magazines.

## Research Magazines

There are thousands of smaller magazines available to advertise in, all you need to do is find them. The Internet is the best place to start.

- Do a search for small business magazines, you will find that quite a few directories will show up.
- Start a list or database of the magazines that you feel would target your market.
- Call these magazines or if they have a website, visit it and obtain a rate card.
- Ask for the demographics.

You will find that these smaller magazines will be more apt to work with your budget than some of the larger magazines.

## Scheduling your ad

When scheduling your magazine ad, consider the following:

**Frequency:** Make sure that your budget allows for you to place your ad in the same magazine at least three times over a six month period.

**Crossover readership:** If you would like to advertise in a single month, place your ad in three magazines with similar reader profiles. This is called “crossover readership” between publications.

**Response time:** Unlike newspapers, reader response to magazine ads is not immediate.

**Ad size:** Full page ads will get noticed the most; if your budget does not allow full pages (in most cases it will not), consider using one-third page ads.

**Design:** Unlike newspaper ads, where most of us can design it ourselves, magazine ads will require you to hire a professional designer to create an ad that will be able to compete in the magazine environment.

**Magazine ad representatives:** Work with the magazine ad rep and build a relationship. Explain about your business, your goals with the ad and your budget.

## **Yellow Pages and Business Directory Ads**

As a VA, you will find most of your prospects may not look for you in the Yellow Pages. As a matter of fact, most Yellow Pages do not even have a heading for “Virtual Assistants”. There are, however, on-line Yellow Pages and it is within these on-line directories that we are seeing more VA services being offered.

### **Advantages to Yellow Page advertising:**

- Six out of ten consumers say they do not have a preference when turning to the Yellow Pages
- Those who read the Yellow Pages are ready to hire your services
- Twenty-four hour accessibility
- Geographically specified

### **Disadvantages:**

- Majority of prospects will not look in the Yellow Pages to hire a VA
- Yellow Pages does not have advertising for Virtual Assistants
- Your ad remains the same for an entire year
- Too much advertising clutter
- Your ad will have to stand out to get results

As stated in earlier chapters, a majority of your clients will come from referrals and word-of-mouth, however, if you want to list your services in the Yellow Pages, here are a few tips:

### **Where to place the ad:**

If a prospective client was looking for your services in the Yellow Pages, where would they look first? With the Yellow Pages, you can have your ad placed in more than one category, however, it will cost more.

### **Size of the ad:**

Big is not necessary in the Yellow Pages. Do research and see what your competition is doing. You will find that in many of the categories, the most established businesses run the smallest ads.

### **Colour or Not:**

Again, research what your competitors are doing; is it necessary to choose a colour ad to compete with the other ads in your section? If you decide on colour, make sure you read the rate card carefully, colour charges mount up quickly.

### **Choose the right directory:**

Before spending your money on any directories ask for distribution information. Find out exactly how many people receive the directories and how often.

**What should your ad include?**

As with all your print ads, your headline is one of the most important elements. Other information which may be valuable to the reader includes:

- Listings of services
- Benefits of services
- Special qualities
- Length of time in business
- Professional endorsements
- Full contact information

**How should your ad look?**

If possible, hire a designer to create an ad that matches your company image. Try to stay away from the directory designers in order to create a unique image for your ad.

## **Television and Radio Broadcast**

Television and radio ads are one of the most expensive ways to market your services. We will not spend a lot of time on advertising through TV and radio. As a result of the cost associated with this form of advertising, it is way out of budget for most VAs.

However, there are some ways you can take advantage of what television and radio can offer. This would be more in the area of publicity rather than advertising, however it is free.

Publicity is one of the best marketing tools for services and the best way to get publicity is to have a regular schedule for contacting media.

For radio and television, the best way to contact media is to start compiling a media list. You will need to do a lot of research to get the name of those individuals in charge of programming at the TV or radio stations. Start by sending out press releases to local TV and radio stations and see what the response is.

If you are comfortable, call a few program managers and tell them about what you do and what is unique about it.

Target those stations that you feel would best represent you to the viewers – small business shows and career shows are great places to start.

There is no guarantee that you will be called for an interview or to be a guest on a show, but if you do, watch out...the response can be overwhelming.

## **Free Publicity**

One of the first things most people think of to get regular publicity is to write an article for a newspaper, newsletter or magazine.

Being featured as a regular writer in a newspaper or magazine can be surprisingly hard to achieve unless you know someone or have a connection.

However, here are a few suggestions to get your name in print...at no cost to you!

### **Letters to the Editor**

Believe it or not, letters to the editor is the second most read part of the paper. People like to read what other people are saying and thinking.

One of the best ways to get your letter published is to add something extra to an article that was already printed. For example, your local paper runs a story about the challenges of working from home. This would be a great lead-in for you to comment on the effectiveness of working with a Virtual Assistant. There are plenty of stories that would enable you to add your own little piece of expertise.

### **Create your own news**

Begin writing articles and tip sheets for newspapers, magazines and newsletters. In the PR world they call these tip sheets the “ten commandments.” These are a one-page sheet of tips from your field, for example: Top Ten ways to work with a VA, Top Ten ways to be more productive, etc. More information on article marketing in Chapter Eleven.

### **Giving talks and workshops**

Giving talks and workshops is an ideal way to get publicity and promote your services. You could put a workshop together on a variety of topics such as:

- Small business productivity: Use a Virtual Assistant
- How Virtual Assistants can help your business succeed
- The Virtual Assistant: Secretaries of the new millennium
- Work from Home? Enjoy the benefits of working with a VA

There are a variety of angles – the objective is to appeal to prospective clients.

Not everyone is comfortable speaking in front of groups; however there are some ways to overcome this phobia:

1. Understand that it is normal to be nervous, and prepare yourself for this...move ahead. Remember, the participants are interested in what you have to say or they would not be there.
2. Do establish eye contact. Look at the audience and establish eye contact with a variety of people. You will see them smile and this provides an instant connection and comfort.
3. Tell your story. Give examples or real stories: how you got into the business, challenges you have experienced or accomplishments you are proud of achieving.

### **Key Elements to a Good Presentation**

There are four key elements in delivering an effective presentation:

1. Content
2. Sharing
3. Excitement
4. Customizing

#### **Content**

When creating the content for your presentation, decide on three clear points that you want to get across to the audience. Under these three items, develop specific details. By focusing on clear and simple points, your audience will be able to understand your presentation and the elaborated information.

#### **Sharing**

Give a little bit of yourself to the audience. Share interesting stories about you, your background, even your childhood if it can be incorporated into your presentation. By providing real stories, your audience will be able to relate to you and your topic and remember what you are saying. Sharing good stories is always memorable.

#### **Excitement**

Reflect your excitement and passion for your topic. If you show excitement for your topic, it becomes infectious and your audience will begin to feel your emotions. There is nothing worse than listening to a presentation where the presenter has no passion or excitement.

## **Customizing**

Customize your presentation, even if it is just a few lines for each audience that you present. It could be as simple as changing the introductory remarks. The best way to customize your presentation is to know the people to whom you are speaking. If possible, mingle before the presentation.

Most importantly, do not read the content; the worst way to present a workshop is reading word for word from sheets of paper or worse cue cards. Your audience will respond better if you let your presentation flow naturally, not forced.

To get your presentation or workshop noticed, place an ad in your local paper and to generate some publicity, invite a local reporter to attend.



## **Chapter 10 – Summary**

Advertising is impersonal and the least cost-effective way to marketing your practice. It does not incorporate the ideal marketing methods such as building relationships and providing superior client service. However, it is the easiest way to market your services, sometimes even easier than the more personal approach.

## Market by Writing

### *Article Marketing and Blogs*

*The art of writing is the act of discovering what you believe.*  
-David Hare

Writing can be an extremely powerful tool in marketing your business. It has never been easier to get your thoughts, ideas, tips and knowledge in front of the public. The Internet has made this process incredibly effortless. With numerous article submission sites and blogging tools, anyone who has a flair for writing and has something of interest to share can get their message read; position themselves as an expert and direct traffic to their website.

In this chapter, we will review two common methods of marketing your business by writing; article marketing and blogs.

- **Article Marketing** is the writing and distribution of articles to market your website and/or your product or service. Each article contains a “Resource Box” or “by-line” which includes the author’s business contact information. These articles are meant to be distributed freely and not only have the potential of positioning the author as an expert, increasing their credibility within their market but may also increase your chances of obtaining new clients.
- **Blogs** are, simply put, an on-line diary or journal. Generally blogs are created for personal use, like a journal, where people can write their daily adventures and express whatever ideas they may have. However businesses are now utilizing blogs as a way to promote their services and increase their sales. Some blogs provide an option for people to leave feedback and comment on your posts, allowing you to gain insight on your readers and their perspective.

Both of these methods have gained enormous popularity over the past few years and continue to gain momentum. Let us explore these two methods in greater detail.

## **Article Marketing**

Article marketing is not new; in fact it has been used by professionals for as long as mass print has been around. Submitting articles to print publications is frequently utilized by businesses as a way of obtaining free press space. Local businesses provide their expertise in written format to a publication free of charge and in return the publication prints the business contact information with the articles. Since smaller publications are on a limited budget, this has proven to be a win-win situation for both parties.

With the introduction of the Internet and on-line commerce, article marketing has made a transition from traditional print to the on-line world as well. On-line article marketing as with print forms provides publishers with expert, free content and businesses with free advertising.

However with the transition to the on-line world, writing articles has taken marketing your business in a new direction. Article marketing is not only used to establish your credibility in a particular industry but to drive interested readers to your website, and ultimately to purchasing your services. Article marketing is also being used for search engine optimization.

### **Credibility and positioning yourself as an expert**

Writing about topics that you are passionate about and tying it into what it is you are offering is a great way to begin positioning yourself as an expert in your field. As a VA you may choose topics directed to your target market such as, productivity tips for the Real Estate Agent, managing a home office, benefits of outsourcing, etc. The topics are endless. By composing well written and interesting articles, that are relevant to your market, your chances of exposure increase and so does your credibility.

### **Drive traffic to your website**

For every article that you write you will include a Resource Box. This Resource Box is similar to an e-mail signature and will contain contact info and a link to your website. If you have an interesting article, the intention is the reader will click through to your site to find out more about you and your offerings. This is a direct way to get visitors to your site.

### **Search Engine Optimization**

Search Engine optimization deals with the order in which web pages are ranked with specific keywords or phrases which are typed into a search engine. The higher a page is ranked, the greater your chances the site will be viewed by more visitors. One method of SEO encompasses the idea that a website's rank in search engines will increase as it gets more HTML links pointing back to it. This is where the Resource Box comes in. In theory, your website's ranking on search engines should increase with the more wiring and distributing of articles that contain your website link.

Alexandra Amor, a Web Copy Specialist and author of *Write Great Articles that Make You a Client Magnet* (I highly recommend this book to anyone who is interested in article marketing), believes article marketing is a great fit for Virtual Assistants. She has compiled a Top Five Reasons for Virtual Assistants to Submit Articles On-line.

## **Top Five Reasons for Virtual Assistants to Submit Articles On-Line**

By Alexandra Amor, Web Copy Specialist

Maybe you have heard of submitting marketing articles on-line but are not sure about the value of this marketing strategy. As an experienced former VA and small business marketer I would like to share with you the top five reasons why submitting articles on-line is the perfect fit for Virtual Assistants.

### **1. Article Marketing is Free**

Starting up your Virtual Assistant business can be an expensive proposition. Suddenly you are responsible for the cost of equipment, office space and supplies. Add the cost of marketing the business to this and some VAs find themselves quickly sinking under the weight of mounting bills. The good news is that writing one short article a month is a completely free, and effective, way to successfully market your business. The Internet is rife with places to submit articles and in fact these article services are often actively looking for and needing your article about how Virtual Assistance can support small business.

### **2. Education is Appealing**

At any given moment, we all want to know “What is in it for me?” It is human nature. Especially when we are being pitched an idea that is going to cost us money. When you are pitching your Virtual Assistant services to potential clients, the most appealing way to approach them is to educate them about how VAs work, rather than trying to entice them to “buy” what you are selling. Articles are a fantastic way to do this. Pick a common topic that your potential clients often misunderstand about Virtual Assistance and write an informative article about it. Now you are an attractive resource for the business owner, not just one more person who wants money from them.

### **3. What is Your USP?**

Marketers are great at creating acronyms like USP for simple concepts like being unique. Your USP is your “Unique Selling Proposition”; i.e. what makes you different from all the other VAs out there? Writing articles to submit on-line is a perfect way to market yourself by using your own unique voice. Readers will hear a bit of you in what you write and they will (hopefully) be attracted to what you have to say. A well-written article is almost a mini-screening process for potential clients. Those who are attracted to what you have to say will contact you and those who are not would probably not be a good fit for your business anyway. You can also focus your articles on your particular areas of specialty AND submit the articles to sites that your ideal client will likely be viewing.

#### **4. Speaking of Your Ideal Client...**

Anyone who works with a VA needs to have a certain level of comfort with the idea of having their assistant not be in the same room, or even in the same city, as themselves. These are people who are comfortable with technology and are open to running a business in a new way. If your potential clients find you by reading an article you have submitted on-line, chances are they are comfortable with technology and at least a “wee bit savvy” with the Internet. Just as in Reason #3, on-line articles act as a bit of a pre-screening process for you. The technophobe who is resistant to switching to a cordless phone is not likely to be surfing on-line for information about virtual support for his business. This is very good news for you!

#### **5. Articles Are Great Multi-Taskers**

When you get in the habit of writing articles and submitting them on-line regularly, you are also building up a library of information that you can use in several areas of your marketing strategy. Here are a few ideas about how to use your articles for more than just on-line submissions.

A) Bundle a few articles together and call it a Free Report and give it away on your web site as a promotional product.

B) When you are at in-person networking events take copies of your articles with you and hand them out instead of business cards. (An article will capture much more interest than a business card. Make sure you have an offer somewhere on the page for the reader to contact you for a free telephone information session about your VA services.)

C) Contact those who write e-zines (or magazines) for your niche market and ask about submitting some of your articles to them (e-zine and magazine publishers are always looking for content that will be informative and useful for their target audience).

D) Send your articles out periodically to your list of business leads; it is a great way to keep in touch with those who know about you but who are hesitating about hiring you. They will learn more about your services and become informed about Virtual Assistance at the same time.

Submitting articles on-line is a marketing strategy that is tailor-made for Virtual Assistants looking for low-cost and no-cost ways to effectively market their businesses and attract ideal clients. The best way to find out if it is a strategy that works for you is to give it a try!

*Alexandra Amor is a writer and web copy specialist. She is the author of several e-books for VAs who want to build their businesses FAST. For more information about how to write great marketing articles visit [www.ClientMagnetArticles.com](http://www.ClientMagnetArticles.com).*

There are numerous sites available to you to submit your articles, far too many to comprehensively list here. We have compiled a short list to help you with your search. When submitting your articles, be sure to follow any formatting instructions that may be listed.

Article Alley

<http://www.articlealley.com>

Fee: Free

Article Blotter

<http://www.articleblotter.com>

Fee: Free

Article 99

<http://www.article99.com>

Fee: Free

Associated Content

<http://www.associatedcontent.com>

Fee: Free

Article Marketer

<http://www.articlemarketer.com>

Fee: Free

Ezine Articles

<http://www.ezinearticles.com>

Fee: Free for first 10 articles

I Snare

<http://www.isnare.com>

Fee: \$10.00 USD for 5 articles

Idea Marketers

<http://www.ideamarketers.com>

Fee: Free

### **Sample Resource Box:**

**Jennifer Smith** operates a successful Virtual Assistant Business and specializes in supporting busy Real Estate Agents. For more details visit her site at: [www.vasrus.com](http://www.vasrus.com) and receive your FREE copy of Top Ten Productivity Pitfalls to Avoid.

## **Blogs**

Blog, is a term that seems to be getting plenty of attention these days, but what exactly is a blog? Well a blog is a shortened word for web log. In essence it is an on-line journal or diary that people use to write about all sorts of topics and arranged in chronological order. Individuals who write in their blog frequently are often referred to as bloggers.

Over the past few years blogging has become extremely popular and it is not hard to believe that there are millions of blogs on the Internet from people all over the world.

So why has blogging become so popular? It is one medium that allows users to freely express their opinions about virtually any subject. Even better you can create your own blog free of charge at hundreds of sites.

In most cases blogs are created for personal use, an on-line journal or diary where people can write about their daily lives and share their ideas, thoughts and pictures with family and friend. Most blogs also provide an option for people to leave feedback and comment on your posts (entries in your blog), which allow you to get a different perspective on what you have posted.

Although generally used for personal use, with the arrival of more and more on-line businesses, blogs are being used to help businesses promote products or services. In some cases individuals who are using business blogs to help promote their business, will also use their blog as a way to share their articles, with their readers and similar to article marketing establish a name for themselves in their industry.

### **Components of a Blog**

**Subject or Header:** Your blog's title

**Content or Body:** The "meat" of your blog. Your thoughts, opinions, tips and advice are part of the content.

**Comments:** The comment feature allows other to take part in a discussion regarding the contents of your blog. It allows visitors to add their own thoughts and opinions to the subject matter.

**Time and Date Stamp:** Blogs are arranged in chronological order and it is important for visitors to note the time and date of the posts.

## Reasons to Start a Blog

- 1. You have something to share with others.** Everyone has an opinion about something. Having a blog is ideal for anyone who likes to discuss issues and a blog allows others to see your point of view.
- 2. You want to promote your business.** A business blog can help you promote your business. It is a way to share with others, what it is you do, the services you are offering, and alerts to future services and promotions. It keeps clients updated and it can also lead to new clients.
- 3. You are an expert in something.** Start a blog to offer tips and advice for others. Use your blog to display your articles and expertise.
- 4. It is easy.** Starting a blog has never been easier. Thanks to the simplicity of free blogging sites such as Blogger.com anyone can blog. Even those with little or no technical skills can blog.
- 5. It increases your website page ranking.** If you would like to bring traffic to your site, a blog is a great start. Due to the fact that blogs are updated on a regular basis, Search Engines love blogs!

There are many reasons to start a blog, it is a way to express your creativity, and it is a way to stay in touch with family and friends. However in order to make your blog successful, you have to have the passion for it. If you do not have a passionate interest in something that will compel you to make regular posts and updates, your blog can become stale very quickly.

*“When I became a life and business development coach I wanted to find some way to share what I did, a way that was tangible and had impact. Blogging fit the bill and was the solution I was looking for. To date my blog receives over 40,000 visits a month from all over the world. Most importantly, blogging has enabled me to give back, to support others in their own personal development, market my coaching skills and practice, and make some amazing connections. In my humble opinion, blogging is one of the best ways to create a buzz, connect, learn, explore, and to reach out to many on a grand scale.”*

**Pam Thomas, M.S., ACC**

Life and Business Development Coach - [www.whatswithinu.com](http://www.whatswithinu.com)

Author of Will the Real YOU Please Step Forward Series

Blogging Addict – [www.makethemostofu.com](http://www.makethemostofu.com) & [www.walkingmyownwalk.com](http://www.walkingmyownwalk.com)



## **Blogging Tools**

There are a few software tools that you can use when publishing content to a blog. These tools are based into two categories; Server-Based Blog Software and Client-Based Software.

### **Server-Based Blog Software**

Server-Based Blog Software is comprised of two types. The first type is blog publishing tools that you install on your server or web hosting server. This type of software requires you to download application files yourself and install them. Some software you will have to pay for, while others are completely free (with a small donation). The advantage of this type of software installed on your own server is the level of control and customization you have over your design. The disadvantage is most people do not have the time or technical knowledge to maintain their own blog software.

When you are considering this option be aware of the additional time you will need for the technical aspect. If you are more interested in simply writing and publishing content then you may want to leave the technical details to someone else and use Host Blog Software Services.

The second type of server-based blog software is Host Blog Software Services.

### **Hosted Blog Software Services**

These blog software tools are located with a blog hosting services provider. You simply create an account, and in minutes you are blogging. The advantage of using a hosted blog software tool is the ease of it. You do not have to install software or manage configuration settings and can focus all of your attention on writing and publishing your content. For Hosted Blog Software Services you will normal find several site design templates that allow you to quickly set up your blog layout and design. You will also be able to customize your details of your template, such as colours, columns and fonts. The disadvantage to using hosted blog software services is the limitations of configuration and control. Some individuals may find these limitations a little too confining. Hosted services are designed to make blogging, simple, easy and fun to do. In some cases you are required to pay a fee however there are quite a few sites that are free. Before signing up with any company do a little research and ensure it meets your blogging needs. A few companies are listed below:

Blogger.com

[www.blogger.com](http://www.blogger.com)

Fee: Free

TypePad

[www.typepad.com](http://www.typepad.com)

Fee: starts at \$4.95 US/mth

BlogHarbor

[www.blogharbor.com](http://www.blogharbor.com)

Fee: starts at \$8.85 US/mth

## **Client-Based Software Services**

Client Based tools are software programs that are installed and run on your computer and help with publishing your blog. These tools are referred to as text editors for blogs. A blog editor allows you to compose and publish content from your desktop. The advantage to using a Blog editor is the convenience of it. Instead of opening your browser, logging into your blog software control panel and then access the text editor, you simply have to open your blog editor on your desktop. Most blog editors support the popular server installed and hosted blog software tools available. Check to make sure your blog tool is supported before you purchase a blog editor.

There are a variety of tools that you can use to manage your blog, the key is finding the one that works for you.

*"My site has gone through many integrations trying to find the one that will give me maximum exposure within my target market. And changing to a blog-site was the trick.*

*I started seriously blogging in March 2007, and my traffic increased by over 1600 hits in the first month alone. Within three months, I have had a 267% increase in traffic to my site.*

*And it is definitely because of the flexibility of the blog-site. Because the site is updated regularly with real, quality content, I am getting more search engine traffic. Because I discuss issues of concern to both the Virtual Assistant industry and my target markets, I am getting more "buzz" traffic. Because I comment on other blogs, I am driving still more traffic back to my site. Tied in with my article marketing efforts, I am seeing an explosion in traffic, enquiries and sales. All very good things!"*

**Jill Chongva, Virtual Assistant  
Graphic & Web Designer**  
[www.divalishmedia.com](http://www.divalishmedia.com)

## **Chapter 11- Summary**

Writing is a great way to let people know what it is you do. Writing articles that provide useful content to readers not only helps you establish yourself as an expert, but with a well crafted resource box, will also bring those readers to your site.

Having a blog is another way to direct traffic to your site and allow you to share your ideas, thoughts and advice with others. It can also be a lot of fun too!!

## Networking and Building Community

*Nature gave us one tongue and two ears  
so we could hear twice as much as we speak.*  
- Epictetus

Even Virtual Assistants need to learn the fine art of networking. Though you work from the comfort of your home, it is imperative that you begin to develop your “networking circle”. You will find that a networking circle is a very powerful tool when marketing your practice. Networking is not only about how many relationships you can build, but it also introduces you to individuals and resources that may help you in your business.

There are two options for networking:

1. **In person networking events:** Networking events such as your local chamber of commerce, or small business group are great ways to meet local business people within your community. Remember that the members of these organizations are small businesses...your target market.
2. **Virtual networking meetings:** You will find plenty of virtual meetings that you can attend simply by dialing into a conference line. Quite a few Virtual Assistant associations and networking communities have regular networking calls that you can attend as part of membership. This is a wonderful way to meet your fellow VAs and expand your community.

Networking is not the easiest task; if you are somewhat shy and introverted. It will be challenging to put your apprehensions aside and introduce yourself to new people. However, it will all be worthwhile in the long run.

Most of us already have networking circles that we are not even aware of. We have networks of friends, networks for schools we attended or schools our children attend. There are neighborhood networks, sporting event networks, job networks and even networks within our free-time activities.

Your best contacts will already be a part of your existing network; they are just waiting to be found. One of the best ways to market your services is to have the people in your existing networks market for you. Word-of-mouth and referrals will be the key to your success.

The people in your network not only provide word-of-mouth and referrals but will also provide you with your social needs or be a source of positive thinking, encouragement and support. Networking is a great way to deal with the isolation of working from home. Approach networking as a social event, having fun and meeting new people, not as a way to get as many referrals as possible. Expect nothing and you will reap the rewards.

## **Top Ten Tips for Successful Networking**

### **1. Find out WHO the person is.**

Approach networking like a big treasure hunt. Find out as much as you can about the other person. Make the goal in all your conversations to connect rather than impress. The more interests you have in common with the other person, the easier it is to connect and remember each other and build a relationship.

### **2. Keep track of who you know.**

At each in-person networking event, you will come home with a bunch of business cards. Make sure you have an effective way to manage all your contacts. Use a database to organize contact information, special notes, and where you met the contact.

### **3. Network everywhere.**

Use every opportunity you have to meet and network. Try to schedule time each week to attend networking events in your area.

### **4. Project sincerity.**

Be authentic, let people know who you are and be honest. People will be observing you as well.

### **5. Prepare a 30-second elevator speech.**

Develop a 30 second introduction that clearly states a benefit for the person you are meeting. Your introduction is a statement that lets them know how you can help them or someone they know. Practice this introduction so you can say it in your sleep (more information on your 30-second elevator speech later in this chapter).

### **6. Listen more than you talk.**

The art of great conversation is being a good listener. Ask questions that draw out other people. When you talk, you are not learning anything new.

### **7. Ask for referrals.**

You do not necessarily need to come right out and ask someone you just met to provide referrals for your business. Ask in a way that lets them know that you are not just thinking about what you can get from them. For example: *Ask people what would be a good referral for them.* This will encourage them to reciprocate and ask you the same question.

**8. Give a lot and first.**

Give to your network at every opportunity. The best way to create a network of people who want to do things for you is to do things for them. These things can take the form of just about anything. Offer to assist with a project, be a resource for them or it may even be as simple as being a sounding board.

**9. Use your own networks.**

Your own network consists of friends, family and colleagues. Do not hesitate to ask for business from your existing networking circles. Most people would rather do business with someone they know and trust.

**10. Always expand your network.**

Continually adding new contacts and resources to your database is a way to be a resource for others and increase the opportunities of reciprocal business.

**More tips for Successful Networking:**

- Know what it is you want to accomplish before attending any networking events.
- Always have business cards in your wallet, pocket or purse.
- Keep track of your success. After each event make a list of what you learned and how the event helped you.

*“A marketing tip that has worked for me but may not be everyone’s cup of tea is I joined a Barter Group where I have gotten several clients that started out with me working for them on barter then turned into permanent cash paying clients. If you are not familiar with a barter group this is an organization that gets people to join who can exchange goods or services on barter instead of cash. I can work for one company and get whatever amount in barter we agreed upon (usually it is my normal rates but in barter money not cash) and turn around and spend that barter money with any other member in the organization.*

*For example my daughter is getting her retainer and braces done through barter so I don’t have to use my limited cash flow for this. This also applies to all my printing for my business materials such as my flyers, business cards, letterhead, envelopes etc....all done with barter money instead of cold hard cash, I also get all my phone expenses covered on barter through Telehop. I believe this is a great way for new VA’s to start out because more people are inclined to use your services when they don’t have to put out cash and your reputation grows at the same time you are making barter money that you can spend on things you may not have considered purchasing because of low cash flow. “*

Karen Kilpatrick  
S.A.K. Virtual Services  
[www.sakvirtualseervices.com](http://www.sakvirtualseervices.com)

## Top Ten Networking Myths

- 1. Networking is about what you can get from others.**  
Networking is all about building relationships and what you can do for others.
- 2. If you know a lot of people you have a strong network.**  
This is true in some sense, however, the old saying “it is who you know” does come into play.
- 3. Networking is about schmoozing and collecting business cards.**  
Not so, networking is about genuine, sincere exchanges.
- 4. Great networkers are all extroverts.**  
Connections and relationships are developed through learning. Networkers are made, not born.
- 5. Networking takes too much time.**  
It does take time but schedule it in each week and make it a part of your marketing plan. Do you have the time not to? Referrals and word-of-mouth will make up 70% or higher of your business.
- 6. I built my network, it will always be there.**  
All relationships require care and nurturing. Without continual maintenance, networks will eventually die off.
- 7. I will look like a failure if I ask for help.**  
Not true. You look like an individual who is growing a business. Most people will enjoy helping you especially when they see potential for reciprocity in the future.
- 8. I offer superior service: I do not need connections and my work speaks for itself.**  
How many people actually know your work? With a networking circle you can grow your business more efficiently and effectively.
- 9. I cannot possibly meet the right people.**  
Who really are the right people? It is amazing the people that you can meet through networking.
- 10. I cannot network virtually.**  
Of course you can, and you must. Developing your virtual network and building on line communities is imperative for your business success.

## Different Types of Networking Groups

There are a variety of different networking groups. Here are a few just to give you some ideas:

**Industry Groups:** These groups are dedicated to specific industries. As a Virtual Assistant, you will find that these groups are growing rapidly. The majority of these networking groups are very supportive and a wonderful way to meet your virtual colleagues. Industry groups are great for keeping up on the latest information and industry news. Keep in mind that networking with other Virtual Assistants is a great way to also build your referrals and be a resource for other VAs who may have a full practice.

**Local Business Groups:** There are numerous small business groups within your area. Your local chamber of commerce or business to business networking groups are a great way to dip your foot in the networking pool. Local business groups not only provide a wonderful way to build your referral network but also provide a great way to get involved within your community.

*“For my business the best marketing tip I have found is that I joined my local Chamber of Commerce. I attend the occasional meeting and networking event and I give them my business cards and flyers for distribution to other members. I have obtained several good local clients from this membership and it also adds certain credibility to my business by being a member of a Chamber of Commerce which is a great added benefit and helps out in way of the cost to join.”*

Karen Kilpatrick  
S.A.K. Virtual Services  
[www.sakvirtualseervices.com](http://www.sakvirtualseervices.com)

**Virtual groups:** There are an increasing number of “virtual” groups available on-line, apart from the VA organizations. There are interest groups, forums and discussion groups that you can choose.

**“Free time” groups:** The best way to network is when you are doing it while having fun. Free time groups mean the country club, baseball games, art class, etc. Add an activity to your life, it is the best way to meet new friends and friends are the best source for referrals.



**Trade shows:** Being an exhibitor at a trade show is an excellent place to network and introduce your business to the participants. However, even if you want to attend a trade show as a participant as opposed to being an exhibitor – there are plenty of opportunities for networking.

### **Tips for exhibiting at a trade show**

You will have many opportunities to take a booth or table top to exhibit your services. Here are a few tips for an effective display:

- If you plan on exhibiting a lot, invest in a table top display, the most cost effective booth. It will provide you with a professional look and not break the bank. The cost for a table top display runs approximately \$500 to \$1,000, but worth the investment.
- Let your existing clients and prospective clients know you will be exhibiting at the event. Invite them to come see you.
- Create a friendly atmosphere. Introduce yourself to exhibitors on either side of you. Greet people as they come by your table.
- Have an attention-getting sign and incorporate your benefits into the information. Consider using a laptop with a power point presentation that continuously loops, outlining key facts about Virtual Assistants.
- Provide handouts or tips that people will keep because the information is valuable.
- Do not overwhelm visitors by too much information. Instead of bringing all your information, have a sign up sheet so you can send them more information after the show.
- If within budget, provide free “give always”, such as a book mark, pen, pencils, etc. Make sure you have your company name and contact information on each item.
- Offer a free subscription to your newsletter or have a draw for complimentary services.

## **Your Thirty Second Elevator Pitch**

Imagine getting into an elevator in an office building. As the doors close, the person next to you says, "A colleague of mine said you are a Virtual Assistant; what do you do?"

You have exactly thirty seconds or less before the elevator reaches the bottom floor to effectively tell this person what you do.

The thirty second elevator pitch is something you need to practice and perfect. It is a basic introduction of who you are, what you do, who you do it for and what the benefit is to the person who hires you. It will form the basis of your introductory message when networking and when a new client contacts you.

As you reach out to network with others, you will be required to cut to the chase quickly. Most contacts want a clear, direct approach and are not looking for your life history. It is important for you to develop a level of comfort in your personal presentation and you can achieve this by practicing the delivery of your Thirty Second Elevator Pitch as much as you can.

### **Creating your Elevator Pitch**

Here is an easy to use formula that will help you create your elevator pitch:

1. My name is \_\_\_\_\_.
2. I am a \_\_\_\_\_ who assists \_\_\_\_\_(who, what type of people do you assist) by \_\_\_\_\_ (what is it that you assist them with) so they \_\_\_\_\_ (what are the benefits).

You can be more elaborate by including answers to other questions such as:

- What is the advantage of hiring you over someone else?
- Why are you unique?
- How do you assist people (virtually, in person)?
- What is your niche?

## Here are a few samples to help you along:

I am Jane Smith. I am a Virtual Assistant who assists Real Estate agents virtually from home by using the Internet and e-mail; I manage their client contacts and prospective clients allowing them more time to follow up on leads. Is this a service your company would be interested in?

Hi I am Amanda Jones, a Virtual Assistant. I support small businesses with their administrative tasks from bookkeeping to document preparation. I do this from my home office so my clients do not need to worry about finding space for me. If you are interested, I would be happy to send you more information?

Hi my name is Mary Black. As a Virtual Assistant, I provide administrative support to clients worldwide. By utilizing today's technology such as the Internet and e-mail, I am able to provide professional administrative support to any business. This enables my clients to focus on running their business, instead of their business running them. As a business owner, is this something you are finding?

All of these samples are simple, direct and will peak their interest, so they will want to know more.

Remember to contain the following when working on your elevator pitch:

- **A "hook"**  
Open your pitch by getting the individuals attention with a "hook." A statement that piques their interest to want to hear more. The word Virtual Assistant always seems to entice the individual to know more since not everyone has heard about the profession.
- **About 150-200 words**  
Your pitch should go no longer than 60 seconds.
- **Passion and Enthusiasm**  
Individuals appreciate energy and passion! Give it some gusto!
- **A request**  
At the end of your pitch, ask for something. Did they want more information, a business card, to schedule a full presentation, etc.

## Delivering your Elevator Pitch

You must deliver your pitch with confidence and passion. Speak clearly, smoothly and slower than usual. Practice your pitch in the mirror if you feel this will help or ask a friend or family member to listen and ask for feedback. Do it over and over again until you can do it in your sleep.

You never know what opportunity will cross your path, so be prepared.

*"I cannot stress enough, the importance of networking for the growth and sustenance of your VA business. Network not only with the obvious - target market(s), but also with fellow virtual assistants who are often in a position to refer business to you or to subcontract your services for their own clients."*

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## **Building Community**

Being a part of a community, whether it is a person-to-person community or a virtual community, is really the “heart” of being a Virtual Assistant. It is what is unique about this profession. Building community is an important part of not only being a Virtual Assistant but in the success of your practice.

There are many on-line associations and organizations that promote the idea of developing community within the VA profession. These associations and organizations can be wonderful resources when promoting your business.

In most cases these associations/organizations offer membership at a nominal fee. For this membership fee you will have access to on-line materials, a listing in their directory and be a part of a community.

Some of these associations/organizations will also host networking calls, in-person networking events and opportunities for you to meet your fellow VAs.

There are plenty of benefits for joining on-line organizations such as:

- Meet others in the same profession
- Helps to deal with the isolation of working from home
- Submit requests for proposal (If a client comes to the site and requests a work proposal, as a member you will be able to submit one)
- Inclusion in their directory
- No geographical boundaries
- Networking opportunities
- Volunteer opportunities
- Referral opportunities
- Industry tips and information

Like with everything you invest your money in, make sure that it is right for you. Not all organizations promote the profession; some are just out to make a few dollars. Before you join any organization, consider these suggestions:

- Research the organization as much as possible.
- Speak with other members and ask them how they like the organization.
- Read their code of ethics and any membership agreements before joining.
- Ask yourself what you want to get out of joining a particular organization.

## **Benefits of Community:**

### **1. Relationship-building**

Building relationships is what marketing is all about. By being a part of a community you are building much needed relationships to grow your business.

### **2. Referral generation**

By being a part of a community, you are opening yourself up to possibilities of referrals from colleagues. If you build those relationships and build the trust within your community, others will be comfortable referring your services.

### **3. Wealth of information**

You will have a wealth of information right at your finger tips – use it.

### **4. Become a leader**

By being an active participant in your community, you will gain the respect and trust of others in the community. Let your voice be heard, become a leader.

### **5. Helps with isolation**

At times you feel very isolated from the rest of the world, sitting alone in your home office. By being part of a community, you are surrounded by others who deal with the same issues and experiences. Extend yourself to your community.

*“Be the best member of your site. Lead by example by participating as much as you can in your own community. This is a good way to attract other well-intentioned members of your site and also reminds everyone a real person is behind it all and building the best community they can for everyone. Speak honestly and be supportive of other members. When I think of all the communities I’m a part of, the ones I love are the ones I see the creators using everyday.”*

**- Matt Haughey**

Source: *fortuitous: Some Community Tips for 2007*

## **Chapter 12 - Summary**

Networking is really about relationships. It is about building friendships with people who we would also like to do business with...it is as simple as that!

## Referrals and Word-of-Mouth

*“While it may be true that the best advertising is word-of-mouth, never lose sight of the fact it also can be the worst advertising.”*

**-Jef I. Richards**

Throughout this book, we frequently mention the importance of referrals and word-of-mouth. As a Virtual Assistant, you will find that the majority of your business will come from both of these.

Referring back to Chapter One – Introduction to Marketing and the marketing cycle, you see that by building successful working relationships with clients, it leads to the development and attainment of those necessary referrals to build your business.

Virtual Assistance is not unlike any other service-based profession in the sense that if you have happy, satisfied clients, you will receive repeat business as well as new business that they have referred to you.

The diagram to the right shows how simple it really is.

Word-of-mouth and referrals are all about providing the best quality of service possible.

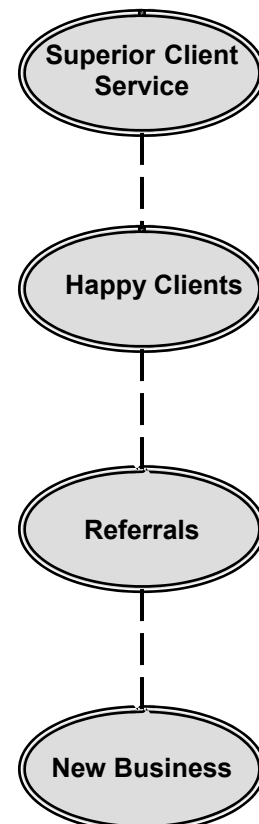
By providing the best possible service, your clients are satisfied and you have begun the steps to building a solid working relationship and have obtained their confidence.

Once they trust your service they will feel comfortable in giving your name to others they come in contact.

This is all common sense.

Referrals do not have to come from just your clients. Referrals can come from a variety of sources: people you have met at networking events, resources that you have used in your business, or even friends and family.

The most common reason people give referrals is because they like you or your service. If you are new in business, you will need to start with referrals from non-clients who know you in other ways. As discussed in Chapter Twelve – Networking, you need to talk and tell everyone what you are doing and that you are looking for business.





## **Building Confidence**

Everything you do for a client will help to build confidence, providing you are doing the right things, even small simple actions can be powerful.

A few are listed below:

### **Provide realistic time lines and meet them**

Never over-promise. Always be realistic when determining the length of time for a project and always meet those timelines. Clients who expect their work completed within a certain time frame will be very disappointed when this is not met and will quickly lose confidence in your ability to provide work in a timely manner.

### **Be solution oriented**

The best way to build client confidence is to be there for a client when they have a problem and provide a solution to help them through it. You should approach all client relationships as a partnership and view your client's problem as your problem, and find a solution.

### **Be courteous**

Being friendly and courteous really does go a long way.

### **Go above and beyond the call of duty**

Take your work a step further. Do something for your client that they did not ask for or expect to have done. This could be as simple as sending an article to your client that you feel would be of interest to them.

### **Provide resources**

If you cannot help them, have a list of resources that you can give them. Make sure these resources have proven track records.

### **Always communicate the truth**

Your clients will not think any less of you if you are unsure of a project or do not have the skills to do it. Be truthful with them and they will appreciate your honesty.

### **Only provide services you do well**

Do not add items to your service list for the sake of having a larger service list. Only add those services that you do very well. If you know a little bit about bookkeeping – not good enough. You need to know a lot about bookkeeping in order to offer this as a viable service.

## **Building Relationships**

There are a variety of ways that you can build relationships, so much so that it actually becomes second nature to us, we do not consciously realize we are doing it.

When trying to develop a business through relationship building, word-of-mouth and referrals, you will have to try to be aware of your relationship building technique.

A few things to always consider:

### **Be a friend**

Not only provide services to your clients but offer your friendship as well. When we talk about friendship, we do not mean you have to begin spending your weekends at their house, or go on shopping trips together. Form a relationship that is comfortable to you. People love to talk about their interests outside of work, so listen and spark up conversation regarding this - be personable.

### **Be giving**

Everyone loves to receive something at one time or another. We do not mean buying your client's affections; we are talking about offering a gesture of gratitude. This can be as simple as buying a thank you card, thanking your client for their business.

### **Share**

Share your experiences, share your thoughts, and share your resources and connections. Share anything with a client that you feel will help to build a relationship.

### **Talk about yourself**

A majority of clients will love to hear about you, your family, and your business anything that helps them get a clearer understanding of the person who is doing their work. Remember to be appropriate when divulging information about yourself. There are some things you should talk about and other things that should be left unsaid.

## **Types of Referrals**

### **Client Referrals**

These are the referrals you get by providing great customer service and the most rewarding type of referral.

### **Professional Referrals**

Referrals you receive from other Virtual Assistants, these referrals are generated through ongoing networking and relationship building within the profession.

### **Resource Referrals**

These types of referrals are from resources you use within your business. Web designers, printers, accountants and bookkeepers often make fantastic referral sources. If possible, create alliances with other professions and provide reciprocal referrals: win-win for everyone.

### **Association Referrals**

Some associations will provide your name as a referral if you meet the criteria of a prospective client. These types of referrals are not too common and keep in mind that most associations are required to give the name of at least three other businesses when giving referrals.

## **Asking for Referrals**

Asking for referrals may not be easy for some people, however; you need to get over it. As a VA, referrals are your lifeblood.

To help you gain confidence in this area, here are a few things to know about asking for referrals.

- Ask for referrals outright. Explain what you do and would appreciate referrals. It is as simple as that. Of course, you are not going to ask a complete stranger who knows nothing about you to refer clients to you. You are going to build relationships or use existing relationships with people to build your referral base.
- Build your reputation. This takes time by providing exceptional client service. When you are good at what you do and have confidence in your ability, asking for referrals will become second nature.
- Be involved in an atmosphere where referrals can occur. People refer people who they like and trust. This means you need to get out and talk with confidence about what it is you do and about the clients you work with. As covered in the previous chapter, networking is an important part in getting the word out. Join your local chamber of commerce, go to seminars or join a health club. Even social activities can provide great opportunities for networking.
- Do not come from a place of desperation. If you are desperate for clients and are needy, people will sense this and run the other way. Desperation is a repellent, not an attraction. Think of it this way: if you were to walk into a bank and say, "I am desperate, I need money". That is a reason why you want the money; it is not a reason why the bank should give it to you. The same applies for referrals.
- Be clear on the terms of the referral. Some people will give you referrals just because they like you and want to help you. Others may see something in it for themselves. Be sure that there is not a hidden agenda when someone refers business to you.
- Give referrals to get referrals. When you provide a referral for another business that you trust explicitly and you know they will provide the best service possible, this will reflect on you. Best-case scenario: the happy customer will then send business your way.
- Offer referral fees or free services. Let everyone know that if they refer someone to you, they will receive a referral fee or, preferably, two or three hours of free services.
- Thank those who refer you. Once someone refers you, the relationship does not stop there. Send them a thank you note or a small gift. Keep in contact with them and remind them of how appreciative you are for the referrals.

## **Word-of-Mouth**

*“Word of mouth is far and away the dominant force in the marketplace. Yet it is also the most neglected. Companies have vice presidents of sales, advertising and marketing. Yet there isn’t a single vice president of word of mouth in any corporation in the country. Why?”*

- *George Silverman, Author*

An amusing quote, yet so true. Spreading the word on your business and the services you offer is just as important as those necessary referrals. You have to build your reputation and your credibility as a Virtual Assistant who provides superior client service.

Sometimes spreading the word is not as easy as it sounds. People need to witness and experience the results themselves in order to confidently spread the word.

For these individuals, let them do just that. Offer a free hour of services or a complimentary intake session to discuss their administrative challenges and the solutions you can provide for them. You will find that they will be intrigued to take you up on your offer.

The great thing about being a VA is the “newness” of the profession. The term Virtual Assistant itself will peak interest and start conversation. Not only between you and the person you are speaking to, but guaranteed the next day that same person will be telling someone else about this new profession they heard about called Virtual Assisting. And of course your name will come up.

Every time you talk about what it is you do, you are creating a chain effect. This is the very basis of word-of-mouth. So, you can see the importance of talking and talking a lot about your business.



**The conversation starts and word-of-mouth begins!!**

## 10 Quick Tips for Generating Word-of-Mouth Referrals

1. As mentioned earlier...ask for them.
2. Be specific. Provide people with a few details about your target market.
3. Develop word-of-mouth marketing promotions. Develop a marketing plan that encourages referrals.
4. Promote positive feedback. Ask clients to evaluate your services and provide feedback on the service they are receiving.
5. Encourage self-development. Make a commitment to life long learning. Constantly grow and develop your knowledge.
6. Build a customer community. Find way to bring your clients together. This may include teleconferencing, chat rooms or inviting clients to an event.
7. Leverage your competitive advantage. In your promotional activities, feature what sets your business apart from the competition in the eyes of your clients.
8. Become an excellent listener. Communication skills are extremely important in trust building with clients.
9. Enjoy networking. Establish a networking plan built around helping others.
10. Develop an eye-catching website. When web surfers come across an interesting site, it is not uncommon for them to tell others about it.

*"I've never forgotten the advice from my college advertising professor who said the best kind of advertising is word-of-mouth. In that vein, I ask for referrals and have almost exclusively used word-of-mouth to build my business."*

Karen Barker  
Opatrix Communication & Design  
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## Start getting referrals NOW!

How will you make yourself a topic of conversation for your clients? List ten good reasons that your clients might talk about you; these questions may help:

- What is unique about your service?
- Why is it so valuable to your clients that they know and trust you?
- What is new that you do that not many people know about?
- What good feedback have your clients recently given you, and how could you do more of what they find valuable?

### When people talk about you more, you will notice the difference:

- You will spend more time SERVING people and less energy selling to them.
- You will be able to spend more time doing the things you like to do as opposed to marketing your business.
- You will be more confident and find it easier to talk with people about what you do.

## Word-of-Mouth Worksheet

Place an X in the appropriate yes or no column.

| YES                      | NO                       | QUESTIONS   |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | I send referrals to my clients.   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | My clients, friends and professional network know who I like to work with.                                  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | I update my network regularly as I change specialty / upgrade my service through training, etc.             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | I have a newsletter that is easy to run and gives value for people.   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | I help people to experience what I do rather than telling them about it.                                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | My clients have all my details and spare business cards to give to others.                                  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | I thank people for referrals.   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | I know the eight people who send me the most business, and I have a strong relationship with them.          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | I continually improve my product/service and have an easy system for informing my circle.                   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | When a client is dissatisfied, I take three 'over the top' actions to make sure it will never happen again. |

You should have an X under the YES column for each question. Start a regular routine with these items. Set up reminders for each of these procedures.

## **Chapter 13 - Summary**

Throughout this book we have covered a variety of marketing techniques that could be the basis for all your marketing. However, referrals and word-of-mouth are the most effective, least expensive marketing methods for obtaining new clients.

You should also be aware that referrals do not just happen; you need to cultivate and build relationships.



## **Creating your Marketing Plan**

*Goals in writing are dreams with deadlines.*  
**-Brian Tracy**

Just as you have discovered if you have ever written a business plan, there are many variations in the format and outlines for marketing plans. It is up to you and only you to decide how extensive you want your marketing plan to be.

You need to decide the purpose of your marketing plan. If you will be using your marketing plan to attain a loan for business start up at a financial institution, you will be required to provide a very detailed and extensive plan. If your marketing plan is only for your benefit, to help you get clearer on your marketing initiatives and goals, it can be simpler and less formal.

We will be looking at two different variations:

- 1) A simple, mini marketing plan
- 2) A more extensive overall marketing plan

Keep in mind, even if you start with the simpler plan of the two, it can be revised and added to when you have a need to do so. The simpler plan will give you a good basis for the more extensive marketing plan.

As a VA in a sole practice, you may find that you do not necessarily need a more extensive plan, and you would be in the majority. It is not too often that a VA will find use for a more extensive and highly detailed marketing plan. However, if the urge to expand your marketing initiatives grabs you then we applaud your efforts and encourage you to take a look at the extensive marketing plan within this chapter.

### **Benefits of Planning**

- A plan will encourage you to do research
- A plan will help you learn more about yourself and your business initiatives
- A plan helps you direct your efforts to get you where you want to be
- A plan will motivate you to reach your specific goals
- A plan will help you organize your ideas
- A plan will give you clear timelines to reach your goals

## **Planning requires some guesswork.**

If you are in the initial stages of starting your business, you will find that you will be required to do quite a bit of guesswork when working on your marketing plan. Forecasting will be required, but do not let it discourage you, be realistic when goal setting and setting your budget and you will do just fine. Remember, some amazing things have been accomplished by guesswork.

So let's begin!!

## Getting Started

Up to this point you should have all, or most, of the information you need to begin creating your marketing plan. To help you start planning, it is easier to have all your information in one place. To refresh your memory on topics we have covered in previous chapters, use the Marketing Worksheet below:

### Marketing Worksheet

Business Name \_\_\_\_\_

Services you plan to offer

---

---

---

Our service will sell because:

---

---

---

---

Describe the benefits your service will offer customers (the SPECIFIC problems the service solves or SPECIFIC advantages it offers to the customer)

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

### Location and Type of Market

Our market will be:

- |                                      |  |                                   |  |
|--------------------------------------|--|-----------------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Local       | <input type="checkbox"/> International | <input type="checkbox"/> National | <input type="checkbox"/> Province or<br>State Wide |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Combination | <input type="checkbox"/> Other         |                                   |  |

**Our typical client is:**

- An individual       A family       A business       Government

**The typical client is located in:**

- Rural area       Suburbs       Large city

**Typical Individual Client**

The customer is:

- Male       Female       Male or Female

**The typical client's income level is:**

- \$50,000 or less       \$50,000 - \$70,000       \$70,000 - \$100,000       No typical level

**The typical client will require:**

- All services       4-5 Services       1-3 Services       No typical level

**The majority of services needed are:**

- Daily Basis       Weekly Basis       Monthly Basis       No typical level

**The principal reason a client will pay for our services is:**

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**The number of clients in our market is:**

- Increasing       Constant       Decreasing

**Competition**

**How many other services like yours are in your area?**

---

**How will your service differ from your competitors?**

---

---

---

---

---

**Is there any particular industry jargon, knowledge or past work experience you possess that would give you an edge over competitors if you focused on bringing in business from a particular industry? (Example: have you ever worked in a law office, typed statistical data, etc.)**

---

**Getting Clients**

**How are you planning to find clients? (Check all that apply)**

- Mailings
- In-person sales calls
- Phone calls
- Paid advertising in newspapers or magazines
- Classified ads
- Ads on the Internet
- An ad in the Yellow pages
- Word-of-mouth advertising
- Network at business meetings
- Window signs to attract walk-in trade
- In-store displays to sell add-on services
- Bidding on jobs
- On-line classified advertising or websites
- Other (specify)

**Our target audience for advertising is:**

---

**The geographic area for our advertising will be:**

---

**Our advertising budget will be:**

\$ \_\_\_\_\_ in the 1<sup>st</sup> year

\$ \_\_\_\_\_ in the 2<sup>nd</sup> year

\$ \_\_\_\_\_ in the 3<sup>rd</sup> year

**What will it cost you to use each of these marketing methods?**

\_\_\_\_\_ Mailings (Include cost of postage, mailing lists, if they will be rented, and printed materials. If you will create the mailers on your own printer, be sure to include the cost of paper and ink.)

\_\_\_\_\_ In-person sales calls (include gas money)

\_\_\_\_\_ Phone calls

\_\_\_\_\_ Paid advertising

\_\_\_\_\_ Classified ads

\_\_\_\_\_ Small display ads

\_\_\_\_\_ Yellow pages

\_\_\_\_\_ Word-of-mouth advertising

\_\_\_\_\_ Network at business meetings (include cost of meetings, if any)

\_\_\_\_\_ Banner ads on the Internet

\_\_\_\_\_ Ads in electronic newsletters

\_\_\_\_\_ Bidding on jobs

\_\_\_\_\_ On-line classified advertising or websites

\_\_\_\_\_ Other (specify)

We will evaluate our marketing effectiveness by:

---

---

---

Once you have answered these questions you will have the basis to start on your marketing plan.

## A Mini Marketing Plan (MMP) in Four Easy Steps

A mini marketing plan is the simplest way to begin planning and implementing your marketing efforts. As stated earlier in this chapter, this type of marketing plan would not be detailed enough for a business start up loan; it is a great way to clarify your personal planning purpose, marketing goals and initiatives.

1) What are your goals of marketing?

Goal #1: \_\_\_\_\_

It is important to keep this answer simple, direct and specific. Making more money or getting more clients is too general.

Here are some more specific examples:

- To get (state number) *new* clients within the Real Estate Profession
- To get publicity in the “Franklin City Times”
- To get repeat clients
- To get (state number) referrals from each client

These goals may even be more specific such as to get on a local radio show or to become a guest writer in a trade magazine or newspaper. Choose a goal that is realistic and achievable.

2) What are the action items to reach your goals?

Goal #1 \_\_\_\_\_

Action: \_\_\_\_\_

Action Items are the steps you will be taking to help you reach your goals. The action items may be as simple as making a telephone call.

Goal 1: Increase awareness of VAs R US within the business community.

Actions:

- Attend at least four networking events every three months
- Advertise in at least three mediums per year
- Join two networking organizations a year
- Donate services to local charities

Goal 2: Get new clients within the Real Estate profession

Actions:

- Create a database of Real Estate professionals
- Create a hard copy mailing introducing my services
- Offer a discount on services if contacted within a certain timeline
- Follow up by telephone to at least 20% of the people that received the direct mailing

3) What is your marketing budget?

I will spend \_\_\_\_\_ hours per week on marketing.

I have \_\_\_\_\_ dollars to spend.

Each year I would like to increase my marketing budget by \_\_\_\_\_.

As a small business, you will need to budget enough time and money to get results. If you currently have no clients, you should be marketing most of the time.

4) What is your schedule for action?

Tomorrow I will \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Tomorrow I will work \_\_\_\_\_ hours.

I have scheduled these days and times during the week to work on marketing.

| Day   | Time  |
|-------|-------|
| _____ | _____ |
| _____ | _____ |
| _____ | _____ |
| _____ | _____ |
| _____ | _____ |



By the end of this week, I will have accomplished \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

By the end of the month, I will have worked a total of \_\_\_\_\_ hours on marketing.

At the end of the month, I will have accomplished \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

By committing to a specific schedule, it is easier to motivate yourself to reach your goals. A schedule is a direct commitment for taking action on a particular action at a particular time. It helps you to focus to finish your mini marketing plan.

**Important to Note:**

With the simplicity of this mini marketing plan, it is still imperative that you understand who your target audience is, what your niche is, what your company identity says about you and who your competitors are. Although this mini plan does not discuss all of these items, you should still be clear on these items.

## **The Extensive Marketing Plan (EMP)**

The best place to start with this marketing plan is at the beginning, with an understanding of what you hope to accomplish in your business and a feel for the strategies that will best help you to achieve those goals.

As mentioned earlier, this type of plan is a fairly extensive plan and will require you to think and look ahead. It will also require you to do a fair bit of research and approach this research with an analytical mind.

History has shown that there is one reason why some people succeed and others fail. The difference is not one of knowing, but of doing. It is not so much of what you know but the actions in which you take.

### **EMP Overview**

Typically your EMP should include the following sections:

1. Executive Summary
2. Market Review
3. Competitive Analysis
4. Product/Service Review
5. Strength, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats (SWOT)
6. Goals and Objectives
7. Strategies
8. Action Plan and Implementation
9. Evaluation

### **Executive Summary**

The Executive Summary is usually the first section of a marketing plan. It summarizes your plan for quick review and is normally written last. Once you have completed the meat of your plan, come back and write your executive summary.

The Executive Summary should briefly cover:

1. Market Review
2. Competitive Review
3. Product/Service Review
4. Strength, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats (SWOT)
5. Goals and Objectives
6. Strategies
7. Action Plan and Implementation
8. Evaluation

The executive summary could be a paragraph to a couple of pages long. Outside readers may only read this and then glance to one or two sections.

## **Market Review**

For this section of your marketing plan you will need to do a bit of research and find the answers for the following questions:

1. Who are the major users of your services (be as specific as possible)?
2. How big is the potential market?
3. Is the market growing, at a stand still or decreasing? What changes do you see happening?
4. Is the market segmented by location, quality, age, income or services?
5. Who is your target audience?
6. Who are your competitors?

As with all of the other sections of your marketing plan, there is no right or wrong way to organize your information. Organize the market overview section in a way that makes sense to you.

## **Target Market**

In this section of your marketing plan, go into as much detail as possible about who is your market. Include items such as:

- Age
- Sex
- Profession
- Income level
- Educational level

Find out as much as possible about your target market.

## **Example:**

At VAs R US, our target market consists of Personal and Business Coaches who primarily work from their home offices. The majority of this market is women from the ages of 39-45, and have a post-secondary education and have formally been trained as a Personal and Business Coach by a training institute that specializes in this type of training.

Our target market consists of Coaches who have an annual income of \$60,000 to \$100,000. These Coaches are more apt to have the financial resources to hire a Virtual Assistant.

Here are some other questions you may want to answer and include in the Market Review section of your marketing plan.

1. What do clients like about your services?
2. What do they like about your competitors' services?
3. What made them decide to hire you?
4. What advertising message have they seen prior to hiring you, if any?
5. What emotional aspects impact their purchase?
6. Who is the decision-maker for this type of hiring?
7. What values and attitudes played a part in this hire?

### **Competitive Analysis**

For this section of your marketing plan, you will want to provide a complete and thorough overview of your competitive market. Cover not only those companies you are directly competing with (companies that offer the same service, same profession), but also other companies outside of the profession. For example: As a VA you are not only competing with other VAs, you are also competing against temporary placement agencies that provide administrative professionals to companies on a temporary basis.

Describe your competitors and answer the following questions:

1. What are their strengths and weaknesses as a company?
2. What are the differences between your services and theirs?
3. What is their pricing structure?
4. What were their sales last year?
5. In what media mediums do they advertise their services?
6. What is their advertising message?
7. Where else do they promote their services?
8. What were their total advertising expenditures for last year?
9. What is their overall goal?
10. How are they trying to meet their goals (low prices, better quality)?

Information is often the key to a strong competitive advantage. Visit your competitors' websites, request information or even just ask them the questions.

## Product/Service Review

Use this section of your marketing plan to fully describe:

- Your service and its purpose
- Its features
- Current pricing structure
- Delivery your services
- Current promotions and advertising

Make sure the information is specific and accurate. This part of your marketing plan should be easy for you. You know the services you are offering; you should also know what benefits your clients will receive from your services.

In a nutshell, you have to make the end result very clear that is ultimately the reason why someone should hire you.

## SWOT Analysis

SWOT stands for STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES, OPPORTUNITIES and THREATS. Strengths and weaknesses are internal factors. For example, a strength could be your expertise with web design. A weakness could be the lack of a service such as bookkeeping.

Opportunities and threats are external factors. An opportunity could be the development of new software that could be used on a developing market. A threat could be a new competitor in your target market.

\*\*A word of caution: SWOT analysis can be very subjective. Because it is based on people's perceptions rather than hard data, take the results with a grain of salt.

SWOT begins by looking at internal strengths and weaknesses. To help you determine these, use the chart:

| Factors              | Strength | Weakness |
|----------------------|----------|----------|
| Profitability        |          |          |
| Sales and Marketing  |          |          |
| Quality              |          |          |
| Customer Service     |          |          |
| Productivity         |          |          |
| Financial Resources  |          |          |
| Financial Management |          |          |
| Operations           |          |          |

Internal strengths and weaknesses are easy. For each key area, ask yourself whether it is a strength or a weakness – it may be both. You are looking for a rough profile of your businesses’ internal performance. You want to be able to capitalize on the strengths and defend or improve weaknesses.

Now you will need to look at the external environments where your business operates. While these factors are not under your control, if you examine how they will affect you, you can take precautionary action.

| <b>Factors</b>       | <b>Opportunities</b> | <b>Threats</b> |
|----------------------|----------------------|----------------|
| Current Clients      |                      |                |
| Prospective Clients  |                      |                |
| Competition          |                      |                |
| Technology           |                      |                |
| Government           |                      |                |
| Economic environment |                      |                |

Again for each factor, ask what opportunities and threats to the success of your business are coming up.

Technological factors include new or improved technologies. For example, desktop publishing software is becoming easier and friendlier to use – is this an opportunity, threat or both?

Government factors could include taxes for small businesses, regulations and new laws for doing business outside of the country.

Economic environments – local, national and international – will have a direct impact on your business. For example, if you charge your clients in US dollars and the US dollar plummets, this can directly affect your financial goals. However, if the US dollar rises significantly, it will have a positive affect on your financial position. Threat or opportunity?

Once you have completed both charts, pick five strengths and opportunities to work on and no more than five weaknesses and threats.

### **SWOT Summary**

The most important strengths we possess and the best opportunities we face are:

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)
- 4)
- 5)

The most dangerous weaknesses and threats we face are:

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)
- 4)
- 5)

Now create your action list to build on your strengths and opportunities and to improve your weaknesses and threats.

Examples:

#1 Strength or Opportunity:      Excellent reputation

Action:      Leverage word-of-mouth, ask for referrals

#1 Weakness or Threat:      New competitors

Action:      Provide more personal service, build solid relationships with existing clients, fast response times

Your SWOT analysis is now complete. Include all your charts and your action list in your marketing plan.

## **Goals and Objectives**

Without goals we would never get anywhere or do anything in life. As described in the mini marketing plan with Goals and Actions, the same concept applies here within the Goals and Objectives section of your marketing plan.

There is a distinction between goals and objectives. Goals are long-range, anywhere from a year to many years, and help you maintain your business direction. Objectives are short-range, specific activities that are tactics to move you towards your long-term goals.

You need two sets of goals: One for your business and one for yourself. Personal goals come first.

To set your personal goals ask yourself these questions (you may have already answered some of these questions if you completed the marketing worksheet at the beginning of this chapter):

1. How much money do you want or need to earn?
2. What sort of lifestyle is desirable for you and your family?
3. How big do you want your business to become?
4. How will your business reflect you and your values?
5. How much risk do you want to take? In what areas?
6. What do you want to achieve over the next five years?

Now that you have a clearer understanding of what your personal goals are you will be able to create business goals that are aligned with your personal desires.

### Sales and Marketing Goals

After completing your personal goals, now focus on your business goals and more specifically your sales goals and marketing objectives. Start with your sales goals first.

For each service that you offer, forecast sales for the next year. A worst case/best case/most likely case approach makes this somewhat easier and more accurate than just guessing. Use the chart below; some services have already been filled out, complete according to your offered services.

| Services               | Worst Case    | Most Likely Case | Best Case      |
|------------------------|---------------|------------------|----------------|
| Word Processing        |               |                  |                |
| Bookkeeping            |               |                  |                |
| Desktop Publishing     |               |                  |                |
| Web Design             |               |                  |                |
| Database Management    |               |                  |                |
|                        |               |                  |                |
| <b>Example:</b>        |               |                  |                |
| <i>Word Processing</i> | \$500.00/year | \$1500.00/year   | \$3000.00/year |

For each service, estimate what sales would be if everything goes wrong next year. Then estimate what sales would be if everything goes perfectly. Since neither case is likely, indicate the most likely case scenario. This number is not an average of worst and best cases, but rather your opinion of what will happen to each service over the next year.



For the example, keep in mind as a VA you will have ongoing clients that will require word processing on a regular basis and other clients who are more project-to-project. It is a good idea to estimate your sales per service. You may have a client who requires bookkeeping, word processing and web design; try to forecast these figures individually as opposed to combining them.

By forecasting these services separately, it will also give you an indication which services you predict will be the real money makers.

### Marketing Objectives

Your marketing objectives should be the means to achieve your sales goals. Some marketing objectives could be increased sales, improved market share, entry into new markets or adding a new service. Your objectives could even include improving your company image, advertising or promotional efforts.

#### Marketing Objectives Examples:

- 1) Create a website that clearly defines benefits of services for promotion.
- 2) Create a 5,000-person database of potential clients for distribution of marketing material.
- 3) Add two new services this year.

**Set Goals for the future.** Although your marketing plan need only to forecast for the next year, try forecasting your sales goals for the next three years to provide direction, stability and help you to maintain your focus.

\*\*For next year, add “most likely case” figures.

| Services                 | For next year | In three years |
|--------------------------|---------------|----------------|
| Word Processing          |               |                |
| Bookkeeping              |               |                |
| Desktop Publishing       |               |                |
| Web Design               |               |                |
| Database management      |               |                |
|                          |               |                |
| <i>Example:</i>          |               |                |
| <i>Word Processing *</i> | \$1,500.00    | \$3,500.00     |

\* This sample shows that we have forecasted our increase in sales to be \$1,000 per year.

## **Strategies**

The strategies portion of your marketing plan will need to cover the following:

### ***Service/Product Strategy***

Your service strategy is the nuts and bolts of your service list and why someone would hire you to perform them. Discuss the features and benefits of your services and what makes you different from your competitors.

### ***Pricing Strategy***

This discusses how you will be pricing your services. Are your prices too low or too high or competitive within the industry?

Some things to think about:

- 1) Although your strategy may be to offer lower prices than your competitors, consider the reflection this may have on your services. Does this communicate that your services are inferior to your competitors?
- 2) Will pricing your services at the higher end of the scale hurt your chances of getting clients or will it communicate that your service is supreme?

When writing your pricing strategies, back it up with current data about your competitors' prices.

### ***Promotion Strategy***

Your promotion strategy is the section of your marketing plan where you will discuss the tools you will use to promote yourself.

This section should cover the following items:

- Advertising
- Relationship building (word-of-mouth, referrals)
- Direct marketing
- Promotions and events
- Marketing materials
- Other promotions

You will discuss the action plan and implementation of these items in the next section.

## Action and Implementation

This section of your marketing plan is where you put words into action. You will want to show the reader how you plan to implement your strategy more specifically your promotional strategies.

To help you better organize this consider using a chart as shown below:

| Strategy       | Action   | Cost                | Deadline  |
|----------------|--|---------------------|-----------|
| Advertising    |  |                     |           |
|                | Place ad in "Franklin Times"                               | \$250.00            | Jan 4/04  |
|                | Place pay per click banner ad on Real Estate resource site | \$100.00 - \$300.00 | Mar 30/04 |
|                |  |                     |           |
| Direct Mailing | Create 2000 person database                                | \$0.00              | Apr 10/04 |
|                | Create flyer for mailings                                  | \$30.00             | Apr 12/04 |
|                | Buy stamps for mailings                                    | \$102.00            | Apr 13/04 |
|                | Complete mail out  | \$0.00              | Apr 15/04 |
|                |  |                     |           |

Be as detailed as possible when listing your actions and as realistic as possible when listing your deadlines.

## Evaluation

For the last section of your marketing plan, you will need to include information on how you plan on tracking your successes and losses for each promotional marketing strategy you are using – how you will be determining what works and what does not.

This could be as simple as asking prospective clients how they heard about you or tracking the number of enquires you receive after an ad is placed.

## **Chapter 14 - Summary**

Your marketing initiatives do not stop after you have created your marketing plan. Review your plan quarterly. Ask yourself where your business is coming from, existing clients or new clients? What is your competition doing? What is your overall position in the market?

Your plan will be an evolutionary process; from year to year you will find new and improved ways to market your business and will be able to add these initiatives to your existing marketing plan.

Keep up the planning, goal setting and implementation!

# MARKETING MATERIAL SAMPLES

Following are a few basic examples of VA specific marketing materials. The designs are quite simple, without a whole lot of “bells and whistles” to emphasize how easy it really is to create your own materials. You can be simplistic or very creative with your materials...the choice is yours!

## Basic Brochure Design #1

Sample 1: Outside Brochure

Panel 6

Panel 5

Panel 4

|   |  |  |
|---|--|--|
| <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Service List</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Administrative Support<br/>Services<br/>for the Small Business Owner!</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Document Preparation</li><li>• Accounting/Bookkeeping</li><li>• Web Design</li><li>• Presentation Support</li><li>• Reminder Services</li><li>• Market Research</li><li>• Organizational Consulting</li><li>• Transcription</li><li>• Event Planning</li><li>• Travel Arrangement</li><li>• Data Processing</li><li>• Contact Management</li></ul> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Get 20% off your first invoice!!</b></p> | <p style="text-align: center;"></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Contact us for a free complimentary session!</b></p> <hr/> <p style="text-align: center;">Virtually Anytime:<br/>123 Winners Street,<br/>Pro Island, ON<br/>T7G 5H5</p> <p>P: 555-222-3333<br/>F: 555-222-4444<br/>E: info@anytime-va.com<br/>W: www.anytime-va.com</p> | <p style="text-align: center;"></p> <hr/> <p style="text-align: center;"></p> <hr/> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Administrative Solutions...<br/>Anytime, Anywhere!</b></p> <hr/> <p style="text-align: center;">Start running your business instead of your business running YOU!</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Contact us now!<br/>www.anytime-va.com<br/>info@anytime-va.com<br/>555-222-3333</p> |
|---|--|--|

## Sample 1: Inside Brochure

### Panel 1

#### What is a VA?

Virtual Assistants are independent contractors who perform a wide range of administrative and business services. By utilizing today's technology we are able to provide administrative support to businesses all over the world.

Virtual Assistants are more than just secretaries: we partner with our clients, learn about their business and provide the professional support that is needed in order to succeed.

VA's communicate with their clients via email, telephone, fax and diskette transfer: distance is never an issue.

VA's provide a variety of skills from document preparation to bookkeeping to strategic planning: skills to meet the needs of all business professionals.



### Panel 2

#### Company Profile

**Virtually Anytime** is a full service Virtual Assistant company that opened it's doors in 2001. We offer innovative and cost effective administrative solutions for small businesses.

Jennifer Smith, owner and operator of Virtually Anything, has 15 years experience in the administration profession.



In 2001 Jennifer created Virtually Anytime a one-stop shop for small businesses looking for support.

Virtually Anytime provides more than just administrative support: we partner with you, in growing your business.

At Virtually Anytime our goal is to save you time, money and to handle the details, do you don't have to!

### Panel 3

#### Benefits for YOU!

- You no longer need to spend your valuable time on those tasks you don't have time or are not able to do.
- You don't need to provide a physical workspace.
- You don't need to purchase any computer equipment for your Virtual Assistant to use.
- You won't need to deal with payroll, taxes or benefits.
- You can accelerate your business' growth by freeing up your time to focus on the more important aspects of your business.
- You are able to make better decisions by being able to "bounce "ideas off your Virtual Assistant.
- You have peace of mind knowing that your Virtual Assistant is handling the details professionally and on time.








## Basic Brochure Design #2

### Sample 2: Outside Brochure

Panel 6

Panel 5

Panel 4

|  |  |   |
|--|--|---|
| <p><b>Service List</b> </p> <p>Administrative Support Services<br/>for the Small Business Owner!</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>◆ Document Preparation</li><li>◆ Accounting/Bookkeeping</li><li>◆ Web Design</li><li>◆ Presentation Support</li><li>◆ Reminder Services</li><li>◆ Market Research</li><li>◆ Organizational Consulting</li><li>◆ Transcription</li><li>◆ Event Planning</li><li>◆ Travel Arrangement</li><li>◆ Data Processing</li></ul> <p><b>Get 20% off<br/>your first<br/>Invoice</b></p> | <p></p> <p> Virtually Anytime:<br/>123 Winners Street,<br/>Pro Island, ON<br/>T7G 5H5</p> <p>P: 555-222-3333<br/>F: 555-222-4444<br/>E: info@anytime-va.com<br/>W: www.anytime-va.com</p> | <p><br/><b>Virtually Anytime</b><br/>Here when you need us!!</p> <p><b>Administrative Solutions...<br/>Anytime, Anywhere!</b></p> <p></p> <p><b>www.anytimeva.com</b></p> |
|--|--|---|

# Sample 2: Inside Brochure

## Panel 1

### What is a VA?

Virtual Assistants are independent contractors who perform a wide range of administrative and business services. By utilizing today's technology we are able to provide administrative support to businesses all over the world.

Virtual Assistants are more than just secretaries: we partner with our clients, learn about their business and provide the professional support that is needed in order to succeed.

By working with a Virtual Assistant, it enables the entrepreneur to enjoy the support benefits that was once available only to individuals in large corporations.



VA's communicate with their clients via email, telephone, fax and diskette transfer: distance is never an issue.

VA's provide a variety of skills from document preparation to bookkeeping to strategic planning: skills to meet the needs of all business professionals.

## Panel 2

### About Virtually Anytime

#### About Virtually Anytime



Virtually Anytime is a full service Virtual Assistant company that opened it's doors in 2001.

We offer innovative and cost effective administrative solutions for small businesses.

Jennifer Smith, owner and operator of Virtually Anything, has 15 years experience in the administration profession. In 2001 Jennifer created Virtually Anytime a one-stop shop for small businesses looking for support.

Virtually Anytime provides more than just administrative support: we partner with you, in growing your business.

At Virtually Anytime our goal is to save you time, money and to handle the details, do you don't have to!

## Panel 3

### Client Needs Assessment

Contact Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Business Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Business Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Business Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_

Business Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Website: \_\_\_\_\_

Tell me about your business: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

What administrative challenges are you facing at the present moment?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

In regards to the administration aspects of your business what is it that you like doing the least?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

#### Services of interest:

- Administrative tasks
- Bookkeeping
- Website Design
- Desktop Publishing
- Data Processing
- Contact Management
- Internet Research





Basic Flyer Design #1

|   |  |
|---|--|
|   |  |
| <b>Take Your Business to the Next Level with Virtually Anytime!</b>   |  |
|   | <p>Virtually Anytime provides a one-stop shop for ALL your administrative needs. By offering small businesses innovative and cost-effective solutions business owners will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>√ Save Money</li><li>√ Have More Time</li><li>√ Grow Your Business</li></ul> <p>Most of all you can begin running your business, instead of it running you!!</p> |
| <b>SERVICES</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Office Support Services</li><li>• Bookkeeping</li><li>• Web Design</li><li>• Presentations</li><li>• Email Support</li><li>• Desktop Publishing</li><li>• And MUCH MORE!!</li></ul> |  |
| <b>CONTACT US TODAY!!</b> <p><b>P:</b> 555-222-3333</p> <p><b>E:</b> info@anytime-va.com</p> <p><b>www.anytime-va.com</b></p>   | <p>Mention this Flyer and receive</p> <p><b>20% off</b></p> <p><b>YOUR FIRST INVOICE</b></p>   |



**HAVE MORE TIME**  
**SAVE MONEY**  
**GROW YOUR BUSINESS**  
**THINK OF THE POTENTIAL!!**

Virtually Anytime provides a one-stop shop for ALL your administrative needs. We offer small businesses innovative and cost-effective services such as:

- Office Support Services
- Bookkeeping
- Web Design
- Presentations
- Email Support
- Desktop Publishing

• And MUCH MORE!!

**Take Your Business to the Next Level with**



**Virtually Anytime**  
Here when you need us!!

Start running your business, instead of it running you!!  
**Contact us for a free consultation and receive  
2 hours of free services!!**

Phone: 555-222-3333      Email: [info@anytime-va.com](mailto:info@anytime-va.com)

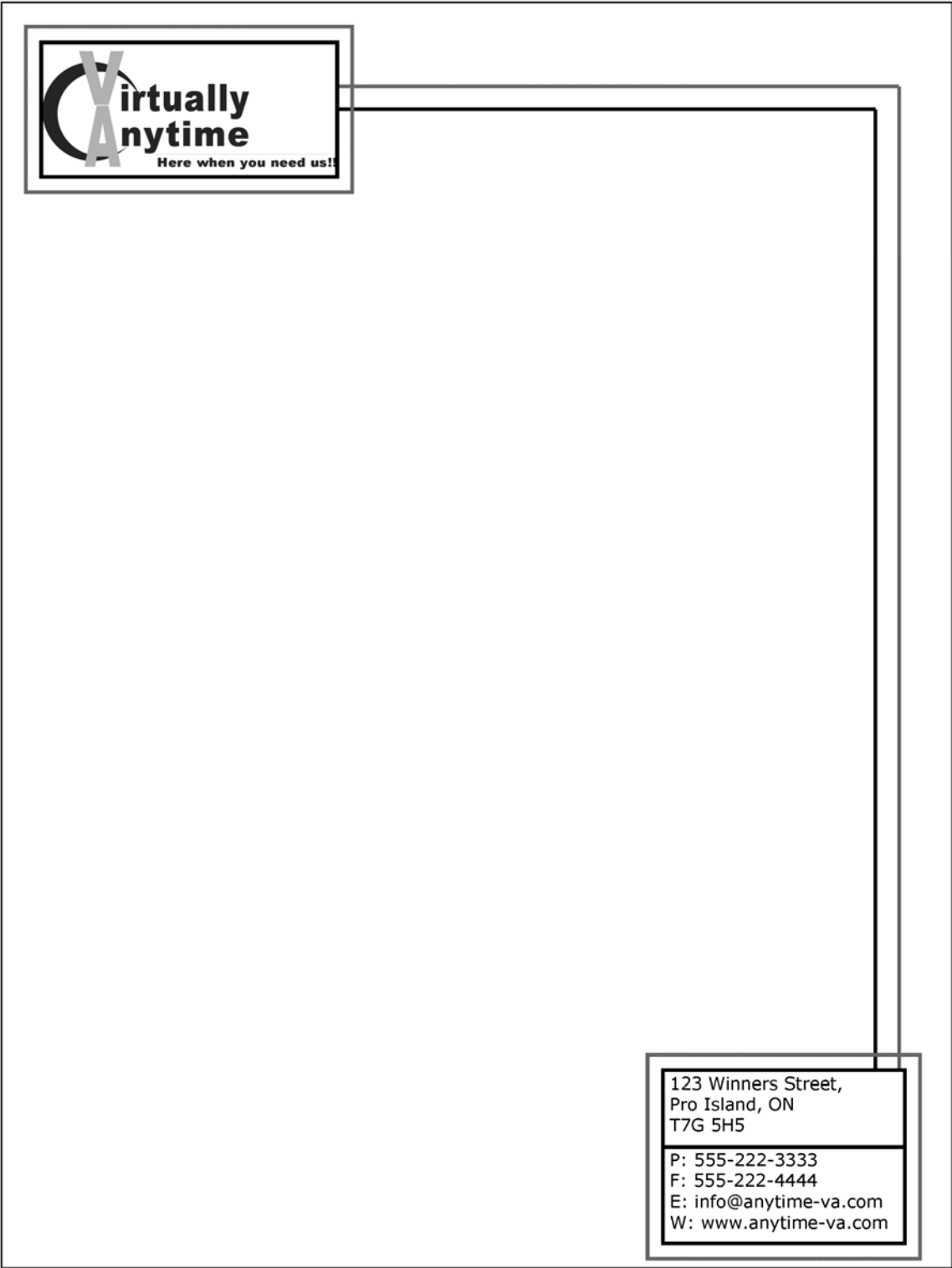
**[www.anytime-va.com](http://www.anytime-va.com)**

**Basic Letterhead Design #1**

The logo features the word "Virtually" in a bold, sans-serif font, with the letter "V" being significantly larger and overlapping the "i". Below it, the word "Anytime" is written in a smaller, bold, sans-serif font. Underneath the company name is the tagline "Here when you need us!" in a smaller, regular font. The logo is set against a white background with a grey border, which is itself on a grey background. To the left of the logo is a vertical black bar.

123 Winners Street, P: 555-222-3333  
Pro Island, ON F: 555-222-4444  
T7G 5H5 E: info@anytime-va.com  
W: www.anytime-va.com

**Basic Letterhead Design #2**



## Sales Letter Design



Monday March 19, 2007

Jonathon Smith  
123 XYZ Street  
Toronto, Ontario  
M2K 4Y5

Dear Mr. Smith,

We hope your business is flourishing and you are achieving business success. We would like to take a moment of your time to acquaint you with our organization and the services we provide.

Virtually Anytime is the one-stop source for virtual assistance. We offer a wide range of services:

- Bookkeeping, Client Invoicing, Accounts Receivable, Accounts Payable
- Desktop Publishing
- Document Preparation
- And all around general administrative support

As a principal in a growing company, you are taking care of all aspects of your business: client billing to accounting to scheduling and finally marketing. What percentage of your time are you actually actively growing your business? Wouldn't you like to spend more of your time doing the work you love?

We understand the challenges you are facing and have the answers you are looking for. We have a staff of fully qualified professionals to meet all your administrative needs.

*"Virtually Anytime has been a delight to work with: Jennifer is professional, reliable and wonderfully supportive." -Susan Liptchitz*

Contact us for a free personalized consultation with one of our client representatives to discuss how we can assist you in growing your practice!

We look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

*Jennifer Smith*

Jennifer Smith  
President  
Virtually Anytime

123 Winners Street,  
Pro Island, ON  
T7G 5H5

P: 555-222-3333  
F: 555-222-4444  
E: info@anytime-va.com  
W: www.anytime-va.com

**Basic Business Card Designs**

**Design #1**

**Front (enlarged to show detail)**

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <b>Jennifer Smith</b><br>President  | <b>123 Winners Street,</b><br><b>Pro Island, ON</b><br><b>T7G 5H5</b> |
|  | <b>www.anytime-va.com</b>   |
| <b>P: 555-222-3333</b>  | <b>E: info@anytime-va.com</b>   |

**Back (enlarged to show detail)**

|   |
|---|
| <b>Service List</b>   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Bookkeeping</b></li><li>• <b>Web Design</b></li><li>• <b>Desktop Publishing</b></li><li>• <b>Word Processing</b></li><li>• <b>Data Processing</b></li><li>• <b>Reminder Services</b></li><li>• <b>Email Support</b></li><li>• <b>Presentations</b></li></ul> |
| <b>Call for a free consultation!!</b>   |

Design #2

Front (enlarged to show detail)



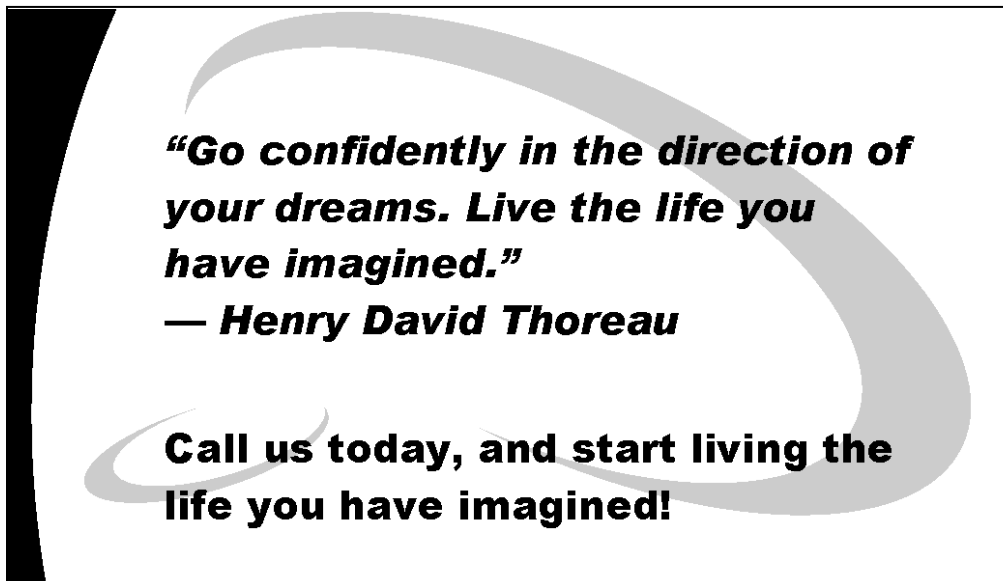
**Virtually  
Anytime**  
Here when you need us!!

**Jennifer Smith**  
*Owner*

**123 Winners Street,  
Pro Island, Ontario  
T7G 5H5**

**Phone: 555-222-3333  
Fax: 555-222-4444  
E-mail: [info@anytime-va.com](mailto:info@anytime-va.com)  
Web: [www.anytime-va.com](http://www.anytime-va.com)**

Back (enlarged to show detail)



***“Go confidently in the direction of  
your dreams. Live the life you  
have imagined.”***  
**— Henry David Thoreau**

**Call us today, and start living the  
life you have imagined!**

## Basic Advertisement Designs

Size: 2 X 2

|  |   |
|--|---|
|  <p><b>20% off your first invoice</b></p>               | <p><b>Do you need more time?</b></p> <p>Top-notch VA services for the professional. Offering administrative solutions for the small business owner. Word-processing, data processing, desktop publishing and much more!</p> |
| <p><b>Benefits to you:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• NO payroll</li> <li>• NO taxes</li> <li>• NO training</li> </ul> |  <p><b>Virtually Anytime</b><br/>Here when you need us!!</p>   |
| <p><b>Contact us today!</b></p> <p>P: 555-222-3333<br/>E: info@anytime-va.com<br/>W: www.anytime-va.com</p>                              |   |

Size: 3 X 3

| <b>Big Business Solutions</b><br>for the Small Business!!  |  |
|--|--|
|    |  <p><b>Virtually Anytime</b><br/>Here when you need us!!</p>  |
| <p><b>Benefits to you:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• NO payroll</li> <li>• NO taxes</li> <li>• NO training</li> </ul> | <p>Top-notch VA services for the professional. Offering administrative solutions for the small business owner. Word-processing, data processing, desktop publishing and much more!</p> |
| <p><b>10% off your first invoice!</b></p>  |  |
| <p><b>Contact us today!!</b><br/><a href="http://www.anytime-va.com">www.anytime-va.com</a></p>  |  |

Size: 4 X 5

| <b>Small Business Administrative Solutions</b>  |  |
|---|--|
| <p>Top-notch Virtual Assistant services for the professional. Offering administrative solutions for the small business owner. Word-processing, data processing, desktop publishing and much more!</p> | <p><b>10% off your first invoice!</b></p>  |
| <b>Virtually Anytime, Anywhere!</b>   |  |
| <p><b>Contact us today!!</b></p> <p><b>P: 555-222-3333 E: info@anytime-va.com</b><br/><b>www.anytime-va.com</b></p>   |  |
|  <p><b>Virtually Anytime</b><br/>Here when you need us!!</p>   | <p><b>Benefits to you:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• NO training</li> <li>• NO space or equipment</li> <li>• NO payroll, taxes, benefits</li> </ul> |



## Basic Press Release

### **NEWS RELEASE**

For Immediate Release

### **For more information contact:**

Samantha Smith

Samantha@anytime-va.com

### **VIRTUALLY ANYTIME LAUNCHED**

April 22, 2002 – Samantha Smith, from Lake View, Ontario is announcing the launch of her company Virtually Anytime. Virtually Anytime is a company providing Virtual Assistant Services to clients throughout North America.

By utilizing today's technology, Virtual Assistants are providing innovative solutions to small businesses, home-based businesses and entrepreneurs world-wide. A fairly new profession, but one that has seen a dramatic growth over the past two years, Virtual Assistants are the answer to companies world-wide who are looking for administrative support but do not want or need the services of on-site support.

Samantha Smith, owner/operator of Virtually Anytime lives in a small town in Ontario yet provides services to clients who live literally miles away. The distance, however, is never a problem since the growth of technology has paved the way for professions such as Virtual Assistants. All work assignments are received via e-mail and items such as word processing, database management, and desktop publishing are the primary requests from clients.

“Working with Samantha has been a wonderful experience. Being a home-based business, I am unable to have the necessary administrative support available to me until now. Virtually Anytime is really just that: a wonderful solution to any business who needs administrative help!”

Joanna Anyone – JA Consulting Ltd.

For more information, contact:

Samantha Smith

Virtually Anytime

123 Hope Drive

Lave View, Ontario

L8N 9I2

Tel: 555-555-5555

Fax: 444-444-4444

media@anytime-va.com

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## CONCLUSION

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As the pages of this book come to an end, I want to reiterate the meaning behind the original Virtual Assistant's Guide to Marketing and this 2<sup>nd</sup> edition.

The VA approach to marketing is about:

- Not just building sales, but building relationships.
- Doing all that is in your power to provide the most sincere, unmatched form of superior client service.
- Providing and offering only those services that you do well and with integrity.
- Being open to trying new marketing methods.
- Understanding the importance of finding YOUR ideal client.
- Creating community.

And above all else...LOVING what it is you are doing. If you are not doing something that you love and are passionate about, then no means of marketing will make your practice a success.

Good Luck and Best Wishes

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "M. Jamison". The signature is written in black ink on a light-colored background.

## **GLOSSARY OF TERMS**

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**Advertising** - Advertising is bringing a service to the attention of potential current customers. Advertising is done with items such as signs, brochures, mailings, etc.

**Article Marketing** – Writing and submitting articles that will support you in your marketing efforts by sharing your expertise and driving readers to your website by way of your resource box.

**Blog** - The term “blog” is derived from the term “Weblog” or web log. It is an on-line journal or diary that organized by chronological order and may or may not allow others to comment on your postings.

**Branding** - is a name, terms, design, symbol, feature and/or identity which distinguishes your service or services, from others.

**Client Information Package** – A marketing tool that you send to prospective clients that contains important information about you, your company and your services. It can be in hard copy or e-version.

**Company Identity** – are the various characteristics by which you and your service are recognized and known.

**Company Image** - is how your business identity is perceived by customers, professional associated, the media, and the public at large.

**Core Values** - outline the ethics and values of the organization, creating a pledge to its staff, clients and the world at large.

**Logo** - a name, symbols or trademark designed for easy recognition.

**Marketing** - Marketing is anything you do to get or keep a customer. Marketing is a wide range of activities involved in making sure that you are continuing to meet the needs of your customers and getting value in return.

**Marketing Kit** – A term to describe your marketing materials all of your marketing materials. It is an imaginary marketing treasure chest that contains all of your company marketing material.

**Mission statement**- is a short written description of the aims of a business, charity, government department or public organization.

**Niche** - Similar to target marketing, however more specific.

**Promotion** - Promotion keeps the service in the minds of the customer and helps stimulate demand for the services. Promotion involves ongoing advertising and publicity.

**Publicity** - Publicity is mention in the medial. With publicity you usually have little control over the message in the media, far less than with advertising.

**Public Relations** - Public relations includes ongoing activities to ensure the company has a strong public image.

**Rifle Marketing** - You are clear on whom it is you are aiming your marketing message at. You have a particular type of client to whom you are marketing your services.

**Sales** - Sales involves selling your service to potential clients. It allows for the personal touch.

**Shotgun Marketing** - You are spraying your message all over the place hoping that some of it will hit. You are unclear of the type of client would use your services so you bombard everyone with your marketing message.

**Tagline** - is used to better explain what your business does and to create an impression about your company and/or service.

**Target Market** - Those individuals to whom you target your services.

**Vision** - the ability to imagine how a country, society, industry, etc. will develop in the future and to plan in a suitable way

### **Website Terminology**

**Domain name** - A name that identifies one or more IP addresses. Domain names are used in URLs to identify particular Web Pages that make up a Web Site.

**TLD** - Top Level Domain – refers to .com. net .org

**CcTLD** - Country Code Top Level Domains – refers to .ca – Canada, .au – Australia

**Keywords** - (Meta Tag) A group of words describing the content of a web page used by search engines to index the Web site.

**Meta tags** – A special HTML tag that provides information about a Web page but does not change the way the page is displayed.

**Search engines** – A program that searches documents for specified keywords and returns a list of the documents where the keywords were found.

**Site navigation** – The links on a website that help you navigate from one page to another.

**Spider** - A program that automatically fetches Web pages for search engines.

**URL** - "Universal Resource Locator", this is the address of a web page.

**Web hosting** – a hosting company that provides the server that your site will sit on

### **Important Marketing Distinctions**

***Marketing versus advertising:*** Advertising is only one function of marketing although it is often the most visible. One can usually live without advertising; one cannot live without marketing.

***Marketing versus promotion:*** Promotion is a part of marketing. You can be a successful marketer without being a promoter.

***Marketing versus sales:*** Marketing is not selling, although selling is a part of marketing.

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