

How to work with a

*Virtual
Assistant*



COMPILED BY THE
SOCIETY OF VIRTUAL ASSISTANTS

About Us



Society of Virtual Assistants



Society of Virtual Assistants was formed in 2006 to help virtual assistants set up and stay in business by encouraging and supporting one another. One of the first aims we had was establishing best practice guidelines for VAs in 2007.

With 2,500+ active VAs, SVA remains the largest and longest running organisation for VAs in the UK.

We do not charge for membership, but rely heavily on donations to fund our work.

Costs

Full time
availability
- part time bill

*UK VAs will cost
£15-£35/hour*

Bear in mind that having a VA isn't the same as having an employee - we often save you money because we only charge for the work completed.

You will pay extra for an employee including:

- Desk space/office rental
- Supply of phones, equipment, subscriptions, line rental, heating, lighting etc.
- Dead time like coffee breaks, waiting for work to come in, internet usage etc.
- National Insurance contributions
- Running PAYE payroll for them
- Pension (3% minimum employer contribution from April 2019)

So, cost wise, a 20 hour on-site employee job might equate to 10 hours of VA work because it's not paying for set up, downtime, printer jams, coffee breaks etc. Plus you usually aren't limited to a specific time slot, the VA does the work when you need it done.

What Should I Outsource?

The best tasks to outsource are those which will save you most time and which are repeatable - tasks which you do daily, weekly, monthly. Brief the VA once and they will repeat on a schedule for you.

Also - the jobs you put off doing and really hate doing - VAs love the "administrivia" of running businesses. Admin is what they love, they're professionals.

On that note, another one you may want to outsource: jobs that you don't have great skills in. Business owners are brilliant at what they do, but doing the admin isn't something they dream of when starting up!

Get a specialist in - VAs offer a wide variety of marketing, social media, SEO, design and website updating skills.

Administrivia:

(Noun) The tiresome but essential details that must be taken care of and tasks that must be performed in running an organisation

Checklist For What To Outsource



Administrivia: Minutiae of details which are essential to running your business.



Specialist skills: Anything you don't feel confident about doing yourself or take a long time to complete due to lack of skill in that area.



Recurring tasks.



Tasks you procrastinate over.

**Ideal tasks to outsource
to a VA**

Offshore

Low cost per hour may equal high cost per task - a task which may only take a competent VA 15 minutes may take an inexperienced one struggling with language difficulties over 5 hours.

Get a quote per task

For tasks which are repetitive and a low priority, offshore working can be a great way to minimise your admin bill.

However, legally, if it's dealing with data you have a responsibility to ensure that GDPR protocols are adhered to - you would need to ensure that it's not compromised or copied in any way.

Deadlines are often tricky because of time differences - VAs working in different time zones may send you a query which you don't pick up till the following morning, which the VA won't action until overnight - you've lost 2 days' work.

Language is also a barrier. Tasks have to be written in very simple English and there can often be cultural misunderstandings with things such as distances, postal services, legal responsibilities, data protection, copyright protection.

Your UK based VA will be happy to help you manage your offshore tasks effectively, to provide the very best value for money.

Checklist For Offshoring work



Is this work dealing with any form of personal data?



Is the VA working outside my timezone? Is this task time sensitive?



Does it require a good grasp of English/local knowledge?



Was the quote open-ended (based on an hourly rate)?

If YES, do not outsource offshore

WHAT SHOULD I ASK THE VA?

Top tips for hiring a great VA!

Checklist

Security

Ask about your VA's security procedures. They need to be running professional standard antivirus software, have off site data back up in place, have a proper domain specific email, and they should be aware of their data handling responsibilities and be registered with the ICO's Data Controller Register (check here: <https://ico.org.uk/esdwebpages/search>).

Rates

Rates in the UK for VAs generally range from £15-£35 per hour. You should ask what is included (Phonecalls? Postage? Any systems/software?).

How long work will take

Audio typing should generally take between 3-6 times the amount of audio depending on clarity of the recording. Some tasks are tricky to estimate but the VA should be willing to estimate based on a sample of the work or by doing a short amount of the task (say an hour) and letting you know how much they have completed. You should be prepared to pay them for this time.

Turnaround times

Ask your VA how fast they would be able to complete your work. Some VAs will only work part-time, some will have a specific time of the week set aside to complete your tasks, some may have a cut off time for work submitted if you want it back the next working day.

Insurance

Your VA should have suitable professional indemnity insurance. The VA will be advising you about your admin in a professional capacity and will often have access to sensitive material. Make sure you are protected - ask to see their policy.

Team working

Ask if your VA is a solopreneur or if they work as part of a team? Both models have pros and cons. Solo VAs ensure the same person always does your work, but may have issues if the VA is sick, on holiday or simply busy with other clients. Team environments usually have better capacity but continuity is sometimes an issue and they may/may not have quality control in place - ask about this.

Professional antivirus installed

Domain specific email address

ICO Data Controller registered

Data back up/disaster recovery

Availability/turnaround times

Professional indemnity insurance

For Multi VAs: What quality control is in place?

For Solo VAs: What cover is in place?

Get Started



Brief Properly!

Hire a VA when you have lots of time to document your tasks and brief them properly.

The easiest way to start is with those repeatable tasks - next time you are doing them, open up a Word doc and write down all the steps you take to complete the job. Include any passwords, templates, screen grabs etc that they may need. Time yourself - that's the maximum amount of time your VA should be taking to do the task (since you are documenting as well as doing it). Your VA may even be able to suggest better ways of doing the task - listen to them!

The first task that you outsource should be relatively short and non critical dealing with non sensitive data. Make it a research task, or maybe reviewing a publicly available document/website.

It should test whatever skills you need your VA to regularly do.

Bear in mind, you are only paying for the hours the VA works - you can have as many different VAs as you like, all with different skills. It won't cost you more money and you don't need to find all those specialist skills in just one person.

Do

Pay your VA on time

Typical payment terms are upfront for new clients or big projects and 7 day payment terms for most other clients. Tell your VA if there is a problem with payment straight away.

Be Organised

Collate all the information your VA will need to complete a task - logins, contacts, graphics, scanned paperwork.

Keep in Touch

Make sure you return phone calls and stay on top of your other responsibilities.

Don't

Expect your VA to work on site

We are *VIRTUAL* assistants - working on site takes us out the office, means we are unavailable to other clients. Good VAs will have workarounds for physical tasks.

Micromanage your VA

They are a professional and they will have other clients. By all means set a deadline with some leeway and expect your VA to check in regularly on longer term projects. But their business relies on working uninterrupted for you, so extend that courtesy to everyone else your VA works with.

Ask your VA to work on commission only

They have no idea how good your prospect list is and have no control over that.

Ask your VA to do anything illegal

This includes scraping data or marketing to non opted in B2C lists.

Run for the hills

Working with a VA is so great that we find a lot of clients revel in their new found freedom: No longer tied to their desks, free of their phones.... And they *LOVE* it! In fact so much so that we occasionally have to remind them that it is still their business and they have certain unshirkable responsibilities!

Ready To Hire?



We've done some of the background work for you!

SVA Approved VAs will:

- Be UK based.
- Have a professional email address and website to ensure your security.
- Be registered with ICO as a Data Controller.
- Back up data securely off site.
- Answer phone calls or emails received within office hours by next working day or have an answerphone or autoresponder telling you of their return date.
- Only take on tasks which they are fully capable of completing.
- Carry suitable professional indemnity insurance to protect you if something goes wrong.

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