

Virtual assistants help professionals handle the heavy load

Robert U. Craven has been the CEO of large companies and led teams of employees working from corporate offices. But, when he scaled back to launch ScalePassion LLC, a professional coaching company, Craven found he needed one part-time employee: an administrative assistant to take on much of his day-to-day planning, organizational and technology needs.

It didn't matter whether the employee was on site or remote. So, Craven hired a virtual assistant to handle tasks that otherwise would have consumed his time and focus.

"My biggest need was someone to handle my calendar, book my travel and manage my schedule," said Craven, principal of the North Palm Beach-based firm.

Virtual assistants (VAs) are finding favor across the business and professional landscape. From small or closely held companies that need tasks handled – but not necessarily by a full-time employee – to individuals who need a "personal concierge" to oversee errands and other personal errands, VAs provide services that free up clients to pursue profitability – in money or time.



BOOSTING YOUR BUSINESS

Jeff Zbar

VAs often include stay-at-home moms and seasoned administrators who were laid off during the recession. Most are looking for income or balance – and have a skill to sell, said Stephanie Goldberg Glazer, owner of Your Personal Manager. The business, which debuted in 2006, today helps about 20 tri-county area businesses and individuals "organize your life, free your time."

Using little more than a broadband Internet connection from her Hollywood home office, Goldberg Glazer taps tools like LogMeIn or GoToMyPC to access client computers and manage their own customer databases.

DOING TASKS OTHERS PREFER NOT TO

Goldberg Glazer sees some clients each quarter, and some no more than once a month. She generally does tasks they'd prefer not to, like package a direct mail campaign or update their social media status. With about 40 percent of her clientele being individuals with non-business tasks, some quirky requests come in – like dog sitting.

"I don't do pets," Goldberg Glazer said. "You have to know your limits. The most important thing I can provide is service."

The cost: about \$60 an hour. Money well spent, said Paula Holland De Long. She has used Goldberg Glazer since late 2009. Today,

she attributes a 10 percent increase in income at What's Next For My Life?, a cancer survivor coaching firm in Wilton Manors, to being able to focus on the 80 percent of her business that makes her money.

"When you're growing a business, there's only so much you can do," she said. "Steph-

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Robert U. Craven | Principal, ScalePassion LLC

anie helped me clear stuff off my desk so I could focus on things that will make me money."

That includes handling uploading events to Holland De Long's Web site, updating her social media, and entering new contacts into her database. What else? When Holland De Long's printer died, Glazer Goldberg handled the repair. And she sliced her workweek from 60 hours to about 40 hours. Holland De Long had to learn to delegate, as well as use her newly found hours wisely.

"To make this profitable, you have to reinvest your freed hours in something that will be profitable," she said.

Not a problem for Craven. His assistant – from her home and using little more than a laptop computer and an e-mail account branded with Craven's ScalePassion.com address – arranges appointments and interviews with prospective clients and other coaches.

Looking to hire a VA? Know your needs. Craven needed someone comfortable with e-mail, some technology and juggling of various tasks, but bookkeeping wasn't important.

Though he currently pays about \$15 to \$20 an hour, Craven is looking to embrace even more "labor arbitrage" by hiring VAs from the Philippines, he said. Then, his VA will manage a team of offshore VAs, who can cost about \$6 an hour, he said.

"I feel proud that I'm reaching into a community that's used to making minimum wage," said Craven, whose business often serves "change the world" entrepreneurs in socially responsible businesses and causes. "It's important to find someone who's very talented and cultivating her talent."

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tal integrity and sustainability; a wide range of affordable, market-rate housing types in a pedestrian-scaled urban form; economic activity areas; and a community-wide transportation system," according to DPZ's Web site.

In addition to its residential and commercial component, Abacoa is home to a portion of the Scripps Research Institute's Florida facilities.

Hallmark Senior Housing is one of the Love Cos., which has roots in real estate, finance and development going back more than 135 years. Affiliated companies have been involved in development and ownership of a broad range of real estate activities in several states, including Missouri, Florida and Texas.

The Allegro brand exists in several locations, including the Allegro at East Lake in Tarpon Springs and the Allegro at College Harbor in St. Petersburg.

F. Thomas Godart, a development specialist at PMA Sales Group, which represented both Hallmark and seller Pulte Homes, said the Allegro site is a premier location.

"They are trying to put up a building that has the presence of a luxury hotel," Godart said. "And you just can't build a facility that is first class and hide it. They put it in the most prominent spot on one of the major roads in Abacoa."

Miller said the timing of the project was driven by demand for independent living for elderly residents, which is still growing. He said the rental rates had not been set, but that pricing would be competitive, adding: "It will be finished at a level comparable to most of the newer stuff going around Jupiter in that market area."

Los Angeles-based owner Canyon Capital Realty Advisors.

"We are patient investors," Turner said. "We are happy and excited about the up-zoning, but at the moment, we are sitting back, like most people, until the indigestion has passed."

Turner was referring to the lack of financing and overbuilding in both residential and commercial sectors of the real estate market throughout South Florida.

DEAL OF THE WEEK: IPTS LEASE IN RIVIERA BEACH

A West Palm Beach-based manufacturing company has leased 20,000 square feet of industrial space to relocate to Riviera Beach.

IPTS, a manufacturer of solutions for the power transmission industry, signed a 10-year lease to occupy 7221 Haverhill Business Parkway, within the Haverhill Business Park. The deal is worth about \$2 million over 10 years, IPTS VP and co-owner Rick Diasio said.

IPTS will begin leaving its current West Palm Beach location – a 22,000-square-foot facility – when its new lease starts on Jan. 1, Diasio said. The old lease runs through Feb. 1, so there will be some overlap between the two facilities, he noted.

Rents are cheaper these days for tenants looking to move, but IPTS's main incentive to go Riviera Beach was a clause

out bonuses, for the property on the river is eight stories. The property closest to the highway can have 36 stories.

COMMERCIAL FISHING LANDMARK

The building situated on the river, designed in Mediterranean Revival style, was one of the last landmarks from the time when commercial fishing activity was centered on the river.

"Advertisements described the building

without a price.

The previous owner, Peter Swartz, owed about \$15 million on the site, which was once to become the 32-story Riverhouse Lofts condominium. Swartz shifted gears after the residential real estate market imploded, seeking a joint venture partner to build commercial space and a dockominium for 480 boats.



IPTS signed a 10-year lease to occupy 20,000 square feet within the Haverhill Business Park in Riviera Beach.

that would allow the company to end its lease if it opted to buy 1.9 acres to erect its own building, Diasio said.

"We eventually want to build our own building," he said. "We're just not ready to do it in the next year."

Diasio Car Co., a race-car building business, will also occupy the new space, Diasio said. The two companies have a total of 10 employees, he noted.

Bill Reichel of Reichel Realty was the sole broker on the deal. He represented the landlord, Haverhill Business Park 6 LLC.

Reichel said most of the leases he is seeing are businesses enticed from one location to another by low rents and other amenities.

"It's a great time to be a tenant," he said. "They are getting more for less."