

**The Small Business Owner's**

# **OUTSOURCING PROFITS**

**by Deanna Maio**



**OUTSOURCE**

# **The Small Business Owner's Outsourcing Profits**

**By:**

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Successful business people outsource. It's as simple as that.

Outsourcing is the single most important component to build into your business right from the planning stage. When you outsource, you hire specialized contractors to perform various tasks within your business, freeing you up to concentrate on your unique money making talents.

Outsourcing increases the value of your business, helps you present a more consistent, professional image and stops you from wasting time on tasks that frustrate, gobble time... and lose you money.

## **What Can Be Outsourced**

There are many tasks and aspects of business management you can outsource to independent, self-employed contractors -- businesses who serve other businesses -- rather than undertaking the expense and responsibility of hiring employees.

When you hire a web designer to code HTML for your sales letters, you're outsourcing. When you commission a new logo from a graphic designer, you're outsourcing. When you pay for that company to secure your WordPress blog, you're outsourcing. When you hire a virtual assistant to provide customer service via your Help Desk, you're outsourcing.

The real secret of outsourcing, however, lies not in simply just doing it, but in having a plan and making good business decisions. This report will show you how.

## Why You Should Outsource

We've already talked about outsourcing as a tactic to help you save time and free you up to concentrate on your true passion and "money-maker" skills. But what does that really mean?

Writing your own eBooks or making your own graphics is like growing your own vegetables. Buying PLR or pre-designed batches of graphics is like shopping at a supermarket. Hiring an outsource contractor to create custom work for you is like hiring a gardener to grow your vegetables for you -- the exact ones you like (perhaps exotic ones you can't find in your local stores).

If you love growing roses but hate growing vegetables, you might want to tend the roses yourself (particularly if they are award-winning roses you breed and show -- ones that make you money when you sell them to nurseries). If you want fresh veggies for your family, however, but don't have the time and energy to plant and care for them, that's where your gardener comes in.

And, obviously, you're not going to hire a Master Gardener at this point -- a gardening assistant would be just fine.

On the other hand, hiring a gardening assistant who specializes in vegetables will virtually guarantee that you get great, home-grown produce as a result.

If you have orders for three hundred of those grafted rose bushes, however, well, that's the time to hire a gardening assistant who specializes in roses. As your

orders multiply and the profits add up, you'll add another assistant... then another... until you have a well-oiled team.

You are now sharing your passion with assistants -- but the roses are going out with your Nursery name and brand, under your supervision.

Make sense?

## Overcoming Your Own Resistance

"I'm not at that stage yet," you might be saying. You may be worried about budget constraints (or even a budget that's simply not there yet).

Nothing is impossible, if you cultivate the habit of a creative mindset. You can *plan* for outsourcing now and you'll find having that concrete goal -- when to outsource, who to hire and what task you want them to take over or boost your business by completing -- helps you focus more clearly on your timeline. You'll get things done and be less inclined to procrastinate, if you have a clear destination to reach by a certain date.

Another common reason people procrastinate when considering outsourcing: The belief that "it's better if I do it myself". Whether that comes from pressure to keep working without interruption or from a need to control every facet of your business, that's a mindset you need to overcome, if you're going to achieve the success you want.

Figure out how you're fooling yourself and where that comes from. If you're a perfectionist, you may need to work on just letting go of some tasks. (Say you're the CEO of a big inner-city hospital: It would be ludicrous for you to refuse to



attend fund-raising meetings with important sponsors because, instead, you think you need to spend the afternoon sweeping and mopping the floors. You'd hire someone to do that, right? Because landing that fund-raising guarantees you'll keep your CEO job.)

One other factor to think about: ***Your business is going to be a success.*** That means eventually you'll find yourself spending more time answering emails than you'd like to spend. And not every single one of them needs to be personally answered by you.

With success comes the occasional "crank" letter and the inevitable complaint. A third party (your VA or Customer Service Representative) can handle these objectively and professionally, without having to show most of them to you.

The down part about receiving negative emails -- especially the unreasonable ones without legitimate complaints: They tend to knock you flat. You need your mood to be positive, and your attention focused on positive action and goals -- not sabotaged by someone who wants to vent at you because they're having a bad day.

Adding the right outsourcing contractor will round out and complete your business, as well as adding leverage your peer competitors may not have.

## **10 Clues You Need to Outsource**

Pay attention to these ten clues: They're a big hint ***you should probably outsource a particular task if...***

1. You constantly procrastinate, every time you have to face it
2. You're about to invest in lengthy courses, to learn how to do it
3. You receive complaints and experience glitches after you've completed it and put it out there
4. You habitually make mistakes in completing this task
5. You find yourself exhausted and knocked flat, after tackling it
6. You find yourself irritable or feeling over-faced, just at the thought of tackling it
7. You answer the question "is this directly making me money?" with a "No"
8. You wish you were doing something -- anything -- else
9. You end up pulling "all nighters" just to get through it
10. It takes you way too long to complete this particular task

## Types of Outsourcing

Before you plan to outsource, it helps to know what's out there; and how it can specifically help you.

We're assuming you're an online entrepreneur, but is your business service-based? Business to business? Or business to end client? Is your business product-oriented? Are you a retailer or a service provider?

Are you a coach? If not, do you plan to become one? Run a membership site? Moderate a forum?

Take a moment to jot down your business goals, as well as any future plans for service additions such as becoming a coach.

Then look over the following list and select any outsourcing contractor types you think you might need -- even if you're not planning to hire them yet. Go over them again, this time numbering them in the order you'd like to add them to your services.

We'll have a worksheet, further on, for you to fill out when you're beginning to seriously plan; but for now, it helps to start getting a general idea of your needs -- as well as who is available to fulfill them.

Here's a rough idea of the type of outsourcing contractor valuable to online entrepreneurs. (And remember that each type may specialize in different facets of their general area of expertise!)

**Virtual Assistant** -- Handles tasks associated with day-to-day business operations. These can include any one (or more) of:

- Autoresponder management
- Email management and/or customer service (questions and queries, complaints, refunds, tech problems)
- Content formatting (putting into HTML, .PDF; cleaning up MS Word files first; adding graphics and eCovers, etc.)
- Metrics management (gathering and assessing stats, handling A/B testing, tabulating data into spreadsheets, etc.)
- Social media management



- Podcasting or radio handling
- Webinar coordination and implementation; "behind the scenes" running while you host
- Article marketing and submission
- Writing content
- Proofing or copy-editing content
- General office duties
- General office management (supervising and coordinating other outsource contractors; making sure tasks are completed on time; managing your schedule, etc.)

**Designer** -- Like virtual assistants, designer come in all shapes and sizes, and there can be much crossover. For example, someone calling themselves a web designer may design custom WordPress blog themes... and so might someone calling themselves a graphic designer or blog specialist. (The key is to check out their services -- and *ask!*)

You can hire web designers, graphic designers, application designers/coders or blog designers.

Designers can help by performing the following tasks for you (most often on an occasional basis; occasionally as a one-off; and very rarely -- unless your business directly involves designer products -- as an ongoing, monthly contractor)...

- Logos
- Headers

- Blog themes
- Facebook Pages
- Web page graphics
- Ebook graphics or photos
- Forms, charts, presentations
- HTML, software and/or applications

**Social Media Manager** -- Although it's generally recommended you keep a personal foot in the water, when contacting your list or niche via social media, there are tasks that a social media manager easily can do for you. For example:

- Determine which social platform best suits your business
- Upload pre-written posts to multiple platforms via apps such as HootSuite, Flock and TweetDeck
- Help you determine the type of material to share
- Handle your Facebook Page
- Help you stay on track with the image you want to present

Often, a social media manager is just another name for a VA who likes to specialize in social networking.

**Marketing Consultant** -- a marketing consultant will work with an overview of your business goals, creating a blanket strategy encompassing many areas of marketing. It's her job to publicize and promote your business via:

- Press release creation and distributions

- Securing guest interviews (both on and offline)
- Handling your social media campaigns
- Handling your advertising campaigns
- Dealing with the media
- Advising you on strategy
- Keeping a pulse on market trends and changes
- Measuring campaign results

**Project Manager** -- This is often a senior Virtual Assistant with a solid array of experience under her belt. A good project manager will not only coordinate all aspects of successful project completion, she will often also help you brainstorm and bring fresh, creative insights into your campaigns, products and projects -- pointing out flaws or opportunities you might not see yourself.

In fact, plan for one, down the road, when you'll likely have built up a team of outsource contractors -- managing people should be one of her skills too.

Project management includes some or all of the following duties:

- Coordinate all contractors working on your multiple projects of multiple business facets
- See that timelines are followed and tasks completed by deadline
- Anticipate or solve glitches, pointing you to the best solutions (often in advance of the problem)

- Relieve you of energy-draining, non-direct-money-making tasks such as autoresponder management, tracking
- Ensure your campaigns stay on budget
- Assist with planning and strategizing
- Evaluate campaign results

**Affiliate Manager** -- The term "affiliate manager" typically refers to either a program or a person. For our purposes, we're looking at the latter.

An affiliate manager answers "how to" and tech questions; ensures resources are in place (often creating them herself); points affiliates towards resources and solutions; and makes sure all affiliates are paid on time.

**SEO Specialist** -- A traffic manager or SEO specialist takes care of optimization. She helps you build your list by optimizing websites, blogs, articles, etc., for the search engines and social search.

She may also handle your Facebook page, ad campaigns and actively seek out strong backlinks and crosslinks.

**Bookkeeper** -- If finances aren't your thing, do yourself a huge favor and hire a bookkeeper! Throw all your receipts into a big monthly envelope and print out your online monthly stats (PayPal, your shopping cart, etc.) then let her do the rest.

**Customer Service Representative** -- This is most often a virtual assistant who enjoys specializing in customer interaction. She will:

- Take care of customer correspondence in a timely manner
- Answer questions
- Solve tech or "how to use" problems
- Handle refunds

But her most important role will be to act as a trusted substitute for you. Clients and customers should regard talking to her as if they were personally talking to you.

**Research Assistant** -- Again, this may be a virtual assistant who performs other specialty tasks for you... or you may hire someone who solely specializes in research.

All the time you are engaged in research, you are not directly making money. A research assistant saves a lot of time by doing the "donkey work" for you -- digging up experts to consult, authority links to explore, facts you need for your articles or eBooks, etc.

**Ghostwriter** -- If writing content (articles, blog posts, website copy, sales letters, eBooks, etc.) is your personal idea of Hell, finding and retaining a competent ghostwriter should be pretty much at the top of your outsourcing list!

Even if you do enjoy writing your own copy -- in fact, you're actually a copywriter yourself -- you may need a ghostwriter to help you expand your services, allowing you to take on new clients.

A ghostwriter or copywriter can provide you with custom content, all speaking with your "voice", including writing:

- EBooks and reports
- Articles and blog posts
- Sales copy
- Direct response advertisements
- Website copy

Not all ghostwriters or copywriters offer all of these services -- so make sure you hire one who specializes in the task(s) you need her for.

**App Creator** -- This is not the type of outsourcing contractor you're likely to need on an ongoing basis -- but don't discount the power of offering a custom app to your subscribers and fans.

Usually, one hires an application creator for a "one off" project. The sort of apps you could offer your customers include:

- "Building" apps (sales page creation software, headline customizing software, etc.)
- Custom widgets
- Task-performing apps (calculators of all sorts e.g. metric to imperial, paint coverage, etc.)
- Branded apps (RSS readers, skins, etc.)
- Games



- Puzzles
- Quizzes
- Polls

There are more types of outsourcing contractors out there, but here, we've focused on the most common types.

Again, there can be much crossover among outsource contractors and the tasks they offer to do for you, so it's a good idea to look at the tasks you need performed first -- then find the right contractor.

For example, you need someone to help you research content, optimize and upload articles and posts to your blogs and niche directories, as well as pretty up your eBooks by adding graphics and covers, you may not necessarily need to hire a research assistant, SEO specialist and graphic designer: You may find a virtual assistant who specializes in or offers all three services.

Remember that you are not making a life-changing commitment, when you hire outsourcing contractors -- you may only need a "one off" task performed; or a minimal number of hours invested in minor tasks monthly -- but by adding outsourcing to your business, you may achieve positive, life-changing results.

Remember the phrase about not being able to see "the forest for the trees"? Outsourcing contractors bring an impartial, outside objectivity to your business, often seeing potential problems or brilliant opportunities you might completely miss on your own. They are experts who add new layers credibility and authority to your business, helping you achieve measurable goals with maximum professionalism.

## Finding the Right Fit

Now here comes the most important part -- finding the right contractor at the right level for your business. The best way to find a good contractor: Word of mouth recommendations.

You've likely seen contractors in your forums, mastermind groups and Facebook posts. Visit their Facebook pages, LinkedIn profiles and websites, to see:

- Which services she offers
- What she specializes in
- What her rates are (many will only offer custom quotes on your specific projects)
- If she offers any package deals
- If she is currently offering any specials
- How focused and professional her website looks

Visit contractors' websites and forums you know they frequent, to see what sort of feedback or client comments they are getting.

Check contractors out with the Better Business Bureau, and look for feedback and ratings on "hiring fair" sites such as Elance.

While it always pays to hire the best, don't be afraid to hire a contractor whose skill level is closer to your own: If she's a good fit, you will grow together and build a great, mutually beneficial working relationship.

Before you hire a contractor, it helps to know:

### 1. What they'll need to know from you

## 2. What to expect from your contractor

Also consider outsourcing companies, rather than individuals -- this takes the "risk" factor out of dealing with single individuals, since companies specializing in outsourcing don't usually survive (let alone operate with a fleet of staff) unless they are competent and professional at what they do.

### **What Your Outsource Contractor Will Need to Know from You**

There is lots of advice floating around on the net about choosing a good outsourcing contractor, but one important factor in the equation is often overlooked. Namely: Your own level of expertise.

If you are relatively new to your business or niche, you will need a different type of contractor than if you're already an established expert -- both contractors may be virtual assistants specializing in content management, but a new business owner will need and expect different levels and facets of service than a seasoned veteran.

And you may be an expert in your niche, much respected, with a strong following... but if you're not an expert *in the particular task you're outsourcing*, consider yourself a "newbie" in your contractor's specialty field and approach her from that standpoint.

When approaching an expert contractor, always look for ways to position yourself well. If you can identify any benefits your business would bring to her business, let her know about them up front.

If a contractor turns you down (which happens, especially with those specializing in uncommon areas), **ask for recommendations to other experts** in her field.

**Spend time determining the right questions to ask** before you ever contact your potential contractors -- don't waste their time, and never be vague.

Even if you're a consummate expert in all areas of your business, however, there are two strong reasons why you should consider outsourcing administrative tasks or part of your production output:

1. An objective outsider can generate fresh insights and ideas. She may be able to identify gaps that you've overlooked (we tend to make assumptions, when left to our own devices). She will provide a good sounding-board for your strategies and procedures in those areas you've decided she'll share
2. An extra pair of "hands" allows you to expand the reach of your services and/or frees you up to -- you guessed it -- focus on your best money-making skills


## **Where to Find the Person you Need**

Supposing word-of-mouth fails, and the contractors you already know through forums or social networks are all too busy? Where do you go, if you need to start from scratch?


[oDesk](#) is the marketplace of choice for seasoned online entrepreneurs: It's a reliable place to find almost any type of contractor (and you can search by category).

## Remote staffing for long-term work


Hire, manage, and pay a distributed team as if everyone were in your office. Hours paid are hours worked - **guaranteed**



**1** Hire one or more contractors



**2** Verify time worked with visual time sheets




**3** No payroll hassles

[Search Contractors](#) or [Post a Job](#)

[Looking for work?](#)

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**Why Online Workteams?**

**Flexibility**  
Ramp up and down, from short-term engagements to full-time teams.

**Cost Savings**  
Pay only for hours worked. Hourly rates fit any budget.

**Access to Talent**  
Hire the best from around the world.

## #1 Mistake You Can Make with an Outsource Contractor

(Well, apart from Not Paying, that is...)

One of the most common and irritating mistakes people new to outsourcing make is **expecting their outsource contractor to run their business for them.**

If that statement confuses you, note that what this means is not the same as knowing **specifically what task you need them to perform** and **giving them free rein to perform it:** By "expecting their outsource contractor to run their business for them", we're talking about people who hire a VA without having any specific clue what they want the VA to do.

They're just hazily and vaguely hoping the VA will automatically mind-read and take care of all the things the client hasn't bothered to educate herself about or prepare for.

Time for one of our real-world examples: Say you want to sell apples from your orchard and make a fortune. You put out an ad: "Staff wanted for Apple Orchard" and begin interviewing local applicants. If you don't know precisely what you need

them to do -- what's involved in getting your apples from the tree to your end destination (and where that is), your interviews are likely to go like this:

YOU: "I've had a look at your qualifications and I think we could use you."  
APPLICANT: "To clarify, since your ad only said "staff needed": You want me to pick the apples?"  
YOU: "Umm... maybe... yes... no... I don't know. Do they need picking?"  
APPLICANT: "Well, yes they do if you want to sell them at local markets."  
YOU: "Markets? Hmm... I hadn't thought about that. Uh... Yeah. Go ahead and pick them."  
APPLICANT: "Do you want them in bushel baskets?"  
YOU: "Uh... baskets? I suppose."  
APPLICANT: "Do you have baskets available? Or do you use crates or boxes?"  
YOU: "Umm... not yet. What?"  
APPLICANT: "Have you ordered any containers at all?"  
YOU: "Erm... I have to *order* them?"

Okay, so that was a highly proactive applicant (a tad frustrated, by the sound of it -- but no wonder) and a very silly example... but it does demonstrate the importance of **clarifying your goals first** and **identifying specific areas you want your contractor to tackle**... while making sure she has all the necessary tools in place at your end to do so.

For example, if you want her to work on building your mailing list and driving subscribers to it, you need to first decide on an autoresponder. And you need to decide whether you want your new VA to set it up from scratch, or whether you can set it up yourself and leave her to just manage your lists and populate them with content.

Once you've thought about that, if you *can* set it up yourself, you then need to decide whether setting it up yourself is **the best use of your money-making**



**time**... or if your VA would actually be saving you money by handling that task for you.

Make sure your contractor feels like a good fit personally, too. Is she easy to talk to? Does her preferred method of communication jive with yours? Do you feel comfortable with her... or do you feel like you're bothering her, whenever you ask a question?

But don't make the mistake of getting someone exactly like you -- find someone who complements you: Someone who is strong in areas you're weakest in, or who brings balance to your business. For example, if you were a highly creative artist who finds it hard to be structured, your best bet would be to hire an outsource contractor who is flexible enough to appreciate your style but more structured than you are.

To put it even more simply: If you wanted a bookkeeper, you wouldn't hire another artist, right?

Finally, look for a contractor who states they'll send you a questionnaire: These often contain questions that circumvent the sort of waffling and mind-reading in our example above. Questionnaires are helpful to both of you.

## **What to Expect from your Contractor**

A good contractor will most likely have a client questionnaire ready for you to fill out, to help you clarify your needs and goals (particularly if her target market is newer marketers).

And just as clients don't stay forever, neither will outsource contractors... so it's a good idea to make up a standard operating procedures manual, duty outlines or some type of spec sheets for each area you outsource.

If you don't have the skill in that area to make them up yourself ask during the hiring process if she would be willing to do this. Ask during the interview process, not as an afterthought!

For example, if the VA handles your temperamental Help Desk ticket system, about whose mechanics you know absolutely nothing, ask her to create tip sheets or mini-manuals, in case she is ever ill or on vacation; or something has to be done in a hurry while she's unavailable.

One of the biggest keys to successfully using outsource contractors is to make sure you are ***as specific as possible***, when assigning tasks and responsibilities.

Set up a system of checking in and checking to see tasks are complete. It doesn't matter whether you decide checking is your responsibility or your new contractor - - just make sure you are both clear about who does what -- and when.

## **Pitfalls and How to Avoid Them**

We've already discussed the importance of being specific, and communicating your specific goals and expectations. Some other potential pitfalls you can easily avoid:

- If your business is ground-breaking, or your new outsourcing contractor is helping you develop new products or material, you may wish them to sign a ***confidentiality agreement*** guaranteeing they will not discuss your work with anyone else or adapt it for their own use.

- **Always** check references. Telephone or email people whose names are given.
- Make sure your new contractor **specializes** in the areas you wish her to cover
- Make sure you **pre-plan**, so you get the most out of your outsourcing dollars. Don't be reactive, calling in contractors only when you're in a jam: Schedule them ahead of time. In fact, try to make things like VA services **a regular part of your schedule** (even if you can only afford two hours per week). Among other benefits, this will give you leverage to call on them for extra help when you have an actual emergency.

Remember, the more in demand your contractor seems to be, the more you need to make it easier for you to be her ideal client.

**Outsourcing Strategies** -- How to make outsourcing work for your budget and unique business needs.

Below are several good habits you should get into, if you're planning to make outsourcing part of your business strategy.

- 1. Keep a detailed "To Do" list** -- Get into the habit of jotting tasks down as they occur to you & you'll always have tasks you can quickly assign.
- 2. Outsource day-to-day administrative tasks first** -- These are typically the tasks that eat up most of your time but must be completed such as record-keeping, email & customer support management, research, bookkeeping, updating, autoresponder management, etc.

3. **Try before you buy** -- Take advantage of a one-time "package" deal showcasing your potential contractor's services, or commission a small project, to ensure that projects are completed on time and that you can both work well together.
  
4. **Budget and plan for *regular, ongoing* outsourcing** -- even if only for two or three hours per week. Plan for this especially in the areas of administrative assistance and content creation or management. Remember, doing these tasks are required but do not have to be done by you.

Making it a regular part of your business lifestyle is imperative, if you want to really benefit from outsourcing!

You've got a good feel now for what an outsource contractor can do for you. Now let's get your ideas ready to put straight into action.

Remember to start by determining which specific tasks:

- Don't directly make you money
- Drain your energy and distract you the most
- Are repetitive and ongoing

## Section II: Getting Started

Print out and use the following worksheet to help plan your outsourcing strategy...

<p>Tasks I directly make money at, when I'm engaged in them, include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. _____</li> <li>2. _____</li> <li>3. _____</li> <li>4. _____</li> <li>5. _____</li> </ol>	<p>Tasks I perform that waste my valuable time include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. _____</li> <li>2. _____</li> <li>3. _____</li> <li>4. _____</li> <li>5. _____</li> </ol>
<p>Six months from now, I want to be making \$_____ per month.</p> <p>One year from now, I want to be making \$_____ per month.</p>	<p>My monthly income currently averages: \$_____</p> <p>My monthly profits (after expenses) currently average \$_____</p>
<p>One-time &amp; occasional tasks to outsource include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. _____</li> <li>2. _____</li> <li>3. _____</li> <li>4. _____</li> <li>5. _____</li> </ol>	<p>Regular, ongoing tasks to outsource (in order of priority) include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. _____</li> <li>2. _____</li> <li>3. _____</li> <li>4. _____</li> <li>5. _____</li> </ol>
<p>Right now, my maximum budget for outsourcing is \$_____ week without going into debt.</p> <p>Six months from now, I'd like to be able to budget \$_____ for outsourcing without</p>	<p>Outsourcing right now will save me _____ hours &amp; \$_____ per week</p> <p>Six months from now, I'd like outsourcing to save me _____ hours &amp; \$_____ per week</p>

going into debt.	
<p>I need:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>🍏 A virtual assistant</li> <li>🍏 Content creators</li> <li>🍏 An affiliate manager</li> <li>🍏 SEO traffic manager</li> <li>🍏 Social media manager</li> <li>🍏 Marketing/PR consultant</li> <li>🍏 Graphic designer</li> <li>🍏 Other _____</li> </ul>	<p>Contractor:</p> <p>One-Time Task or Ongoing? _____</p> <p>How many hours per week? _____</p> <p>Rate to pay? _____</p> <p>Amount budgeted: \$_____ per wk/mth</p> <p>___ I have weighed <b><i>the cost of using this contractor</i></b> against <b><i>the profit I can make as a result of using their services.</i></b></p>
<p>HIRED:</p> <p>Name: _____</p> <p>Email: _____</p> <p>Phone: _____</p> <p>Date hired: _____</p> <p>Rate: _____</p> <p>Payment method? (PayPal, check, invoice, etc.)</p> <p>_____</p> <p>Payment date(s) per week/month/project:</p> <p>_____</p>	<p>Notes:</p>

Fill out this worksheet ***before*** contacting outsourcing contractors. It will help you be clear and definite about how they can best help you.



## Budget-Conscious Outsourcing Strategies

You should never go into debt over outsourcing -- and you should make the most out of every outsourcing dollar. Having a plan is crucial to the latter.

Just remember that plans can be revised at any step of your journey, as new information and opportunities come in.

- 1. Make up a "job spec" sheet for your potential outsourcing contractor.** (You can return it to her, along with the questionnaire she requests you fill out.) The more specific you can be now, the more money you'll save on her services.
- 2. Make sure the person you hire is a good fit for your own level of business.** Check all references and, even if you've got the budget for a top-level contractor, consider whether or not a more expensive (i.e. skilled) contractor is going to expect a higher level of engagement and pace. Get one that fits where you are now but who seems like they can ride along and grow with you
- 3. Some outsource contractors will also barter services,** so that's an option you might want to look into, if your budget is tight. For example, say you are a blog theme designer: A copywriter might agree to write you a sales letter if you design a custom web theme for her, in exchange.
- 4. You can also start by getting into the habit of "thinking outsourcing" in smaller ways:** For example, instead of hiring a copywriter you can't yet afford to write you that eBook, buy a batch of ten PLR (private label rights) articles on your niche topic, and combine those pre-written articles into your

eBook, tweaking, re-arranging and rewriting a little to give it your unique "voice".

Using PLR is a lot faster than writing from scratch: For one thing, it virtually eliminates the research step. It's not true outsourcing -- but it does get you out of the "I must do it myself" perfectionist mindset

**5. Regularly re-evaluate how much money you are paying your contractor monthly against the increase in your income and/or profits.** Ideally, you should see the income/growth figure increase more and more. At the very least, your contractor should not lose you money (i.e. your income/profits should not decrease monthly. The idea is, this saves you time -- time better spent on your income-driving talents.)

Adjust your plan to compensate (e.g. add or subtract an extra couple of hours per month as needed; try a different contractor, if you suspect the problem is at her end).

Even if your VA or content creator aren't making you oodles of money initially, you should see a noticeable increase in how smoothly your business runs -- and before too long, in rising income/profits.

## How to Pay your Contractor

This is a question people new to outsourcing often feel a little uncomfortable about, but the general rule of thumb is:

1. Check your potential contractor's website to see if payment preferences are stated up front.

2. For "one off" jobs or projects, if paid per project -- expect to pay 30-50% in advance: The remainder on completion and delivery
3. Try to avoid paying for the full project up front.

Sometimes, if you're dealing with a contractor who is much in demand, this is not a negotiable issue so you'll need to weigh up how much you want to work with that contractor plus her golden reputation against the "risk" you feel you're taking by paying up front. (If she's that good, it isn't a risk at all.)

Use your common sense here -- if a job is really small (under \$100) payment up front is not unreasonable. If you're dealing with a large contract, however, a partial retainer is more usual.

4. If you are hiring a contractor on a regular basis, suggest switching to regular invoicing (weekly, bi-weekly or monthly, depending on output and work bulk). Be aware, however, that larger outsourcing companies are more likely to do this. Independent single contractors often can't take the risk of having your account unpaid at the end of thirty days.
5. Be sure to check in advance how your contractor would like to be paid. By cheque? By PayPal?

On the next page, you'll **find a list of questions** to ask your new Virtual Assistant. Send it to her, or ask these questions as part of a telephone interview.

Following it, you'll find a similar questionnaire for a content creator (copywriter, ghostwriter, VA specializing in copywriting).

Your potential, new VA or copywriter will thank you for asking these specific questions: Doing so will help you identify any potential conflicts or problems, and ensure you don't get any disappointing surprises.

## VA Questionnaire

1. How much experience do you have in the specific services you offer? Are you comfortable with these tasks? Would you rate yourself as:
  - highly skilled/expert
  - proficient
  - fairly new to it
2. What software do you have / work with? \_\_\_\_\_
3. What equipment do you have?
  - Fax
  - Mobile phone
  - Other
4. Do you prefer to talk via email? \_\_\_\_\_ Phone? \_\_\_\_\_ Text messaging? \_\_\_\_\_
5. Do you have Skype or another online calling method?
6. How do you prefer to be paid? PayPal? Check? Other?
7. How often do you want to be paid? Weekly? Monthly? Per project?
8. Will you include a breakdown per task on your invoice?
9. Do you live in my State/Province?<sup>1</sup>
10. Will you personally be handling my business or do you outsource?
11. How do you track your hours & will you be submitting a time sheet?
12. Do you use cloud-type, online storage?

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<sup>1</sup> You may need to add tax on each invoice, if you both reside in the same State/Province, depending on that area's laws and your tax classification

**13.** Which project management systems are you familiar with?

## Copywriter Questionnaire

1. What writing experience do you have[eBooks, sales letters, articles, direct response ads, etc.]?
2. What software do you work with? \_\_\_\_\_
3. Do you have a .PDF creator? A screen capture program such as Snagit?
4. Do you include screenshots or graphics? If so, who will own the rights?
5. What system do you have for proofing?
6. Can you optimize for SEO?
7. Do you include transposition into HTML for your sales letters or squeeze pages?
8. Do you have Skype or another online calling method?
9. How do you prefer to be paid? PayPal? Check? Other?
10. How often do you want to be paid? Weekly? Monthly? Per project?
11. Will you include a breakdown per project on your invoice?
12. Do you live in my State/Province?<sup>2</sup>
13. Will you personally be writing my content or do you outsource?
14. Do you use cloud-type, online storage?
15. Which project management systems are you familiar with?

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<sup>2</sup> You may need to add tax on each invoice, if you both reside in the same State/Province, depending on that area's laws and your tax classification

## Section III: Advanced Strategies

No matter how fantastic your contractor is, the real secret in outsourcing is **how well you use it**. Here's how to make sure you outsource like a pro...

### Use a Project Management System

One way to increase efficiency and productivity, when working with outsource contractors is to utilize some sort of **project management system** that you can both access instantly, to check the status of tasks.

If you already subscribe to multi-tasking project management systems such as [TeamWorkPM](#), simply add your new contractor as a user. If you don't yet have a project management system, try out one of the simpler systems, like [TeamworkPM](#). Start out with their free account to make sure you're comfortable with the interface. If you like it you can upgrade at any time if you need to.

### Communication and Feedback

One other crucial part of successfully managing your outsourcing business so that you get the most for your investment: Clear communication.

It's your responsibility to ensure that neither you nor your contractor is operating with foggy or partial information, or running along on expectations that are unverified and based on loose assumptions. Clear communication is essential for avoiding these two common pitfalls.



A system is the best way to avoid communication glitches: Having set procedures for every step of the process:

- Assigning work
- Confirming and clarifying the assignment is understood clearly
- Delivery

Yes, you can communicate via email -- but emails have a habit of going astray; either ending up in spam filters or not being delivered at all. A project management system such as TeamWorkPM cuts down on communication glitches and allows you to create an effective system both you and your outsource contractors can follow.

Take the time to create those instruction sheets and train your contractors to follow your system. If you're using copywriters or ghostwriters to write your content, send them a style sheet with your formatting preferences on. If you're relying on a VA to format your content, make sure she has that style sheet too.

Post standard documents in an area of your project management system where everyone on your team can access them.

## **Adding More Team Members**

When the time comes to add more team members, don't automatically start scanning the forums and social networks, or rush back to oDesk or Freelancer.com -- simply ask your current team members! These are the people who are most likely to know who is currently active in their field -- and you can be sure they'll point you to someone who they feel is a good fit.

After all, they aren't going to want someone messing up projects they're personally involved in!

## **The Do-It-Yourself Syndrome**

One common fear for new business owners lies in letting go of the reins -- that is, passing off part of their business to someone else. When considering outsourcing, if you think "I can do a better job myself," then you may have this fear.

In truth, giving up control in non-essential (i.e. non money-making) areas allows you greater freedom to analyze, build and shape your business -- and to focus on those areas that really do bring in the big bucks.

There's another part to this "do-it-yourself" mentality that can hinder things even after you've taken the plunge; and that is micro-managing.

You must resist the urge to look over your new contractor's shoulder. Don't hound her for progress reports until the due date is close. This will just interrupt a contractor who may be working away on your project, totally in her zone. Constant interruption can cause nervousness which may result in lower quality work. In addition, it won't make a poor contractor any better!

Another little-understood truth to getting the best out of people: Don't confuse providing clear, concrete job specs with how to do the job. The more precisely you insist a contractor follow your own preferred method of working, the more you'll interfere with her natural excellence. Provide her with a style sheet or clear overview and delivery date, and leave her to it. As long the project is accurately finished, it really doesn't matter how it was done. Trust your contractor to do her job professionally and well, and don't hinder her by micromanaging.

Finally, when it comes to micro-managing, continually sending suggestions & afterthoughts while she's working on your project will add extra stress to her and cost you more due to having to continually make changes. Instead, plan properly in advance. Make a plan, think about it for a few days to ensure you haven't forgotten anything, and then assign the task.

## The Importance of Trust in an Outsourcing Relationship

Trust really is the key, when working with people on joint projects. If you have issues trusting someone else with passwords, delivery dates and deadlines, or simply worrying that they'll do a good job, realize that is your failing -- not your contractor's.

So how do you make sure your trust is not misplaced?

- 1. Do your homework.** Check out references. Visit contractors' websites. Talk to people.
- 2. Start out with a small, non-essential project, as a "test" run.** If your contractor passes this with flying colors, give her more responsibility, a step at a time
- 3. Realize that your contractor has to trust you too.** She may be self-employed and independent -- but that's all the more reason to make her feel like a vital, valued member of your team. And you won't do this if you micro-manage!

It's not the end of the world if someone knows a password. If she turns out to talk a good game but not deliver, or to be a poor fit -- and this will happen

occasionally -- it's easy enough to change a password or delete a user from a database.

## Have a Back Up System!

This is especially important if you are using an online project management system. Make sure you and your VA are *both* keeping backups. Hard drives and motherboards die now and again. Files get lost or sent to spam folders (another reason not to rely on email). Clients lose material you send; and inundate you with urgent requests for another copy.

Have backup contractors lined up too -- in case your main one comes down with flu or has a family emergency.

## Be Cost-Effective -- Right from the Start

One other often-overlooked area you'll have to take care of, if you want to get maximum value for your outsourcing dollar -- ***making sure you price your jobs effectively***, if your business is service-based. There's no use hiring that super-VA at \$50 an hour, if you're going to use her to write articles that bring in \$10. Even assuming she could write two in an hour (and that sort of turnover can mean a real "hack" job, with minimal research) you'd be making \$20 to pay out \$50 -- a loss of \$30 an hour!

So when you're hiring, don't just look at what you can afford strictly from your monthly operating budget or focus on the skills the contractor possesses. Ask yourself: "How much money will she bring me in per hour or per project... versus what I'll pay out for her services?"

The good news is -- as any successful online entrepreneur will readily tell you -- adding outsourcing to your mix almost automatically builds in price increases. The value and range of your service ability increases, and you're able to take on more clients or attract higher-paying clients.

Besides, if you're paying top dollar (or any sort of extra dollars at all) you'll want to make sure you're getting good value on it yourself. This can unexpectedly be a great motivator for re-evaluating and streamlining one's business practices and procedures. And your new outsource contractor can often contribute great ideas and strategies to help this process along.

Ask any top online marketer when things changed for them, and they'll often tell you: "When I began to outsource and build up a quality team."

Outsourcing allows you to add top skill sets and incredible added value to your business without all the hassle and expense of being a regular employer.

So instead of buying eBook after eBook and course after course, plan for and invest in outsourcing instead. Get yourself out of the "little guy" mentality and make the most of this wonderful, valuable resource.

Good luck with your outsourcing!



*Deanna*