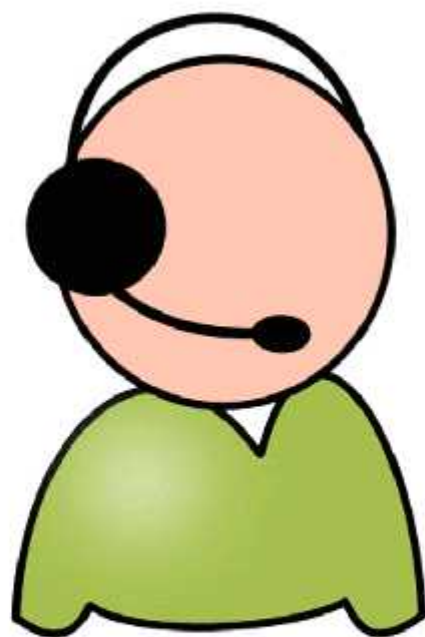


**Build Your Business
with the**

Benefits of Outsourcing



BUILD YOUR BUSINESS WITH THE BENEFITS OF OUTSOURCING

Outsourcing involves giving your work to qualified professionals for the benefit of your business enterprise. Large corporations have been doing it for a few years now with great success to their bottom line. These companies outsource jobs to other countries where they can be done just as efficiently for less cost. People get jobs and the company wins on all fronts.



This concept is not just for the big companies. Small business enterprises can use outsourcing to their benefit as well and that doesn't mean you need to set up a call center in India or even hire outside your country, if you don't want to.

Whether you are running a small business out of your home or online, it takes work to keep everything running smoothly. There don't seem to be enough hours in the day to get all of the work done and if you look at it, not outsourcing is probably increasing your stress and, unfortunately, decreasing your profit potential.

Consider outsourcing as a means of boosting your bottom line and lightening your load a bit. With an online enterprise, usually you are the "everything person." You function as the bookkeeper, web designer, content writer, Internet marketer, customer service representative and the executive assistant. It could take the better part of a day to respond to all of your business emails or to handle bills at the end of the month.

If you need help, there are affordable choices for small businesses. For you, outsourcing in the virtual world is a great option. People with certain expertise can help your business to grow. The trouble is finding these people and more specifically, the right people to handle your business needs.

In this report, you will learn about the process of outsourcing. Outsourcing works best when you know what jobs you can outsource and which ones are best left in-house. Also, learning the benefits of outsourcing makes you more confident and knowledgeable when looking for an individual or company to contract with.

Once you decide to outsource, you'll need to know how to find who you are looking for. Creating an application and interview process gives you tools to determine who will be the best fit for the jobs you want to outsource. Virtual assistants are putting a new face on the process of outsourcing and proving themselves to be a great asset.

Reasons to Outsource

Free Time

When you first start an online business, free time is non-existent. Either you are setting up a website or marketing your business or answering emails. Each job is important but it leaves no time for anything but work and sleep.

Many parents begin home businesses to spend more time with their families. You may have that opportunity eventually, but in the beginning you'll work almost as much as you did with your regular job. Outsourcing allows you to get a few of those piles off of your desk and into the hands of someone else. Life becomes a little better because you can now see the light at the end of the tunnel.

Increase Productivity

With small businesses, if you don't do it, it won't get done. This includes the big M – marketing. In order to sell your goods and services, people need to know that you exist. Putting the word out there about you requires a marketing strategy that includes advertising. Just researching the market and establishing an online presence takes a big chunk of time each day.



When you outsource some of the tasks within your business, it leaves more opportunities for you to handle more pressing work of the business that requires your attention. Developing a marketing plan involves trial and error but that won't bother you as long as you know that all your other bases are covered through outsourced companies or individuals.

Better Customer Service

Anyone who has ever owned a business or patronized one knows how important customer service is. A business, especially a small one or an online enterprise can be made or broken on the strength of their customer service program. Each customer wants to feel special, as if they are the only one that you have.

A good customer service program takes care of their new and returning customers. Questions and emails are answered promptly. Issues with merchandise are rectified rapidly. Outsourcing customer service to a third party frees you from answering business related emails or telephone calls. The customer's need is met and you only answer emails or calls from anyone who needs your expertise to handle their situation.

Increased Profits

You go into business to make money. It is true that you want to be the boss, but without money coming into the business your stint as head honcho will be short lived. Maybe you want to expand your business but don't see how without some additional help. Outsourcing some of the daily duties allows you to focus on streamlining business functions and finding new markets to explore.

Lower Overhead Costs

If you have more money coming in than going out, you are doing something right. One way to lower your costs is to hire virtual contractors instead of employees. Employers are responsible for their employees' health care benefits package and unemployment insurance.

Outsourced jobs are done by contractors. Virtual assistants and other companies that you hire to take some of the burden off of you are also business owners. As such, they pay for their own health insurance and any other expenses they might incur. You don't pay for equipment or lunches or breaks. The actual time spent on your projects is all that you are being billed for.

Many online businesses use contractors instead of regular employees. In the beginning, you usually can't afford to have any full-time people working for you. Outsourcing allows you to keep that status quo and increase your profits at the same time.

Employing Knowledge and Experience

As we stated before, outsourced work is done by contractors who are also working to build their own businesses. They have built a reputation of reliability and on-time product delivery. It is as important to them as it is to you to do a good job.

Most virtual assistants and other contractors bring a wealth of knowledge and expertise to the table. You might need a person who can answer your emails and perform customer service duties. That same virtual assistant may have extensive experience in website building. They can be of assistance to you further in other ways.



Choosing contractors, who have many talents instead of just the one you need at the time, will save you headache if and when you need more jobs outsourced. A knowledgeable person can troubleshoot problems and answer your questions without the need to consult yet another person.

Around the Clock Service

When you run an online business, you deal with people in many different time zones and countries around the world. While you are sleeping, your clients are just starting their day by bombarding your email and voicemail with messages. That means a lot of busy work to do when you get going in the morning.

One thing to consider when outsourcing your work is the location of the contractor. If they are living in another time zone, this benefits you because while you sleep, they are still working and taking care of clients. It is like a 24 hour convenience store. There is always someone on duty. Handling responsibilities like that requires someone you trust implicitly but that will be discussed in a later section of this report.

What Jobs Can You Outsource?

Outsourcing is the wave of the future. You could pick up the phone in the United States and talk to a customer service representative in India. Alright, that probably won't happen with your small business but you get the picture. Whenever outsourcing is viable, it will be employed.

Before looking to outsource any of your business work, think about what jobs you can outsource. There are several considerations that are included in that decision. The last thing you want is to compromise the trust of your customers by making a wrong decision.

Confidentiality

Whenever you are dealing with a business, there are confidentiality issues. Your clients trust you with their personal and financial information. Anyone working for you must have that same level of commitment to the clients that you have. Outsourcing work that will include this and other sensitive information about your business needs to be placed in the right hands.

Draw up a confidentiality contract. Anyone who wants to work for you must sign this contract stating that they will not reveal any information that they are given to a third party. Also, any work that they do for you is proprietary, meaning it belongs to you and not them. No one wants any breach of confidence but if there is one, you have a legal right to sue for damages with a signed contract.

Time Constraints

Working with someone who is in the same time zone has its perks. You can communicate in the same time and that person can answer you back directly when you call, IM or email them. It is like being in the same room.

On the other hand, a person working in another time zone presents a delay in getting some projects finished. You wouldn't outsource a job with time constraints on deliverables if your contractor was half a world away. Communication would be challenging to say the least if you needed answers right away. Everything depends on your type of business and how you feel comfortable working.



Outsourced Jobs

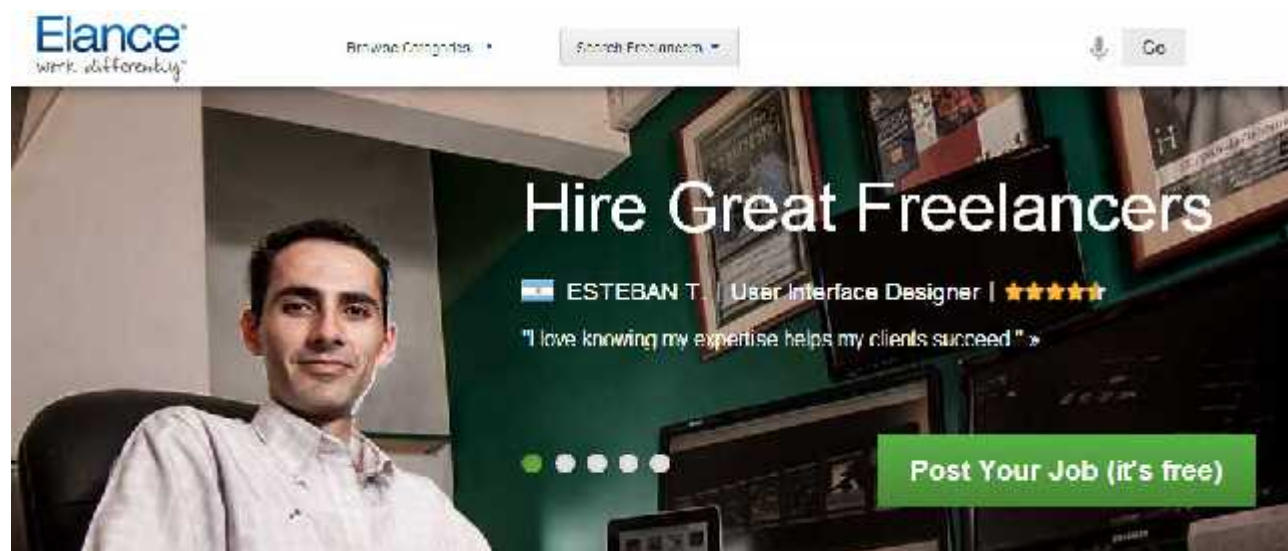
Now, we are down to the nitty-gritty. What jobs will you outsource to others? Here is a short list of possible outsourcing opportunities:

- Website content
- Email marketing
- Customer service
- Billing
- Taxes
- Website design
- Other marketing responsibilities

You'll notice that some of these jobs don't involve any sensitive information. The ones that do require it need someone with the utmost of discretion.

Having a website is important for an online business. Your website is where people will find you, get answers to their questions and buy your goods and services. Static pages, old content and faulty buttons are not going to win you any new customers. A website designer can handle the job of fixing website problems and making it search engine friendly. On your own, it takes a while to learn the ins and outs of setting up a website and keeping it up. Outsourcing to someone with these skills is a good idea especially if you know nothing about websites.

How to Find the People You Need



The image is a screenshot of the Elance website. At the top left is the Elance logo with the tagline "work differently". To the right of the logo are navigation links for "Browse Categories" and "Search Freelancers", along with a search bar and a "Go" button. The main content area features a large photo of a man, Esteban T., sitting in an office chair. Overlaid on the photo is the text "Hire Great Freelancers". Below this, there is a profile card for "ESTEBAN T. | User Interface Designer | ★★★★★" with a testimonial quote: "I love knowing my expertise helps my clients succeed." At the bottom right of the photo is a green button that says "Post Your Job (it's free)".

Many people are outsourcing these days to virtual assistants. A virtual assistant is not a secretary but a business professional who wants to meet your needs. If that need is answering business emails or running an affiliate program online, this person can handle the responsibility.

The number of virtual assistants available is almost as large as the number of skillsets they bring with them. Even so, finding just the right person may not be so easy. You are looking for someone who will add to not detract from your business. Something has to "click" between the two of you for the relationship to work and grow.

Cons of Outsourcing

It wouldn't be fair to give you the good without the bad. While there aren't many cons to outsourcing the ones that exist need to be known before hiring someone. Most of the complaints come from choosing the wrong person in the first place.

You are no longer in total control of everything that happens when you outsource. Sure, you decide what jobs to outsource, but if the virtual assistant makes a mistake, they will look to you to

clear it up. If the person you hire is not as experienced as they say, that might mean you are doing a lot of clearing up.

Look at location. We have found both pros and cons to finding an online virtual assistant or contractor, and being in the same area. An online virtual assistant will potentially be in another time zone and work while you are asleep. Unfortunately, this means that if they have questions, they have to wait for the sun to come up on your side of the world.

On the other hand, a person living in your time zone or better yet, your state, can visit you from time to time to compare notes. Seeing a person face to face has the advantage of training sessions to be sure they understand your preferences. You can interview in person and get a feel for the person that you can't do with an email interview.

Don't promise what you can't deliver. Look for outsourcing when you have a workload that will be worth their time. Asking for a full time virtual assistant implies that you will be able to keep them busy. You could be heading for problems if that person is depending on you for a certain dollar amount each month and you can't meet it.

Where are all of the Virtual Assistants?

You can find qualified virtual assistants in a number of places. One place is online. They do most of their work online so it is a good place to start. Visit virtual assistant websites. Many have their own personal site or they work through a virtual assistant service that lists qualified professionals by state or areas of expertise.

Check out sites like:

- VANetworking.com
- Elance.com
- Fiverr.com (for quick projects)

...and even consider posting ads on Craigslist.com.

What now?

Read carefully about their qualifications. You want someone who has gone through an accredited virtual assisting program (most if not all are online schools) and has taken the requisite exams to be licensed or certified by the accrediting body of virtual assistants. These will be listed on their websites and you can check them out for yourself with the agencies they mention.

Call them up. Talking to a person over the telephone is the next best thing to being there. Ask a few preliminary questions: What is your area of expertise? What are your skills and number of years of experience? What is your hourly rate? Are you looking for new clients?



If the person answers your questions satisfactorily, schedule an interview over the phone. Have your questions prepared for them to answer. You can even send out an application and have them email it back before the interview.

Through opening call, the application and the interview you are listening for a few things. Learn their type of work ethic. From then conversation, you can discern their work ethic, their demeanor and their experience. Someone who takes pride in their business will be articulate and know their business intimately. It inspires confidence when the virtual assistant knows what they are talking about.

Do background checks. You would do the same for a person you interviewed for employment. This is no different. It is good business practice to know the people you are entrusting with your client information. Also ask for references. A website that contains testimonials from satisfied clients can help.

Get a signed confidentiality contract. Before assigning any work, have the virtual assistant commit to working with you on your terms.

Try them out on a trial basis. Most jobs give you 90 days to prove yourself. You can also give your contractor 90 days to see if it is a suitable match. Ask for samples of their work where applicable such as website content, sales letters, press releases and eBooks. See if their work meets with your approval.

Now that you have the list of virtual assistants that you like, it's time to narrow down the list. Do you want a virtual assistant who is online or one who is local?

A local virtual assistant can come see you face to face. You'll probably do a fair amount of communication over the telephone since they will be so close. When the computer goes down, they can bring your finished work to you. For small businesses run out of your home, having a local virtual assistant means that they can share a larger workload when it comes to mailing out flyers, brochures and doing legwork with other local businesses.

Online virtual assistants are just as reliable as local professionals. You won't be able to meet them but you can hear their voice over the telephone and read about their attributes on their website. They can handle your website needs, sending emails and setting up online marketing strategies.

Parting Thoughts

Is your small online business growing faster than you can handle? It may be time to get some help. Small businesses can benefit from outsourcing just like the larger corporations. Letting someone else handle the day to day tasks frees you up to concentrate on activities that will increase your business profits.

Much of the work that is outsourced is done by professionals called virtual assistants. They are not glorified secretaries but individuals with a wealth of knowledge that they are turning into a business venture of their own. A virtual assistant with experience over many areas is more valuable to you because of their varied skill set.

Know all the facts before hiring a virtual assistant. This person will be trusted with sensitive client information and has to observe confidentiality issues. Take your time finding just the right person to work with you. Ask questions, interview them and compare applications. Offer a trial period to evaluate their work before any decision about permanency is made.