VA MOOC

THE VIRTUAL ASSISTANT'S MOOC

Booklet on Virtual Assistants

#VAmoocEU

www.virtualassistantmooc.eu

Co-funded by the European Union

CONTENTS

VIRTUAL ASSISTANT: A RISING CAREER IN EUROPE

Dear readers,

The booklet you are reading is the first result of the Erasmus+ project **"The Virtual Assistant's MOOC"** (Project number 2021-1-FR01-KA220-VET-000033162). The project aims to create a set of tools for initial and continuous Vocational Education and Training for learners on how to work as a Virtual Assistant (digital services provider), considering the digital and entrepreneurial skills needed in accordance to the 21st century job market and the situation of the profession in Europe. The consortium of the project consists of the following partners: **YuzuPulse** (France), **bit Schulungscenter** (Austria), **Citizens In Power** (Cyprus), **European Education and Learning Institute** (Greece), **Education Centre EST** (Poland), **Innovación Transferencia y Desarrollo – ITD** (Spain) & **Logopsycom** (Belgium). The project's duration is 24 months (December 2021-December 2023) and through the project, the partners seek to offer an innovative methodology, tools and strategies for the development of market-relevant skills in the business services sector, as well as support entrepreneurship in this field. All the results will be translated into the 6 languages of the project: English, French, German, Spanish, Greek and Polish.

This booklet has been created with the intention of familiarizing readers with the versatility of the Virtual Assistant's profession and to offer more insight on the aspects it entails. The profession of Virtual Assistants seems to be getting more popular by the day, especially in the last years. The downside is that the majority of the existing guidance is not offered as structured courses or free of charge. Furthermore, it is rather difficult to make sense of the situation of Virtual Assistants in Europe, as the existing statistics are mainly focused on self-employment, rather than the profession of Virtual Assistants itself.

This booklet aims to help the readers understand the usefulness and expandability of this profession. Contrary to popular belief, the profession of Virtual Assistants is an accessible type of work that is not only applicable to ICT specialists. In that sense,

the booklet aims to show new career opportunities and to support entrepreneurship in Europe for people of different education levels and social backgrounds. Another goal of the booklet is to inform the readers about the rising trend of Virtual Assistants and entrepreneurship in Europe, and to contribute to the digital education of EU citizens, while offering neutral guidance about different EU contexts for free.

The target group of this booklet is:

1. Digital service providers who are active or in training, or are even considering starting their career,
2. VET learners and trainers that are interested in market relevant skills,
3. Unemployed and disadvantaged people,
4. VET organizations,
5. Employment counsellors.

 For more information on the project, you can visit **https://virtualassistantmooc.eu/**
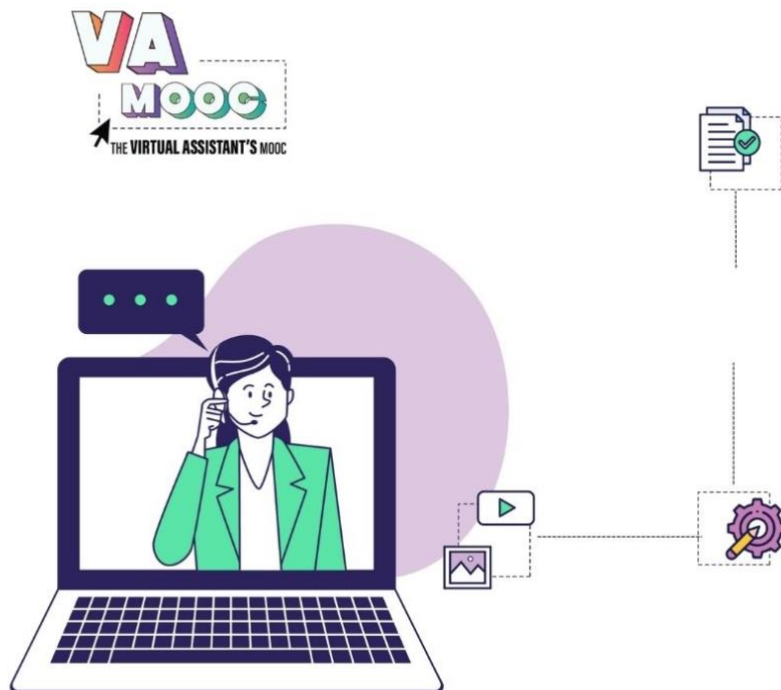
CHAPTER 1: WHAT IS A VIRTUAL ASSISTANT?

General description

A virtual assistant is a person who provides support services to a business from a remote location.

The term "virtual assistant" was coined in the early 1990s when businesses started to use technology to allow employees to work from home. The internet made it possible for people to work from their homes and still communicate with their offices.

VAs provide administrative, creative, or technical support services to other business owners. Thanks to technological advancements they can do almost any task that another support staff performs. For example, they cannot bring coffee in the morning but they can place an order to a food delivery service.

It started with clerical and administrative work, but nowadays VAs can specialize in a specific skill set whether creative or technical or an industry, for example, real estate.

Most VAs work as contractors, whether they run their own home-based virtual assistant business or work for a service company and jump from one contract to another.

Activity sectors and tasks

Virtual assistants are now active in a variety of industries, including law, real estate, and information technology.

Within these industries, they can perform non-technical tasks such as administrative assistance, copywriting, community management, event management (physical and online), customer support, etc.

But they can also specialize in more technical tasks such as graphic design, video and audio editing, web design and management, advanced digital content (Augmented Reality, Virtual Reality, interactive and 360 videos, augmented printing, eBooks, chatbots).

Here are a few examples of why and how VAs can help in various industries:

- In **real estate**, if the realtor has to do many secondary tasks (phoning, bookings, client acquisition…), it limits the sales. Delegating certain tasks to virtual assistants can benefit incredibly.
- In the **IT sector**, workers' workload can vary massively. It is then quite useful to control it by unloading some work to VAs.
- Due to automation, **lawyers** must update their skills to ensure smooth workflows and client experience. They spend most of their time scheduling meetings, preparing documents, legal transcriptions, client communication, and managing databases. VAs can help manage these tasks more efficiently.
- In **finance and accounting**, a virtual assistant with an appropriate skillset can easily do the most time-consuming and tedious tasks online, such as B=bookkeeping, data entry, account payables and receivables, processing of invoices, organization of records, preparation of reports.
- In **marketing** also, many tasks can be outsourced, such as a campaign set up, graphic design, social media marketing and management, search engine optimization, website designing and development, content strategy development and creation, copywriting, market research, email marketing, and the list goes on!

Why virtual assistants are useful

There has been quite a buzz growing around VAs for a couple of years. But why are companies so interested in hiring them?

- ### Better use of a company's employees

Whether it is the highly qualified and specialized employees or the business owner themself, it is better to employ their time to the most beneficial tasks. A developer or web designer does not want to spend a lot of time on tasks that are not their core trade.

Delegating these tasks to VAs can increase the morale and efficiency of the teams. It prevents wasting highly qualified staff time on low-value tasks.

- ## Reduced costs

  - ### Saving salary cost

Employers only have to pay a virtual assistant for actual hours worked or per project completed. Even though VAs' hourly rates are usually higher than employees', they induce fewer overhead costs (facility costs) and have fewer benefits which means they can cost less.

Depending on the country's laws, hiring a virtual assistant can mean no or less employee-related tax. It also means no hardware investment and no office space expense.

  - ### Flexibility of hire

A freelance virtual assistant is perfect for small business owners with limited funds who do not want to invest in overhead expenses unrelated to their business' product or services. It is possible to hire a VA for part-time, short-term, or project-based contracts, for example during peak season, weekends, at night, or during holidays.

It is especially useful for e-commerce or businesses with a need for 24-hour customer service.

  - ### No training cost

A virtual assistant will upgrade their skills and knowledge on their own in order to stay competitive. As a result, their clients do not need to worry about any training expenses.

o Reduced turnover costs

Turnovers can induce significant monetary losses for businesses because while the employee is leaving, productivity strongly diminishes and interview processes are time-consuming. Moreover, the new employees need to be trained to get up to speed to where the previous ones left off.

• Possible disadvantages of employing Virtual Assistants

Of course, there can be some disadvantages to hiring VAs. It is for each business to determine the advantage versus disadvantage balance.

o Work hours tracking

Because VAs work remotely, clients can fear that they will not work the actual hours they claim. It is possible to ask for personal reporting but more and more businesses use software to track hours. Most modern productivity management tools now propose timers to track times spent on a task.

o Communication

This is the other side of the coin of the flexibility of remote work: when a VA works at different time shifts or in a different time zone, there may be some irregularities in communication with the client. Or the VA can be unavailable when the client has an emergency.

o Hardware issues

Hardware issues on the VA's side are out of the client's control, which can prevent solving the problems fast. One can think about broken computers, loss of internet connection, or new software understanding.

○ Split focus

Virtual assistants can typically have several clients, and sometimes have to prioritize one task over another. A client cannot be totally sure that the VA's priority will be the same as theirs.

Why working as a VA is interesting?

- Advantages

    ○ Independence

You are your own boss! You organize yourself as you wish, take your days off when you need. If there is a type of task that you do not like, you can refuse the jobs that

require you to do it. You are not a staff assistant you provide the services that you choose.

o Remote Work

You can just get up from bed and start working. No commute. But you can also work wherever you want, in a coffee shop or at a library or even outside, as long as you have a laptop and access to internet. You save on commute and can even get paid while traveling.

o Choosing your clients and missions

There are countless services that a VA can offer. You have to specialize, which is actually an advantage. You can provide a service package that is focused and relevant to your clients while having to develop a limited range of skills. A VA can focus on a few needed services that they enjoy doing.

o Inclusion

Because VAs can work remotely, it opens up possibilities for people with reduced mobility since they don't have to commute. It is also useful for parents that must take care of children because they can better adjust their schedule and stay at home.

o Earning potential

VAs usually do not work for a monthly salary; their income is directly related to the work they deliver. With experience, most VAs manage to streamline their services to provide the same high-quality work but more efficiently. This way they provide much work in less time and make more money.

• Disadvantages

o Remote work

Yes, remote work is also a disadvantage at times. Working remotely can be hard for extroverts that need office camaraderie. But you have ways to balance this in your

free time, for example by getting involved in associations or any activity that grows your social network.

Working from home comes with a lot of distractions. Many experienced it during the covid era: having family or friends at home while working is hard. It requires motivation to resist these distractions.

In the end, it is easier to leave work behind when you leave an office building, but it is more complicated when this office is your home. You can have background thoughts about your job, your clients or feel guilty about taking a break when there is no clear start and end to your workday.

o Management

A VA has to hustle to find clients on their own. Finding their first clients can be a daunting task at first because they do not have a portfolio or testimonials. Even well-established VAs needs to spend time self-advertising, and this constant chase for work can be exhausting.
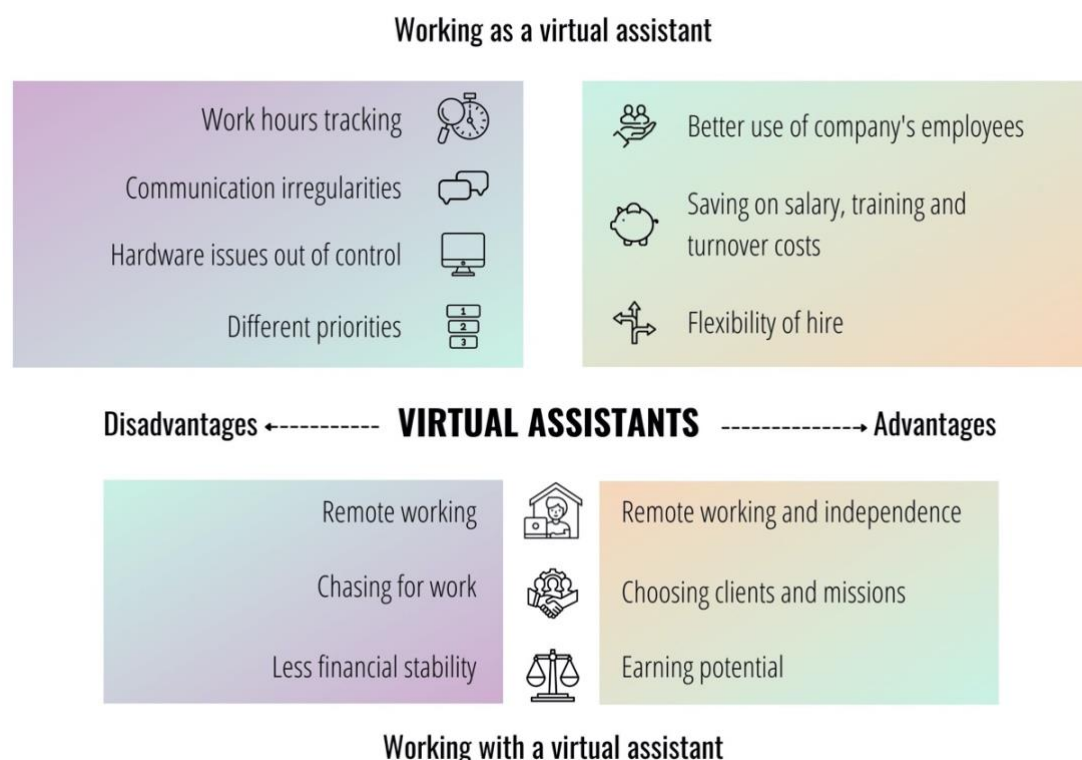

IMAGE 1
Working as a virtual assistant (design by VAmooc team)

Working as a freelance means doing project management tasks that can take time and put your business in danger if not well taken care of.

○ Less financial stability

Because you need to find your clients and projects, your payment is not guaranteed. You also have to consider that, depending on your country's law, you may not have health insurance and may have to pay lots of taxes. But once you obtained a sustainable pool of clients this generally goes well because it is possible to make more money than if you were an employee.

What does the life of a VA look like?

We summarised the main points of a VA's testimony about her daily work life (A Day in the life of a VA. tiger-recruitment.com).

• Work start, breaks, or end

You can skim the online news and social media to keep a head out for opportunities and business insights. Also, enjoy the time you save by not having to commute.

Make sure to have a clean break between your home and work life. It can be by physically separating your workstation from the spots where you take your breaks and meals.

Morning is a good time to check your inbox. If there are emergencies that must be treated the same day, the sooner you know the better. The same goes for virtual meetings.

Meetings are held via videoconference apps, and modern technology facilitates file

sharing, tracking of conversations, and meeting notes. Interacting via video call is also a means to maintain human interaction and reduce loneliness.

Scheduling meetings in the morning gives you time to implement urgent actions later in the day. If your activity is close to a traditional personal assistant role, these activities might be something such as making reservations and bookings for you clients.

Working virtually requires balancing and organizing tasks effectively. You can choose to process tasks in chronological order but keep time to deal with emergencies or prioritize work for a client with whom you have a strong relationship. Estimating how long a task will take is something that comes from experience and allows to structure the day.

- ## Lunch

Appreciate having the freedom to stay at home or go outside!

- ## Afternoon

Maybe you block out a time slot to deal with a more specific and engaging task which goes beyond the role of a standard VA like marketing or business consulting. Some VAs sees the relationship with clients as a partnership and treat their business as their own.

Time to check your inbox again to spot advancements on some topics and avoid being overflooded. As a virtual assistant, you may operate more than one mailbox, so it can take some time.

Before the end of the day, it is a good thing to think to plan tomorrow's tasks. With experience, you'll know how to prioritize properly.

The workday ends at different times, for example later if you need to communicate

with people in other time zones or odd hours. You might also want to finish this task with an approaching deadline or this other one that came through at the last minute.

- ## Before or after work

Don't forget to stay active and social when you are working from home, so either engage in sport or art sessions, any activity that you can share with other people.

CHAPTER 2:
WHAT IS THE SITUATION OF VIRTUAL ASSISTANTS IN THE EU?

General description

Virtual assistants (VAs) are part of a relatively new and emerging market across Europe. VAs have the capacity to perform a variety of tasks and assume responsibilities ranging from administrative assistance, event management, customer support, website management and content creation, to name a few. This means that VAs can find opportunities in a wide array of industries, including more generic and/or specific industries.

Freelancing

This, however, renders it highly challenging to obtain specific statistics on how many VAs there are in Europe, especially given that this is an emerging field of work. Nevertheless, while VAs fall under the umbrella of freelancers, there is sufficient statistical evidence to demonstrate that working as a VA has promising opportunities.

For instance, in the context of the EU, freelancers have increased by 45% since 2000 and represent the fastest growing segment of the EU labour market, while in 2018, there were about 11 million EU freelancers. Becoming a freelance VA is therefore an emerging form of work in the European context.

Emerging opportunities following COVID-19

While the COVID-19 pandemic imposed many challenges, it also paved the way for alternative ways of communicating, learning and working, and mainly so through virtual means.

For instance, studies have shown that the COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the adoption of digital and technological solutions for work (Euro Scientist, 2021). Moreover, the report by Eurofound (2020) on 'Living, Working and COVID-19' confirms an 'upsurge in teleworking across all countries during the COVID-19 pandemic'. Close to 40% of workers in the EU were working remotely during lockdown, and this way they managed to maintain their jobs (Eurofound, 2020).

Additionally, according to 'The Future of Work in Europe' (2020), a recent report by McKinsey Global Institute, aging and migration led to the decrease of the working population by 1.4% across the EU since 2011. Nevertheless, despite the challenges that led to the decrease of the working population, including the COVID-19 pandemic, working as a VA is a way to bridge the gap given that it offers a flexible way of working.

General situation in specific EU countries

Delving deeper into the situation of VAs in specific countries of the EU (namely **France**, **Cyprus**, **Greece**, **Austria**, **Belgium**, **Spain**, and **Poland**) will help determine how to ensure that existing and new VAs make the most out of this career path.

In most of the countries analysed, working as a VA is a relatively new and emerging role and this is the case with all countries analysed, where no specific network, training or concrete definition for VAs exist. Most of the information available is usually under the context of freelancing.

Greece has marked the highest numbers in Eurostat's statistics regarding self-employment amongst EU Member states. The employment rate of self-employed

workers in Greece in 2020 accounted 'for more than one quarter (28.0%) of the total number of persons employed in **Greece**' (Eurostat, 2022). This percentage continued to rise after the pandemic and the necessity of remote work.

Although VAs in **France** and **Austria** are also a relatively new occupation, the two countries seem to be more familiar with the role & responsibilities of a VA in comparison to the rest of countries.
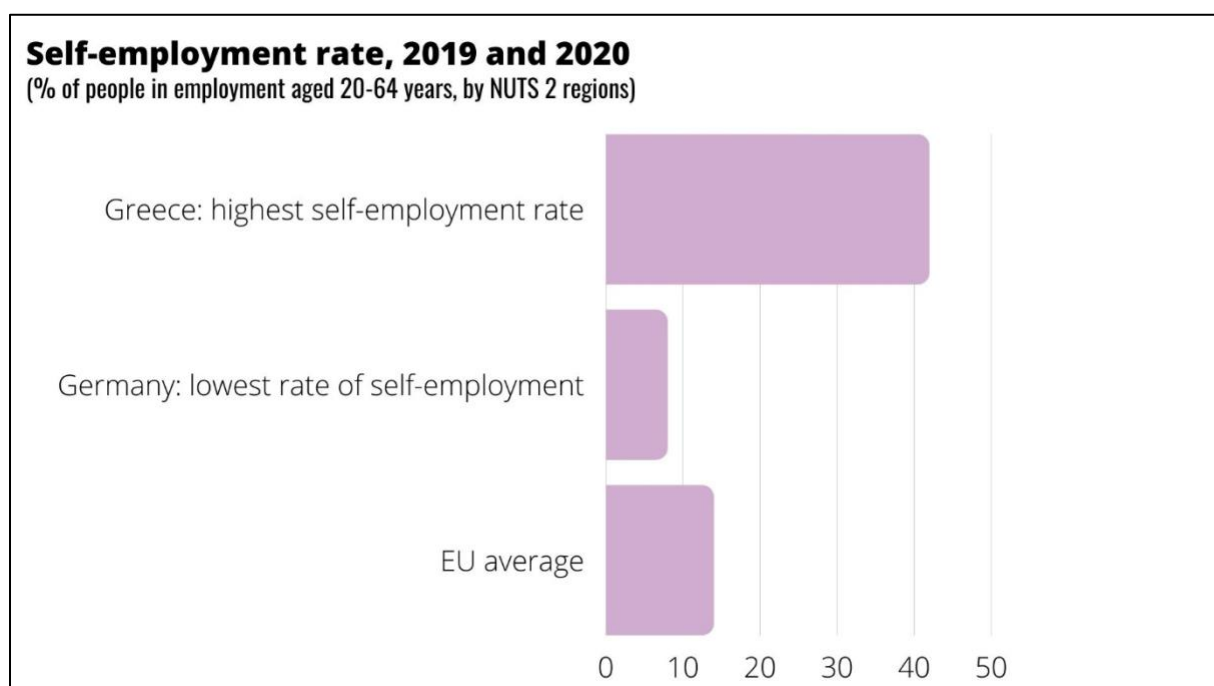

Self-employment rate, 2019 and 2020
(% of people in employment aged 20-64 years, by NUTS 2 regions)

- Greece: highest self-employment rate
- Germany: lowest rate of self-employment
- EU average

0   10   20   30   40   50

IMAGE 2
Self-employment rate, 2019 and 2020.
Source: Eurostat (online data code: lfst_r_lfe2estat (design by Vamooc team)

For **Austria**, resources on VAs are more reflective of this role rather than of freelancing in general. For instance, following research on VAs on the company registers of the Austrian Chamber of Commerce, it was found that there are 18 companies for VAs officially registered as businesses. The older was registered in 2015, following by 2-3 registration between 2016 to 2018. Around 4-5 registrations occurred in 2019 and 2020, which makes these years the peak of VA-associated companies' registrations in Austria. There was one company creation in 2021.

Amongst the 18 registered companies, all of them are 100% the product of individual

entrepreneurs, while one of them also has employees. Notably, 90% of VAs company owners are women and 10% are men.

The example of **Austria** leads to two key interpretations to keep in mind: 1) VAs peaked during the pandemic, offering professional virtual opportunities and 2) this is a promising filed for female entrepreneurs.

The job of a VA is new and not well known in **France**. It is sometimes referred to as "assistant freelance", "assistant à distance", "secrétaire indépendant". 47% of freelancers in **France** are in Paris. 56% of freelancers declare having changed their specialization twice or more during their career. Some of the difficulties they meet include negotiating with clients, being paid on time, financial instability.

Average work hours per week amount to 37h. Moreover, 27% of that time is dedicated to secondary tasks (bookkeeping, formation, networking, self-promotion). Additionally, 73% of freelancers report to be satisfied with their position. VAs in **France** are mostly hired by small companies (69%) or medium ones (17%).
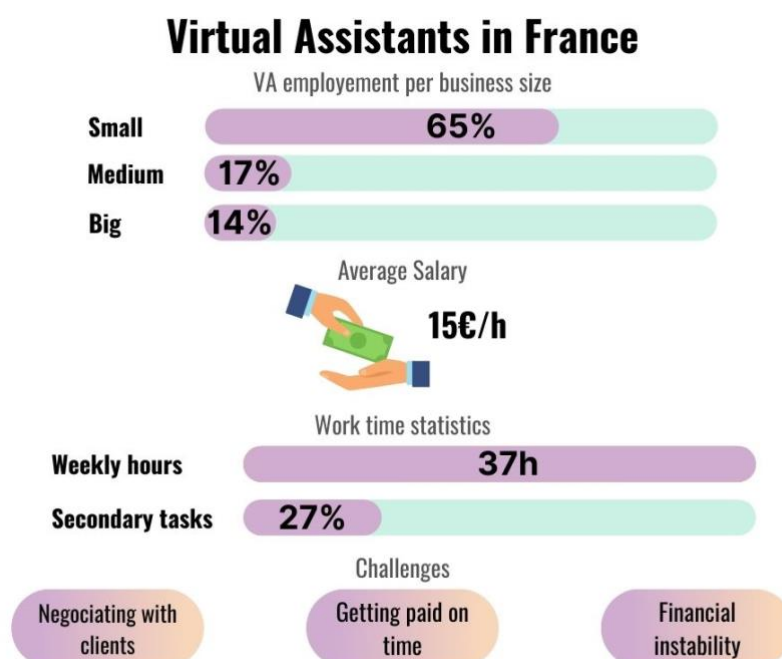

IMAGE 3
Virtual Assistants in France
Source: Data from Malt, Boston consulting group (design by Vamooc team)

Additionally, due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the Russia-Ukraine war, the **French** economy is likely to have a lower growth compared to its set target of 6%. Because of this, companies are reluctant to accelerate their traditional recruitment and long-term contracts. Many managers have instead proceeded with social plans to preserve the workforce as much as possible without having to show shareholders catastrophic results that would break confidence. The easy way out was to outsource certain very costly items of expenditure and recruit freelance professionals to replace them. The positions most often targeted are advertising, marketing and administration. **French** VA demand increased by +55% in 2021 on the Upwork website.

Current Market Situation in EU countries

- ### Most demanded tasks

The tasks that are most demanded of VAs are usually common in all EU countries analysed (**France**, **Cyprus**, **Greece**, **Austria**, **Belgium, Spain**, **Poland**). Notably, to begin working as a VA in all the aforementioned countries does not require certification or training.

In the context of **Belgium**, research on digital freelance websites showed a total of 32 virtual assistants; 28 VAs on Upwork.com and 4 VAs on Malt.com. These VAs in **Belgium** work mainly in the following areas: translations, proofreading, project management, administrative support, video editing, social media marketing, customer service, social media content creation and copywriting.

Some of these VAs located in **Belgium** happily responded to questions regarding specificities of a VA's profile. For example, Trui Calis is a woman working in **Belgium** as a virtual assistant at Kimori Office Support. According to her, you need to have a lot of experience and/or good adaptation and learning skills. You should be able to work after a quick introduction. Furthermore, she says that many companies

do not yet trust VAs but they are starting to see the benefits.

Another example is Greet Van de Paer. She has been a Virtual Assistant for 1.5 years. According to her, to be a good Virtual Assistant you first need to have a lot of enthusiasm as a superpower to use for starting your own business. For Greet, a good guidance by a VA Course is also very much recommended. In addition, Greet experiences that the term Virtual Assistant is not commonly known and if known, a VA is mostly considered to be a general freelancer, but a VA in her opinion is more than that; a true expert in the specific area some business owners need help with. Nevertheless, the advantages of a VA are not really known yet in **Belgium** among entrepreneurs. Finally, she adds that as a virtual assistant there are plenty of opportunities for people with disabilities and specific learning disorders because you can work 100% from home and specialize in the area you stand out with.

Following research through hiring pages in **Cyprus**, the most popular tasks and expertise usually include email handling, internet research, translation, data entry, content writing, customer service, Admin Support, Sales & Marketing, social media management, bookkeeping, and copywriting, to name a few of the most common. The profiles of VAs in **Poland** differ as they work in many different business areas. Typically, their tasks include admin/management, content creation, social media management, research and customer service.

In **Greece**, existing VAs mostly work as remote administrative assistants and more specifically as secretaries and as calling centre employees. Few of them are employed in the fields of content creation and management.

In the case of **Austria**, following research on VAs on the company registers of the Austrian Chamber of Commerce, it was found that branches of registered VA-related companies are divided in the branches consisting of office services (60%), advertising (30%) and information technology (IT) (10%). These are therefore the most demanded tasks in Austria.

In **Spain**, The National Classification of Economic Activities (CNAE) is a numbering system whose purpose is to group and classify all production units according to the

economic activity they carry out. There is no CNAE related to virtual assistance per se, but some of them classified under 'professional, scientific and technical activities' can be partially related to a Virtual Assistant's possible activities. These include: Advertising and market research, including community managers; Other professional, scientific and technical activities such as specialised design activities, photography activities, translation and interpretation activities; Other professional, scientific and technical activities; Administrative and support service activities such as office administrative and other business support activities (combined administrative services, photocopying, document preparation and other specialised office activities, organisation of conventions and trade fairs, business support activities, or other business support activities. However, there is no way to identify, under these classification codes, which services are really corresponding to virtual assistants, and therefore how to quantify the number of companies/professionals developing this kind of work.

In **France,** most tasks demanded of VAs include Graphics & Design (Graphic designer, Motion / Sound designer, UX / Web designer, Art director); Marketing & Communication (Marketing consultant, Analytics consultant, Community manager, social media managers, Project, Project management, Sales representatives); Support functions & others (Finance, HR, Legal, Purchasing, Operations, Management, Research and other professional activities).

• Average Salary in EU Countries

For the majority of the countries analysed there is no reliable source of information about the salary of a VA. This is especially the case in **Austria**, **Belgium**, **Spain** and **Cyprus**.

Additionally, in most cases there are no specific details as to the way of charging services, i.e., on an hourly-basis or task-related. The overall charging is flexible based on the VA or the VA's company preferences, but also dependable on the task given the wide array of tasks and expertise a VA can assume.

In the case of **Greece** there is no concrete info about the financial requirements to hire a Virtual Assistant, as every agency or individual freelancer charges different amounts. It was identified, however, that most VA Agencies charge per calling volume and less are changing per hour.

In **Poland**, VAs charge from around 30 PLN (6.5 Euros) per hour upwards, depending on the tasks, their professional expertise and demand for the specific work.

In **France**, Virtual Assistants invoice their services according to the number of hours worked. They can be invoiced by the hour, full time or half time. They can also opt for a monthly subscription or an annual package.

- In the case of hourly rates, the virtual assistant offers his services for an average of 10 euros per hour. This corresponds in particular to the daily services.
- For the subscription formula of 1 to 2 hours of work per day, the assistant proposes on average between 45 and 145 euros each month.
- For the half-day pricing formula, the virtual assistant proposes on average 500 euros per month for 75 hours of work during 20 days.
- For the annual pricing formula, each service provider is free to define its price according to its calendar and the hours worked.

Conclusively, as a starting point, the average salary of VAs in each of the countries could be calculated based on the country's rate for freelancers, the nature of the task and professional expertise.

Legal Matters

In the context of legal matters for VAs in **France**, the auto-entrepreneur status was created to simplify and facilitate the launch of the professional activity of the self-employed. Becoming a VA, registering as such and obtaining a registration to practice legally is quick and easy. In addition, the compulsory administrative

formalities can be done online:

- Registration: After one to several weeks, the auto-entrepreneur receives the registration certificate.
- The preparatory course for setting up is a standard course nationwide to support new entrepreneurs. It is not compulsory, but it can be interesting for new entrepreneurs especially when their latest educational experience is decades old, or when they are not used to dealing with administrative procedures. It covers subjects useful for the management and smooth running of the micro-enterprise. The course is not free of charge (price varies according to the person in charge) and lasts at least 30 hours (spread over 4 to 5 days).
- Not necessary, but a good practice: subscribing to an insurance and opening a bank account for the professional activity.

Legal points to consider in **Austria** include the need to do a business registration with the Austrian chamber of commerce. Concerning the above-mentioned branches (office services, advertising, IT), there is no need to obtain a qualification certificate to register a business-obligatory social insurances and VAT payments (with exceptions if sales are below a certain amount).

The legal status of VAs in **Belgium** and in Spain is independent worker mainly, or additional secondary occupation.

From the aspect of legal framework in **Greece**, VAs are classified under the laws of self-employed workers and they are required to complete paperwork as Sole Proprietorship owners. This means that they need to pay insurance taxes of about 136€ per month and accounting fees of about 300 € per year.

Similarly, VAs in **Cyprus** would be treated under the legal framework of self-employed workers. According to **Cyprus'** tax guide, 'operating as a freelancer is less expensive as there are zero setup / incorporation costs and no requirement for annual audited accounts if the revenue is below €70.000. Moreover, your first

€19,500 of income is tax free. Tax rates then start at 20% and rise progressively to 35% for income over €60,000. The profits of limited companies are taxed at a flat rate of 12.5%' (Advocate Abroad, 2021).

Conclusions

There are several common characteristics to consider when exploring the situation of Vas in the EU. For instance, working as a VA is relatively new in all European countries of the VA MOOC consortium, and this is mostly because the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted traditional work practices, yet it paved the way for alternative ways of working. Assuming the role of a VA is therefore a flexible and promising job opportunity for the coming years.

Although in all European countries a VA is most perceived as a freelancer, different countries have different market needs and rules in terms of salary and legal matters. This chapter provides insights to these differences depending on the employment rules of each country.

Websites to Hire Vas

FRANCE

- Upwork.com
- Codeur.com
- Malt.fr
- https://5euros.com/
- https://www.secretaire-independante.online/

GREECE

- https://www.tileorganosi.gr/en/services/grammateiaki-upostiriksi
- https://tilegrammateas.gr/

- http://www.simpleso.gr/e-gramateas/
- https://myoffice.gr/tilegrammateia-grammateiaki-ypostiriksi/
- https://myvirtualassistant.gr/
- https://www.athenatlg.gr/#page

CYPRUS

- https://www.upwork.com/hire/virtual-assistants/cy/
- https://www.truelancer.com/virtual-assistant-freelancers-in-cyprus
- https://www.freelancer.com/freelancers/cyprus/virtual-assistant

SPAIN

- https://es.indeed.com/
- https://www.soyfreelancer.com/freelancers/asistente-virtual/espana
- https://es.jooble.org/trabajo-asistente-virtual/Espa%C3%B1a
- https://www.workana.com/es/jobs?country=ES&language=es&skills=virtual-assistant

AUSTRIA

- https://www.fiverr.com
- https://www.freelancer.com/freelancers/austria/virtual-assistant

BELGIUM

- https://www.upwork.com/
- https://www.fiverr.com
- https://www.codeur.com/
- https://emplois.be.indeed.com/

POLAND

- https://virtualassistantservices.pl/
- https://wirtualni-asystenci.pl/
- https://assistly.pl/wirtualna-asystentka/
- https://www.upwork.com/hire/virtual-assistants/pl/
- https://www.olx.pl/praca/q-asystent-praca-zdalna/
- https://remote.com/platform/hire-international-contractors

CHAPTER 3:
WHAT DO YOU NEED TO BE A GOOD VA AND DO YOU HAVE THE POTENTIAL TO BECOME A GOOD VA?

Introduction

As described in previous chapters, working as a Virtual Assistant (VA) is one of the easiest options for working from home. This type of employment has emerged thanks to the internet and there is an increasing demand for VA around the world.

VAs can perform a wide variety of tasks, in fact, the services they offer are almost infinite, and it depends largely on the training, experience, skills, and of course, what the company or client demands.

Although the initial main functions were as a secretary/administrator, the VA options have been increasing, as has been explained in the previous chapters. As the possible functions are very broad, we can link them to a battery of skills that can encompass them, as we explain in the following pages.

What do you need to be a good VA?

To become a virtual assistant, you do not need to have any special training. However, to succeed in creating lasting collaborations, you need to be in a constant learning mode: from improving your skills to being up to date with the topics and tools that are important to your future clients.

- ## Technical skills

Majority of the VA work happens online. Depending on the chosen field of specialization, it will probably be necessary to follow some form of training to either expand your knowledge or learn basics of the field you want to be an expert in.

Such training can have different forms:

- ### Formal

- Where you participate in person or online training by a certified institution.

- ### Informal, such as:

- following social media of an expert in the field you are willing to work on
- listening to podcast on the topic
- following a YouTube channel on the topic
- subscribing to newsletters connected to the topic
- creating your own website/blog/social media account where you write about the topic and show your expertise
- reading books and magazines
- having an internship to gain experience
- any other way that you like to gain knowledge
- You can find content creators that have their social networks, webpages or YouTube channels in a wide range of topics and languages.

Our research on the essential technical skills to be a good virtual assistant can be summarized as follows. More detailed information can be found on chapter 4.

Administrative skills, such as customer service, email management, task management or project management, calendar management, data entry and

processing, online research, updating blogs or social media accounts or travel arrangements.

Creative skills, such as graphic design or branding for social media and websites or creative writing for blogs, email automation, lead generation, and social media.

If you decided that you want to become a virtual assistant in the field of digital marketing, you will need skills in areas like:

- Building sales funnel and lead generation
- Creating and managing Facebook ads
- Operating a website on WordPress ex. How to add a blog post or create a landing page
- Content creation adapted to SEO
- Knowledge of graphic design tools (simple like Canva or more professional such as Photoshop or InDesign)
- Setting up a webinar
- Email automation and newsletter set up

You certainly do not need to be fully competent in all of these areas but being an expert in some will increase your chances to be a highly demanded virtual assistant.

Personal skills

Being a good virtual assistant means making your client's life easier. In a sense, you are delegated to take care of the tasks that will be given to you. Therefore, exceptional oral and written communication skills are highly desirable, as you will need to communicate with your clients regularly.

Here are some of the most valued qualities in a VA:

Reliability

Reliability is a must have for a virtual assistant. No matter how qualified or experienced are, you will lose customers if you can't meet the agreed deadlines.

○ Thoroughness

Mistakes are human and will happen but you must avoid unnecessary mistakes such as typos and rushed work. If it happens always take responsibility and propose a solution if needed.

○ Entrepreneurial mindset

Being an assistant is helping your client to achieve their goals. For you it means staying up to date with the latest news connected to their industry and providing ideas on how they can improve their services. The extra income you provide the client could make you an invaluable member of their team.

IMAGE 4
10 jobs you can do as a virtual assistant (design by Vamooc team)

○ Ability to multitask

Being a VA means often working for several different clients at the same time. Effective organization, good time management and ability to keep a work and life balance will allow you not to burn out.

o Time management

Being an independent professional requires time management skills. When your time management affects your client's results, it becomes even more important, as it is in the case of a VAs. Time management implies a set of different skills, such as planning, prioritization capacity, evaluation capacity, goal setting, among others.

AS AN VIRTUAL ASSISTANT YOU SHOULD BE:

RELIABLE
Your clients need to trust your ability to meet deadlines and create a high quality work

THOROUGH
Because it's better to triple check your work then forgett an attachement when sending email to important client.

WELL ORGANIZED
Many different tasks for variety of clients requires efficient planning and ability to sometimes jump from one topic to another.

UP-AND-COMING
Entrepreneurial mindset will allow you to support your clients in generating additional income so stay up to date with industry news.

IMAGE 5
As a virtual assistant you should be (design by Vamooc team)

One popular strategy is the so called "4 D's of time management", which is useful for discerning whether or not a task or project is worth your time. It involves making a quick decision about what to act on now either by doing it yourself or delegating to someone else, what to act on in the future, or what to drop from your to-do list.

The 4 Ds are: Do, Defer (Delay), Delegate, and Delete (Drop). Placing a task or project into one of these categories helps you manage your limited time more effectively and stay focused on what matters most to you.

Where to start?

Identify your starting point: which role am I comfortable with?

As we have seen, a VA can provide a variety of services. In general, we can identify three different roles:

- ### The administrative

The people assuming this role are organized, methodical and dedicated; in the traditional world of work, they would make an excellent secretary; they love to help and see that tasks are done well.

- ### The creative

They like to express their creativity, come up with ideas, learn to work with image, video and audio editing software; they are attracted to aesthetics and are generally a very visual person.

- ### The technician

They are passionate about technology, have an enormous curiosity for the technical elements of the web, likes to learn everything he has not yet mastered, and sees himself programming apps and websites.

Although you don't need to try and fit in "the one" role, you probably can identify with which one you feel more comfortable. This is a good starting point to identify which kind of jobs you can offer and therefore which kind of skills you already have or you need to improve. It is just a way of starting and identifying possibilities that might be

easier for you to achieve. It doesn't mean in any way that you belong to just one, and of course you can start developing other complementary roles on your way to professionalisation.

Determine your goals

• Choose a specialisation

The first step is to know what you like and what you do not like. The roles described above are a basic starting point, but then you can go further: Identify your strengths and weaknesses in order to choose a specialisation that you have the knack for. Would you like to be a virtual assistant in customer service? Then assess your administrative and communication skills. Are you a creative person? Identify your skills in graphic design or video-editing.

By identifying your strengths and weaknesses you will be able to choose the area you want to work in as a virtual assistant.

• How do you want to work?

As we said before, although VA is mainly a freelance occupation, there are also companies dedicated to it, so as a VA you can become either an independent professional or an employee. Of course, being an employee or an independent professional has its advantages and disadvantages. A deeper look in this topic will be done in chapter 4, but we can have a quick preview here:

As an employee: You do not have to invest or find your own clients. Your rates, working hours and the way you work will be more restricted. Obviously, if you are hired as a freelancer, you will be considered self-employed and, in many cases, you will be asked to be registered as a freelancer in order to issue the corresponding invoices. There are some websites where you can find occasional job offers for virtual assistants where you are not required to be self-employed.

As an independent professional: As freelancer, you will have an easier time scheduling, choosing your clients and setting your rates. However, you will have to find the clients and pay taxes. Starting a virtual assistant business is relatively easy and does not require a large investment. The usual things to start this online business are as basic as a computer, a telephone, internet connection and eventually a printer.

Beside this decision, regarding self-employment or employee, you will need to define the way you would like to work. Think about what is important to you, what are your values and how you imagine your work routine. Ask yourself questions like:

- Would you like to be a virtual assistant part-time or full-time?
- How would you like to cooperate with your clients?
- How much money do you want to receive for your services?
- How much time can I dedicate to improve my skills?
- What don't I want to do?
- How would I like to organize my day?

Identify your potential clients

Determine who you will want (and also don't want) to work for. Your specialisation and skills will help you to identify potential clients in your preferred domain.

• Personal network

Start networking and talking about your services firstly with your close network. This can be a family member, a friend or a former colleague. You will have the opportunity to work for people you already know and thus take the first steps in your professional life as a virtual assistant. Additionally, you can create dedicated graphics to advertise your services on social networks like Facebook (for family and friends) and LinkedIn (professional networks).

• Websites

If you don't have any experience you can consider to start with easy and low-paying missions. This tactic allows you to quickly build experience and create a portfolio to share with your future clients.

One of the most effective ways to find offers quickly is to register on a platform that specializes in putting you in touch with clients.

What makes these platforms interesting is that they have a feedback system through which customers can give notes and comment on the service provided by the virtual assistant. And, the more positive reviews a user receives, the more their profile is highlighted on the platform.

Example:

- Upwork.com and Malt.com are the largest freelancing platforms in the world. It offers many jobs offers for a wide variety of assignments and for all budgets.
- 5euros.com: the principle of this one is different, the customer, instead of posting an offer, consults your profile and orders one of your services.

• Create a blog

As VA work happens online you should have an online presence. Potential clients will probably put your name in Google before they start working with you so make sure that their search results will show your best professional side.

Here are some ideas on what you could do:

- Make your website known by publishing content regularly on its blog section.
- Create your personal page and share the content of your blog with people on your social media accounts
- Go on specialized forums, answer questions and talk about your business
- Keep the email of your prospects and develop your own newsletter, to stay close to your target market.

- Organize all your social media accounts: Instagram, Facebook and Twitter. In addition, protect the content of your private accounts so only your friends see what you post in your private life.
- Submit your website address to search engines and directories.
- Make sure you are listed in regional online business directories that your target market may visit.
- Choose a specialisation

There are many groups on Facebook dedicated to virtual assistant services where you can post your ad and search for clients. In addition, you can broaden your search to include business-oriented groups where you can answer some frequently answered questions and promote yourself as an expert in the field.

Collecting testimonials

Put yourself in the shoes of a client for a moment: you are looking for your virtual assistant to delegate the administrative management of certain tasks in your company. What is most important to you? Reliability: knowing that I can entrust these tasks to someone who will do the job perfectly and on time. And for that, nothing is better than the testimonies of other virtual personal assistant customers.

Therefore, when you start out, your goal is to get as much positive feedback as possible. Every time you are cooperating with a client ask for 2-3 sentences of opinion and an authorization to publish it in your social media.

The more positive ratings you get, the more your profile will be promoted. As a result, you will have more customers ... A virtuous circle that is all to your advantage.

Tips for starters

Hereunder are some very practical aspects you should keep in mind when thinking about becoming a VA:

Dedicated working space

As a VA you will work remotely, which means you can do it wherever you want. Even if that is completely true, it is highly recommended to have a dedicated working space, either at home or from an office or coworking space. Separating personal and professional life is always a good practice!

• Dedicated working time

Working at home does not mean working all the time nor at any time. Make sure you have a clear timeframe for working, and make sure your clients now it. This will avoid calls in inappropriate situations, and will make your availability clear towards your clients.

• Flexibility, not chaos

Working in flexible hours can be very convenient, but here are some tips to avoid confusing flexible with chaotic:

• Control Multi-tasking

This is something cherished in different corporations but it can be very challenging when you're supporting multiple clients.

Focus on finishing what you start as best as you can. Not all tasks can be completed in one sitting but resist the urge to work on more than one thing at a time. Especially if it is for different clients.

• Schedule Your Day

Schedule everything you do each day and not just the obvious ones.

Schedule time to move, stretch, work on yourself, work on your business, etc.

Then, do your best to stick to your schedule. It might take practice and some tweaking but you can develop this helpful habit.

- ## Work in Batches

Schedule certain days of the week for client or discovery calls. Don't do them every day – it makes it hard to stay focused on tasks.

- ## Eat the Frog :)

Do the yucky tasks first. These are the tasks that you don't like and they seem to be the ones you move from day to day on your schedule.

Get them over with first and stop letting them take up critical brain space.

- ## Work in Short Bursts

This will help you keep concentrated. The Pomodoro Technique is one that might help you. There are many browser extensions that make it easy to stick to it.
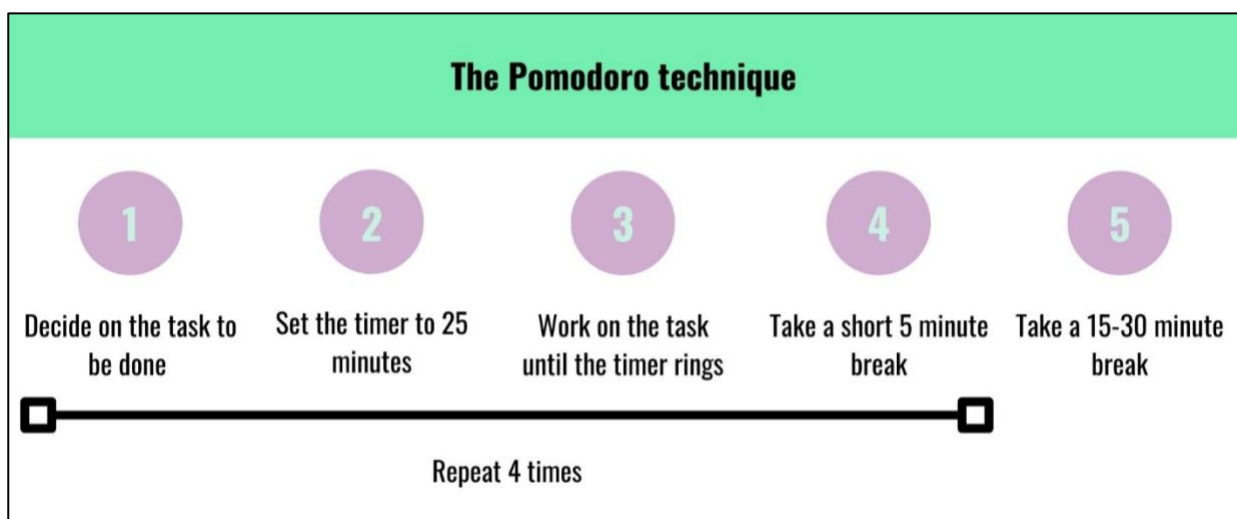

IMAGE 6
Pomodoro technique. Source: https://www.fractuslearning.com (design by Vamooc team)

- ## Identify your peak energy hours

Figure out your peak energy hours, because these are the hours in the day where you do your best work.

Keep those hours for the most demanding tasks.

- ## Process for Interruptions

Create a process for getting back to work when you're interrupted.

For example, if I have an unexpected interruption, I'll use the time right after to walk around and stretch before getting back to it.

- ## Manage your Inbox

Probably the first way for contacting you will be by mail. Don't leave your inbox open all the time.

Instead, schedule time to check your emails a number of times a day (2-4 times a day could be a suggestion). This will keep you away from distractions and interruptions.

Special profiles

- ## Possibilities for workers with physical disabilities

The job of virtual assistant has great advantage for people with reduced mobility because in the vast majority of cases it is done from home. In fact, it allows to limit the constraints related to travel or to be in a known and adapted environment. The flexibility and non-strict schedule make it possible to receive care during the day (at home or not). Therefore, it saves time and simplifies daily life by reducing fatigue in many situations.

In addition, digital tools used in teleworking can facilitate communication for people who have problems with hearing or seeing. Certain adapted accessories can make the voice of interlocutors more intelligible (remote microphones, adapted communication headsets, Bluetooth connection with hearing aids, etc.).

- ## Compatible with Specific Learning Disorders (SLDs)?

  - ### How to make it work:

There is no fully reliable estimation of the number of people with learning disorders in Europe but together these disorders are believed to affect around 10% (for the French Federation of Dys -FFDYS) or 12% (according the European Dyslexia Association - EDA) of people to a lesser or greater extent. That is a great part of labour market.

Having a learning difficulty does not mean that a person cannot have a successful career and/or a fulfilling life. For example, according to a Dyslexia study published in 2021, these are the professions where dyslexic executives excel:

- digital marketing expert,
- application developer,
- data analyst,
- cybersecurity expert,
- management analyst.

These are jobs that can be done as a virtual assistant.

In addition, people with learning disorders are considered to have many creative abilities and they have used work-around strategies which makes them good at graphic design. This is a great skill for the virtual assistant profession.

One of the adaptation methods at school for people with dyslexia is the use of digital tools. This can also work out in professional life. To help yourself you could use for example: voice to text programs, recording meetings with client to remember the tasks, word-cutting modules, voice synthesis, proof-readers. Adjusting the computer settings like colours and fonts is also important. Most reading and writing software have a screen masking option that tints all active screens - from email to Word and Excel - with a colour of your choice.

Good organization and one thing at the time without being distracted is not easy for any of us and one of the biggest challenges in VA work for people with SLDs is multitasking. With knowledge on how to set goals, breaking them in small steps and working towards achieving them, cumulation of tasks should be manageable. There are many online tools like task lists and time organizers that can help you during the day.

To conclude, many companies still overlook the need to accommodate dyslexic employees in the workplace. The good news that a VA with learning disorder is free to adapt the way they work to their needs.

CHAPTER 4:
DIFFERENT WAYS OF WORKING AS A VA

Typical services

People hire assistants to handle all kinds of tasks. Virtual Assistant services, in particular, can be a key element for businesses and individuals, when it comes to task delegation. It would be a smart decision to hire a Virtual Assistant for a plethora of tasks, whether it be for menial ones or ones that are more complicated.

- ## Administrative tasks

This section refers to general administrative tasks that Virtual Assistants can take up. They relate mainly to maintaining an office and depending on the industry and the size of each business, these tasks might differ.

  - ### Email accounts management

Email management can be one of the biggest time-wasters for businesses and an element that distracts one's workflow. Having a Virtual Assistant manage email accounts inbox and sent emails can save hours.

IMAGE 7
What can a Virtual Assistant do? (Design by Vamooc team)

o Calendar management

Virtual Assistants make sure that their client's schedule is organised in the most efficient way according to the client's needs and requirements.

o Invoicing, banking needs performance

Managing the basic banking needs of a business can include checking account balances, bill payments and money transfers, reconciling transactions and maintaining financial records, as well as invoicing third-party clients.

- ### Handling customer inquiries

Whether by email or by phone, businesses receive numerous inquiries from clients on a daily basis. A Virtual Assistant can take up managing the incoming client inquiries in a timely manner.

- ### Appointment scheduling

A Virtual Assistant can help manage existing appointments, i.e., confirm appointments' times, reschedule or cancel appointments, set-up new appointments or even screen potential unnecessary ones.

- ### Travel bookings management

The world of travel can be complex. A Virtual Assistant can research, plan and make bookings for the optimal trip routes and prices, along with accommodation and various transfer options.

- ### Bookkeeping and payroll duties

A business can hire an independent Virtual Assistant with the aim of them managing the day-to-day finances. They can also plan and process the payroll of employees.

- ### Customer service

A Virtual Assistant can make sure that the clients of a business receive the best experience by assisting them before and after they interact with the business, by collecting feedback and by making sure that, through their service, the clients will return to the business. Another, more in depth, aspect of customer service is keeping track of recurring customers and important dates, and then send birthday cards or thank you notes.

- ### Client lists curation

The curation of client lists plays a major role for the well-being of a business and a Virtual Assistant can help with that by compiling lists of potential or new clients

and/or updating the already existing ones. This can be conducted with the help of online tools.

o Backups creation to prevent data loss

Virtual Assistants can use a variety of tools to ensure the creation of data backups by creating copies of the data on the business' system, which will be used for recovery purposes in case the original data is lost or corrupted.

o Interviewing/recruitment of potential team members

The interview process is a multi-stage process for hiring new employees and delegating this to a Virtual Assistant can be of great help. The process typically includes writing a job description, posting a job offer, scheduling interviews, conducting preliminary interviews, conducting in-person interviews, following up with candidates and making a hire.

o Ads placement

Taking care of the business' sustainability can be a task for a Virtual Assistant, which also includes the service of being in charge of researching the optimal business ads placement and its implementation, as well as renewing or cancelling already existing ads.

o Project management

A Virtual Assistant project manager takes on the task of managing parts of a project, in order for it to deliver the best results. They work on the parts of a project that do not require close contact to other members of the team.

o Data research, collection, entry

This section refers to the services that have to do with the systematic process of handling digital data, i.e., research, collection and entry, using online tools and other software.

- Research important data, statistics, and facts

One essential element of running a successful meeting is the preparation before. A Virtual Assistant can help research important data, statistics, and facts for a meeting with the aim of providing essential help beforehand.

- Transcription of voicemail, video or audio, podcasts, meeting recordings

A service that can be of great importance is the one of audio transcription. Whether it be voicemail, video or audio, podcasts, or meeting recordings, a Virtual Assistant can convert auditory data to written data, allowing it to last longer and to be easier to handle.

- Turn raw data into detailed reports and slideshows

Gathering important data from various sources is one aspect of a Virtual Assistant's work. The next step can be gathering all this raw data, and organizing and presenting them in a variety of ways, e.g., detailed reports or slideshows.

- Develop and deliver slideshow presentations

Depending on the needs of their employer, Virtual Assistants can prepare, develop and deliver slideshow presentations, using various online tools.

- Convert, merge, split various file types

Digital files need to be processed quite often and it can be a mundane task for a busy person. A Virtual Assistant can take up the task of converting them to other types of files, merging them and/or splitting them into more files, using manual procedures and special software.

- Create forms or surveys for customer feedback

One way to offer customer service is to gather feedback data from clients. A Virtual Assistant can create forms, questionnaires, or surveys in order for a business to

assess whether their service strategies are working, what their clients like/dislike etc. The Virtual Assistant can also gather the data, analyse it and then present it.

- ## Social media management

Managing social media includes many interconnected tasks which can be outsourced to a Virtual Assistant either as a whole package or in smaller assignments, ranging from creating and publishing content on social media platforms to engaging with their users.

- ### SEO and web marketing strategy

Some of the tasks requiring specific expertise can be delegated to Virtual Assistants. Search Engine Optimization is one of them. Instead of learning the secrets of this

highly specialized profession, e.g., how to conduct an effective keyword research for web content creation, the tasks can be delegated to a qualified VR.

o Set up/Create landing pages

A Virtual Assistant can be assigned with a task of creating and maintaining a landing page technically while the employer's job is to provide the relevant content, or vice versa - the company may already have a template for it and employ a VA as a copywriter. Delegating both these tasks to a VA is also an option.

o Social Media accounts management

Social media management services are commonly delegated to Virtual Assistants. These services can include not only creating an overarching strategy, but also creating and posting content, responding to comments/questions, engaging users and setting up advertising campaigns.

o Social Media content creation

High-quality and relevant content is essential for a social media campaign to be effective. A hired Virtual assistant can be of great help in the time-consuming process of writing posts, creating and uploading visual content, infographics, testimonials, etc.

o Engagement of SM audience

A Virtual Assistant can be an invaluable aid in conducting the interconnected tasks of frequent posting, creating and joining groups, communicating with followers, conducting surveys, holding online Q&A sessions, etc.

o Affiliate marketing

With this advertising strategy a firm compensates third-party publishers (affiliates) to generate traffic or leads to its products and services. The development of affiliate communication is one of the common tasks of VAs.

- ## Content creation

This relates to a general category of tasks commonly assigned to Virtual Assistants. Some of them require specialized expertise and some can be taken up by VAs with versatile skills.

- ### Audio & video editing

There are many cases, especially in social media publishing, when audio and video material can be edited by a non-expert experienced in using adequate software for this purpose. And such tasks are commonly undertaken by VAs.

- ### Preparation of manuals for other workers

We should distinguish here a case of a specialist writing the content of a manual and someone less qualified in the particular field but able to edit the material, prepare for publishing, etc. Both the tasks can be delegated to a subcontractor offering virtual assistance.

- ### Proofreading/copywriting

A good copywriter should have strong creative writing skills to be able to communicate a message effectively and originally. On the other hand, a good proof-reader needs to have sound knowledge of spelling, grammar and punctuation as well as a sharp eye for detail. VAs with both these sets of competences are in high demand.

- ### Articles/blog posts creation

Writing something of sense requires knowledge, understanding and time. When looking for a Virtual Assistant for such tasks, the employer should therefore ensure the availability of his/her competences in the particular business field.

- ### Composing press releases/newsletters

The same refers to press releases and newsletters. They have to be meaningful and concise to communicate a message to someone who may only have a minute or so to grasp its meaning. A good Virtual Assistant for such writing is someone who is able to create such content.

o Produce content marketing materials

Content marketing is about developing and distributing relevant and useful content to the company's audience. A VA can be assigned with the creation of any materials needed for a particular marketing campaign, whether content-wise or technically (e.g., managing distribution channels).

o Translations

Automated translation quality has been greatly improved in recent years. Still without knowing the target language quite well it is difficult to judge the accuracy of an automated translation. Virtual Assistants versed in the target languages can thus provide a very useful service to a company operating in international markets.

o Logos and graphic elements design

This is a good example of a specialist field in which virtual assistance is commonly provided. The service can be based on a one-off contract for designing key visual communication elements (e.g., logos, themes, user interfaces) to online support in the implementation of the strategy.

• Generic errands

This category of tasks includes those which do not require specialized expertise but can be assigned to a General Virtual Assistant (GVA).

o Buying items online

Online purchasing has accelerated during the pandemic. It is best dealt with when there is someone in charge of ensuring that all the needed items are purchased at

competitive prices and delivered on time. Smaller companies can delegate the task to an assistant dealing with all sorts of generic errands.

o Arranging locations for events

There are many aspects to consider when searching for a location for a business event. Someone has to review and consult possible venues, available dates, catering options, parking spaces, etc. A General Virtual Assistant can be assigned with all these tasks that can be conducted online.

o Hiring a cleaning service

This is certainly something that seems pretty straightforward but can become a nuisance unless there is someone in the company taking care of it amongst all the other generic errands. Hence the growth of GVA service offers on the web.

• Web development

Websites are very strong foundational stones for building an online presence of any business: they help establish strong brand authority, make it easier for customers to know about products and facilitate orders and sales. VAs can be helpful in many related tasks.

o Web design, planning and development

Many small firms opt for buying and customization of a WordPress theme for their new website. There are plenty of professional themes and templates on offer as well as a world-wide community of WP specialists offering online assistance in any aspect of website design and development.

o Coding for technical support

WordPress, as compared with other tools, is easier to setup and install with no coding skills required. However, there are cases when a deeper customization of a

website is needed. WP is open source so a Virtual Assistant specializing in WP technical support can be called in.

○ Maintaining website functionality, security and troubleshooting

The backend interface of WordPress is very intuitive which facilitates maintaining website functionality, security and troubleshooting. A Virtual Assistant, not necessarily an IT expert, can thus administer the site installing and updating plugins, uploading content, monitoring website traffic, etc.

• Freelancers vs. Contract employees

Virtual Assistants are essentially freelancers. The rising numbers of freelancers in Europe show that the profession has already gained much popularity, and it is "here to stay". Taking into account the aforementioned advantages of working as a freelancer Virtual Assistant, it might seem that working as a freelancer, in general, can be the best option in contrast to being a contract employee. Nevertheless, some

aspects of both types of employment need to be taken into account, before one makes up their mind on how they would like to work.

○ Full-time benefits

A major aspect of working as a contract employee are the benefits of full-time employment. Those include healthcare and insurance, as well as financial aids, such as paid vacation time or sick days. These benefits are not an option for freelancers and they will not be able to have access to them or similar perks. Freelancers will have to ensure their own health insurance and also cater for their own retirement funds, as they are responsible of managing their income themselves.

○ Flexibility vs. security

If the first thing that comes to your mind, when hearing the word "freelancer", is working under palm trees whenever you feel like it, then flexibility is what you are thinking of. It is true that the main feature of freelancing is being flexible when it comes to work hours, workload and workplace. Especially in the case of Virtual Assistants, having a Wi-Fi connection and a laptop alone can allow for spatial flexibility. These elements might sound ideal and liberating to some, but others prefer the security of a steady contract job. Working as a contract employee means that you will not have to look for clients yourself and, most importantly, you will enjoy the security of a steady income.

○ Supervision, monitoring and accountability

An important part of working as an employee is the process of supervision, which describes the activity in which a manager monitors the activities and responsibilities of employees he manages, from the exact hours they work to the quality of their work deliverables. A freelancer Virtual Assistant works remotely, which means that supervision cannot be conducted in a conventional way. On one hand, the employer needs to adopt different ways of monitoring the employees' work. On the other hand, freelancers need to stay accountable for their work and their deliverables themselves.

○ Case study of the working methods of a VA

As explained throughout the above presentation, there are many cases of Virtual Assistants providing specialised services like web design, SEO or producing specific content for a marketing strategy. There are also many General Virtual Assistants (GVAs) dealing with all sorts of tasks ranging from managing social media to generic errands like buying items for routine activities of a firm or arranging various events. We would like to explain the latter case in more detail as it tends to be common in many small firms.

Such a case is best explained through an example of a concrete GVA working for a firm and providing a wide range of services. Let us consider a company based in Poland, owned by an Italian former travel agent. The firm is not a typical tourist agency, as it targets only nationals of one country, Italy, with an offer of Poland tours, rich with a cultural and educational programme. The firm has only 3 regular employees, a number of tourist guides with temporary contracts for specific trips and 1 General Virtual Assistant with a significant role in the company. She speaks both Italian and Polish fluently. She now works full-time (often over-time) in the firm on a B2B contract and her responsibilities cover the following essential aspects of running the business.

Administrative tasks: She provides assistance in managing correspondence with prospective clients and those who already paid for the trips. The questions usually relate to the programme of excursions, travel and facilities, timeline and various other issues. The whole communication is supervised by the CEO/company owner, and all financial issues (invoicing, bank transfers, etc) are dealt with by an accountant.

Data research: In order to stay competitive, the company is constantly updating information in the following fields: venues to include in the tours, trends in the tourist business, offers by other operators active in the market, both in Poland and Italy. The GVA reports data to the CEO online using predefined templates. The processed information is then discussed with the key members of the team and impacts the company's marketing strategy.

Social media management: The assistant started work at the company when the whole marketing strategy with its tools had already been set up. Her main role is to create content and continuously update all the sites. The visual material is usually provided during the tours but the essential task is to present it in such a way as to 'hook' Italian clients. This means regular posting to engage users/visitors into the exchange. This part of her work is very time-consuming and requires regular attention from the GVA.

Content creation: Besides social media, the company has a blog on its website on tourist attractions in Poland. The GVA is responsible for writing articles on the blog and thus keeping an interest in Poland as a tourist destination among Italians. For the articles, she has to do extensive research in order to provide up-to-date information standing out in the multitude of related sites. A graphic designer responsible for the visual aspect of the website is in charge of illustrating and editing the articles for online publishing.

Generic errands: In view of her qualifications and engagement for more challenging tasks, the GVA is not usually assigned responsibilities that are more mundane. However, because of her regular contacts with hotels and travel providers for the tourist trips she is also asked for booking accommodation and flights for the CEO and other team members travelling to tourist fairs and other events, visiting business partners, etc.

Web development: Online presence is a very important part of the firm's marketing strategy hence a professional service is provided by a specialist on a B2B basis. Still the GVA is collaborating closely with the web admin and designer when it comes to new content uploads. For more straightforward tasks, like updating info in various subpages, being familiar with the functionalities of the admin WordPress panel, she does the work herself.

The above case proves the existing work opportunities in the SME sector for Virtual Assistants, having strong foundation competences in certain area/s (e.g. a foreign

language and administration as in our example) but willing to learn new skills required to offer a more comprehensive service.
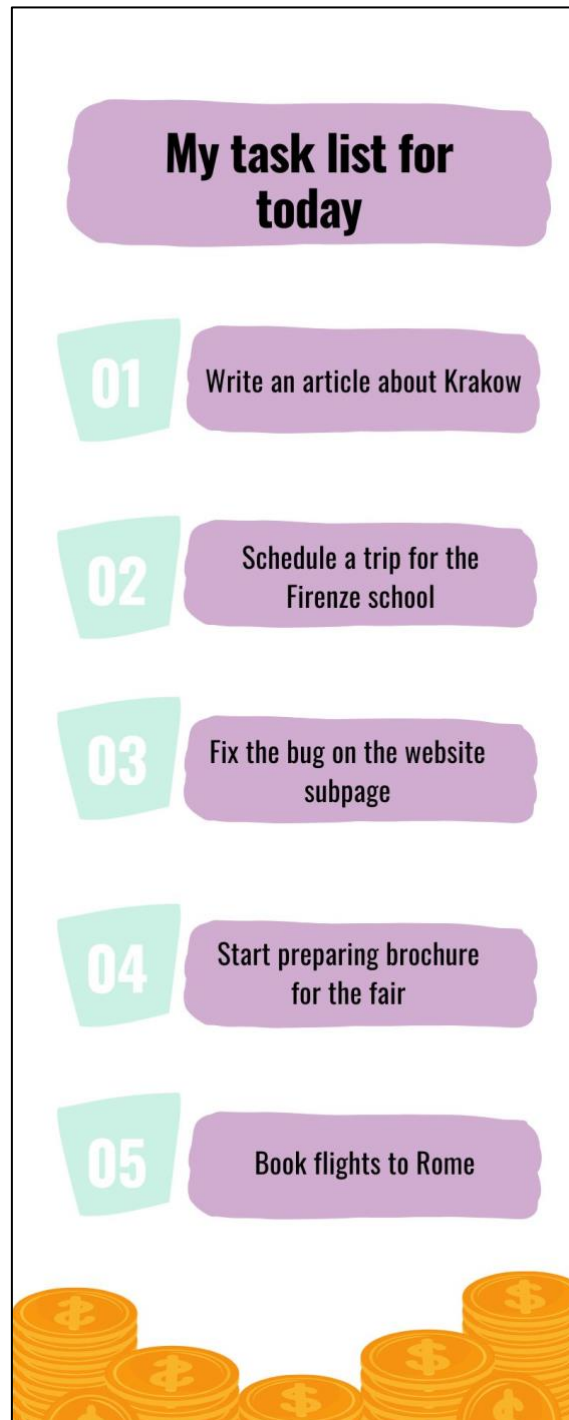

IMAGE 8
My task list for today (Design by Vamooc team)

CHAPTER 5:
GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS ABOUT THINKING TO BECOME A VA

Introduction

Now that you know what a VA is, who can become a VA and about the variety of services VAs can offer, you might be interested in how to start this journey. Planning is fundamental and can solve many problems before they actually occur, especially if you aim to start your own business. The goal of this chapter is to give you a glimpse about basic steps to prepare for the process of becoming a VA and providing your services.

It will start with basic business model development, which might help to structure your thoughts around the services you want to offer. We also want to share some general notes about legal requirements around the topics of (self-) employment and founding businesses. The chapter will conclude with a summary and a checklist.

Steps to become a VA

One of the fundamental things to do before starting to work as a VA is to think about the services a VA aims to offer, how to establish customer relationships and how to calculate costs and revenues. In this chapter, we aim to give you some basic information about developing a business plan based on the Business Model Canvas (Image 9). This tool is widely known and applied not only by departments in big companies, but also by start-ups, entrepreneurs and even by NGOs.

- Firstly, we will think about the value proposition or the specific services you are going to offer.
- Secondly, we will introduce to the specification of possible customers.
- Thirdly, it will be very important to specify necessary infrastructure such as key activities, key resources and the partner network.

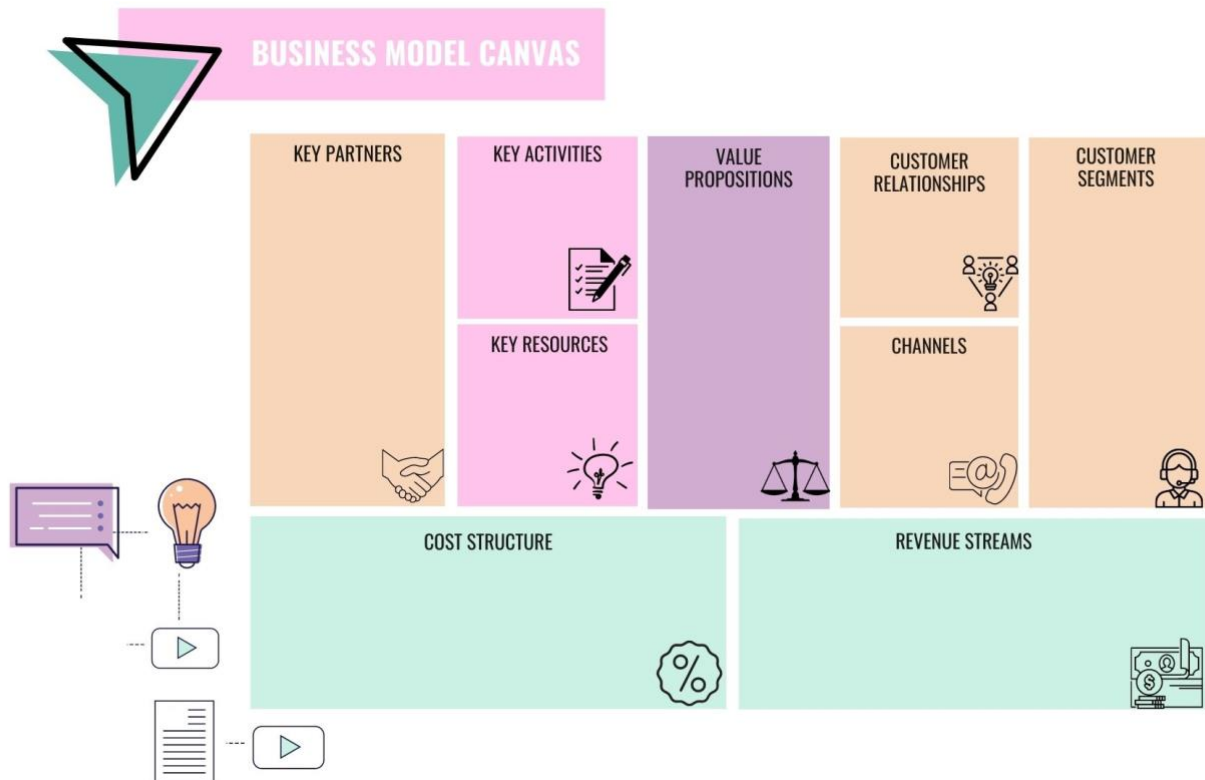- Lastly, we are going to talk about the finances: What will be the cost structure and the revenue streams?

IMAGE 9

Business model canvas. Source: Osterwalder and Pigneur, 2010 (design by Vamooc team)

Your value propositions:

• What kind of services do you want to offer?

This building block is one of the most important ones since you can specify here your services which you are going to offer to your customers. This might depend on your experiences and the strengths you showed in your previous jobs. As you have learned in chapter 4, possible services of a VA can vary very much: general secretarial and office tasks, preparation of presentations, bookkeeping, translations as well as website and social media management are only a few of many possible services a VA can offer to his/her customers. To find out about your specific proposition, you might think about the following questions:

- Which competences did you strengthen throughout your previous career? Is it possible to summarise them to extract specific tasks?
- Which of these tasks did you really like in your previous jobs? You may also ask your colleagues or friends to find out about your strengths.
- How did you support your colleagues or your management by doing these tasks? Which problems did you help to solve?

By answering these questions, you can specify the services you are going to offer more and more. Maybe you can elaborate a "unique selling proposition" (USP) which no other competitor is able to offer easily. For example, if you speak a certain foreign language, you might offer your services to companies who have already or aim to establish international connections to such a country.

You might also switch the perspective and ask yourself as a customer if these services might be helpful to outsource. How much time and money will they save?

• Your customers – To whom do you want to sell your services?

o Customer segments

Once you have specified your services, you also want to know to whom you want to sell your services. If you don't aim to access a mass market, it is very important to know who your customers are, their needs, their behaviours and even their profitability. The more you know them the better you can reach them and offer customised services. Possible questions to think about may be:

- Which companies did you work with in your previous career (size, branch, international focus, etc.)? Which of these companies were the most exciting ones?
- Would these companies be interested in your services? Why?
- Are you already a specialist or very interested in a specific branch (medicine, law, education, etc.)? From your perspective, would it make sense to concentrate only on a certain branch?

By answering these questions, you might be able to develop different segments of customers. A segmentation can be helpful to group customers based on specific needs, branches, company sizes, and other attributes. These customer segments may also require different types of relationships or have a different profitability. After this first segmentation has been elaborated, you can focus on the ones you considered most important to design the further business model.

○ Channels

Most probably, you will offer and carry out your VA-services online. But what does it mean specifically? The "channels" are an important interface to communicate with your customers and other partners. Here, you can distinguish between different phases:

Awareness: Which channels will you use to attract potential customers?

- These might be national or international VA platforms where you can find customers or can place service offers.
- But also, freelance platforms are helpful to find VA jobs. There are often many thousands of other freelancers for quite different services.
- You might also develop your own website to attract customers for your services. In this case, you should optimise your website for search engines such as Google to have your website on top of search results. The keyword here is Search Engine Optimisation (SEO).
- You can also use social media platforms to make people aware of your services.

Evaluation: Through which channels will you make sure that the customers will find all information needed about your services?

- Here, you can use the same platforms and describe your services e.g., on the VA or freelance platforms.

- On your website it might also be possible to write some blog articles about your work. This may be additional information about your services and the potential for your customers to outsource them to a VA.

Purchase: How can the customers find your offers and buy them? Will It be on your website, or can they contact you personally to purchase your services?

- It is often very easy and comfortable to purchase your services via the platforms since all necessary functions are already available (accept offer, send invoice, payment, etc.). However, you, the customer, or both usually need to pay a fee for this.
- You can do the purchase also directly with your customer by sending an offer beforehand and an invoice after the completed service.

Carry out: How will you perform your services? Will it be just via e-mail or other communication and collaboration software?

- There is many software available depending on your type of services. An office package might be the easiest to purchase. But you might need communication and collaboration software too.
- Specific software may be necessary for carrying out your service (programming software, enterprise-resource-planning (ERP) software, transcription software and many others).
- The type of software may also depend on your customer and the software they usually use.

  ○ Customer relationships

Once you established relevant channels to acquire customers, it will be relevant to know how to establish long-term and trustful relationships with them. They are important to minimise efforts for permanently acquiring new customers and rather convincing existing customers for more jobs with your proven expertise. Or even getting recommendations from them to other possible customers. Some strategies might be:

- Customer service: You may include a customer service already in your offer. By this, you avoid open questions by your customers after finishing your service and you stay in contact with them for possible new jobs.
- Social media and other online channels: You can stay in contact via online networking platforms or write regular newsletters to your network.
- Personal contact: For some customers it might also be relevant to write or call them personally from time to time.

There are for sure many other strategies to establish customer relationships. They help you to raise the customer's satisfaction, to strengthen their loyalty and consequently their willingness to buy your services again. This will raise your economic success far more than by investing in the acquisition of new customers again and again.

Your infrastructure:

- ## Which resources are required to offer your services?

  - ### Key activities

The key activities describe the most important actions you need to do to let your business model actually work. This is important to be able to find the most suitable infrastructure and calculate how many, and which kind of efforts are required to run the business successfully. Therefore, you might think about the following:

- What kind of activities is necessary to perform and deliver your services? Depending on your services, you might deliver rather individual services for each of your customers. This might cause more efforts in customisation than in producing a standard service for all customers and has to be considered in your calculation of costs.
- How do you establish and maintain your customer relationships and your partner network?
- By which activities do you reach your "market" or your customers efficiently?

○ Key resources

Whether you are working as a VA or as part of a company, you need some resources to deliver your services. These resources comprise physical infrastructure, financial, intellectual, and human resources. In chapter 3 you already got some insights about all necessary means to be able to work as a VA. Please find a short overview:

- Office: Do you have enough space to work from home? Or do you prefer working in a shared office or co-working space? The last options may also be suitable for networking activities to get to know other VAs or possible customers. Some co-working space hosts also offer workshops especially for start-ups.
- Hardware: If you expect to travel often, you might need a laptop. On the other hand, if your services include computing-intensive processes such as image editing or programming, you might need a powerful personal computer including all necessary peripherals.
- Software: As introduced above, software is a critical resource and depends on the service you want to offer. Also, customers may decide about the software to be used.

Since most of the VAs don't offer manufacturing goods, you don't need to invest too much in expensive resources such as production machines or real estate. In many cases, a laptop including peripherals, some basic software and a desk at home is sufficient for the first months. You may invest sooner or later in more hard- and software to provide specific services.

○ Partner network

To establish a good partner network can be very useful. It might help to optimise activities or to get expertise in specific cases. For example, one of your services includes the creation of a screencast. However, you do not want to provide the voice over and can hire another person for this job. Also, other VAs (although probably acknowledged as competitors) may help when you are in vacation or have too many orders in a certain time.

- Which services can be optimised to reduce costs or time by acquiring partners?
- For which services may you need a backup?
- Are there any services you would be excited to offer but you need a partner for parts of it?

In several networking platforms, you may find partners to work with. Also, if you consider working in a shared working space, you can find other people to develop and offer services jointly.

Your finances:

• Which costs will be expected and what are your revenues?

The last part of developing a business model will be about the finances. You already thought about your services and the resources you need to offer these services efficiently. However, there are always costs incurring when running this business. Once you have a clue about the most important costs you can calculate the revenues you aim to make for your services.

o Cost structure

When you think about all resources you need, the maintenance of your customer relationships, and other activities necessary to deliver your services, there will always be costs incurring. It helps a lot to know about the most important costs to be able to minimise them. Therefore, you might think about the following questions:

- What costs will you expect to spend over the course of the first year? You might think about the facilities, hard- and software, rents, salaries, but also taxes or insurances.
- Which costs will remain the same despite the volume of services (fixed costs), which will vary depending on the volume of services (variable costs)?

Based on these calculations you may think more in-depth about your services, what they will cost and how many customers you need in a certain period to cover all

costs (see also next topic 'revenue streams').

The cost structure along with the revenue streams (finance plan) will be the basis for possible negotiations with banks or investors to receive debt capital if needed. To be best prepared, please keep in mind:

- Plan realistically: Don't over- or underestimate the need for capital or the pace your business might grow.
- Be able to prove the calculations: You won't experience bad surprises if you can estimate the costs as exactly as possible. You may conduct a thorough research. This will also lead to easier negotiations with banks.

To be prepared also for the next years, you may continue with the finance plan for the next three years. Consider that your VA business will be more efficient (which might drop the costs) but you will also have more orders (probably with your first staff?). Thus, the cost structure will somehow differ. Therefore, you might develop two or more scenarios and make adaptations on a regular basis.

Also, use the possibility to speak with start-up experts!

o Revenue streams

After calculating all the costs incurring for founding and running a VA business, you may also think about how much revenue you will get for your services. How much time will you be able to spend on working as a VA? Will it be your main job?

- What do other VAs from your country take for similar services?
- How would you assess your expertise and experiences in the field you want to deliver your services?

To plan your revenue streams, you should be as realistic as possible concerning your possible workload and depending on this the number of customers you are able to work with.

Additionally, you should consider all taxes and expenses for insurances (pension, accident, health insurances and others) for your calculations. Also, other costs which

are usually unpaid (e.g., client acquisition, bookkeeping and communication) and even vacation need to be kept in mind.

However, as a VA newcomer, it is difficult to charge as much as a VA with five or ten years of experience in this field.

Further preparations to think about

- ## Courses / Memberships

In contrast to other professions such as lawyer or doctor, no degree is necessary as a precondition to become and work as a VA. It is even possible to work as a VA without any qualifications if you collected proven practical expertise in the field, you can offer your services. However, to prepare your future job as a VA, it is crucial to gain some knowledge about basic general requirements (e.g. (self-) employment regulations, business plan development, marketing). But it is also important to be up to date regarding your field of expertise which you might prove by obtaining related certifications.

- ## Courses about general knowledge on being a VA

Based on web-based research, some MOOC-platforms exist which offer general knowledge courses about establishing a VA service. However, most of them are fee-based (e.g., Udemy, 58 results) and it is not easy to find information about the quality of these courses and the relevance of the material. Courses on individual websites face the same challenge. The quality and relevance are not easy to find out. Additionally, some of them seem free of charge. However, it would be worth it to check if this is not only a free demo version with additional full material to be paid.

- ## Courses to enhance specific expertise

Once you build up your VA business, it will be important to be up to date regarding the services you are offering. Find suitable training possibilities in your specific field. Check if this will be provided online or in person. There must be plenty. It may be

worth it to reserve a certain amount of money only for continuing education in your field of expertise or even beyond to explore other fields you want to work on. You can find suitable training opportunities at adult education providers, higher education institutions or other institutions.

• Legal requirements

There are different possibilities to work as a VA. Either as an employee with an already existing VA service company or you want to run an own VA business. As for the own businesses there are some aspects to consider. However, they differ from country to country and can be shown here only on a general basis. In many countries, you may get help from start-up advisors or from the chamber of commerce. They are often free of charge and very helpful.

- Form of business: Most of the prospective VAs choose the foundation of a sole proprietorship since many of them are working independently. Also, if you want to start your business as a side job besides your main employment, this may be your choice. The effort is low, and depending on your country you don't need any starting capital for the registration. However, it is possible that you are liable with your personal assets.
- Side jobs: You may check your employment contract for clauses that prohibit side jobs in relevant sectors.
- Foundation: You need to officially register your business at a local trade office. For some professions, you may need a business licence as a requirement. After the registration, you can apply for a tax ID at your local tax office.
- Taxes: There are different taxes to pay to the tax office. The amount depends on your country and probably on the amount of your revenues. Maybe you can use (free) consultancy from start-up advisors or the chamber of commerce.
- Social insurances: Have a look if you are compulsorily covered by a social insurance institution when registering your business or if you need to do this for yourself. This depends on your country. Also, the type of insurances (accident, pension, and health insurance) and the amount of contribution are

different from country to country.

Summary (incl. checklist)

To start a career as a VA is possible for everyone, but at the same time it is not easy because it requires a lot of preparation and thoughts to elaborate a basic business model. By this chapter, we aimed to give you a glimpse on different aspects to consider. This may help theoretically, but equally important is to ask professionals in the field of business foundation for feedback on your plans, to network with potential customers and partners. Also, to attend courses on general issues such as business plan development will help you to structure all your thoughts around your ideas.

CHECKLIST

☐ List all your strengths and skills to determine what you would like to provide.

☐ Specify your services as precisely as possible.

☐ Calculate how much these services might cost and research rates of other VAs.

☐ Specify the customers you want to offer these services.

☐ **Decide your contact possibilities and places to offer your services:**
- At which host will you setup your email address?
- Will you have an own website?
- Will you offer your services only on external freelance / VA platforms?
- Do you have social media accounts?
  If you want to use them for your VA business, update them accordingly.

☐ **Establish and strengthen customer relationships:**
- How will you promote the services?
- How will you get in contact with potential customers?
- Which measures need to be taken to strengthen customer's loyalty for securing further purchases?

☐ Calculate the finances (costs and revenues) as precisely as possible for the first year. Try to do it for the following two years too.

☐ **Set up your working environment:**
- Where do you want to work? At home, in a shared office, or other working environments?
- Which hard- and software do you need to effectively deliver your services?

☐ Get feedback from professionals and experts in the field of the services you want to offer and/or business development.

☐ Evaluate your business model on a regular basis.

☐ Network with potential customers and partners (online and if feasible on local/regional events)

☐ Be informed about necessary procedures to establish a business in your country. In which existing institutions you could find support and information?

☑ Keep on learning.

IMAGE 10
Checklist for VA's (Design by Vamooc Team)

CONCLUSION

Reaching the end of this booklet, you should have gotten an idea of the key aspects of the Virtual Assistant's profession. At this point, it should be obvious that working as a Virtual Assistant allows people to set their own rules and be flexible, while making use of their already-existent skills. Furthermore, it is inarguably one of the most inclusive professions, allowing for people of all backgrounds to employ themselves in that field.

Looking back at the contents of the booklet, the following contents were pointed out and concluded:

- A Virtual Assistant offers remote administrative assistance and can be active in a wide variety of industries and businesses. Their services may include basic administrative tasks, data processing, social media management and content creation, web development services, and even generic errands.
- Virtual Assistants can be a valuable asset for a company, offering their expertise, knowledge, and skills, as well as allowing the companies to cut back on costs and workload.
- Working as a Virtual Assistant has many benefits in regards of daily scheduling and working independence, but at the same time, poses challenges when it comes to earning potential, managing oneself, etc.
- To become a Virtual Assistant and to offer some basic services, one does not need any specialized training. It is necessary, though, to have some basic technical and personal skills, as it is a prerequisite to have basic IT knowledge and communication skills. It is also necessary that a few basic steps be taken before stating to work as a Virtual Assistant, in order to ensure a smooth and successful work transition.
- The profession of a Virtual Assistant has great advantage for people with reduced mobility as it involves working from home in its core. Furthermore, the wide variety of industries, which a Virtual Assistant can work for, makes this profession friendly to people with Specific Learning Disorders.
- The profession of Virtual Assistants is a relatively new and emerging market across Europe. The situation differs throughout the European countries, but it

is noticeable that a framework has started shaping in order to accommodate this field of work, as it is gaining more popularity every day.

Considering the recent changes in business conducting across the globe, as well as the new trends of working, it comes as no surprise that the profession of Virtual Assistants is becoming more and more popular among people of all ages and backgrounds. Outsourcing tasks can be a key to the business's future success. On the other hand, working as a remote freelancer Virtual Assistant can lead to great personal work success. To sum up, it is important for both businesses and workers to work smarter, not harder!

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