

INFORM

Office assistance

run your business the virtual way

by Brigid Kelly

While small business owners dream of handing over time-consuming payroll jobs, mailouts and even office parties to a competent assistant, most reluctantly put a PA at the bottom of their wishlist. Not any more.

New technology, tightening belts and a workforce that wants flexibility means you can hire a PA as and when you need one – and they don't even need their own desk.

A quick sweep of the Yellow Pages reveals any number of virtual PAs offering secretarial and support on an ad-hoc basis.

The concept gives the PAs themselves flexibility to work for companies anywhere, while providing businesses with a simple and cost-effective method of outsourcing office chores.

Aucklander Linda Bennett says an ability and desire to make someone else's job easier is a must for a PA. After years working as a personal assistant and legal secretary, which she loved, she decided to take her work home so she could enjoy more flexibility and time with her children.

She set up her virtual PA business About Time around two and a half years ago.

Her services range from copy and dictaphone typing, legal documents and producing newsletters and advertisements to event management and accounts. When her workload gets heavy, she has a network of at-home mums with secretarial skills to draw on.

"Most people have a computer and Internet connection at home. Many people have a fax. So if you've got the skills, why not use them?"



Ms Bennett says the key benefit to clients is cost-effectiveness. Start-ups and small to medium businesses often don't have quite enough administration work for a full timer, or the space for one.

"If you use an outside source for your admin, typing, accounts and so on, those people have to pay for their own office space and rates and telephone line. If you employ someone you have to pay them a salary, holiday pay, sick pay, and give them a desk."

Like many virtual PAs, Ms Bennett has deliberately kept her business home-based, but Tauranga's Mandy Veza decided to open an office in town due to difficulties with broadband service to her home.

Her company, Virtual Office Assistant, has been based in Devonport Road for one year. She

shares the space with another independent worker who handles VOA's financial services, and employs temps to handle overflow work.

It is the only business of its kind in Tauranga.

"I wanted to raise the level of service that was out there for SMEs needing help with administration and marketing support in the Bay of Plenty. It's very hard for small businesses to start off."

Some clients work with VOA weekly, while others employ the company for one-off tasks.

And the customers don't have to be local. VOA has a number of overseas clients, and is about to launch a website targeting the UK market. As the customer sleeps, VOA carries out the job.

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Creating brands not bland

by Allison Toner

Your business may have a name and logo but that's not brand personality, neither is having a personality face your brand.

Brand personality is using every single avenue to express your brand's uniqueness and create emotional connection.

When searching my cupboards for evidence of brand personality I found nothing. I already knew it was few and far between.

No food product showed any evidence, certain brands of clothing and cosmetics had an element of prestige associated with them, but not personality.

Without personality brands are 'bland' that blend right into shop shelves.

The charity event 'Movember' has personality as it gets people involved, challenging each other and having a laugh at who can grow the silliest mo. It has much more personality and profit potential than a street collection.

How can you create brand personality?

Before you attempt to create brand personality you need to figure out what your goal is and how you want your customers to feel.

Do you want your brand to create laughter, relaxation, luxury, excitement, curiosity, intrigue, education or awareness of a cause?

In a book titled 'All Marketers Are Liars' Seth Godin describes how marketing is nothing but story telling, and that people buy your story not your product and that being authentic, remarkable and consistent is the key. What story does your brand have?

How do you express personality?

A consumer has to see, feel and experience this personality (not just logo) through every avenue - packaging, advertising, staff uniforms, retail space, receipts, bottles, office, website, TV, newspaper, emails, call centre, business cards, napkins.

42 Below's Geoff Ross' title even has personality – 'chief vodka bloke'. There is a family owned pharmacy who insists every customer gets free samples with every purchase.

What policies can give your brand personality?

Every customer has to wear a silly hat to get in. You must donate to charity to be allowed to purchase. Will you only hire jugglers to work in your café? 42 Below must have a 'controversial event policy' which helped them build their profile so quickly.

'Personality publicity' i.e. consumer chat factor will market your business more effectively than actual marketing.

Personality is permission to make your brand fun (to think some people have to work for a living!).

Ideas Architect Allison Toner runs company Niche Forecasting which creates brand personality and loyalty, emotional marketing, motivating KPI's, USP's, staff fulfillment and brand culture. Check out Niche Forecasting's inaugural list of '100 Problems to Solve in 2007' at www.nicheforecasting.co.nz