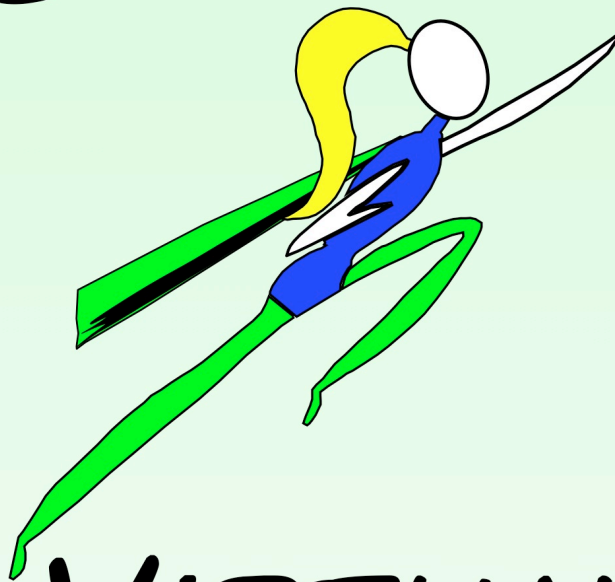# Become a Super Virtual Assistant!

A Guide and Resource Companion for the Aspiring VA

By Sarah MacGregor

BECOME A SUPER VIRTUAL ASSISTANT

A guide and resource companion for the aspiring VA

About the Author

I officially started out as a Virtual Assistant in 2007. After careful planning I started my business off with a bang and it just keeps growing, having now evolved into a Multi-VA practice.

I first decided to create my own company when I moved with my partner to a northern town in order for him to find more business. This was not our first move and I was tired of looking for jobs every time we went somewhere new, so I decided to create my own business that would follow me wherever I went. Voila - SMac To The Rescue!

For me, my business means freedom - freedom to make my own schedule; freedom to choose who I will work with; freedom to make my own decisions. I had never imaged myself as a self-employed business woman, but now that's exactly what I am! Proud of it and couldn't imagine ever going back.

The clients that I work with are often interesting characters, and I wouldn't have it any other way! I'm still convinced that it's my unique website theme that has attracted them to me, and it has proven to be the perfect litmus test. None of my clients are in the same types of business and I like the variety that this gives me, as well as the insights into different businesses and philosophies that I gain from each.

On a more personal level I admit that I am also an interesting character. I have a variety of secret identities and I firmly believe that we can have fun AND work professionally at the same time. I have been a teacher/trainer in many different capacities over the years and I've been told I'm a great project manager. I'm a former software developer so you can be assured that I am truly a techno-geek, and I once spent a year organizing communications for a summer folk festival so you know that I am an organizational extraordinaire!

I really enjoy sharing my skills and I am excited to help you begin your journey of becoming a Virtual Assistant.

SMac

Sarah MacGregor a.k.a. "SMac"
CEO, SMac To The Rescue!

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Introduction

Want to become a "Super" Virtual Assistant like me?
Got the smarts but don't know where to begin?

Never fear! SMac To The Rescue is here!

Gosh, I just love saying that - I feel like I can tackle anything when I use my Superhero voice!

I first want to say Congratulations on being brave enough to take this first step towards your goal of becoming a Virtual Assistant. You can do it! And it's not as complicated to get started as you think.

In this e-book you'll find some excellent resources to help you begin your journey towards becoming a Virtual Assistant and Solopreneur, as well as valuable advice and recommendations from an experienced and successful VA who has been there.

Enjoy!

Training - Which programs are Superhero caliber?

Usually one of the first things I get asked is whether I know of a good training program for aspiring Virtual Assistants. Of course there is a lot of different training out there, but here are a list of my favourites and why (click on the links to go to the websites for more in-depth info):

Virtual Business Startup System
This is the one that I used myself when I was first starting out, hence being at the top of my list. The VBSS is a treasure trove of information and exercises to get you rolling, and it throws in a bunch of bonus books and coupons as well. And, you get to work at your own pace. For some folks (like me) that's usually how I like to work - by myself and at my own high speed!

VA Training Academy
There are a variety of training programs offered here so it is an excellent resource for both starting out *and* continuing your education. This academy was created by Pam Ivey, an expert VA who has contributed loads to the entire VA industry. The "VA Success Blueprint" course can be started anytime.

Online Virtual Assistant Certificate from Red Deer College
I have not actually taken this course, but a couple of gals on my team have and they loved it. I had the pleasure of interviewing a few others at one point, and I even had an intern from this program working with me for a couple of months, and I'm impressed with the new VA's emerging from this program.

VA Classroom
This one has some excellent training for very specific skills - including a startup system - and once you're on your feet this is THE place to go to get all of the latest high-demand skills under your belt. Almost **all** of the ladies on my team have taken something from the VA Classroom!

Of course there are always new training courses being invented so do a good search online and make sure to check out testimonials for any courses you're thinking of taking.

Support - Is there a League of Superheroes that I can team up with?

There are a few notable places where Virtual Assistants hang out, and where you can find loads of excellent information and resources to help you on your journey.

Almost all of them have some kind of forum where you can lurk about and soak up information (if you're the shy kind!), and of course you can always ask questions too and you'll get all kinds of helpful advice and suggestions. Remember that if you're pondering a question as a new VA, chances are someone else out there has already pondered and solved the same question!

(FYI - click on the links to go to each association's webpage)

Virtual Assistant Networking Association (VANA)
If you haven't already been to VANA, go there now! VANA is THE place where you can find piles of useful information: they have forums for everything, they have all kinds of free reports you can download, they have free teleseminars, etc. etc.

There is the free membership, and there is also something called becoming a **VAinsider** - if you're an insider you have access to RFP's, templates, past teleseminar recordings, a whole new level of discussions, etc. I became a VAinsider when I was a new VA, and it was so helpful! Having access to all of the VAinsider goodies was one of the best thing I did for myself, so I'd suggest you seriously consider it. Trust me, it's worth it!

International Virtual Assistant Association (IVAA)
IVAA has some excellent member benefits including free web hosting, and this is the place that hosts the annual Summit - a not-to-be-missed information extravaganza! When they came close by I went to one of their annual conferences and boy-oh-boy was that fun!

Canadian Association of Virtual Assistants (CAVA)
If you're a Canadian then you should seriously consider joining this network. They have an excellent program available to members called the Success Partner Program where you team up with one of the industry expert VA's and get some awesome coaching. I took advantage of this after I had been in business for about a year, and I wish I had done it sooner! These days I can sometimes be found on the opposite end of the spectrum and sometimes participate as a mentor when I've got time.

Start-Up Costs - What did you spend money on in your first six months?

I get asked this question a lot and what I first did was join a few different associations such as VANA, CAVA, and IVAA (see the previous section) - I wanted access to the forums so I could ask questions and I wanted access to the membership benefits of each one. They usually aren't too expensive, you can choose which groups sound like they would be a good fit for you and then after a year is up you can decide whether you are getting your money's worth and renew or not as the case may be.

The second thing I did was purchase a backup program - wouldn't it suck if you got everything all ready for your business and then it all got lost! And of course once you start working with actual clients you want to be absolutely sure that you don't lose any of their important info. After searching around on the various VA forums it sounded like one of the best and most versatile & affordable programs out there is called Carbonite, and now it works for both Mac and PC.

The next important purchase I made was for a password management program - you'll discover very quickly that there are so many passwords you'll need to remember, both for your own work and each of your clients. I chose a program called 1Password and it not only stores, generates, and fills passwords for you, it also handles credit/debit card info, identities, software licences, and secure notes. What a lifesaver! I simply could not live without this program, and again it works for both Mac and PC.

Last but not least I created and printed some business cards - this is a must have if you're going to be doing any kind of networking, which of course you should be! Many people have used VistaPrint according to the forums and although they are reasonable, I don't believe that their quality or service is very good and I wouldn't recommend it. Go with a local printer in your area and then you can see the proof in person before you commit to getting them printed.

I also designed and printed up some brochures, but unless you're planning on doing trade shows or other similar in-person promotion gigs you probably won't use them very much - we're virtual, right?!? My brochures are still sitting in my closet, looking pretty in their box, so stop and seriously consider if and how you would use them before you fork out the money to get them printed.

What are the most common programs that you use?

Name	Free / Paid?	What Does It Do?	Must Have!
LogMeIn	Free	Log in to a computer from afar, this program is so handy if your client has a specific program they want you to use, or if you're working away from home and need to log into your home computer	✔
MyHours	Free	For tracking your hours spent on your work - this program is so wonderful I really don't know why it's free!	✔
PayPal	Free	You must have a way for clients to pay you virtually and PayPal is so easy and familiar to everyone. You can even send invoices via email.	✔
Audacity	Free	Audio recording/editing tool	
Dropbox	Free	For syncing files across computers	
FaxZero	Free	Send up to 2 free faxes per day, max 3 pages each	
Free Conference Call	Free	The name says it all!	
GeoCoder	Free	For finding map coordinates based on an address	
MailChimp	Free	For list management and emails/newsletters	
Split PDF	Free	Online editor for PDF	
SendThisFile	Free	Sends large files that are too big to send via email	
WebResizer	Free	Optimize your photos for the web so that they don't take so long to load	
1Password	Paid	Keeps track of all your passwords and other secure info, auto-fills passwords and forms, and more - I could not live without this program!	✔
Carbonite	Paid	Online automatic backups - it all happens in the background so that your data is constantly getting backed up - very important for any independent business!	✔
Freshbooks	Free < 3 clients	Online time tracking plus invoicing that can be connected directly to your PayPal account. Also has the ability to connect with Contractors; All-in-all it's an incredible time saver.	✔
Hostgator	Paid	By far the best priced, and best supported web hosting that I have come across. The Baby plan rocks!	✔
1ShoppingCart	Paid	THE online shopping cart program that everyone uses the most	
Constant Contact	Paid	Newsletters, emails, and list management - my favourite one to use!	
GoToMeeting	Paid	Online meetings - share your desktop with anyone	
Xiosoft Instant Teleseminar	Paid	If your client wants to do teleclasses or webinars, this is an awesome program that is easy to use	

Were most of your clients in the same town as you?

Definitely not! I've had three clients total that were in the same town as me and I met them through networking opportunities all in the beginning of my business. I found that it was actually much more preferable if they did NOT live in my town because local clients often wanted me to stop by their office, or they wanted to get together for a meeting, or in one case they actually stopped by my house unannounced! I had to keep telling them, "no no no, I'm virtual, you don't see me, I'm not here!" Trust me, it's far simpler if they live somewhere else. Of those three local clients there was only one that I didn't mind getting together with as she was a friend of mine, but that was a personal choice.

Being virtual is what we do, it takes a lot of time from our day if we have to drive here and there meeting clients, and you'll find that you'll be much more productive if you simply stay put. It shouldn't matter where you live as long as you have internet access. And if you ever have to move your clients won't bat an eye since they're already accustomed to not seeing you in person - this has happened with my business more than once, and what a relief it is to not have to start all over again finding new clients every time we move to a new town!

As an added bonus, if you ever get the chance to visit one of the towns where one or more of your client's live, you can specifically arrange a dinner meeting or a coffee meeting and get to know them better. Trust me, it can be lots of fun! And you get to write off the travel as a business expense as well. Bonus!

How do I drum up clients?

This question is opening a huge can of worms, and there are all sorts of books and resources out there that will give you excellent information on marketing your practice. So, instead of reinventing the wheel here are a few basic suggestions:

1. Read Michelle Jamison's awesome books on marketing your VA practice
2. List yourself in as many relevant directories as you can
3. If you have taken classes with any of the VA training mentioned earlier they all have their own RFP systems available to graduates, an awesome bonus
4. Being a member of a bunch of associations usually gives you access to their RFP systems
5. Make sure your website is up to date and has been optimized for search engines
6. Take advantage of any networking opportunities that come your way

There are endless opportunities out there, and you simply need to keep making sure that you are visible and build a good reputation for your business.

Conclusion

You're ready to roll! It's time to take your newly acquired knowledge and become a successful Virtual Assistant. You can do it!

Hang on to this book as you build your practice, you never know when you'll need to check back and be reminded of some of the excellent resources that are listed here.

I wish you the best of luck, and every success!

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