



This book demystifies the questions every Virtual Assistant asks & provides the resources to help develop their business.

Tawnya Sutherland

How to Build a Successful Virtual Assistant Business

International Version



Everything YOU need to know to start, build and expand your Virtual Assistant practice!

by Janice Byer and
Elayne Whitfield-Parr



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International Version

Written by:

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Foreword

This is the time to become a Virtual Assistant (VA)! Working from home is no longer relegated to unachievable dreams. Becoming a Virtual Assistant is now a reality for anyone with administrative experience, a computer and the support to make it happen. Elayne and Janice's new book is that much needed support for Virtual Assistants worldwide and is a welcome addition to this emerging and exciting industry.

When I first became a Virtual Assistant, it was a tough struggle from start-up to success. It was a time-consuming mission to find even the smallest tidbit of information to answer the tiniest of questions I had revolving in my head regarding starting up a Virtual Assistant business. There were few, if any, resourceful books or other social networks to satisfy my quest to learn more on this topic. Then along came Elayne and Janice who were one of the first contributors to my success as a VA. It was their organization, Canadian Virtual Assistant Connection (CVAC) that I first joined after a long hard search on the internet for more information on this unknown term "virtual assistant." It was at CVAC that many of my questions were finally answered. This led me onto the path of eventually leading a worldwide network of Virtual Assistants as well as becoming a major spokesperson in the VA industry, a feat I never would have dreamed possible at that time. Kudos and many thanks to Janice and Elayne for their contribution to my success and for now taking it one step further and authoring an international version, *How to Build a Successful Virtual Assistant Business* to further help others just like me make a mark for themselves as a Virtual Assistant.

This book demystifies the questions every Virtual Assistant will have when developing their business. Most of all, it challenges the Virtual Assistant chapter after chapter to operate and build a successful Virtual Assistant practice no matter who they are or where they are located. It can be achieved by each and every individual by simply following this book from start to finish. By paying careful attention to the following pages, you will have the opportunity to unravel the (not so) complex steps to building a successful Virtual Assistant business. You'll read about the important business planning stages, setting up your office, developing your service list, marketing for new clients, training and certifications, balancing business and family life, not to mention the marvelous resource tools found within this book. The reader can view this as a "how-to" manual or strategic business planner. Either way, it will benefit both new and veteran VAs in developing their dreams of obtaining a successful Virtual Assistant business.

Had this VA resource book been around when I was starting out, I know my journey would have been not only considerably shorter but much less stressful. I wish all Virtual Assistants the success in building their new Virtual Assistant business. Trust me, from one VA to another, this book will be a resource that you will be regularly taking down from the library shelf for a long time to come. Make sure it is reachable on your bookcase!

Tawnya Sutherland, CIMBS

Founder of VAnetworking.com, the Original Virtual Assistant Networking Forum since 2003 and Author of the Virtual Business Startup System (VBSS). A Certified Internet Marketing Specialist, Tawnya also runs Mediamage Business Solutions helping her clients turn their website clicks into cash.

Foreword– Author Follow-Up

We would both like to thank Tawnya for her time and effort to review our book and provide us with such a wonderful *Forward*.

Tawnya is a force to be reckoned with in the Virtual Assistant community. As a member of CVAC, she has helped us to take the organization to new heights by working with us on various initiatives to share the word about CVAC and the VA industry.

Her passion to help VAs succeed and teach business professionals about the advantages of working with VAs led her to develop www.VAnetworking.com, an international community of and for Virtual Assistants. VAnetworking is a leading source for all things VA related and the place to be for any VA, no matter if they are new to the industry or are veterans.

We are proud to be working with Tawnya to offer this book as part of her extremely successful Virtual Business Startup System. We have recommended this system to hundreds of VAs in the past as a way to get started and are happy that our book has the information that she feels is beneficial to new VAs.

With this new partnership, *How to Build a Successful Virtual Assistant Business* has now hit new heights and has become the book to have for any aspiring VA.

Thank you Tawnya for your dedication to this industry and for endorsing this book. We look forward to a long and successful partnership with VAnetworking.com.

Sincerely,

Janice & Elayne

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Introduction

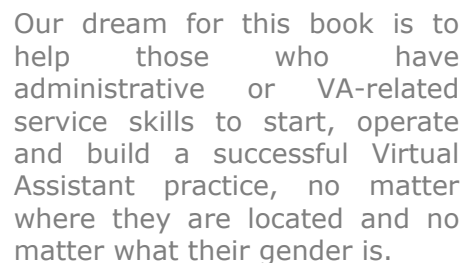
Although the term “Virtual Assistant”, also referred to as a VA, is still very new to the business community, there are thousands of home-based administrative workers around the world who now refer to themselves as VAs. The opportunities for the professional services offered by these VAs are endless.

Our dream for this book is to help those who have administrative or VA-related service skills to start, operate and build a successful Virtual Assistant practice, no matter where they are located and no matter what their gender is.

How to Build a Successful Virtual Assistant Business includes information and tips to help aspiring and established VAs with every aspect of starting and building a Virtual Assistant business. From naming your business, to upgrading your skills, to expanding your business, we have put together everything you need to know based on our combined years in this industry and the input of successful VAs worldwide.

This book includes information that any VA can use to become successful.

Being a Virtual Assistant is an exciting and highly rewarding career. The Virtual Assistance industry works hard to help the term “VA” become recognized in all business circles. Our wish, along with VAs around the world, is to change the question from “what is a VA?” to “who is your VA?” and with the professionalism that we have witnessed in this industry, that won’t take long to happen.



Our dream for this book is to help those who have administrative or VA-related service skills to start, operate and build a successful Virtual Assistant practice, no matter where they are located and no matter what their gender is.

So, welcome to a fast-growing industry that allows you to have the freedom of working from home (or *virtually* anywhere), be your own boss, and assist the many entrepreneurs and business professionals around the world who need to concentrate on running their businesses while you handle their non-core tasks.

Thank you to Tawnya Sutherland of VANetworking.com for encouraging us to present our book to a global market to help VAs all around the world learn how to build a successful Virtual Assistant business.

We hope ... no, we know this book will become your VA encyclopedia and we look forward to seeing you become successful by growing your business beyond your wildest dreams.

Sincerely,

Janice & Elayne

Acknowledgements

Janice's Acknowledgements - Firstly, I would like to thank my family for their support while working on this book. There were countless evenings and weekends when I had my laptop in front of me and they completely understood how passionate this project was and is to me. Thanks to my husband, Randy and my daughter, Megan for being so patient with me.

Secondly, I want to thank all of the VAs out there who helped us with their input and tips to add to this book. The discussion lists from all of the organizations to which we belong were a huge asset when it came to researching what needed to be included. So, thanks to every VA for being helpful and passionate about the success of our industry.

And finally, I want to thank Elayne for being an awesome business partner in the Canadian Virtual Assistant Connection, a great co-author on this book and a wonderful friend! Thanks for just being there, Elayne, no matter if the discussion was business or personal. I am so glad we decided to write this book and I look forward to working on more projects with you in the future!

Elayne's Acknowledgements - It's amazing to me that I am where I am today, doing what I love to do and being so completely happy with my life. I want to thank all of those who played a role in getting me here.

Thanks to my family and friends who believed in me and supported me during those first tough months. Thanks also to everyone who has continued to support me over the years as I have grown my business. Not once have I ever received a word of complaint when I started up my computer on a family vacation or downloaded email when we were out on a secluded island in Georgian Bay. It's amazing where you can access email, isn't it? My husband, Tim, has been a true inspiration and an amazing source of strength and support. Thank you to Tim, Taylor, Cameron and Braedan for your love, patience and support. And thank you for expressing your pride in me so often.

Thanks to the incredible VAs from around the world as you have been a true source of inspiration to me. Thanks to everyone who ever offered me advice or asked for advice from me – both have been of great value to me. Thanks especially to the members of CVAC – what a wonderfully diverse group of women and men who are intelligent, successful and completely supportive of each other. These individuals are what make our industry so exceptional.

I would like to offer a special thank you to Caley Walsh who has worked with me at Executive Assistance for the past five years. I truly couldn't do what I do without her. She is an unbelievable mix of intelligence, wisdom, patience, and unparalleled administrative abilities. And last (but not least) to my partner, Janice Byer. Janice has been an inspiration to me since I began this journey and I'm proud to have had the opportunity to partner with such a brilliant and extraordinary woman. She is such an integral part The Canadian Virtual Assistant Connection and the VA industry as a whole. My life is better for having known her. I am looking forward to years of growing CVAC and am truly honored to be a part of her life, both professionally and personally.

CHAPTER 1 ★ What is a Virtual Assistant?

Definition

A Virtual Assistant, also known as a VA, is an entrepreneur and business owner who takes pride in offering various forms of help for tasks that are generally related to keeping a business running smoothly. Their services are readily available for fellow business professionals, but they are also suitable to anyone who may be in need of some administrative or other related assistance. VAs work from their own offices: usually home offices. They are virtual partners to their clients.

That description may still seem a little vague because it is difficult to best describe what a Virtual Assistant is or does since the services offered and expertise of VAs vary so much.

Most VAs offer assistance with such tasks as word processing, spreadsheets, and other administrative duties. These types of services generally make up the core of any VA practice. However, these services aren't JUST what VAs offer since the quality and experience put into each service is far more than simply "typing a letter." Most VAs have a specialty that includes, or is in addition to, their core services.



VAs are generally experienced in administrative tasks that are necessary to keep any business running smoothly. However, some have more advanced skills in certain services than others. For instance, one VA may be extremely proficient in providing the design of customer-catching marketing material using desktop publishing software, while another VA can do wonders with contact management information in the form of a database. These are some ways that VAs specialize in core tasks.

Administrative tasks aren't the only specialties offered by VAs. The range of services with which to aid fellow business professionals is endless. These can include web design, graphic design, concierge services, ghost writing, and so much more. VAs can even help with everything from travel arrangements to personal shopping.

With that being said, you can see that a VA possesses the skills and expertise to provide professional results for their clients. Most VAs have been in the administrative field for many years and bring that experience to life in the way they run their practices and in the projects they perform for their clients. They take pride in offering their expertise to others in need of their services and communicate with these clients via telephone, fax, snail mail, email and other forms of online communication and technology.

Some VAs will occasionally visit a client's office to perform tasks, but the majority of Virtual Assistants work from their own offices, thus, giving credit to the 'virtual' reference in the term, Virtual Assistant.

Benefits of Becoming a Virtual Assistant

The Virtual Assistant industry is extremely unique. It is made up of entrepreneurs from around the world who come from many different walks of life and are really just one big family.

But as a big family, we do have our “issues” with one another. Sometimes things don’t always run smoothly. However, we still communicate in our hours of need by sharing and learning since this is a vital part of what makes this industry work so successfully.

96.8% of Virtual Assistants practicing today are women¹, but the number of men entering this field is increasing daily

The VA industry also has the benefit of being like an “equal opportunity employer.” Although 96.8% of those practicing today are women¹, the number of men entering this field is increasing daily.

VAs who start their practices now are finding it easier to build their client lists than those who began their businesses five or more years ago. This is because the benefits of utilizing the services of a VA are becoming easier to grasp by our target markets, therefore more fellow business professionals are open to the idea of contracting a VA.

“Benefits of having your own business: Now that I have had to enter the job market on a full-time basis for the short term I hope; I really miss working for myself. I didn't care that it was me doing all the work I found it challenging. I miss the days of waking up, getting dressed and making the two-minute commute to my office. I would spend all day working on the one project, and take a break whenever I wanted. Work through a project with no interruptions except for the dogs wanting to go out. It was great! I didn't miss the water cooler chit-chat because I was able to get out and network with other likeminded people. I was able to connect with other professionals. The freedom and independence to be your own boss was wonderful and a great high, not to mention a great ego boost.”

Francesca Frate, Owner/Operator
AdminConcepts ★ www.adminconcepts.net

¹ VAnetworking.com's Virtual Assistant Survey, 2008 (www.VAnetworking.com)

Since its inception, the VA industry has received a fair amount of publicity, which has increased its exposure. This recognition in the media has also helped individual VAs to have their written material accepted by publications, another great benefit of being a VA. Other advantages of being a home-based Virtual Assistant are:

- You have the freedom to be as creative as you like.
- You can be home for the children when they need you.
- You don't have to worry about office politics.
- You can provide a non-biased view to your clients.
- You can save money on child care expenses.
- Your target market isn't limited to just your local area.
- You have the freedom to schedule your time as needed.
- You can determine your own fees as opposed to someone else determining your pay rate.
- You have the freedom to choose if you would like to work with someone or not.
- You don't have the added expense of requiring a 5-day-a-week business wardrobe
- You can work in the comfort of your own home and in whatever outfit you choose (although we do recommend getting dressed ... you never know who will stop by).
- You will build relationships with many talented business professionals.
- You will have access to a multitude of resources on the Internet.
- You will revel in the feeling of accomplishment for everything you do!

Downfalls of Being a VA

The benefits of being a VA definitely outweigh the downfalls, but yes, there are a couple of issues that VAs must face and conquer.

Most VAs work from home. Working from home can produce feelings of isolation which can have a negative effect on yourself and your business. A great way to learn to overcome these feelings is by joining various VA organizations, which include email discussion groups that can give you ideas on ways to beat any feelings of isolation.

Another downfall, which is easily overcome, is ensuring that you stick to a schedule and realize you are the only one responsible for everything that happens in your business. When working from home, it is very easy to take time off to handle personal matters. Being your own boss does give you that privilege, but you need to keep this type of activity to a minimum.

And finally, you may find it a challenge to do everything that needs to be done to build your business as well as keep up with your client work. But, it can be done as you can tell by the number of successful Virtual Assistants who are practicing today.

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Who Can Benefit From the Services of a VA?

In short, anyone needing help with the core tasks of running their businesses is someone who can benefit by utilizing the services of a VA. Whether it is administrative tasks or other services that VAs offer, working together with a VA can be highly beneficial to entrepreneurs and business professionals.

Here are just a few features & benefits of working with a VA:

Feature: Virtual Assistants work on a contract basis.

Benefit: This means that the client doesn't need to worry about the added expenses that are generally associated with an in-house employee. These include payroll expenses such as source deductions & company benefits.

Feature: Virtual Assistants bill only for time worked.

Benefit: Clients do not need to worry about paying salaries for times when an in-house assistant may be sitting idle. They also don't have to worry about providing vacation time or vacation pay.

Feature: Virtual Assistants work from their own home offices.

Benefit: Clients don't have to provide office space or equipment; an expense that many small businesses can do without.

Feature: Virtual Assistants have fully-equipped offices.

Benefit: This allows the client to get help with almost any task that an in-house assistant generally performs. They do not need to worry whether or not the assistant has the proper peripherals or software.



Feature: Virtual Assistants have many years of experience in their given fields.

Benefit: Clients receive the expertise they need in order to handle their projects without having to train someone. And, there is no need to worry about spending valuable time reading through dozens of resumes and deciding who would be best to handle the work.

Feature: Virtual Assistants can offer full-service assistance with the help of others in the industry.

Benefit: If a client has a task in which their VA is not specialized, they don't need to waste time shopping around for someone else to handle the project. VAs work closely with other VAs and can sub-contract any projects that need a specialized touch.

Feature: Virtual Assistants build relationships with their clients.

Benefit: Clients can be assured that after working closely with a VA, common tasks and how a client likes things done will be a given to the VA. They will begin to know what and how tasks need to be performed without the client explaining it over and over again.

Feature: Virtual Assistants are available on an as-needed basis.

Benefit: This allows the client to have occasional projects done by simply contacting their VA when they need them. There is no need to worry about having a staff member available for a particular task. When clients need help, a VA is ready.

Feature: Virtual Assistants handle the overflow for clients.

Benefit: The client can concentrate on generating company revenue and other necessary tasks that keep a business running smoothly.

"Difficulties with being self-employed: Finding time to market when you are busy. Finding time to market when you aren't as busy. Learning how to stay motivated even when you don't feel like it and realizing that the buck stops with you."

Francesca Frate, Owner/Operator
AdminConcepts ★ www.adminconcepts.net

What Kinds of Clients Work with VAs?

Virtually anyone can be a client for a VA. However, most VAs do have specific client target markets in which they often specialize.

Most VAs work with small business professionals, but that is a fairly broad spectrum. To expand on that a little, VAs work with coaches, speakers, attorneys, accountants, real estate agents, doctors, students, authors, non-profit organizations, and other service and product suppliers. In addition, VAs work with other VAs.

Unfortunately, not all prospective clients even know about VAs and how much they can help an organization in streamlining their business. So, it is our job to find those prospects, show them all the benefits of working with a VA, and then keep them coming back for more. You will learn more about this throughout the book.

How Do YOU Know if You are Cut Out to be a VA?

Just because you have a computer and can type does not make you a Virtual Assistant. And, just because you have years of experience in the administrative field does not mean you have the skills to run your own VA practice.

A VA works independently, and thus, must have the skills to be a business owner; not just a secretary. A VA is a business owner and does not work FOR her clients, she works WITH them. She plays the role of a partner to her client and takes pride in helping the client's business become successful. It is a win/win situation for all parties.

Having many years of experience in the administrative field is a great start to becoming a VA, but this does not necessarily mean you are cut out to be a business owner. Being a VA involves taking control of how you run your business and how others perceive your business. If you do not have the skills to be a business owner, then starting a VA practice may not be for you. Almost everyone wants to have the freedom to work from home, but there is more to it than just setting up your computer at the kitchen table and hoping that typing projects will come your way.

Let's look at some of the reasons why people consider starting a home-based business, in particular a VA practice:

- They want to be home with the children and watch them grow.
- They are tired of working FOR others and all the politics that can come along with it.
- They have had enough of the competition in the administrative field and trying to land a job that will sustain their lifestyles.
- Their former job no longer exists as the result of company restructuring.
- They want to make money from home while having the freedom to schedule their own workdays.
- They may be ill and cannot obtain a job due to their circumstances.
- They have the notion that if they can type, they can make money doing it.

If these are your main reasons for considering starting your own business, you may want to do some rethinking. These are only partial reasons for having the desire to start your own business. There are two other very important aspects necessary in making your dream a reality:

You must have an extreme passion and desire to be your own boss; and You must be highly proficient in your skills, while knowing that these skills will give a helping hand to your fellow entrepreneurs, resulting in an income that can sustain your lifestyle (or more!)

Are YOU Ready To Work From Your Home?



Okay, now we have determined why you want to start your own VA practice. It must be time to go ahead and get started, right? Wrong!!!! Now you need to look at whether you have the discipline and passion to work long hours to get your business off the ground and provide the quality of services that are in demand while still keeping your family running smoothly.

Starting any home-based business takes an extreme amount of discipline and dedication. You have to juggle your home life and your business in such a way that there is as little negative effect on your family and your day-to-day life as possible. And, you have to make sure that you have the personality traits required to make your business successful.

First and foremost, you must be sure to have the commitment to make a home business a successful venture. Just because you work at home does not mean you can go off and do whatever strikes your fancy on any given day. Sure, being a home-based business owner does give you that freedom and flexibility, but if you do not schedule yourself and stick to that schedule (as best you can), you may find that you are not putting as much effort into building your business as is required, and thus, your new business will suffer. You need to be disciplined and realize that you alone are responsible for building your business. No one else is going to do it for you.

Effects On Your Personal Life

You don't want your personal life to suffer. When you start your own business, you will spend a lot of time trying to make it soar and the extra effort that you have to put into it can be cause for concern when it comes to your family. Children who are at home during regular business hours may feel left out or ignored while you are trying to accomplish all the tasks that you need to do in building and running your business. It may be time to consider arranging some kind of childcare for the kids.

You may be lucky enough to have children who are old enough to attend school full time. But if they are still too young for school, this means they are around the house during the day and may be trying to get your attention when you are trying to concentrate on work. Although childcare is an expense you were probably hoping to do without when you decided to work from home, it may also be the answer to your dilemma of keeping the children entertained when you are trying to get work done.

You don't have to have them gone all day, or even every day, but you could consider having them visit a babysitter's home a few days a week or see if your local community has any kind of children's programs in which you can enroll them. This will give you at least a little bit of a break from the constant "Mommy!!!" during the day.

"Starting your business: Don't let the naysayers stop you. There will always be people in life who will tell you not to do something and they'll be the first ones at your door saying "I told you so." The only person you have to or should listen to is the little voice inside of you telling you to go for it. If you don't try you'll always be wondering what would have happened had you given it your best shot. If the business doesn't take off you'll have grown as a person because you gave it your best shot."

Francesca Frate, Owner/Operator
AdminConcepts ★ www.adminconcepts.net

Organizing your day so you can build your business and still have time for your family can be quite tricky. During the start-up phase of your business, you may be tempted to work in the evenings to get caught up on marketing your business or completing that extra project for a client. But, there is no need for you to be super-mom all the time. Be sure to set aside some time for family and other extra-curricular pursuits. You may find yourself suffering from burnout if you work too much. And, in the long run, that will have a negative effect on your business.

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"How to Build a Successful Virtual Assistant Business, International Version, is an absolute 'must read' for new and/or aspiring Virtual Assistants worldwide."

Caley Walsh, *Assisting4U.net*

How to Build a Successful Virtual Assistant Business...

is the perfect resource for anyone interested in starting or building their own Virtual Assistant practice. It helps you every step of the way... from choosing the right name for your business... to determining your rates... to marketing your services... and even helps you when it comes time to expand your business... plus so much more!

200+ pages, this book takes critical information needed to turn your desire to start your own Virtual Assistant business into a profitable endeavor that is guaranteed to bring success... including dozens of sample letters, contracts and other documents; an extensive list of helpful websites and software; and input from VAs in all stages of business ownership.

VAnetworking.com presents this extensive informational book that comes to you directly from Janice Byer and Elayne Whitfield-Parr's office desks. Both of these outstanding women have a passion for seeing the Virtual Assistant industry, and every individual VA, become a household name. Each is also the owner of a successful VA business that started with just one client who took a chance on them, and now they have clients all over the world. Learn how to build a successful Virtual Assistant business from the best in the industry...

Janice D. Byer, CCVA, VAC, MVA

...has owned and operated Docu-Type Administrative & Web Design Services (www.docutype.net) since 1998. She is a Certified Canadian Virtual Assistant (CCVA) and certified Master Virtual Assistant (MVA). She has also helped VAs, both in Canada and around the world, by writing articles and ebooks; volunteering with the OIVAC and other associations; mentoring VAs in all stages of their careers; and, co-operating the Canadian Virtual Assistant Connection (www.cvac.ca). Her business has grown to a level where she now has contractors from around the world working with her to provide her clients with everything they need.

I sincerely hope that this book helps to alleviate some of the concerns that both new and established VAs have during the various transitions of running a VA practice. I hope you find all the information helpful and I wish you tremendous success in this exciting and rewarding career choice!"



Elayne Whitfield-Parr, CCVA, VAC, MVA, PREVA

...has owned Executive Assistance Business Solutions Inc. (www.executive-assistance.ca) since 2000. She is a Certified Canadian Virtual Assistant (CCVA), a certified Master Virtual Assistant (MVA), a Professional Real Estate Virtual Assistant (PREVA), and a member of several related associations. She now operates several businesses in which she supervises numerous contractors worldwide and also offers her expertise to regular industry events. Not to mention, she is also a co-founder of CVAC and mentors VAs to levels of success that she finds rewarding.

"When I started my business I put, literally, hundreds of hours into research. I hope that this book cuts down on that learning curve for VAs just starting out as well as VAs who are ready to bring their business to the next level. I truly hope that you are as fulfilled and completely happy with your business as I am with mine."



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