

# myweeklymarketing.

## **Janice Hostager:** 0:04

I'm Janice Hostager. After three decades in the marketing business and many years of being an entrepreneur, I've learned a thing or two about marketing. Join me as we talk about marketing, small business and life in between. Welcome to my Weekly Marketing.

Do you work alone in your business? So many of us start out as solopreneurs and we get so used to doing everything ourselves. But at a certain point, that DIY mentality will either break us or break our business. We can't do everything and grow a business at the same time. Recognizing that requires a mindset shift for many of us, me included. Even if we work 50 or 60 hours a week, there are things that other people can literally do better. If we just let go of them, Much of what we do during the day can be done by somebody else, and that will leave you free to do the work that you love or the work that's needed to grow your business. That's what makes virtual assistants such a great thing. Virtual assistants or VAs are part-time, flexible employees that can work from anywhere to help you out with a myriad of things in your business.

## **Meredith Raber:** 1:22

My guest today, Meredith Raber, started as a VA and grew her business into her own VA agency. Now she focuses on marketing, but since she came up through the ranks of being a VA agency, I thought she was the perfect person to talk more about how you can bring a VA into your business to help with your workload too. So here's Meredith hey, Meredith, how are you today? I'm good. How are you doing? I'm doing great thanks. So tell us about your story, how you got here. In the intro I talked a little bit about your background and your bio and all of that, but just tell us your story and your words about how'd you arrive at this place in your life.

## **Meredith Raber:** 2:02

So I think my journey is a little different than some of the entrepreneurs you hear. A lot of them say they've always wanted to be an entrepreneur, but I was very different. I was a corporate gal all the way. I worked in corporate advertising for 10 plus years in LA and loved it, loved every minute of it, loved my agency, loved my team and my clients. But when I had my first child, I realized that the demands of my work and I had a little bit of a commute were challenging. So when I had my second child they were pretty close.

2:34

Less than two years apart I just the schedule wasn't working anymore for me and I was like I got to figure something out. So I took a moment and tried to think about what I could do, and that's when I found the world of virtual assistants and being in the corporate world. I never even heard of what a virtual assistant was like. I had no idea,

but I found it. A friend of my father's was an executive virtual assistant and she was telling me about what they did and I was like I can do this, I can do this from home. So I kind of just like jumped in.

3:07

This was way back in 2017. Now people know what virtual assistants are, but way back in 2017, no one knew who that you know what that was and so I kind of just jumped in and I started and I announced my business to my family and friends and, you know, one client from a family friend turned into, you know, kind of a little boutique agency of virtual assistants within two to three years, and I then continued to build my team and I have a team of amazing, five amazing ladies who we are now. We've even pivoted again now in 2024, to just a marketing agency. So we're helping our clients with social media management, podcast management and email marketing.

**Janice Hostager:** 3:54

Wow, so you really did cover the whole gamut there. So what is it that? So, first of all, I hear the term VA, and I have V, I have VAs. But I've also heard the term EA executive assistant. Are they different in what? And if so, how are they different?

**Meredith Raber:** 4:14

I think they're the same. I mean, I feel like it's just a virtual assistant. Is confirming that they're virtual? You know, an executive assistant could be someone in your office, you know, but they could be also virtual. I think they're the same executive assistant to me. When you say that makes me think more of the stereotypical assistant duty. Their tasks will be doing. You know someone who's taking notes, someone who's setting up calendars, someone who's, you know, an assistant to a specific person, where a virtual assistant can be an assistant to a whole team, to a whole business. They could be helping out in different facets of your business, from marketing to general admin, to customer service.

**Janice Hostager:** 4:56

Gotcha Okay. So how do Now? I hired a VA? Probably. It took me a while before I was ready to make that step. How can a small business owner or entrepreneur determine if they need a virtual assistant?

**Meredith Raber:** 5:13

What I always like to recommend is to think about your week depending on if you're working full-time, you're working part-time. How many things are you doing during your work time that could be taken care of by someone else? We all think that it needs to be done by us, but if you really take a moment and look at a week and write down tasks invoicing clients, setting up social or scheduling social media posts they don't need you

to do that. Your creativeness does not need to be in those tasks. So when you start getting overloaded with the day-to-day and you can't focus on the core of your business, that's when I think it's time to start to enlist some help.

**Meredith Raber:** 5:56

And the best part about virtual assistants is you don't need them 40 hours a week. If you just need five hours a week or 10 hours a month, that might not seem like a lot, but for you as a small business owner like I, work part time. So for someone to take on 10 hours of work for me, that's huge. That's life changing. That 10 hours of my work I don't need to do anymore. So you can you can start very small. You don't have to start as a full-time employee.

**Janice Hostager:** 6:33

Yeah, that is so, so true. I mean even just the mental load of giving a task to somebody on a repeated basis. I have one VA that all she does is my podcast. She just manages all the details that go along with that. And just giving her that I mean it's just. I don't have to think about it cause I know she'll do it. She does a great job with it. So I think, and also I think we as entrepreneurs, we come, we have a let's go do it mindset. Sometimes you know it's like I could do that, you know and and even like so. I came up through agency world, the agency world as well, and was an art director, so I can easily jump in and do design work, no problem. But just because you can do something doesn't mean you should be doing something right, because that's not the core of my business anymore at all. Um, so it's really hard to sometimes let go of those things, I think.

**Meredith Raber:** 7:29

Especially, I think, when it's small business and sometimes it has our name on it, Like my company and my name. You know, it was hard for me to trust. You know, are you going to do the best of the best? You know, are you going to do what I would do? And that always takes some time to get used to and trusting someone else. But you realize sometimes they can do it better than you, you know. Yes.

**Janice Hostager:** 7:47

Yeah, and you know so many VAs are young people too. I have noticed, and you know, just giving them feedback and giving them a chance to show how they can do something and develop their skills in a certain area, it's really benefiting them as well. So now you mentioned, you know you can hire somebody part-time doesn't have to be full-time. Is there a minimum number of hours that you can use it in your experience in the agency that you have?

**Meredith Raber:** 8:22

So for virtual assistants, every virtual assistant runs their own business, right, because they're a contractor. So what you'll typically see is an hourly virtual assistant. So maybe someone who wants to commit, you know 10 hours a week to your business. Or, you know, depending on the needs you have, maybe you're like I need someone who can do a lot of things, like I need someone who can publish my blogs, who can schedule social media, who can invoice clients. That would be someone you would probably more want a commitment on an hourly level. But then there's also VAs who are specific. You know they're a show it designer, you know website designer, and that's what they do. They're a social media VA and that's all they do is social media. So they might have a monthly retainer or a package that you would buy, depending on the skillset you're looking for and the responsibility and tasks you want to hand off. So those are the two. You'll see An hourly so you can buy 10 hours a week or 10 hours a month, or a package or a retainer with a VA.

**Janice Hostager:** 9:29

Okay, the VAs that you had in your company are they strictly US-based or are they in other time zones? Obviously, the US has more than one time zone, but I mean, are they in other countries or how did you work?

**Meredith Raber:** 9:47

My team's all US that I was working with but they can be anywhere. I mean, as long as you know the time zone works for you. I think when you're thinking about where you're hiring them, one of the things you need to think about is what types of tasks are they going to do? Do they need to be on meetings with you? Then it might be more advantageous for them to be in your time zone. So you're not saying, you're not telling them oh, meet me at nine, but really for them it's 6am or something like that. But if they're not, if you're just handing off projects, it doesn't really matter where they are.

**Meredith Raber:** 10:19

You know, like a lot of my teams all over the US now, and everybody works at a different time because they have different schedules. So sometimes people are working at night, sometimes people aren't working in the morning. So you just have to see if that works for your type of business or not.

**Janice Hostager:** 10:36

Right, right, one of mine is in the Philippines and she's 14 hours ahead of me, so that makes communicating with her really challenging, and I use Asana and put all the tasks in there, yeah, and it works really well. I guess it does get to be kind of a challenge when we talk about meetings, so because I'm in the evening, or she'll be morning, I'll be evening, or vice versa. So know, so that you're absolutely right that you can run into issues with that, but by and large, I would say that most of our communication is done

online anyway. I also think that, depending on the type of task that you want them to do, you also need to make sure that they have command of your language and, like the one and there are times and she learned British English, so there's always a little bit of editing that I need to do with that, but I think I had.

11:38

So I did this the wrong way. I just put something out and said I need a virtual assistant. I was flooded, flooded with applicants, many of whom were very qualified, some of whom were absolutely not, and I would not recommend doing that. Do you have any thoughts about that?

**Meredith Raber:** 11:56

Yes, I have big recommendations because I've hired a lot, not only for like my team, but for clients when I was working on other clients' teams and they would need new people. So I always recommend, first and foremost, is create a detailed job description of what they're going to do, just the tasks. Because not only will that help you know what they're going to do, but it's going to help them start on the right page, so we're all on the same page of what you're doing. Also, once you have that job description, then I would also create a Google form that asks some questions. This is pretty normal now. I think a lot of people do this, but just you know about different things. So, say, I'm hiring them to help with social media.

**Meredith Raber:** 12:38

I want to know do you know how to use Later? Do you know the scheduling tools? Do you use Instagram, like you know? Do you do design work? Do you use Canva Like it's?

12:47

Then you can kind of qualify them before you move on to the next step, because I always feel like you still need to meet with two to three people, even if you feel like they're good fits, because for me, as a small business owner, I feel chemistry is a big deal. I feel like if I need to talk to them, I need to feel like, okay, we're on the same page, I can teach you to do whatever I need you to do. Really Like, if you don't know how to do it, most of the things in our business we can teach you or there's a process. But if we don't have the chemistry it's going to be tough, right. So I think if you qualify them first, then you get down to you know three qualified applicants and talk to them.

**Meredith Raber:** 13:27

I feel like that's a little bit easier but you will get a lot of applicants. There are a lot of VAs, especially if you go which I imagine you probably did in the Facebook groups. There's lots of Facebook groups where you can do one post and then you're done Like you'll get 85 applications, you know, and it's almost more time to go through it all. Also,

it's always great if you have other small business owners to always ask for references to. Obviously that's great If they're already working with someone, if they're taking on new clients, it's always great to get references as well.

**Janice Hostager:** 14:00

Right, and I think within Facebook groups sometimes, like various groups I'm in people will oftentimes ask you know, like, does anybody have a VA that they really like and and can work with? And and I just, and I really enjoy working with VAs because they're so flexible too, and I would probably always keep VAs on staff even if I expand which I hope to someday do and am able to hire a full-time staff. I mean, I love their flexibility. Oftentimes they're really eager to work. But you're right, when I put out a post, I think I put it in a couple of groups, I think I got more than 200 applicants and I did screen them through a Google form, but then you're still going through the Google form and, yeah, it was a whole thing.

14:52

I would definitely use an agency going forward. But, um, the other thing, I think you know, when people are looking at VAs or it used to be kind of interns too I like I initially looked at getting an intern, um, because I live in a college town, um, but that was tougher, I would say by far, to pull in an intern. Even though my husband is a professor at a university and had lots of connections, it was still really hard to find someone that had the time to do it first of all, I guess I'm stating my preference right now is that I love working with interns, but I think a VA has more flexibility and I think works better for me. Did you find that to be true too, or have you not tried interns, or Not for my small business.

**Meredith Raber:** 15:42

You know, when I was in corporate, we had interns, but yeah, I think VA is the commitments there. You know, for them, this is their business, so they might. And one thing I also hear a lot from small business owners is they're concerned they might have two clients or three clients, but you got to think of how much work you're giving them. If you're only giving them 10 hours of work, it's pretty normal for them to have like four clients. That's fine and also I find that to be good because they're learning things in other businesses and helping you. Like they're suggesting oh my other client, we did this, this might be easier for you, this might clean up your workflow. So I think it's good for them to have multiple clients.

**Meredith Raber:** 16:21

When I was running my VA agency, I had 10 clients at a time because we had a team and even when I was by myself way back when in 2018, I had three different clients that I was working pretty like a good amount of hours for, but I still had time to have three

clients and I was learning from all of them and sharing the knowledge you know through all the businesses. So I think it's always great when you have a committed VA that this is their business. This is what they do, and so it's always good to also like recommend them to your other. You know small business owners If they are looking for someone, they're not gonna leave you you know it's good for them to work for other people, you know.

**Meredith Raber:** 17:01

Totally. Yeah, I agree, that's been my experience as well that they do. They learn different apps. They may have recommendations for you. That's like you know. I know you're on this app, but I found that this one works better and, yeah, definitely an advantage, and they need it. Usually. I mean, one client probably is not going to be enough for them to make ends meet either.

**Janice Hostager:** 17:30

So how do you set pricing? How do you recommend that?

17:32

People set pricing for VAs, so like when you're hiring one. How do you set your budget?

**Meredith Raber:** 17:35

Yes, yeah. So when you're just starting out, what I like to recommend is put a price, like a monthly cost, whatever that is that you can afford, and figure out what that is. So, say, \$500 a month is what you can start with. You know, and I think sometimes what gets lost is people get just so fixated on an hourly cost, because if you're just starting out you're probably going to find a VA that's hourly right, because you're just starting out, you probably only want a certain amount of hours. But you also have to recognize what you're asking them to do and the cost of that skill set. So if you're just asking them to do general admin kind of helping out here and there, then your hourly rate might be a little bit lower. But if you're asking them to do email automations, website design, those types of things, your hourly rate might be higher. So my recommendation is depending on the responsibilities you want them to do. I would have a budget monthly that you want to pay. I always found like that's easier for me is that like, okay, 500 is what I can do. So figure out how many once you find your person, figure out how many hours you can do and start there and then they will help you grow. You know, so you start at 500 and then you're like, oh my gosh, they've taken 20 hours of work off my plate. I'm able to take on another client and then you can increase.

**Meredith Raber:** 19:03

Usually, it's always important before you fall in love with someone to make sure they have room to expand. You know, so, say, you only have the budget for 10 hours a

month. When I first started, I hired my first VA in 2018 for 10 hours a month. That was it, and that was life-changing for me. Like she helped with only my stuff. She didn't touch any of my client work at the time. She did all my social media, she did all my email marketing and it was just it pivoted. You know, it changed me. I was able to take on like two more clients because then she had all my stuff and I focused on all my client stuff. So starting small is always a recommendation, and a monthly budget, I think, is good, because then you're not getting nervous like every month oh, can I pay them? You know, if you just start smaller, you can always add.

**Janice Hostager:** 19:55

That's a great idea, because we all have a monthly budget anyway. We know what we can handle each month, and I think that was before I hired one. My fear initially was I was afraid that the cost would run away from me. What if it takes her 20 hours to do this? And I can only afford this much kind of thing? Kind of thing, do you?

**Meredith Raber:** 20:16

Oh, go ahead. Sorry, I was just going to jump in on that and usually experienced VAs. If you're only doing hourly, which is totally fine, and they're just giving you a total at the end of the month, I think it's totally fine to ask them hey, can you give me a check-in every week? Or once you hit 10 hours, once you hit 15 hours, can you let me know? Because that's where my budget hit and they respect that. They understand they don't want to be doing work and then not get paid for it either. So I think telling them being open with what you can afford and don't do 50 hours, that's too many hours is totally fine. Like that's too many hours, it's totally fine.

**Janice Hostager:**20:58

Yeah, yeah, and I actually for my VAs they use a clock app so I can always check in and see where they are for the month. Especially if I give them a bigger project and I'm a little nervous about the cost of it or something like that, I can just go ahead and take a peek at that. Do you recommend that people start out with more of a general VA? Or if they know what they want let's say they want somebody to do their social media are they better off paying a little more but going with somebody with more experience?

**Meredith Raber:** 21:40

You hit it in the second part of your question to figure out what you need. If you're looking for help in all parts of your business, a VA is a great way to go right Because they can most of the time have skills. They can do lots of different things in your business. But if you're looking for big movement in your social media, you need to have



someone who knows how to do social media and VAs do. A lot of VAs do. They might be able to do the design for you and the scheduling and the posting.

**Meredith Raber:** 22:07

But if you're looking for strategy, I would recommend getting someone who knows strategy first and then your VA can implement it for you. You know, in our agency now we do marketing and a lot of the times what we do is I'll do strategy for someone and then their team implements it. You know I'll do their social media strategy and we'll map it out. We'll have, we'll get things ready for their team and then their VAs can, you know, implement it for them. So it depends what you're looking for. If you're looking for, you know, just help with getting tasks off your plate, a VA is the way to go. If there's something specific that you need strategy, for I would get the strategy from the person who knows how to do that. But then they can also help you implement it.

**Meredith Raber:** 22:51

Yeah, that sounds great and I think sometimes it makes more sense to not train someone in. I think with my VA, I think I was probably the first person she had. She was leaving her regular job and she just wanted to stay at home with her children, and so I hired her on and it took a while before we found a place where I think she was really well-suited, which ended up being social media. But I, you know, I ended up training her quite a bit and I think had I just gone ahead and hired somebody who was trained or already had experience in that, it probably would have saved me money in the long run, because I didn't spend all that you know that time and energy and learn through all the mistakes that happen when you're training somebody. So I think that's good advice. Is that what prompted you to shift to an agency? Is that you were doing so many marketing type tasks, or is it your background?

**Meredith Raber:** 23:52

It's my background. It's so funny because it's like I think, starting in like 2021, we were only doing marketing, because everyone would say, oh, do you do general VA? Not really Like all of our clients. We were doing podcast management you know how much marketing goes into that and strategy and workflows and social media management and email marketing, and I kind of started looking at our offerings.

**Meredith Raber:**24:14

I'm like we're not doing any general assistance and we're doing strategy, we're mapping, we're mapping out marketing plans, like so it was kind of just going back to my corporate life, which we had always been doing, but I just started as a VA because I was by myself and that's what I started as, and so it's kind of just been this evolution. But yeah, so the strategy portion really lights me up. I mean, that's where I came from. I'm in the advertising world, I was in account management, so that's yeah. So we're

doing a lot more strategy these days. I'm actually doing coaching too. We still help clients on a day-to-day basis if they need management of their podcasts or social media. But yeah, we're heavy in strategy Very cool.

**Meredith Raber:** 24:58

So if you're running a business and you think that you could really use some help with a VA, it doesn't have to be one big task, right. It can be a lot of little things. They could even start with email management, for example, just keeping your inbox clean.

**Janice Hostager:**

So what are some other tasks that somebody could get off their plate, that um, or how do you recommend that they figure out what they need help with? I mean, do you have them keep track of what they do for a week, or what are your recommendations?

**Meredith Raber:** 25:27

Yeah, so you kind of hit it. What I usually recommend if someone's thinking about hiring someone is I'm a write down person. So if you're a digital person, that's fine, but for a week or two when you sit down and work, just write down the tasks that are not needed. Like your zone of genius is not needed to invoice clients or to say your coach, to email the group to tell them the time has changed or whatever those things are. And write all those tasks down for a week or two because you know, you know we're small business owners, so every week's a little different.

**Meredith Raber:** 26:01

And then, once you get that list going, kind of see what the skill set is. Is it mostly social media, you know holding you back? Is it checking your inbox? That's just taking hours. And maybe you have a product and you have to respond to customer service emails or that sort of thing and figure out where that is. Because once you have those tasks, say you get tasks like 10 tasks. Just start with that. I think that there's always a fear of I'm not going to have enough for them to do. You're going to have a lot for them to do.

**Meredith Raber:** 26:30

As soon as you start them off small, like with a couple things, then you're like, oh, she can do that or they can do this.

**Meredith Raber:** 26:38

So once you get that list of the two weeks, then you'll kind of have a good idea of what you need, because every business is different. Like you said, you handed off your podcast stuff. Managing a podcast is a lot of work so, as you know, that was probably your whole list of tasks was just like everything having to do with the podcast and emailing guests and getting guests and all of that stuff. So then you kind of can figure

out okay, I need a skill set that they know how to do podcasts. They've used Asana and then that will kind of guide you in the way you need to go and then they can always evolve. I mean, my first VA on my team is still on my team six plus years later. Her position has changed a million times. She's like a million different things as her interests have changed and as like we've gotten bigger and you know now she's leading things. But, um, they can always evolve and that's like the goal right yes, yeah.

**Janice Hostager:** 27:33

So how do you ensure like data security and confidentiality when you're working with VAs?

**Meredith Raber:** 27:40

Like as far as client stuff, or what do you?

**Janice Hostager:** 27:44

I mean Just kind of in general, I guess because I know I've been kind of hesitant to give a VA some of my financial stuff, for example Just like, is there a line that you feel like, do you just have them sign a contract? Or how is it that you feel like, do you just have them sign a contract? Or how is it that you feel like you can really trust that person, especially if they're overseas?

**Meredith Raber:** 28:07

Well, I think it's comfortability. I mean, I think that if you're doing financial stuff, we don't do a lot of financial stuff, so I think that's probably a whole contract situation going on of different things and having access. But I think, when it comes to any of that, a lot of the times it's comfortability with our clients to like letting them know, like for instance, for social media. You know we're managing accounts, we're in their Instagram and a lot of the times clients are nervous and that's fine. So it depends, like, what client it is and what services we're offering and we're always open with who's in what account and what we're allowed to do based on our clients' wants. So if our client only wants me like going in their Instagram, that's all that will happen.

**Meredith Raber:** 28:49

We will not share with anyone else that type of thing Just because you know it's. And a lot of the times, as you know, with social media and stuff, we can't control things Like things still get hacked Sometimes. There's nothing you can do. You could have double authentication on everything and that's under, you know, no one's control. So I think, just being in line with your clients and what they're comfortable with, and yeah, you have everybody send a contract, I'm assuming.

**Meredith Raber: 29:21**

Yeah, yeah. We have contracts, yeah, yeah. So I only ask that because I think it's easy sometimes to just hire somebody for a little bit and not even think about that. You really do need to follow some due process in this to say you know, if one or both of us wants to sever a relationship, we need to give each other a couple weeks notice, or things like that. Okay, yeah, yeah. And I think there's plenty of boilerplate contracts online too that people can find to do.

**Meredith Raber: 29:47**

if you're going to hire outside an agency and sometimes VAs will have their own contracts too that you sign as someone hiring them. So definitely check those out if you're signing a contract, make sure you're comfortable with everything, but should have their scope of work and the amount you're paying them and those types of things in there Hours, yeah.

**Janice Hostager: 30:10**

Are there any red flags that you tell clients to watch out for or that you watch out for personally when you're hiring a BA?

**Meredith Raber: 30:19**

Not red flags. I think for me a lot of it is personality and chemistry, like talking to someone. I think it's really important to get them on Zoom, especially if it's not a referral, not you know, like these people, you're going to be trusting them with your business, so it's important to know who they are and get to know them a little bit better. But no specific red flags. I think you kind of know in your gut, I feel like when you're talking to someone, if it's a good fit or not.

**Janice Hostager: 30:47**

Right, right, yeah, I think that sounds fair. So how can people get to know a little more about you and your agency?

**Meredith Raber: 30:56**

You can find me at [meredithraber.com](http://meredithraber.com) and I also hang out on @MeredithRaber.

**Janice Hostager: 31:02**

Okay, great. What's the name of your agency?

**Meredith Raber: 31:06**

Meredith Raber Marketing.

**Janice Hostager:** 31:09

Oh okay, Sounds very easy to remember this.

**Janice Hostager:** 31:11

Perfect. Although there's no one single path to hiring a VA, as Meredith said, it helps if you think through what you need to spend your week doing that's getting in the way of growing your business. A book I recently read that's helped me a lot is called Buy Back your Time by Dan Martell. Truth is, I was hanging on to a lot of tasks that I could easily outsource, and that book helped me identify what they were. To learn more about Meredith's agency or anything we talked about today, you can visit my show notes at [myweeklymarketing.com/52](http://myweeklymarketing.com/52). I don't take you for granted and I so appreciate you spending time with me today, so thank you so much for listening. See you next time. Bye for now.