

# The Return of Investment of a Virtual Assistant

Squarefish Whitepaper 2019



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## Are virtual assistants really worth your money?



Every entrepreneur knows that time is gold. Your start-up's productivity is largely reliant on how much tasks are being done in the shortest amount of time. Hence, you've come to depend on technology and tools to somehow expand time to your benefit. Yet, despite the availability of tech tools at your disposal, effective use of time is hard to come by. A million different things all demand our attention at once. If you're not careful, you might become too caught up in tasks that are time-intensive. At the end of the day, you realize that you devoted too much of your effort with little value added.



## Cue the virtual assistant.

As the name directly implies, a virtual assistant is a person who helps with day-to-day tasks. The catch is, well, as the name also implies, you don't interact with them physically, just over the Internet.

Cue the virtual assistant.

Recently, with the work-life balance movement getting significant traction, and authorities advising entrepreneurs to take it slow and get their health and wellness in check, a VA has been the popular go-to solution to make this possible. Hiring VAs promises not only to keep your business life smooth flowing but also your personal life. By acting as the bridge that absorbs the clutter in your professional and personal life, a VA frees up your time so you can focus on the tasks that add great value to your business. Or do they really?

for you?

## How is hiring a VA a good return on investment (ROI) for you?



Before we delve into a discussion on ROI, let's lay some simple facts about VAs on the table first.



## What exactly does a VA do?

What exactly does a VA do?

Well, practically anything legal, of course. While there are a few limitations as to what they can do over the Internet, a VA can take on the tasks that employees can no longer handle so that they can direct their energies on growth. You can think of the VA as someone who covers the range of tasks you'd rather not be doing, from taking care of your travel arrangements, organizing your schedule, or managing your social media accounts. However, some of the most common tasks that VAs usually do include the following.



**Research**



**Financial Management**



**Social Media Management**



**Content Creation**



**Email Management**



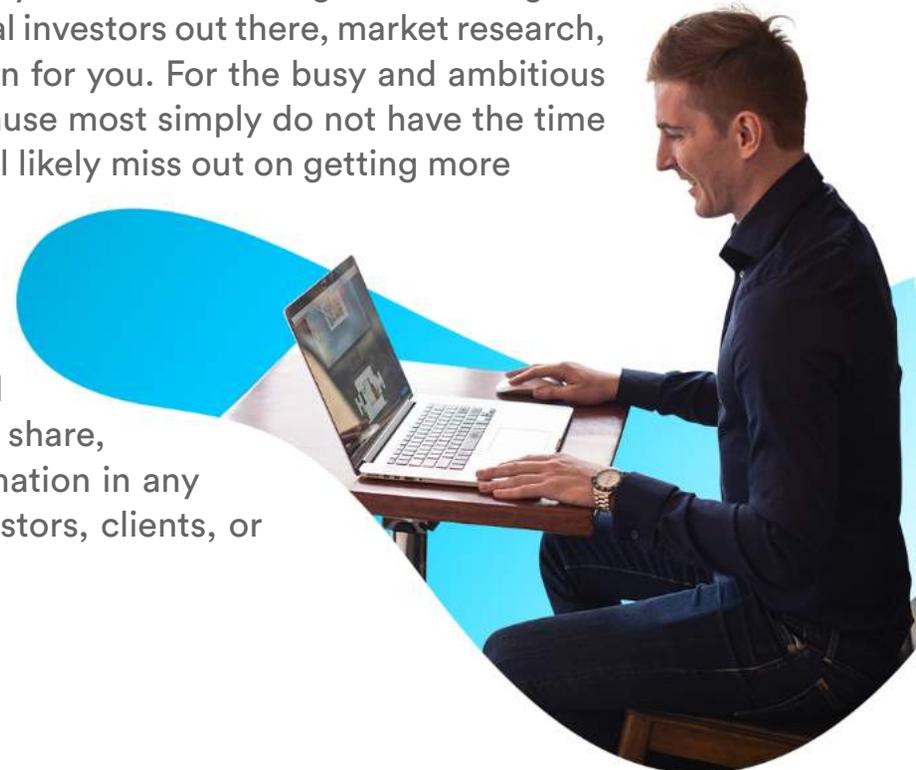
**Organizational Tasks**

## Research

There's a reason researchers are in demand in any field of work or business, or even in personal errands. In making the seemingly simple decision of where to book a flight, hotel room, or purchase a dress to wear at an official function, research takes up so many hours. Of course, since information is likewise key to making good business decisions, hiring someone to do this time-intensive and tedious task is a promising alternative to doing it yourself.

VAs can fast track your business tasks by letting you save precious hours and energy by doing research for you. Research is crucial in guiding you to make strategic calls that grow your business, whether it is knowing who are potential investors out there, market research, or identifying costs, a VA can gather that information for you. For the busy and ambitious entrepreneur, research assistance is everything because most simply do not have the time to do business research. As a consequence, most will likely miss out on getting more complete information on an ever-evolving business climate.

Having someone undertake research can let you create sound strategy and business decisions. Virtual assistants can do analysis of competition, market share, profile of competitors, and compile all of this information in any method you like, whether targeted to potential investors, clients, or within your own organization.



## Financial Management

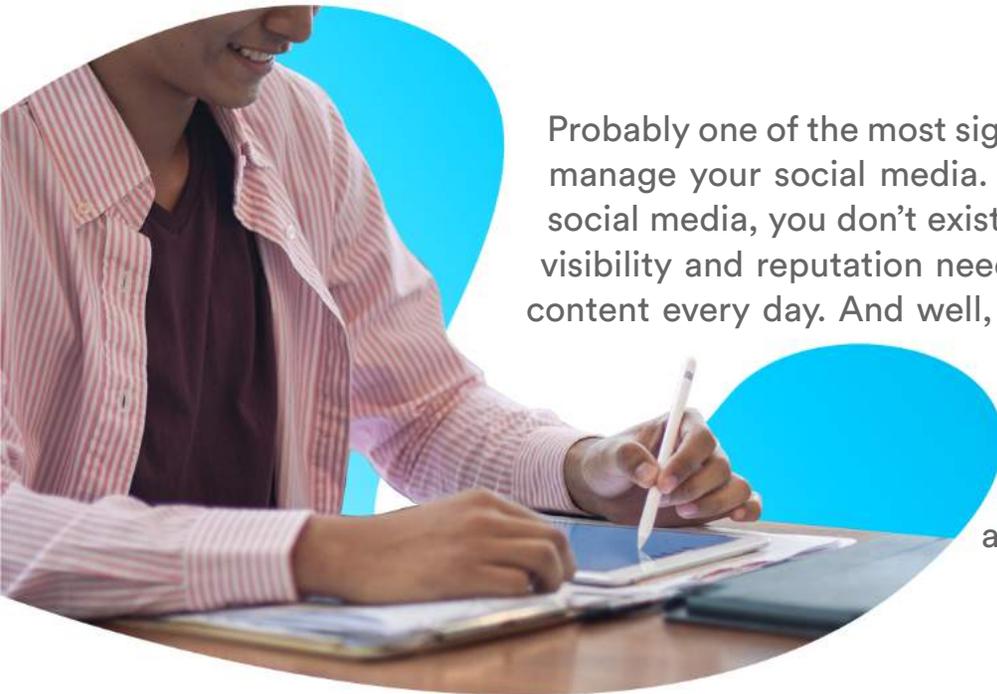
Financial Management

Having someone to organize your finances and track what goes in and out of your coffers is a significant relief for business owners. While virtual assistants are not qualified to do your taxes, they can however make preparation of your financial reports and taxes easy. Imagine how easy tax season will be when your financial information is stored and organized. A VA will maintain your budget, do purchasing, and record your expenditures so that you can better manage your finances.



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## Social Media Management



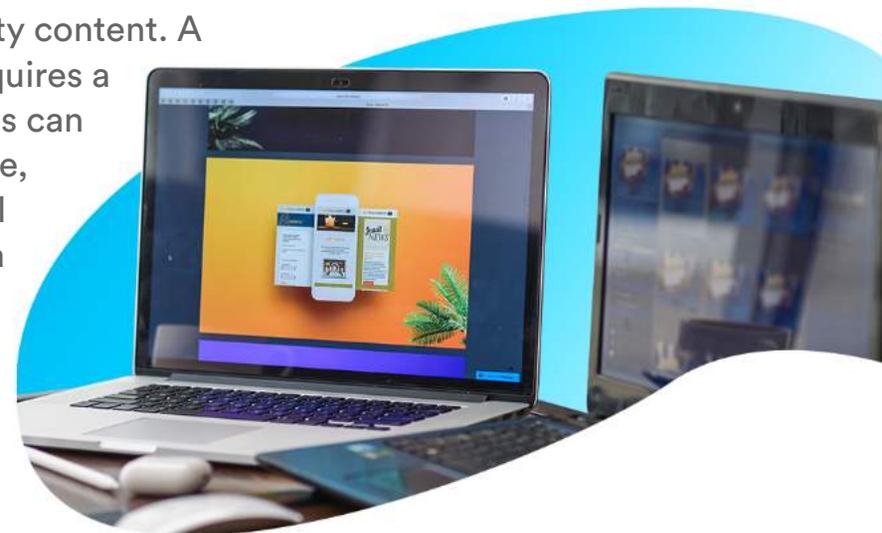
Probably one of the most significant tasks that virtual assistants can do for you is to manage your social media. In the current business environment, if you're not on social media, you don't exist. All your social media pages that enhance your brand visibility and reputation need to be up and running, and on point with interesting content every day. And well, someone needs to dedicate his or her efforts toward making that happen. The tedious and time-consuming task of posting updates, producing content, interacting with clients, and being up to speed with trends is definitely something you need to delegate to a VA.

Social Media Management

Engaging in social media can be a time management nightmare. Managing your social media can consume you. If business owners spend too much time increasing their social media presence themselves, it could keep them from doing business-growing activities. Social media management is something better delegated to a virtual assistant whose task is dedicated to growing your online presence, letting you dedicate your time to more important tasks.

## Content Creation

Aside from social media presence, one of the fundamental rules in running a business today is that, content is king. It's not enough to have a website or social media page, it has to have current and quality content. A virtual assistant can fill this gap. Content creation requires a special set of skills and time, as well. Virtual assistants can act as ghost writers to create content for your website, blog, YouTube channel, or Instagram. Having a virtual assistant can ensure that your business not only has a social media presence, but a felt presence. This is achieved when your website has a steady stream of content.



## Email Management



Email Management

Hiring someone to seamlessly manage your company's inboxes of emails is the most useful decision you can gift yourself. There will always be unanswered emails, unsent letters, and inquiries that have somehow disappeared from your inbox. If you want to achieve productivity, inbox zero is your target. However, this is easier said than done. Virtual assistants can answer contact emails, general questions, job inquiries, and other question. They can use tools to organize your emails and create filters so that your emails are categorized efficiently.

## Organizational Tasks



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Organizational Tasks

Doing organizational and administrative tasks is the general job description of a virtual assistant. Whether scheduling meetings, getting reminders out, organizing your calendar, or doing your daily itineraries, virtual assistants liberate you from the mundane yet must-do tasks. This way, you wake up in the morning ready to tick all of the to-dos in your daily schedule and not having to make the to-do list yourself. We know what you're thinking – pure joy, right? A virtual assistant can let your have that. Having a dedicated VA to perform administrative tasks you're your maximize your work day fully by not having to worry about the nitty-gritty.



A virtual assistant works much like a personal assistant, only remotely. They provide round-the-clock assistance with the things you need to do to be at your most productive. As business owners need to travel frequently, VAs can handle the time-consuming task of booking flights, car reservations and pickup arrangements, and hotel bookings. An efficient VA can handle all these tasks for you, so you can prepare fully for the meeting or conference you traveled for.

## So, how can a VA help you business-wise?



So we've established that a virtual assistant's range of competencies and skills is pretty impressive. A VA can take a huge chunk off your plate, by dedicating their time to tasks you don't care much for but need to do anyway. This is all well and good, but what is the return on investment? How can hiring a VA be good for your bottom line?



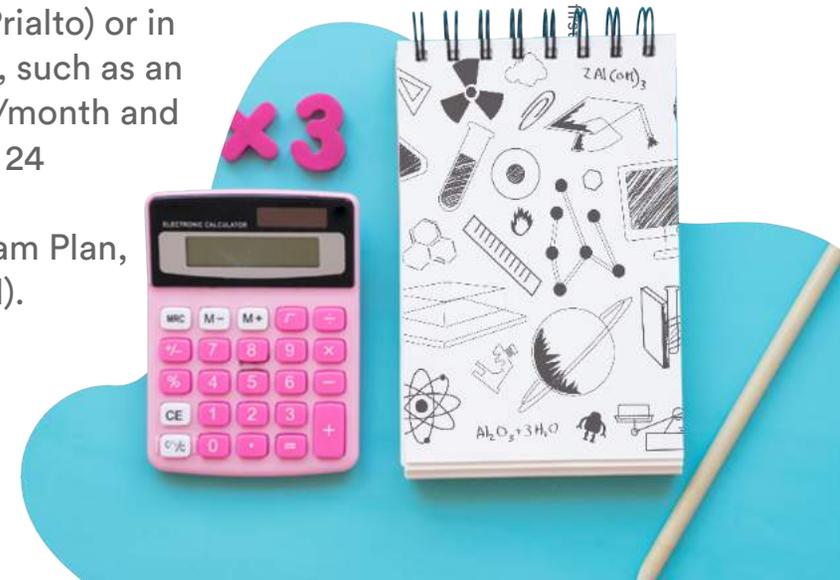
## Let's compute the costs first.

Virtual assistants usually charge by the hour. There is no standard charge of fee for virtual assistants, but Upwork pegs it at an hourly average of \$18 to \$35. This may be the average range, but some VAs actually have inexpensive rates. Some virtual assistants charge a fixed rate for their services for instance, \$1,000 monthly for work rendered 10 hours a week. Most rates are usually negotiable.

There are also established virtual assistant companies that offer pre-vetted VAs to match with your unique needs. They have varied packages and skills range, depending on what you need. For example, VAs could be an Associate which is more inexpensive, charging \$8/hour for 20/40 hours/week, an Analyst, for \$10/hour for 20/40 hours/week, or a Specialist, \$12/hour for 20/40 hours/week (The Virtual Hub). Other companies charge a fixed monthly rate, such as \$1200 per month (Prialto) or in another company a range of enterprise-based packages, such as an Entrepreneur Plan which charges \$398/month for 12 hrs/month and one user, a Startup Plan, which charges \$698/month for 24 hrs/month and two users, or a Small Business Plan, for \$998/month for 36 hrs/month and three users; and a Team Plan, for \$1398/month for 50 hrs/month and five users (Zirtual).

Let's compute the costs first.

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Other companies peg their monthly rate with options for bigger plans when requested, with the cheapest plan going for \$430 for 10 hours monthly; \$790 for 20 hours monthly \$1140 for 40 hours monthly (Worldwide 101). Other companies charge VA services by the hour, with plans going for \$10/hour for 20 hours to \$6 hours for 240 hours (TaskBullet).

The cost of hiring a VA depends on the magnitude of your need to delegate specific tasks. Granted it is not cheap, but it is a much more inexpensive option than hiring a full-time assistant or hiring in-house to do these mundane tasks. With a VA, you have freedom to control costs.

You can think of virtual assistants as long-term contractors for specific jobs. At the end of the day, this is a lot more inexpensive than hiring a full-time assistant to work for you.

At a cursory glance, hiring virtual assistants may entail more payment upfront than hiring actual assistants but, eventually, this choice is more cost-effective. Virtual assistants work only 10 to 50 hours monthly for dedicated, productive work. While hourly rates seem more expensive than actual assistant rates, it is worth it because you are guaranteed productivity.



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Let's compute the costs first.

So, going back to the question of what virtual assistants can do for your business.

## Productivity is key ● ● ●

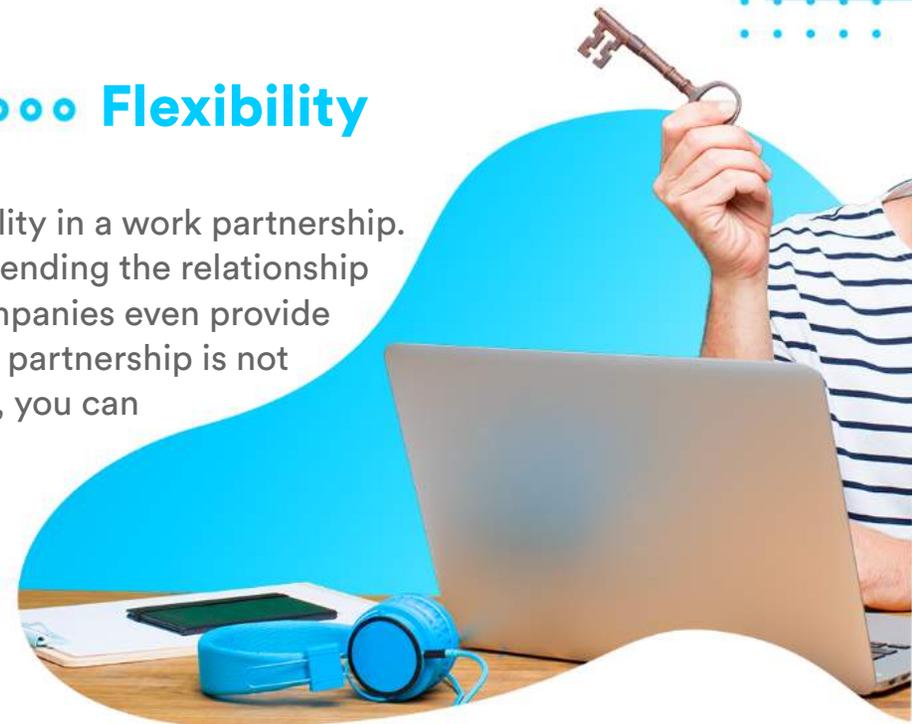
In the final analysis, the ROI of VA comes from an increase in productivity for your business. Even when you have full-time social media managers, or a finance team, having a virtual assistant assures that you unburden your team's daily tasks that take too much time. In this way, your teams can focus all their creative energies into planning for innovation and growth. Some of the most mundane and repetitive tasks drain people of creative energy so, it's ultimately better to leave scheduling posts, answering emails, or booking travels to a virtual assistant. Freeing you and your team from the mind-numbing little things so you can focus on the critical tasks will supercharge you productivity.

Productivity is key

## ● ● ● Flexibility

Hiring a VA also provides you with the needed flexibility in a work partnership. Since virtual assistants are hired on a contract basis, ending the relationship does not cause you any discomfort. Some virtual companies even provide the option of hassle-free replacement the minute the partnership is not working out as expected. If working with a VA works, you can upgrade the relationship with an extended contract.

Flexibility



Flexibility

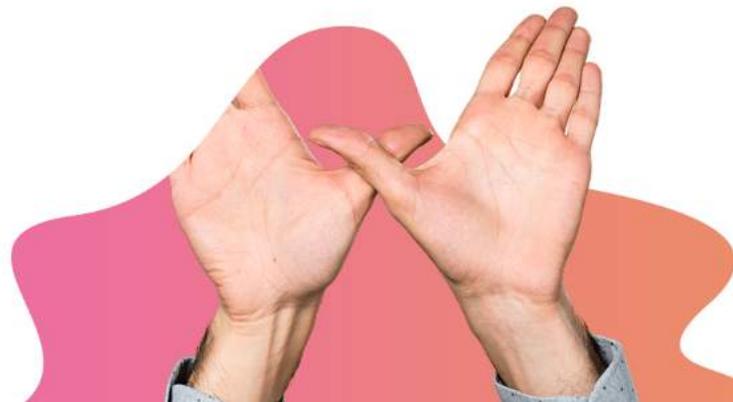
This is why the flexible work arrangement with a VA works. You can hire virtual assistants for fixed term and for particular tasks only – whether for research, social media management, or administrative tasks – to avoid the pain that comes with employment decisions.

## Freedom

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A budding business owner benefits from being liberated from tasks that waste time without adding value. Efficient virtual assistants can definitely be the best version of your entrepreneurial self. You can look for a specific set of skills to complement your own and match your temperament or preferences in the hiring process. Remember, a VA is your shadow, a mini-you if you will. Complementarity and a good fit are essential if the working relationship is to succeed and help achieve your business objectives. Often, this freedom to tailor the profile of your assistant to one you deem best is rarely experienced in the hiring and recruitment process.

Freedom



## Real talk: Is a VA worth it?

Real talk: Is a VA worth it?

If you're wondering if hiring a virtual assistant is worth your money, it really depends on the value of your time and how efficient you make use of your virtual assistant's skills. There is a greater ROI if you free your time for high-value work such as getting new clients or getting new projects rolling. If the virtual assistant frees your time for tasks that improve the cash flow, then the higher the ROI in getting a VA. To illustrate, say you can earn \$50 hourly on high-value tasks. If you hire a virtual assistant for \$20 an hour to make you work on building your client list, you definitely get a positive ROI. If however, you hire a virtual assistant for \$20 hourly but you spend that liberated time on low-value work, then the ROI won't be positive.

To benefit optimally from hiring a virtual assistant, you need to be clear about your expectations and how you envision your working with an assistant to produce as results. Remember that you are hiring an assistant and not a mind reader. You need to level off expectations. This makes the hiring process a crucial factor in getting your ROI. If you hire the right virtual assistant with the correct skills set to achieve your expected results, then you can expect good returns. If not, however, you should also be open to training your assistant in the event this is warranted.

Real talk: Is a VA worth it?



Real talk: Is a VA worth it?

Also, just because you hired a virtual assistant, doesn't mean that you are not dealing with a human person. Investing effort and communicating with the VA to build rapport is also essential in a successful partnership.

Further down the line, you will eventually realize how hiring a VA is a cost-effective solution to your productivity problems. Compared to hiring a full-time assistant, here is why a virtual assistant is the better option:

**Zero infrastructure costs.** Hiring a virtual assistant allows you to save substantially on overhead and infrastructure costs. Since VAs perform their tasks remotely, you cut the need to spend on office space, computers, telephones, furniture, and other necessary equipment. Covering infrastructure expenses can be costly – but hiring a VA eliminates this spending.

**Zero spending on training or hiring.** Every business owner knows how hiring the right person is no joke. Often, hiring the most suitable candidate requires hiring part-time workers to comb through resumes and screening prospective candidates. Hiring a virtual assistant skips this costly process by offering pre-vetted candidates you can choose from. There is no need to pay for additional training because companies will match you with the credentials you desire from your VA. By hiring a VA, you streamline the hiring and training process, with zero spending.



Real talk: Is a VA worth it?

**ROI-friendly pay structure.** One of the most obvious benefits of hiring a virtual assistant is that you don't need to shell out as much money for salaries and mandated benefits as you would full-time employees. Because VAs are contracted on an hourly or monthly basis, their pay structure is much more friendly to your ROI.

**Enhanced accountability.** One might think that remote assistants have less accountability than physical full-time employees. Well, this is a misconception. Virtual assistants report output every day through a daily reporting system that transparently provides you with updates on the completion of tasks. This system guarantees that you have a VA working round the clock to meet your needs.

When calculating the cost-effectiveness of hiring a VA, it really boils down to how to resolve the dilemma of time over money. When you are just starting a business, there is never enough for either. If you're not careful, you might fall into the tradeoff trap – taking on additional tasks to save money, or spending more money to get more time. Both scenarios will not be beneficial to your ROI.

Hiring a virtual assistant is increasingly viewed by many businesses as a tool to resolve the time over money challenge. To many, virtual assistants are God's gift to small businesses because in the end, it really is money well spent. Many might hesitate spending money for tasks they are competent to do by themselves, but in the end, most end up wasting precious hours on otherwise delegable tasks.

Real talk: Is a VA worth it?



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Real talk: Is a VA worth it?

This explains why virtual assistants are becoming a popular tool among small business owners who need help but also desire flexibility in cost. Virtual assistants are a good fit to small businesses since costs are pre-arranged and hiring is on a contract basis. Therefore, business owners who need help can tailor their hiring of VAs to align with their level of business activity and financial capacity. It could very well be that your business may need a VA some of the time or during peak business hours. Virtual assistant companies offer several packages or allow customization to fit your company's specific needs.

## Reasons why hiring a VA makes perfect sense

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Let's face it. There have been numerous times when you were not in control of your productivity. Achieving a balance between and among several tasks competing for your attention is a tough act often unsuccessfully done. Some of us encounter days when we exaggerated the time and energy we had so we end up devoting more hours to low-value tasks rather than high-value work. If you're human, it's likely that similar to the rest of our species, we failed to be at our productive best and waste week after week doing the most mundane tasks.

Reasons why hiring a VA makes perfect sense

## Work-life balance issues

Work-life balance issues

As our to-do lists don't seem to be thinning, chances are we grow anxious and stressed over our lack of productivity. In fact, a Workfront survey indicated that workers in US companies devote 45% of their entire workweek to primary tasks. What did they do with the other 55%? Actually, more than half of their time was spent on administrative tasks – emails, inquiries, meetings, and interruptions at work.

This phenomenon at the workplace is not a trivial one. According to Jeffrey Pfeffer, an organizational behavior expert from Stanford University, most of work-related stress comes from anxiety over productivity. Very often, employees who report the highest levels of stress find it difficult to sleep because they keep thinking about their seemingly unending to-do list at work. This problem indicates a skewed work-life balance that is both unhealthy for your body and unproductive for your company.



## The need to declutter

Like Marie Kondo's record-breaking philosophy of "tidying up," business owners need to do the same. There are just tasks that do no spark joy at all. When you wanted to be an entrepreneur, you wanted to come up with the next best thing in the market you can profit from. All that creative energy is defused quickly when most of your time is spent on the menial and mind numbing. Having too much of the repetitive and monotonous tasks clutter your creative mind and could lead you to underperform.

The need to declutter



## Free your brain

It is unsurprising for entrepreneurs to think of themselves as superhuman. This God complex, while necessary for boosting one's confidence to always get ahead and be innovative, it also keeps you from acknowledging that there are problems you need to fix.

First of all, creativity is dependent on the mental bandwidth available. Our brains can only take so much energy and focus so that doing too much low-order thinking for a couple of hours will deprive you of the much needed mental energy to do high-order thinking. You need to free your brain so that you can do critical tasks that demand high-order thinking. It is therefore to your utmost benefit that you streamline your non-critical decisions in favor of the critical ones. While entrepreneurs are the most innovative set of humans, they are also bound by mental and physical limitations. This is what makes delegating tasks important. You need to limit expending time and financial resources on the non-critical tasks and let others take over that aspect of your operations.

You may think, well, “why do I need to delegate marketing tasks to an assistant, when it would only take me half of the time it takes him?” The answer is that whether that is just 30 min. of work time, it already cost you two hours equivalent in terms of mental resources. The brain expends energy in switching from one task to the next, and if you switch from low-order to high-order thinking, this will drain you of mental resources.

Free your brain



Free your brain

Having a virtual assistant is your most crucial tool for ROI because time is money. The amount of time your VA is able to liberate you also frees your brain to focus on critical tasks and high-order thinking. These high-value tasks should be the ones hogging your mental bandwidth. You don't need to delegate large management decisions or questions to anyone. You only need to delegate the little things – those are easily done with a virtual assistant.

## What's the catch?

There are always downsides to even the best solutions. In hiring a virtual assistant, achieving good ROI is highly dependent on your management of the VA's time and skills. If you don't communicate well with your virtual assistant, this might reduce your productivity. As earlier pointed out, a virtual assistant is not a mind reader. Clarifications, context setting, and expectations need to be verbally articulated and threshed out. Because the VA works remotely and is not to be found in your office, managing technology is necessary for updates and communication.

Of course, not all virtual assistants are of the same make and model. Hiring a VA needs to be done with due diligence. It's always best to double check credentials and policies with virtual assistant companies, such as in case you need to replace a VA. You can also check the reputation of virtual assistant companies who offer their services. Lastly, given the remote nature of the job, there is a high likelihood of the relationship being impersonal. While this may pose an advantage, it's best to be aware that there is a world of difference between an actual assistant and a virtual assistant.



## When Less Means More

Even the most skilled entrepreneurs in the world are limited by the constraint of time. One may think, “I can do those tasks better myself!” but the fact of the matter is, not every task is deserving of your attention and time equally. Here is how you know which tasks to delegate to a virtual assistant.

List all the repetitive tasks you do every single day and how many hours you spend on each. Answering emails? Booking hotels? Filling out reports? After you’re done listing and adding the hours, you’ll be surprised at how much of your workday is eaten up by the repetitive tasks. The ROI in hiring a VA is because the less time you devote on non-critical low-value tasks, the more time you spend doing those that add high value for your business.

Do a cost-benefit analysis quickly with this age-old formula: 20% of tasks is equivalent to 80% of the value. When you’ve computed how many hours are spent each day on the mundane tasks, you will realize that doing those yourself may not translate to any value at all. Hire a virtual assistant – they are value-added tools to make you focus on growing your business. In that light, they are definitely a bang for your buck.



When Less Means More



When Less Means More