



**Choosing a Virtual Assistant  
By Lilach Bullock, asklilach Ltd  
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## **Introduction**

There are an increasing number of small and start-up businesses that are turning to Virtual Assistants to provide ‘hands-on’ support for their businesses. The profession has been around for more than 20 years but demand for services is rising steeply as businesses discover the huge range of benefits and flexibility of using virtual support. As the profession is unregulated, anyone can set themselves up as a Virtual Assistant. That means businesses have to carry out thorough checks to ensure that they employ the services of a reputable Virtual Assistant. This guide has been designed to give small and start-up businesses a better understanding of the Virtual Assistant profession and the checks to carry out if they are considering virtual support. I hope you find the guide useful. If you have any questions then please do not hesitate to contact me on:

- [info@asklilach.co.uk](mailto:info@asklilach.co.uk)
- or by telephoning 01442 231663.

## **What exactly is a Virtual Assistant?**

A Virtual Assistant is someone who can provide a range of services to support businesses. They work remotely from their own office using their own equipment. A reputable Virtual Assistant will be member of one or more of the representative bodies reflecting their commitment to upholding quality standards. The experience and expertise of Virtual Assistants varies widely so research is needed to ensure that any prospective virtual support can meet your business needs effectively. Virtual Assistants can work on one-off projects



or provide support on an ongoing basis including providing valuable call answering services ensuring that new business opportunities are not missed. A virtual office provides all the benefits of a physical office without the additional staffing, equipment or location costs. In general, Virtual Assistants charge between £18 and £25 per hour for their time, with some charging more.

## What are the benefits of using a Virtual Assistant?

There are many benefits to using a Virtual Assistant:

- **their status** - they are not an employee so you have no employer liability in terms of paying an annual salary, National Insurance, holiday or sick pay
- **flexibility** - they can fit with the needs of your business exactly, providing support for ad hoc projects or on a long-term basis as and when required
- **growth** - there is more scope for businesses to expand with a 'safety net' by outsourcing tasks as and when they need to. It also means that there is more opportunity to call on support when work comes in, rather being forced to turn the work down because resources are unavailable
- **cost effectiveness and budget management** - with Virtual Assistants you only pay for the time you use. This is important for small and start-up businesses so that they can track expenditure and change their plans accordingly
- **business profitability** - for all businesses time is money. Often, it is cheaper for business owners to outsource tasks to a Virtual Assistant rather than do it themselves (because their own charge our rate will be more expensive than that of the Virtual Assistant). So, it makes more sense for business owners to use their time to focus on growing their business and looking after customers.



- **specialist skills** - Virtual Assistants bring a wealth of skills and experience. Businesses can save both time and money by using the services of someone who can do a job quickly and efficiently
- **space** - as Virtual Assistants work from their own office you don't need to think about desk space or equipment.

## What types of services do Virtual Assistants provide?

Virtual Assistants can provide a range of services, including:

- **typing** - of business and official correspondence, legal documents and contracts, minutes, mail shots, dissertations, manuscripts, CVs, transcription (from tapes or digital files)
- **travel arrangements** - comprehensive domestic and international itineraries including car hire, flights, train travel and accommodation; provide maps and directions
- **internet research** - research and reports of findings and recommendations
- **diary management** - planning of business meetings and conference calls; providing helpful reminders for important dates
- **business liaison** - call minder service, message taking, filtering emails, contacts database management
- **project support** - act as administrative coordinator for a variety of projects, e.g. arranging courses, workshops, change of address cards
- **personal life management** - plan and organise grand celebrations, theatre bookings, restaurant reservations, receptions, invitations, Christmas card distribution, holidays, weekend breaks, collate quotes for home/car insurance renewal, research that special product or gift, organise cleaner, gardener, handyman etc.



## Where can I find a reputable Virtual Assistant?

Personal recommendation is always a good start when you are seeking expert help or to outsource work. In addition, a reputable VA should belong to one or more of the Virtual Assistant governing bodies. They all provide listings of Virtual Assistants:

- **The International Association of Virtual Office Assistants -** [www.iava.org.uk](http://www.iava.org.uk)  
Provides an online directory of Virtual Assistants in England and Scotland
- **The Society of Virtual Assistants -** [www.scottishvirtualassistants.co.uk](http://www.scottishvirtualassistants.co.uk)  
Provides an online database with facility to search by skill area
- **International Association of Virtual Assistants -** [www.iavao.com](http://www.iavao.com)  
Provides a listing of Virtual Assistants in many countries including the United Kingdom
- **Alliance of UK Virtual Assistants -** [www.allianceofukvirtualassistants.org.uk](http://www.allianceofukvirtualassistants.org.uk)  
Lists Virtual Assistants by county and service area

## What information should I check before employing the services of a Virtual Assistant?

Virtual Assistants vary in their expertise and experience. A reputable Virtual Assistant should, however, adhere to strict standards in terms of professionalism and quality. The following checklist will help you to make an informed decision about whether the prospective Virtual Assistant adheres to



those standards and would be able to meet the needs of your business. A reputable Virtual Assistant will:

- be able to provide references/testimonials for previous work
- have personal indemnity insurance
- have processes and systems to ensure client confidentiality
- be registered with the Data Protection Act
- have a professional looking website and business cards etc
- have risk management procedures in place to protect their business and yours
- have separate home and work phone lines
- have business security processes, procedures and systems in place
- put in place contracts for any work to be undertaken
- be a member of the relevant professional bodies
- undertake study and training on an ongoing basis to keep their skills up-to-date
- be happy to provide timesheets for any work undertaken.

## **How to get the most out of your VA**

There are a number of steps you can take to help ensure your working relationship gets off on the right foot and progresses smoothly. Suggestions include:

- agreeing in writing the nature of the work to be carried out, the specific activity, timescales, time inputs and the respective fees
- ensuring any contract makes clear the arrangements for billing and any other costs that may be incurred
- any changes to the agreement should be noted in writing to avoid any confusion later
- agreeing how activity will be recorded and reported



- agreeing specifics regarding confidentiality and security
- agreeing in advance availability (office hours etc).

## **How else can I tell whether a Virtual Assistant is right for my business?**

Websites, business cards and email addresses are a good indicator of the level of professionalism of the Virtual Assistant. If they do not look professional then you should check carefully the processes and systems that they have in place and whether they can support your business needs. In addition, cheapest is not always best. It is better to seek the services of a Virtual Assistant who has the necessary support systems and personal indemnity insurance, but may be a bit more expensive, than someone who can provide cheap services without those reassurances.

## **The author**

Lilach Bullock, Managing Director of asklilach Ltd, has more than 17 years of experience in PA, secretarial and training roles including working as a bi-lingual legal secretary. She also holds a number of secretarial qualifications. asklilach Ltd is a member of the Institute of Qualified Professional Secretaries, the Federation of Small Businesses and the Watford and West Herts Chamber of Commerce. asklilach Ltd holds memberships with: The International Association of Virtual Office Assistants; The Society of Virtual Assistants; and International Association of Virtual Assistants.

## **Contact Lilach Bullock on:**

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