

# A Concise Introduction to the Virtual Assistant Industry in Canada



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## What is a Virtual Assistant?

A virtual assistant is a highly skilled administrative professional service provider, and business owner/entrepreneur. A virtual assistant provides professional, administrative, technical, and creative assistance on a contract basis for any business owner in accordance to the business owner's specific requirements.

A virtual assistant does anything normally done by an in-house full-time office administrative assistant for a fraction of the cost. A virtual assistant works from his/her own fully-equipped office location.

Areas of expertise vary to include core office administrative assistance and management support, document preparation, data management, accounting, bookkeeping, resume writing, website design and other specialty services without being physically present in a business owner's office. Through the use of the internet, email, fax, phone, mail or courier contact can be made to a virtual assistant locally or anywhere in the world.

Being a virtual assistant is a profession the same as any other specialized profession. A virtual assistant is a business owner and runs his/her own business as well as providing services to clients.

A virtual assistant is a partner — a business owner who can supply services you need, just like other specialized professionals you work with such as accountants, attorneys, financial planners, business coaches, or consultant or any professional service provider or contractor.

A virtual assistant is not an employee. You are not paying payroll obligations (income tax, pension, employment insurance) and you do not have to provide a workstation, computer and telecommunications equipment and stationery supplies in your own office.

Virtual assistants are one of the fastest growing industries. The VA industry is growing from strength to strength. Rather than hiring full time team members to fulfill a number of job roles, businesses are using VAs to provide a wide skillset, typically on a part-time basis\*. It is a cost-effective way of fulfilling a range of roles.

## Benefits of Partnering with a Virtual Assistant

A virtual assistant is someone who you share a common goal with respect to the success of your business.

You no longer need to spend your valuable time on those tasks you don't have time to do or are not able to do.

You can accelerate your business' growth by freeing up your time to focus on the more important aspects of your business.

No need to provide a physical workspace.

No need to purchase any computer equipment as your Virtual Assistant is equipped with the necessary technologies.

No need to worry about taxes, payroll and benefits as your Virtual Assistant is an independent contractor.

Now you will have the freedom needed to work on growing and improving your business skills, knowledge, and client relationships.

You will make better decisions by being able to discuss your business ideas and goals with your Virtual Assistant.

You now have the freedom to assume new, challenging opportunities.

You will be in a better position to practice and maintain live/work balance.

You will have peace of mind knowing that your Virtual Assistant is handling the details professionally and on time.

You are finally able to run your business, instead of your business running you.

## History of the Administrative Support Profession

The first secretaries were men prior to the establishment of the Roman Empire and well into the 19th century. They were respected as trusted advisors. They did scribing using

chisels or styluses to write on stone or clay, wood or wax tablets. Shorthand was a prominent skill.

Throughout the renaissance well into the 19th century men were always well educated, worked with nobility members of society, regarded with high social status. In their prominent positions they handled correspondence and confidential/private matters of the people for whom they worked. With the invention of the writing machine by Henry Mill, it wasn't until the 1880s when women were employed in clerical and secretarial jobs.

As we are all well aware, technology has evolved in leaps and bounds throughout the 20th century and into the 21st century. This evolution has made it easier for people to work from any location at any time, whether they are in their office or not. This evolution has also brought about many changes in the functions of the secretarial profession.

The first virtual assistants started their businesses in the 1980s. It was then that the term 'virtual assistant' was first used to refer to administrative support on a virtual basis. There were 2 networks functioning by 1985: Home Secretary in the United States and another network created in Melbourne, Australia. There are now several administrative professional associations in North America alone, mostly virtual assistant associations.

Educational programs are now offered more extensively for virtual assistant certification on the Internet on virtual assistant educational websites.

## **Clearing Misconceptions about the Virtual Assistant Profession**

The virtual assistant industry is fairly new in Canada and people want to have a better understanding of the virtual assistant profession. Here are some helpful facts:

- A virtual assistant owns and operates his/her own business.
- As a business professional, they have a vested interest in the success of their clients' businesses.
- All virtual assistants have a post-secondary education, highly developed computer and organizational skills, and expertise combined with several years of experience in the administrative and office management or business-oriented field.

- The virtual assistant profession is not limited only to women. Men also work as virtual assistants.
- They are not employees or temps.
- Working as a virtual assistant is not a hobby; it is a specialized business profession in the business support services and office administrative services fields.
- As a profession, working as a virtual assistant is not just for stay-at-home moms and retirees. Anyone who is an administrative professional specializing in business support services and office administrative support can be a virtual assistant.
- Working as a virtual assistant is not just a work-at-home job to earn 'pocket money'.

## Cost of Virtual Assistant Services

In Canada, Canadian Virtual Assistant Connection states that in general virtual assistant rates range from \$25 to \$75 an hour for administrative tasks and from \$50 to \$125 an hour for more complex, detail oriented tasks.

This may seem rather high when you think about the fact that you can get an in-house assistant for \$10-\$15 per hour. However, there are numerous reasons why virtual assistants charge the rates that they do:

- Virtual Assistants run businesses and become a virtual partner to their clients. As a result they have a vested interest in the success of a client's business and will work as diligently as if they were 'the boss'.
- Virtual assistants have fully equipped offices and take care of all of their own business related expenses. You don't need to worry about paying for:
  - ✓ Additional office space for them to work in
  - ✓ Phone, computers and additional equipment
- Utilities, office cleaning and maintenance in compliance with Health & Safety regulations

- Virtual assistants have several years of experience to offer so there is no need for you train or minimal training is required if you use computer software that is unique to your business operating requirements.
- Virtual assistants are professionals and offer exceptional customer service
- Virtual assistants work 'with' you to keep your business running smoothly
- You don't have to worry about payroll obligations associated with hiring a full-time employee such as government related source deductions, taxes, etc. and down time, vacation pay, sick time, etc.

## How to Partner with a Virtual Assistant

### **Communication**

It is extremely important that the lines of communication are open at all times. When communicating with your Virtual Assistant, be concise and direct especially when communicating by email. Weekly meetings help to re-connect and address any new or existing work. Also, be willing to listen to your virtual assistant.

### **Trust**

As with all relationships, trust is a major factor in the success of a virtual relationship. Your Virtual Assistant is going to be involved in many areas of your business. You need to trust your VA. Communicate clearly details about the work or concerns if something doesn't feel right to you.

### **Partnership**

Virtual Assistants are professionals in all that they do. They are more than just secretaries or personal assistants. Through mutual respect and appreciation, Virtual Assistants become a vital part of your business.

### **Realistic Expectations**

When starting out in a new work partnership with a virtual assistant, you need to plan for a trial period and gradually outsource work over an extended period of time. Clear communication is an absolute must. Be realistic especially in allowing sufficient time for deadlines.

## **Respect**

Treat your virtual assistant with the same equal respect you show towards other business professionals. Your virtual assistant is a business owner and specialized professional. Although you are not required to provide your virtual assistant with full benefits and all the other perks to retain his/her services, you should extend the same level of respect without prejudice or discrimination you would extend to other business owners and professionals.

## **What Virtual Assistants Do for You**

Virtual assistants work as an off-site executive assistant or a secretary and also specialize in a wide variety of services including:

Article Submission/Blogging

Bookkeeping

Bulk Mail Outs/Emailing/Fax Services

Calendar Management

CD Burning

Copywriter

Customer Service

Databases or Spreadsheets

Desktop Publishing

Document Editing and Formatting

Document Scanning

Event and Meeting Planner

Graphic Design

Internet Research

Litigation Document Coder

Personal Assistant

Professional Resume/CV Writer

Project Management

Proofreading/Editing

Real Estate Virtual Marketing Assistant

Search Engine Optimization

Social Media and/or Internet Marketing

Telephone Answering/ Voicemail Prioritization

Transcription (general, medical, legal)

Translation Service

Travel Arrangements (Individual/Corporate)

Virtual Author's Assistant

Virtual Concierge  
Virtual Customer Assistant  
Virtual Data Assistant  
Virtual Legal Secretary  
Virtual Marketing Assistant  
Virtual Receptionist  
Website Design, Maintenance and Hosting  
Word Processing  
... and more.

## Things to Do Before You Outsource to a Virtual Assistant

When you are running your own business, time is a very important factor. You have to schedule your day so that you have enough time to complete all that you set out to do to work with your clients, promote and sell your products, and complete your office paperwork and administrative tasks. You may find that your office paperwork and administrative tasks are daunting time-consuming responsibilities. As much as you want to keep up with your office work, you never really get through that pile of paperwork and files on your desk and the more there is to do the longer it takes for you to get it done taking up valuable time you could be spending on revenue generating tasks.

If you are an entrepreneur or a small business owner, it may be too costly to hire a full-time assistant. Payroll obligations require that you must pay employment insurance, pension and income tax. A full time employee needs office space, a workstation and computer equipment, telecommunication equipment, and stationery supplies. You also have to allow for vacation pay, sick time and personal time for medical appointments.

Hiring a virtual assistant makes it easier for you to get the administrative support you need for your business. Even though the cost of a virtual assistant may be a higher hourly wage, you don't have to provide office space, workstation and any of the computer, telecommunication equipment and stationery supplies. You don't have to worry about payroll obligations, vacation time, sick time and personal time. The advantage of outsourcing to a virtual assistant is that you can use their services on an as need or monthly contract basis. Even when you use their services on a monthly contract basis you are still saving quite a bit of money. After all is said and done, outsourcing to a virtual assistant proves to be an economical alternative solution to hiring a full-time administrative employee.



Once you decide that outsourcing to a virtual assistant is a practical, economical solution to fulfill your administrative requirements, make a list of administrative tasks and other office work that you want the virtual assistant to do.

Next, go to our services page to review what business support services would be most beneficial to your business that My Essential Office Assistant can provide for you. On our Contact Us page send us an email to tell us and describe the type of work, office work and administrative tasks or special projects you want My Essential Office Assistant to work on for you.

We will contact you for a one-hour consultation to discuss your business support needs and provide a quote for you.

If you follow the tips describe earlier on page 6 on how to work with a virtual assistant, you will have a successful long-term professional business relationship with your virtual assistant.