

VA Mommy

Tales from a Mommy Virtual Assistant

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You are here: Home / Business Start-up / Q and A With Ruth Martin

Q and A With Ruth Martin

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HERE AT THE VIRTUAL PERCEPTION, IT IS MY GOAL TO PROVIDE GREAT RESOURCES TO NEW AND ASPIRING VIRTUAL ASSISTANTS, AND ANSWER COMMON QUESTIONS ABOUT GETTING STARTED AND HOW TO BE SUCCESSFUL. TODAY I WOULD LIKE TO WELCOME RUTH MARTIN OF MAPLEWOOD VIRTUAL ASSISTANCE, WHO WAS KIND ENOUGH TO ANSWER OUR Q&A WITH AN EXPERIENCED VA SERIES.

How did you start your VA business?

My first two clients found me nearly nine years ago. I had just ended working as a director of a non-profit organization with a 9 month old baby (who I had taken to work with me daily) and wasn't sure what was next. In a matter of a week I had two former business acquaintances asking if I could help them with some administrative work. I knew I didn't want to place my child in daycare so I asked if we could try my working from home and utilizing email and other online services to get their projects completed. Each was open to that and I suddenly had two clients! After doing this for seven years with the same two, I happened upon VANetworking and realized that virtual assistance was an industry that others did, too. This emerging way of working was actually more mainstream than I realized. I, then, formalized my business – giving it a proper name and launched Maplewood Virtual Assistance in 2007.

How did you figure out what to charge for your services?

In the early days I worked with project pricing. When I formalized the business I rounded out my services with pricing plans for hourly, retainer and projects. The majority of my work today is retainer but I do enjoy the variety of meeting per project clients' needs.

How did you find your first clients?

Once launching my business formally, my first client was a local businesswoman. I carefully selected 20 names from the Chamber of Commerce directory that I was interested in their respective businesses and thought I could add value to their services. I mailed a postcard and received a call two days later. We met two days after that and I walked out of the meeting with a signed retainer contract. Interesting enough that client was the only one I ever met in person.

How long did it take you to build your clientele?

Three months after really doing some marketing in the ways of launching a website, passing out businesses cards, telling others what I was doing, getting active on forums, and assembling some information packets for targeted mailings. From there everything snowballed and I have looked back.

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Megan Barber is a Real Estate Virtual Assistant, small business owner, entrepreneur, social media junkie, crafter, wife and mommy to a sweet little boy.

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How many hours per week do you usually work?

Typically, I work 35-40 hours weekly inclusive of about 5-8 hours of weekly admin time for the care and growth of my business. I maintain loose office hours of 9am-4pm weekdays. I rarely work weekends because I feel it's very important to take care of one's self and get out of the office. Working from home can take discipline to know when to walk away and take a break, enjoy the family, and know that all at the office will be fine until I return again.

Do you find being a VA provides you flexibility when you need it, especially family or hobbies?

Absolutely! Being a Mom who can to work her schedule around family needs has been one of the best parts to being an entrepreneur. I've been privileged to chaperone all of my son's class field trips and attend each holiday party. When I served on jury duty I could easily flip my day and handle client work in the evenings without any delays. Several of my clients never realized I served jury duty as they saw no interruptions to their typical work flow.

Do you have a specific niche or specialized target market you typically provide services for? If so, what is your niche and how did you choose it?

I tend to work with those who need to boost their marketing efforts and also clients who need project management or backend administrative assistance. Serving as their online business manager is very fulfilling and I enjoy the close working relationships. My prior experiences in corporate jobs were very much in these same fields and it has been a natural transition to take these services to virtual clients.

What is your favorite thing about being a VA?

I really enjoy the variety of clients, the flexibility I can now have in my daily schedule, and knowing that I am making an impact in another's business success. My services are having measureable impacts that cause another's business to grow and thrive. That is very satisfying.

Do you have any advice for new VAs or those thinking about joining the VA world?

I would encourage emerging virtual assistants to get active with at least one online forum so that you can connect with others in your field who have walked ahead of you, are walking beside you, and who will look to you to see what path you've left behind for them. Never fear that you don't have the experience to work virtually. Lean on those years of experience while working at a brick-and-mortar job. Those experiences haven't left and are there to draw on. The only difference is the method of communication and delivering the finish projects. This CAN be learned. Seek out a mentor whether formally (or as an informal friendship) and get to know this person. Many times the mentor friendships can/will happen very naturally. And one more important suggestion, never return client work too quickly. Always meet your deadlines but if you finish it two hours after receiving it please don't return it until next day. As you grow and bring on more clients your existing clients will be accustomed to your turnaround times and not complain that you're suddenly too busy to give things back in "short" amounts of time.

Ruth Martin is owner of [Maplewood Virtual Assistance \(www.MaplewoodVA.com\)](http://www.MaplewoodVA.com) and author of the blog [Leaf Notes ...Thoughts from MaplewoodVA](http://www.VAnetworking.com/blog) . She also writes regularly for the [VAnetworking blog \(www.VAnetworking.com/blog\)](http://www.VAnetworking.com) and is the [VAcommentators Team Manager](#). Ruth is known for her eye-for-detail and ability to evaluate a project, assemble a plan of action, and reach the goal with measurable results. Ruth makes her home in western Maryland with her husband and son. Outside of the office she enjoys quiltmaking, reading, and photography.



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