

Many Hats Just One Head

Young Entrepreneur Paints Detailed
Portrait of Today's Virtual Assistant

By Sandy Larson

According to Vonetta Booker-Brown, virtual assistants must wear many different hats, including that of a secretary, IT person, and PR representative... just to name a few. Providing such valuable services, from word processing and general administrative support to desktop publishing, virtual assistants have become high in demand among businesses that prefer to outsource job tasks over hiring extra help.

As owner of Right Hand Concepts (www.righthandconcepts.com), a virtual assistance firm in Stamford, Connecticut, Vonetta knows that her livelihood depends on her being extremely versatile. One minute she might be screening a phone call; while updating a web page or performing market research in the next.

Vonetta, who accrued over eight years of experience as an administrative assistant, writer, editor, web designer, and graphic artist prior to starting her home-based business, knows it's also important to be organized, disciplined, and a self-starter.

She says these traits are critical "since you don't have anyone but yourself to tell you when to start and finish that project."

Determination and perseverance are other important characteristics that virtual assistants require to succeed, says Vonetta. She explains, "You have to approach tons of prospective clients that may not have heard of virtual assistance — and even though it's a great concept, you'll still get lots of hesitation or resistance from people who are used to the familiar, i.e., having someone in the office full-time."

Vonetta also stresses the importance of being imaginative. She adds, "You have to be creative, in terms of coming up with different ways to accomplish a client project, troubleshooting a problem, or marketing yourself."

"Last but not least, one has to be comfortable with working by oneself without becoming isolated," asserts Vonetta. "Although working from home sounds great, it's not for everyone — many people find that they do need to have



Vonetta Booker-Brown runs a virtual assistance firm from her home in Stamford, Connecticut.

others around them during the day." In Vonetta's case, this has never been a problem, because she makes a point to frequently get together with friends and pick up the phone.

For Vonetta and many others, being a virtual assistant is a great way to utilize one's talents and creative energy. Vonetta says, "With my personality, skills, resources, and interests, the virtual assistant occupation seems tailor-made — as though it had been created especially for me."

High Tech Hide Away

Booming Design Firm Resides
in Remote Almond Orchard

By Sandy Larson

Rick King operates a thriving home-based graphic and advertising design business in Escalon — a small farming community in the heart of California's Central Valley. Like other successful entrepreneurs who work in remote locations, Rick demonstrates that working in the high-tech industry while living in a rural setting is not only possible, but also practical.

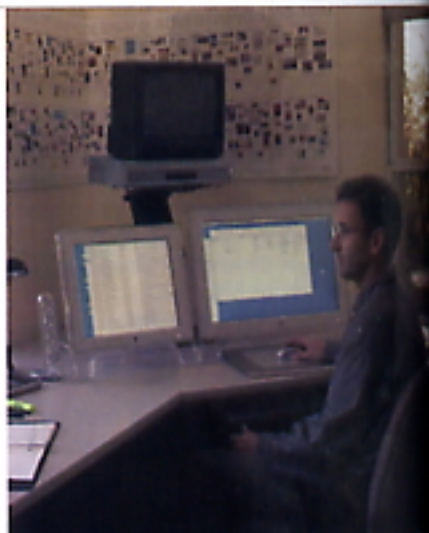
Not visible from the main road, Rick's office and production studio are nestled in the middle of his beautiful three-acre almond orchard. Visitors have to drive up a tree-lined dirt driveway for more than 1,000 feet before arriving at his doorstep.

In contrast to its rural exterior, the home office for Rick King Design (www.RickKingDesign.com) projects the image of a high-tech command post, with its contemporary wrap-around workstation and all the latest in design and production

equipment. It's fully equipped with high-speed computers, multiple computer monitors, laser and ink-jet printers, a large-format printer that produces poster-size prints, and a satellite Internet connection.

Rick's office takes up about 700 square feet of his 3,400 square-foot home, and his detached production studio adds another 1,800 square-feet of workspace. "Over the years, we've learned a few tricks about combining an office with a home, and we put our experience to good use when we built our current house," says Rick. For example, instead of locating his office in the back of the house, which would require visitors to walk through living space, he situated his office right off the front door. He also designed his office large enough to accommodate a small conference table, so he wouldn't have to conduct meetings at the dining room table.

Conducting business from a rural



Rick King looks out onto his three-acre almond orchard from his office window in Escalon, California.

location has never been a problem for Rick, although he does have to travel from time to time to meet with clients. "I try to schedule all of my client meetings on just one or two days a week so as to keep my travel time down," he says. But aside from going on an occasional road trip or plane ride, staying in touch with the outside world is a breeze. He adds, "Between the Internet, delivery services, faxes, and phones, I stay in direct contact with clients as much as needed."