

Transitions: Are You Ready for a Virtual Assistant? 10 ways studio owners and voice teachers can benefit from a VA

by Deanna Maio

Let's face it. If you are an independent teacher or studio owner, your time and money are worth more when you are able to concentrate on what you do best. But when it's just you, you've got to do it all.

There are only 168 hours in the week. That's it. No matter how hard you stare at the clock you can't "manage your time." You can only manage your priorities. And if you're the revenue generator for your business, or one of them, your time is very valuable. But not every task in your business requires the same level of skill. Some are worth more to you and some can only be done by you.

Enter the virtual assistant. Virtual assistants or VAs are work-from-home professionals who are highly trained in their skill areas, as well as a variety of technologies. Many of them have advanced degrees in addition to years of professional experience.

One of the biggest benefits of hiring a virtual assistant is the ability to delegate work to people who have better skills and can do work you don't know how to do, don't have time to do, or just don't want to do.

The next big draw (when considering virtual assistants over bricks-and-mortar assistants) is that virtual assistants only clock-in and work when you need them and they use their own resources. In other words, they're not charging you to sit there and play solitaire on a computer you purchased for them. Most have multiple clients so you don't have to have 40 hours of work

available for them if you don't have it, or the budget to hire someone full time for the position.

Let's consider just a few of the ways a virtual assistant can help your studio run smoothly or grow:



1. Your VA receives calls routed to his/her home office phone and your prospective customers do not receive a voice mail. You pay only for the minutes that the VA is on the phone.

2. You need to confirm appointments for the week. Your VA emails lesson reminders and updates your online calendar, if you're using a mutually accessible calendar program such as Google Calendar, Acuity, My Music Staff.

3. You need a new software program. You communicate your needs, concerns, and price point to your VA. They research, pull together the information and make a recommendation for you to review and purchase.

4. You are preparing a marketing plan and need further information. Your VA can contact possible advertising outlets on the Internet, magazines, periodicals, newspapers, etc. and acquire information on pricing, publishing dates, publishing deadlines, payment policies, etc. All information is compiled into a report for you to review.

5. You need to update your email marketing contact list (Constant Contact, Mail Chimp etc). You send a current student registration list to your VA. The VA deletes former students (or saves them in a designated contact list for students who are not currently enrolled) and adds new students to your contact list(s).

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continued: Are You Ready for a Virtual Assistant?

6. You need a brochure, business card or flyer for your business. Your VA can design, type, and print your advertising material using your own artwork or stock art. Your VA can also make the materials ready to print by a professional print shop and simply email the file to the shop for printing.
7. You have a blog, but do not have time to update entries regularly. Brief ideas and thoughts or links can be emailed to your VA, who then updates your blog.
8. You need a telephone conversation (i.e., conference call, webinar, etc.) recorded. The VA records the call and transcribes the recording for the participants.
9. You dictate letters, reports, notes, or memos and email it to your VA. Your VA transcribes the audio, prints the letters on your stationery and mails them the following day.
10. You cannot keep up with the volume of email and are missing important messages. You or your webmaster set up a general email account (info@mycompany.com). Your VA retrieves all email, sorts, responds to routine requests, and forwards items of importance to you at your personal email account (myname@mycompany.com).

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BONUS: You are going on vacation but can't let your clients wait for two weeks. Your VA answers the phone and email and responds to clients. You are called for urgent calls while you are away if you wish.

BONUS. You've got a stack of sheet music, worksheets, lesson notes, or other paper. You scan it all and email to your VA. They sort, categorize, tag and upload to forScore, Evernote, or some other similar software so you can find it easily when you need it.

Virtual assistants are here to stay. The sample suggestions show that virtual assistants can and do work well for most independent teachers and studio owners. Over the next couple of years, you can expect your conversations with regards to virtual assistants to go from "What is a virtual assistant and what does a virtual assistant do?" to that of "Who provides your virtual assistant services?"

Whether you decide to work with a VA that's a part of a larger agency or an independent worker, screen, interview and hire them as you would an employee. Ask for work examples and references. Start with a small project before committing to a monthly retainer or a large project. Implementing the use of a virtual assistant, especially through a virtual staffing agency, is a low-cost, low-risk undertaking. If the virtual assistant doesn't work out, you simply request another, perhaps for a better fit. What's more, coupling the use of a virtual assistant (or several virtual assistants) with your already up-and-coming business can catapult your income and success to the next level and give you back your most valuable resource, your time.

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She is the founder and managing artistic director of Portland Musical Theater Company. She has written and produced 5 musical revues and is the co-author of GPS for Success with Steven Covey, Dr. John Gray, and Les Brown. After 11 years of full-time entrepreneurship Deanna has hired and managed over 500 virtual assistants, interns, and contractors.

