

How to decide whether a virtual team is right for your business...

Introduction

These days more and more work can and will be done by people who are less likely to share an office space. The virtual assistant industry is over 30 years old but it is becoming more and more apparent that this is a growing industry with outsourcing fast becoming a way to grow your business.

Most virtual assistants work from their home office and therefore they are a cost effective option for business owners as they don't need to incur expenses of staff, annual leave, PAYG payments, sick leave or materials to work on.



Some virtual assistants have taken the extra step of growing their business and employing staff so that although they are still virtual, they can fulfil the client's needs in one space increasing the ability to being able to provide a range of services for each client. These staff are usually highly efficient in their skilled area and can account manage multiple projects.

A virtual team is defined as "a group of people working together across time and space, using electronic communication technology"(1). Team members can be chosen from some of the best talent across the globe as many of the virtual assistants have come from corporate backgrounds with executive project and diary management experience. Virtual staff saves businesses money by reducing office space requirements, and the need to have enough work for the staff member in a full time role.

Many virtual assistants work in a part time capacity so that the client is charged on an hourly rate therefore only paying for the work that is required to be completed. Other virtual assistant businesses have packaged services for a particular area of expertise so therefore the client knows exactly the costs that will be incurred on an ongoing basis and can therefore budget accordingly. Both scenarios are cost effective to your business.

Choosing your Team

When looking for a virtual assistant there are a few things to consider. Building an effective and efficient team is the most important part of outsourcing work within your business. You should be looking for people who are driven, proactive and business oriented with the same values and high expectations that you would have for any employee of your business.

They are usually open minded people and have an attitude or traits that reflect a customer service approach. If there is a solution to be found or an easier way to do

things virtual assistants can usually find ways to make the tasks easier and completed in a timely manner.

When you have spoken with your potential staff member over the phone, it is important to conduct a face to face meeting if possible. This helps build trust and establishes the way forward by discussing the objectives of your business.

Establishing communication guidelines will increase the effectiveness of the work being completed. If you discuss response time requirements and prioritising of particular projects this will definitely assist in effective communication being delivered.

Setting Team Rules

Team rules are important whether the team is virtual or not, and by taking the time to learn how things are required to be done, why they need to be done in a particular way and the reason they need to be followed.

Establish set rules for staff within boundaries so that they also have the flexibility to be able to be proactive and intuitive within your business requirements.

If you are requiring your staff to answer your calls and email correspondence is a good practise to provide them with scripts and templates to ensure consistency within the business. This way if a member of staff is away the other team members can pick up the script and keep going with the work in a seamless manner.

Discuss how often you may like to have team meetings, and what will be the standards expected for participation. e.g. Who will develop the agenda and give the information needed to make decisions, solve problems and provide solutions.

If you have clear and well defined team rules your team will feel like they have individual responsibilities and guidelines to follow and therefore should be able to perform and achieve deadlines in a reasonable manner.

Communication

So how do you communicate with your team? Do you want to touch base daily to find out what the tasks are for the day? Do you want to establish a software program that can manage the tasks list so that tasks can be allocated and delegated to the team members? Or perhaps you would like to phone your team member on a weekly basis to get an update and to follow up on actions that are outstanding or upcoming.



It is important to choose one of the above scenarios (there are others to consider but these would be a good start) and stick with it so that there is a confidence in your team that they are meeting your requirements. Communicate with your staff as you would your clients, treat them with respect and understand perimeters that they are

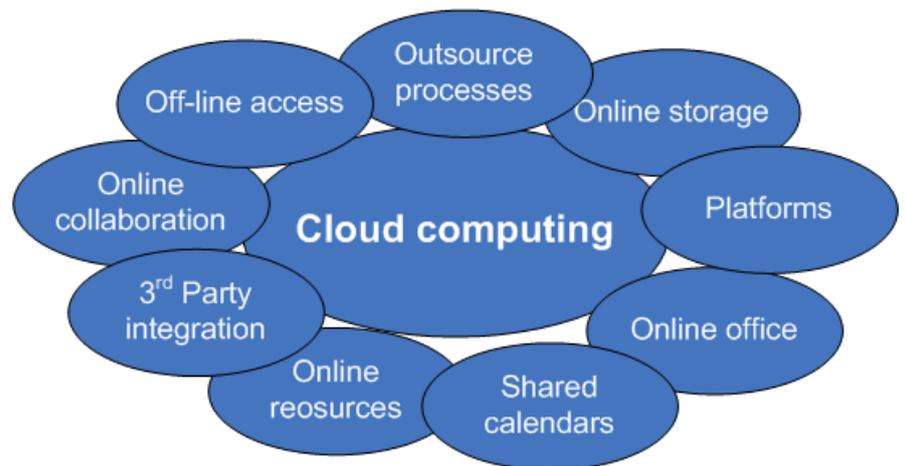
working within. Ensure they feel inclusive and make time to listen to new ideas and options to increase your business growth. Encourage participation in feedback and survey from clients so that you can continue to improve your services.

Organise frequent check ins' so that you can review any tasks that they are having difficulty fulfilling or need further technology for.

Choose appropriate technology

Using project management tools and remote technology such as Skype and Video Conferencing as well as other online meeting tools, to communicate visually as well as through the spoken word, is an effective communication strategy. Visual contact and face to face meetings often increases the understanding and communication between you and your staff and this will then increase their productivity.

Sharing files using Dropbox or Google Docs provides a way to give your staff access to important files and documents that they may require to complete a task. Keeping this up to date and documenting processes and procedures is also a way to keep the communication clear. If you have certain ways that you like tasks completed, documents formatted, spreadsheets developed then you will need to develop a set of procedures for your business. This will assist in completing the tasks in a greater timeframe therefore decreasing your costs. (this is also something that the virtual assistant can develop for you over time – once completed it is an invaluable document that can be used as part of your business and marketing plan).



You are more likely to have a high performing and engaged virtual assistant or virtual team if you create a presence where they feel comfortable in the processes, technology, communication and guidelines you have offered. A successful virtual assistant will be one that also takes that extra step and provides solutions to save on time and become more productive in your business.



If you would like to discuss further these options of working with a virtual team please call Time Well Spent on 03 9271 8222 or email karen@timewellspent.com.au