VIRTUAL TIDBITS

Volume 10, Issue 4

July/August 2008

Business Building E-Booklets

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* Tips for Responding to RFPs (best seller)
* Tips for a Successful Trade Show
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Editor's Notes:

Welcome to the latest issue of Virtual TidBits for 2008.

Summer is in full swing and the temperatures are proving that. We are in a bit of a heat wave here right now so thank heavens for our air conditioner. We try to not use the A/C too much but when the temperatures are like they are now, I find it hard to breathe (have asthma) so we break down and turn it on.

Summer is also a time when we and clients want to spend more time with our families outdoors enjoying the weather. I hope you all get a chance to spend some time relaxing and perhaps read a good book (why not our new book, How to Build a Successful Virtual Assistant Business... see page 3 for more info :-).

I wish you all a wonderful summer!

Sincerely,

[signature]

Janice D. Byer, CCVA, MVA

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What's New?

Summers seem to be a really slow time for "new" things. There are a lot of new things going on in my personal life but business wise, I think more new things will happen in the fall (yes... I am hoping that a milestone in my business will bring new things this fall).

So, with that being said, I will just take this time to say thank you to both Louise and Joanne, two "new" members of the Docu-Type team. You have been a huge help and your expertise and assistance has been invaluable. Thank you!

Congratulations!
(not a business topic but just a proud mom)
To my daughter Megan and all the riders from Greyden Equestrian Facility for the great showing at both the June & July Highpoint Schooling Shows. And a special thanks to Carole (the girls' coach) and Denise (the owner of Greyden).

This is Megan with her new favorite horse, Grady, and her 3 ribbons. Nicely done, honey!

(more pics will be posted at www.greydenequestrian.ca as soon as all the proud parents get them off their cameras :-)

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Spotlight - Pets Get to Stay Vacation Rentals

Pet Friendly homes are finally available to you and your pet family member. No longer will there be an issue with bringing your loving pet family member with you during your vacation.

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How to Build a Successful Virtual Assistant Business
(available in print or pdf)

How to Build a
Successful Virtual
Assistant Business

Everything you need to know to start, build and
expand your Virtual Assistant practice.

by Janice Byer
and Elayne Whitfield-Parr

The perfect resource for anyone interested in starting or building their own VA practice.

It helps you every step of the way...

- from choosing the right name for your business...
- to determining your rates...
- to marketing your services...
- and even helps you when it comes time to expand your business...
- plus so much more!

200+ pages, this book takes critical information needed to turn your desire to start your own Virtual Assistant business into a profitable endeavor that are guaranteed to bring success... including:

- dozens of sample letters, contracts and other documents;
- an extensive list of helpful websites and software; and
- input from VAs in all stages of business ownership

The extensive information included comes to you from the founders of the Canadian Virtual Assistant Connection who have a passion for seeing the Virtual Assistant industry, and every individual VA, become a household name. Each is also the owner of a successful VA business that started with just one client who took a chance on them, and now they have clients all over the world.

**Everything you need to know to start, run and expand your virtual assistant practice
http://www.howtobuildavirtualassistantbusiness.com**
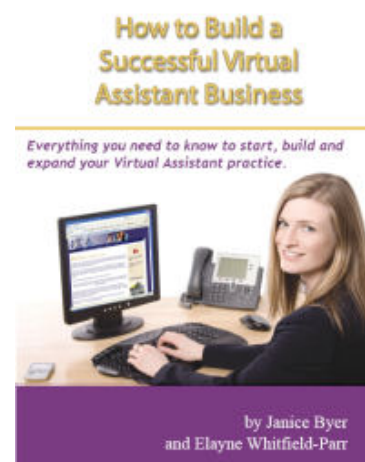
A Little Bit of Fun - The Mom Test

This was too cute not to pass on:

I was out walking with my 4 year old daughter. She picked up something off the ground and started to put it in her mouth. I took the item away from her and I asked her not to do that.
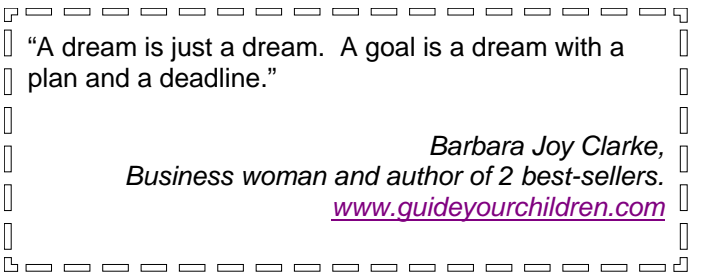
"Why?" my daughter asked.

"Because it's been on the ground, you don't know where it's been, it's dirty and probably has germs," I replied.

At this point, my daughter looked at me with total admiration and asked "Momma, how do you know all this stuff, you are so smart."

I was thinking quickly. "All moms know this stuff. It's on the Mom Test. You have to know it, or they don't let you be a Mom."

We walked along in silence for 2 or 3 minutes, but she was evidently pondering this new information. "OH...I get it!" she beamed, "So if you don't pass the test you have to be the dad."

"Exactly," I replied back with a big smile on my face.

> "A dream is just a dream. A goal is a dream with a plan and a deadline."
>
> *Barbara Joy Clarke,*
> *Business woman and author of 2 best-sellers.*
> *www.guideyourchildren.com*

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Plus other plans to suit your needs

Dates to Remember (for July/August 2008)

July:
1st - Canada Day
4th - Independence Day (USA)
11th - World Population Day
23rd - National Hot Dog Day (USA)

August:
4th - Civic Holiday (Canada)
12th - International Youth Day
26th - Women's Equality Day (USA)
31st - White Rose Day (Australia)

(These dates come from a variety of online resources and are correct, to the best of my knowledge)

Cool Links

http://www.wbwip.com/wbw/emailencoder.html - this site will allow you to encode your email address to place in your html to help cut down on the amount of spam you receive as the email harvesters can't read the encoding.

http://thinks.com - a family friendly place for puzzles and games.

http://gardening.about.com/od/perennials/ss/DividingSBS.htm - how to divide perennial plants.

http://www.anxietypanic.com - help and resources for those that are afflicted with panic disorders (like me :-).

http://www.timeanddate.com - pretty much anything to do with times and dates, including a feature to see what time it is anywhere in the world.

http://www.spaghettibookclub.org/ - Book reviews by kids for kids.

http://www.x-rates.com/ - currency rate history.

http://www.inspirationpeak.com/success.html - inspiration quotes about success and attitude.

http://www.campbellkitchen.com/ - loads of recipes using Campbell's products.

http://www.todaysparent.com/ - help for parents (or soon to be parents).

http://www.singingstation.com/ - a great place to find audio tracks.

Top 10 Things I Know For Sure by Michael Angier

In an interview I watched recently, the interviewer asked, "What do you know for sure?" I was intrigued. And I knew I didn't want to be stalling for time if the question was ever asked of me. So I did some thinking about my answer. And I encourage you to come up with your own list.

1. **We are Responsible for Our Life.** And nobody else. Although all success requires the assistance and cooperation of others, our success can never be left to anyone else. Luck is not a strategy.

2. **Life is Short.** Whether we live 20 years or 100, our lives pass quickly. All the more reason to spend our life doing what we love. Since we never know how much time we have left, we should live each day as if it is our last--for it just may be.

3. **You Can't Learn Less.** We can only add to our knowledge. We don't have to give some of it up in exchange for new knowledge. Our ability to absorb and retain knowledge may just be unlimited.

4. **Clarity Leads to Power.** When we're clear, we're more effective. Our clarity reduces our mistakes and enables us to enlist the help of others. We are more powerful when we are clear, and we are weaker when we are confused.

5. **What You Sow, You Reap.** This is also called The Law of the Farm or The Law of Reciprocity. In order to continue to receive we must give.

6. **You Can't Un-ring a Bell.** No one can change what's already happened. Whatever is done is done. It's up to us whether we use the experience to learn or allow ourselves to be run by the experience.

7. **It Takes a Long Time to Build a Good Reputation and Only a Short While to Ruin it.** Trust and credibility is built slowly but can be lost almost instantly.

8. **If You Don't Believe in Yourself, No One Else Will.** People don't respect or follow anyone who doesn't have confidence in themselves. I think the

Universe tends to trust us to the degree we trust ourselves.

9. **It Doesn't Take Guts to Quit.** Anyone can quit. And most people do--on their dreams and on themselves.

10. **We Can Accomplish Anything We Want, Just Not EVERYTHING We Want.** It's too big a world. There are too many options, too many things and only a certain amount of time.

Action Point: What's YOUR answer? How would you answer the question: "What do you know for sure?"

Michael Angier, founder of SuccessNet.org, recently released the New SuccessNet Resource Book--the Top Must-Have Tools, Products, Services and Resources for Running Your Business Effectively. This $27 eBook can be yours now at no-cost. And most of the over 100 resources are FREE to access and use. Order at no-cost from http://MySuccessNet.com

How to Build a Successful Virtual Assistant Business *by Janice Byer & Elayne Whitfield-Parr*

Although the term "Virtual Assistant" is still very new to the business community, there are thousands of home-based administrative workers around the world who now refer to themselves as VAs. The opportunities for the professional services offered by these VAs are endless.

So, how exactly do you start and build a Virtual Assistant practice, let alone expand it to a level where other VAs are working with you? The first thing you need to do is determine if you have those necessary skills. **Having a computer does not make you a VA.** You really need to have some real-life experience doing the tasks that are generally expected of VAs. If you have a background in the administrative field or a history of providing other VA-related services, you are well on your way to having what it takes to build a successful Virtual Assistant practice.

You also need to ensure that you **have the passion and commitment** to make your business successful. "If you build it, they will come," does not work in the real world of building a small business. You also need to learn how to actually run a small business so the following are just some ideas for starting your Virtual Assistant business.

One of the first steps you will take will be **deciding on a name for your business**. Many VAs have 'Virtual Assistant or Assistance' in their business names. This definitely helps others to determine what you do (well... if they know what a VA is and does) much more than if you pull some name out of a hat and use it just because you like it. Make your business name meaningful, easy to pronounce and understand, and easily adaptable should you decide to change the focus of your business.

Once you have decided on your business name, it is time to **register** it. Every province and state in every country has different procedures that they require you to follow so your best bet is to contact your local small business enterprise centre or local government office and they will help you with everything that needs to be done.

Next step... **your business plan**. You don't necessarily need to write out a formal business plan, although you do need to plan your business. Planning your business is 100% thinking, analyzing, investigating, choosing and decision-making.

Some benefits of producing a business plan include:

● the process of preparing a business plan will force you to think about your business, research some options, recognize opportunities and risks, and test some of your assumptions;

● a business plan will help you identify the cash needs of your business;

● a business plan can be used to raise funds from banks and investors;

● a business plan provides a benchmark against which to compare the progress and performance of your business.

It is a good idea for all businesses to prepare and regularly update their business plans.

Once you have made the decision to start your Virtual Assistant business and have made a plan of action, it is time to **set up your office**. Your office equipment is extremely important to the success of your business. You need to have the most current software to provide the best services as well as an up-to-date and reliable computer system. Other peripherals that you will need could include a multi-line phone system with an answering machine and a printer that allows you to scan and perhaps even fax. You may also need to get other dedicated equipment depending on the services that you will offer.

Once your office is set up and you have determined what services you will be offering, it is time to think about how **you will market your business and who you will target your marketing to**. Your first step will be to develop your business cards and other marketing pieces. You may want to have a brochure ready to hand out at networking events and possibly provide in a direct email campaign. Other means of getting the word out about your business should include a website and you can also write articles for distribution both online and in print publications as well as offer an online newsletter which can help you have a form of keeping in touch with your clients and contacts.

Owning and operating your own Virtual Assistant business can be very rewarding but does require a lot of work. However, if you are passionate about making your business a success, the entire journey will be a labour of love.

How to Build a Successful Virtual Assistant Business *(cont'd)*

This article is just a taste of How to Build a Successful Virtual Assistant Business. You may also need help with determining your rates; getting clients; training and certifications; moving your business; and even expanding your business. The new book of the same name as this article, written by Janice Byer & Elayne Whitfield-Parr, has over 200 pages of information to help you with these and other challenges that you may face during all aspects of running your business. Visit http://www.howtobuildavirtualassistantbusiness.com for more information and to order your copy.

Janice Byer and Elayne Whitfield-Parr, co-authors of How to Build a Successful Virtual Assistant Business (www.howtobuildavirtualassistantbusiness.com), are the co-founders of the Canadian Virtual Assistant Connection (www.cvac.ca). They also own and operate their own busy individual VA practices but have dedicated a tremendous amount of their careers to helping other Virtual Assistants around the world to start, build and expand their own businesses and enjoy the satisfaction of being a part of such a wonderful industry.

6 Proven Secrets to Writing a Trash-Proof Press Release *by Bill Stoller*

In baseball, it's said that you know an umpire is top-notch when you never notice his presence. If he's doing his job, he won't call attention to himself in any way. It's much the same for the writer of a press release. When the recipient of a press release focuses only on its content ~ and not on its creation ~ the writer has succeeded. With that in mind, here's how to develop a style that can help give you a big edge in placing your press releases.

1) Master News Style By Reading News Stories - The folks who write wire copy for the Associated Press are masters at presenting information without calling attention to themselves. Read all the AP wire copy you can: http://customwire.ap.org/dynamic/fronts/HOME and get a sense of the rhythm and flow of their writing. Examine their choice of words and sentence structure (typically, they choose the simplest way of saying things) and their overall tone of solid objectivity. This is the style to which you should aspire.

2) Write a Great Lead - The lead paragraph in a press release should, theoretically, be able to stand alone as a news item. A standard news lead answers the Five W's ~ Who? What? Where? When? Why? Successfully answer those five questions in one paragraph and you've summarized everything beautifully.

Bad lead: The new Acme X100 is drawing raves from customers, who call it the best thing to happen to the flanging industry since the X99.

Good lead: Philadelphia ~ Calling it a "milestone day for our industry", the Acme Company unveiled the first flanger capable of creating widgets using only solar power. According to Acme President Joe Blow, the X100 is expected to find wide use in the developing world, where access to traditional electric power is unreliable.

The Five W's are answered! Who: the Acme Company. What: the introduction of the solar-powered X100. Where: in Philadelphia (the headquarters for our fictional company). When: August 15. And, most important, Why: for use in the developing world.

Remember this: in almost every release that's successful, what put it over the top was the answer to "Why?". You must make plain the significance of your news by answering that question succinctly and without hype!

3) Write in Third Person - Perhaps it's a silly convention, but press releases really should be written as if they're coming from an objective outsider to your company, not from within your business. Of course, the journalist knows better, but nonetheless, they expect releases to be written in the third person. In short, here's the difference between first person and third person:

=> First person: We've developed the Acme X100. It's our most advanced model ever.
=> Third person: Acme Industries has developed the X100, which a company spokesperson called its "most advanced ever"

4) Attribute All Opinions - Never flatly state an opinion. If you want to state an opinion or, as in the above example, make a claim, always attribute it to a representative of the company (which very well may end up to be you!).

6 Proven Secrets to Writing a Trash-Proof Press Release *(cont'd)*

Anything apart from entirely factual info (dates, store availability, product features, biographical information, etc.) should be attributed. Again, the best way to get a feel for this is to read wire copy. Start sorting out the things a reporter feels comfortable including without attribution and things for which he uses a named source.

5) Use the Inverted Pyramid
On the first day of Journalism 101, aspiring scribes learn about the Inverted Pyramid. Basically, it's way of organizing information so that the most important information is at the top ~ the widest part of the Inverted Pyramid ~ and, as you funnel down to the narrowest point, the information becomes less and less vital. There's a good reason for this: if a reporter's 10 paragraph story gets cut to 6 paragraphs because of space considerations, the reader will still be informed of the most important news. What's cut will be background, quotes and other nonessential material. When writing a press release, the Inverted Pyramid is equally important. First, it's the style the journalist is comfortable with and second, it assures that even if a rushed reporter can only read the first couple of paragraphs, she'll get enough info to decide whether to use the release or not. If you bury the best part of your release in the fourth paragraph, the recipient may never make it that far.

6) Remove all "Stoppers"
A "stopper" is something that will stop a journalist in her tracks and distract her attention. Once that happens, your release is toast. The point of your press release: to present information in the least obtrusive way possible. Consider it this way: the journalist isn't dumb ~ she knows full well that you've sent her the press release for purely commercial reasons, hoping to get publicity that will make you more money. She can live with that as long as [a] there's something in it for her (a good story) and [b] she's not reminded of your commercial desires too often. A "stopper" breaks the suspension of disbelief needed for this little dance to be successful. It's the boom mike showing up in the

frame of a movie ~ once you've seen it, it's hard to convince yourself that you're really experiencing something that happened during, say, the Middle Ages. Here are some "stoppers" to avoid:

=> Clunky language. Journalists keep their language pretty simple. Long words, compound sentences and lofty, pretentious phrases are no-no's. Keep your sentences short. Don't try to present more than one idea in a paragraph. Avoid words you wouldn't use in everyday circumstances.

=> Hype and puffery. The ultimate "stopper". Confusing press release copy with advertising copy is a pervasive problem with businesspeople. Don't call yourself the greatest, the hottest, the coolest, the most unique or anything of the sort. If you must make a claim of superiority for your product, service or company, attribute it. Acme President Joe Blow said the X100 "has the opportunity to revolutionize the industry" is much better than The revolutionary Acme X100 is the greatest industrial advance since the Wright brothers flew at Kitty Hawk.

=> Trademark Symbols. Including TM or copyright symbols that scream, "hey, check me out! I'm a press release! I come from a business! The legal department made me include this stuff!"

The bottom line: write like a journalist, avoid the stoppers and answer the Five W's and you'll succeed!

About The Author: Bill Stoller, the "Publicity Insider", has spent two decades as one of America's top publicists. Now, through his website, eZine and subscription newsletter, Free Publicity: The Newsletter for PR-Hungry Businesses http://www.PublicityInsider.com/freepub.asp he's sharing ~ for the very first time ~ his secrets of scoring big publicity. For free articles, including our no-cost report, "Press Release Secrets", go to: http://www.publicityInsider.com

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