

NONPROFITS & TOP PHILANTHROPISTS

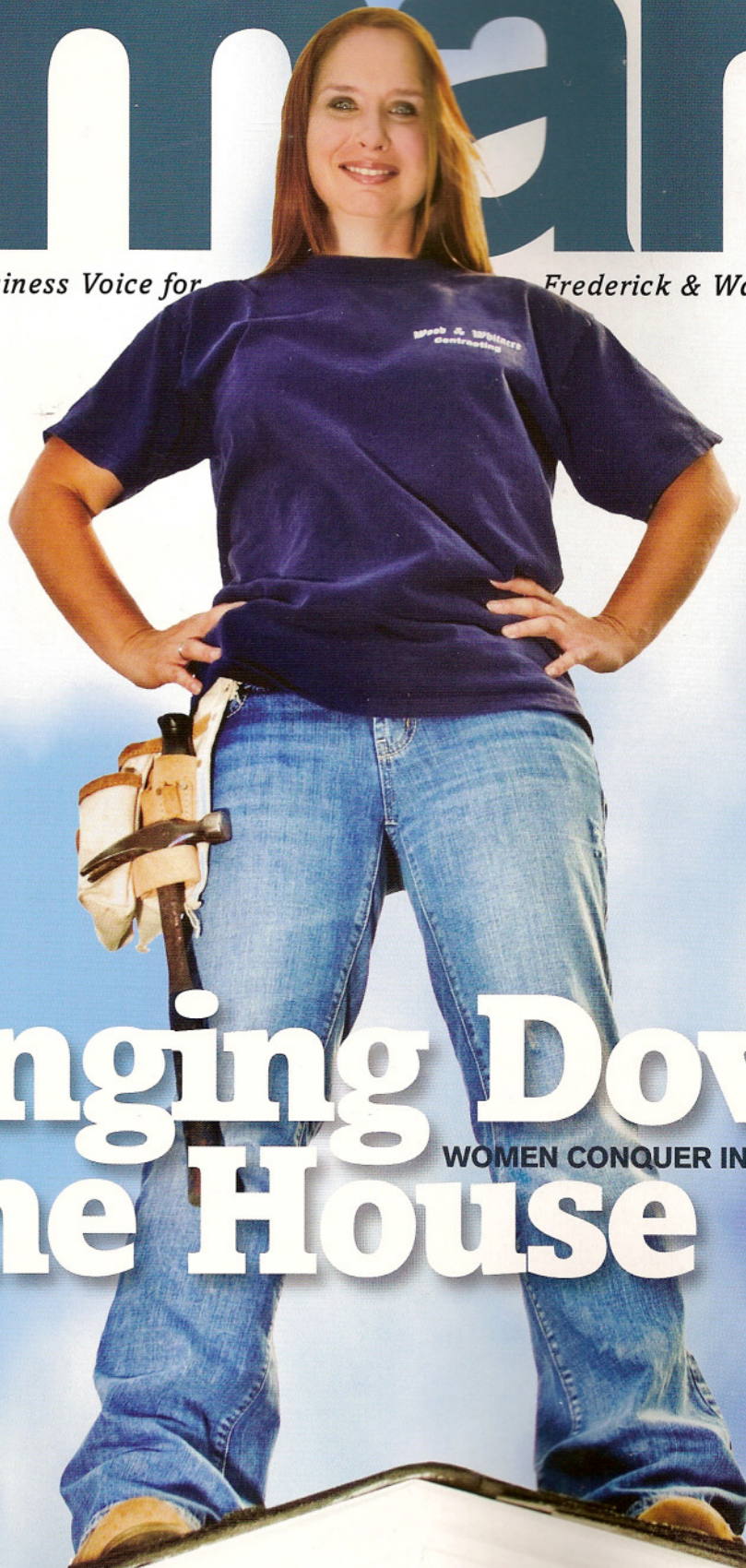
Issue 14 • September/October 2009

smart

COMPANY

* *The Business Voice for*

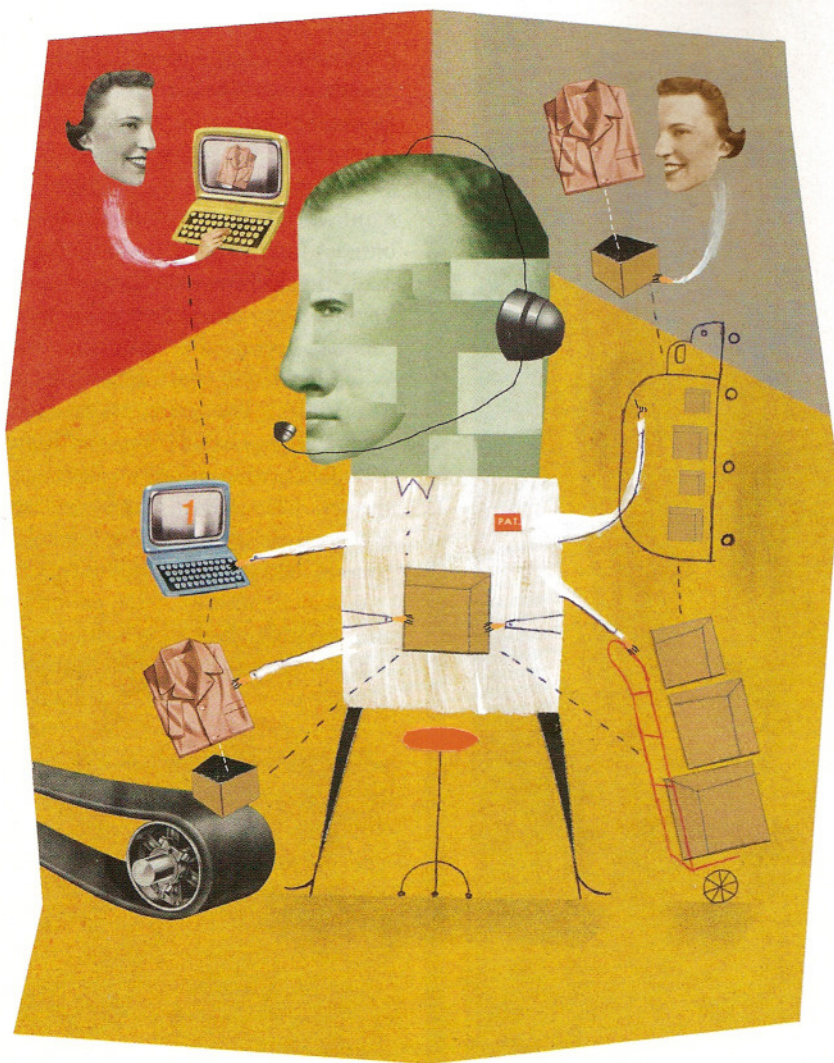
Frederick & Washington Counties



Bringing Down the House

WOMEN CONQUER INDUSTRIAL ROLES

CLEAN GREEN | PROCESS OF INVENTION | TARMAC MILLIONS



Support Via Cyberspace

VIRTUAL ASSISTANTS
OFFER OFFICE
HELP WITHOUT THE
OVERHEAD

By Jennifer Mellace
Illustration by
David Plunkert

Time is ticking. You have proposals to complete, trip arrangements to make and payroll to pay. Not to mention those spreadsheets you've been putting off. Business is good, but your time? Well, that's a different story. In fact, that ever-growing to-do list is essentially drowning you and your creativity. That's when you begin to think about

hiring extra help — someone who can tie all the loose ends together. But the reality of hiring an extra employee is no small task either. There are the salary, health benefits and space considerations. Perhaps it's time to think outside the box, to go virtual — as in virtual assistance.

More than an Admin

In the late 1990s, as technological advances made working from remote locations a viable option, administrative assistants seeking more flexible hours started offering their services from home — and the business of Virtual Assistance was born. It was around this same time that Ruth Martin of Hagerstown decided to leave her full-time job and pursue this career. "I knew I didn't want to place my child in daycare, so when two former business acquaintances asked if I could help them with administrative work, I asked if we could try my working from home, utilizing email and other online services. Each was open to that and I was suddenly an independent contractor with two clients."

But it wasn't until seven years later that Martin happened upon the Virtual Assistant Networking Association and realized that virtual assistance was actually an established industry. Recognizing this, she decided to formalize her business, and in April 2007 she officially launched Maplewood Virtual Assistance.

Cyber Right-Hands

While most virtual assistants — often called VAs — provide administrative and technical help, an increasing number are now offering creative marketing services as well. Such is the case for Martin. "I tend to work closely with those who need a business manager or backend administrative assistance, and those seeking to boost their marketing efforts," she says. Client Karri Flatla of Alberta, Canada, has reaped the benefits of Martin's talents. "I started as a VA and went on to consulting work; that's when I started wearing too many hats," Flatla says. "And while I wasn't looking to build an empire yet, I knew I needed help. I hired Ruth because I knew she

**The National Cancer Institute
at Frederick**

Making Progress Every Day against Cancer and AIDS

Our priority is to speed up the development of new treatments for patients with cancer and AIDS.

Clinical Trials Monitoring

More than 300 worldwide

Nanotechnology in Medicine

A standards-based approach

Drug Development and Manufacturing

68 medicines to clinical trials

Improving Cancer Care

Reaching rural communities



Paid for by
SAIC-Frederick, Inc.

Working for the National Cancer Institute at Frederick

PARTNER YOU CAN TRUST



In today's business environment you need an IT partner you can trust. Technology is complex and the solutions are multifaceted. Swift has the expertise to analyze, plan and maintain your technology infrastructure as your business grows. We base our processes on industry insight, research, and an unwavering pursuit of the best customer service in the business.

IT Services and Support

p: 301.682.5100 or 877.SWIFT.SI
info@swiftsystems.com

Call or Email today for a
Complimentary Technology
Analysis to Show How We Can
Save You Money!



could not only handle the administrative backend, but she could also help me implement the ideas and marketing strategies I had swimming in my head."

A True Asset

Sandra Wiles, owner of the Frederick-based Administrative Toolbox, also made the decision to become a VA when her kids were young. And while certification to become a VA is not mandatory, Wiles decided to take a course through AssitU.com. "The course covered a variety of things — business etiquette, business plans, communications and more," she says. "There is no mandatory certification process, but I believe the online courses help with my credibility."

Wiles' clients are located nationwide and regionally, including Kyndall Francis, owner of Legacy Investment & Management in Columbia, Md. Francis sought out Wiles when he knew he needed help, but didn't want to incur the costs associated with an in-house employee. "Using Sandy allows me the ability to work remotely and not incur overhead fees," says Francis. "I only pay for the work I need — and this has absolutely affected my bottom line."

Virtual assistants' rates vary, but charges often range from \$45 to \$75 per hour and higher for specialty work. "My hourly rate is higher than an in-house admin but there's no overhead," says Wiles. "VAs are not supposed to be cheaper, but more convenient than the alternative. For a client who needs a little of everything, a VA makes sense because then you have no overhead: no workers comp, no health insurance, etc."

Mutually-beneficial Partnership

Francis believes that virtual assistants have a vested interest in the work they do and that the relationship is mutually beneficial. And his company views its relationship with Wiles as a competitive advantage. "We use the fact that we have a VA in our marketing and proposals," he says. "We tout the fact that we can get work done in a quick manner and on off hours."

Like many virtual assistants — who build their business primarily through referrals — Wiles makes it her mission to be available to clients and meet a variety of their business needs. “My goal is to form a partnership. I want to be a one-stop shop for them,” she says. “To me the most important thing is for a VA to have a good relationship with their clients.”

Francis couldn't agree more. “Sandra's creative spirit, her knowledge, her ability to provide advice has really been an asset to us across the board. You can hire someone and train them to do a good job, but you can't buy a good person. Sandra's greatest asset is her relationship with us. She cares about our company — and you can't put a price tag on that.” ★

Hire Smart

Tips for Contracting a Virtual Assistant

The world of Virtual Assistance offers business owners many opportunities for finding the perfect VA — but how can you know that who you're hiring is the right match for your company?

Start by asking yourself, “What are my long-term goals?” According to Karri Flatla, owner of Snap! Virtual Assistance, “Businesses need to be open-minded. While hiring a VA is not the be all and end all, it could be a good effective solution if you can't hire a full-time employee.”

Be willing to invest in your business so your VA can do the same. A good VA will be proactive.

While research on the Internet is helpful, it's also beneficial to speak with other business owners who have used a VA. Flatla suggests making sure your VA prospect is active in the industry and has an online presence. “This is where social media networks like Twitter and Facebook come in handy,” she says. “These are legit ways to get to know people.”

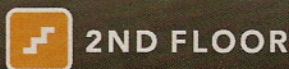
For more tips on learning how to hire the right VA, check out VirtualAssistant.org's “Ten questions to ask yourself if you are outsourcing to the right virtual assistant.”

5 SUSPECTS CAUGHT

IN 7 DAYS.

FIRST WEEK OF LAUNCHING WEB-BASED APPLICATION FOR BERKELEY COUNTY

WE BUILD WEB APPS THAT ALLOW YOU TO LOCK UP AND
THROW AWAY THE KEYS TO YOUR CLUNKY SOFTWARE
AND MANUAL PROCESSES.



WEB STRATEGY ONLINE TOOLS

chambersburg, pa hagerstown, md charleston, sc

717 261 0234 2ndfloormedia.com

afterfive
PRODUCTIONS
www.afpi.biz
301.733.6620

Complete
Corporate
Coverage