



The Virtual Administrator - Technology Helps Small Businesses Outsource Tasks

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special report: technology

By Katie Boyle, of SBT

Administrative functions are vital for any small business. However, modern technology, including the Internet and e-mail, may drastically change office landscapes, because administrative work can be done from outside a company's own office. Yvonne McCoy, the owner and only employee for Eagle-based Swift Office Services LLC, believes a "virtual assistant" is the most cost-effective solution for small-business owners.

"There are lots of advantages for a small-business owner," she said. "One of the biggest ones, I think, is that they have access to high-quality business support on an as-needed basis. They only pay for time on task, and they don't need to provide any office equipment or office space, because a virtual assistant works from her own office."

Additionally, when employers use a virtual assistant, they are not required to pay Social Security, benefits or vacation time for administrative staff, McCoy said. "And virtual assistants are usually very highly skilled," McCoy said. "They all come with years of experience in the corporate world, and, added to that, they're business owners themselves, so they're aware of all the issues that concern a small-business owner." McCoy has worked with Realtors, marketing consultants, business coaches, a human resources consulting firm, an image consultant and a pharmaceutical consultant. Her fees vary, depending on the type of work she is asked to do.

Although Swift Office Services is based out of Eagle, McCoy's clients are located all across the country. "Only two of (the clients) are in Wisconsin," she said. "They're all over the U.S. That's the beauty of working virtually with people. You don't really need to be in the same location as them. You can still do work for them by using the Internet and e-mail." McCoy started Swift Office Services in October 2004 after noticing her brother's struggles with his own business. "I've seen him constantly try to balance his administrative needs," she said. "He doesn't need someone all the time, so he was hiring people, and they had nothing to do in slack times, but he was still paying them. So, I thought about doing office support on an as-needed basis from my own home."

The timing couldn't have been better. McCoy was commuting three hours to Glendale and back each day and had just given birth to twin girls. "The three-hour commute plus paying for somebody to look after the girls - it seemed to me that it wasn't a viable proposition," McCoy said.

McCoy had been working various administrative positions for the last 20 years and felt she was well prepared to take on tasks for a variety of companies. "I've worked in manufacturing, HR, travel, real estate and IT," she said. "I've seen office technology move from electric typewriters to DOF-based operating systems to Advanced Windows based, all encompassing Microsoft products."

The jobs McCoy has undertaken are as varied as her experience. "I don't think I've done the same thing for any two clients," she said. "I've done listing presentations for Realtors; I've done a postcard mailing campaign. I've produced electronic newsletters. I've done some editing and proofreading. I've used Excel to produce a trend analysis showing why people were leaving for an HR consultant. I've done recording of expenses for business owners. I've done Internet research and, of course, word processing, and I've done some Web site maintenance too."

McCoy believes virtual assistance is not only a winning solution for small business owners, but for herself as well. "I work out of my own office, there's no commute time and I set my hours to work around my family," she said. "I'm a much happier, more productive and well-rounded person."

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