

## DREAM or REALITY?

A Guide to Setting up Your Business



From the UK's first VAcertified Virtual Assistant –  
Dawn Lane, [Your Office Online](#)



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## Dawn Lane

When I was at school in Wales during the 1970s, I never envisaged that I would one day be running my own business. I was always going to become a nurse, doing my training with my best friend, Alison. Alison did become a nurse, but I left Wales in 1977 when I joined the Women's Royal Naval Service.

When I left the Royal Navy in 1999 after 22 years service, I had a lot of experience as a manager and organiser within an office environment but had no formal qualifications. After leaving the Armed Forces, I worked for the first 18 months as a civilian communications operator with Devon and Cornwall Constabulary before deciding to put my organisational skills to good use. First, though I had to get a qualification, so I attended Plymouth College of Further Education in my spare time and gained a Business Administration NVQ and a number of RSA word processing and typing qualifications.

After working for a number of years in the construction and tourism industries, I went back to college full time to study for AMSPAR's<sup>1</sup> Medical Secretaries' Diploma and also took more word processing/typing qualifications, this time through OCR<sup>2</sup> and also the European Computer Driving Licence.

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<sup>1</sup> AMSPAR – Association of Medical Secretaries, Practice Managers, and Receptionists. [www.amspar.com](http://www.amspar.com)

<sup>2</sup> OCR - Oxford Cambridge and RSA Examinations. [www.ocr.org.uk](http://www.ocr.org.uk)

Whilst at college I applied for a post with the Strategic Health Authority (SHA) and worked as PA to the Associate Director of Development and Redesign until the SHA was restricted in 2006 when I decided it was time to work for myself.

I set up Your Office Online in October 2006 working part-time in the business until June 2007 when I was able to work within the business full time. I now have a number of 'full time' and ad-hoc clients, and work with a number of associate VAs and their clients.

Like many experienced and aspiring VAs, setting up my business was time consuming and confusing. I had many questions about what software to use, how to set up a telephone answering service for clients, what rate I should set and how to price my services. I found that many VAs, whilst offering some advice, were quite reluctant at times to give the finer details needed. There was a plethora of information available on starting up a business but it was spread all over the place.

If you have the time and energy to search for it, good luck. If you do not, this guide and the Virtual Business in a Box should help you get your business off the ground.

## Introduction

When I set on my new venture with Virtual Business in a Box, it was aimed at the Virtual Assistant sector, my area of expertise. However, no sooner had I decided on this new pathway I was given the opportunity to pitch my new business idea at a seminar in front of an audience of over 80 people. After the meeting, I was surrounded by people who wanted to know more about the business, and who thought it could help them set up (or would have helped those who had already set up).

A quick change to the business model was made and Virtual Business in a Box, rather than VA Business in a Box was born. It has meant a few changes to this guide before it had even gone to press but I hope it will give anyone setting up a new business as a sole trader/partnership the right tools to set up their business. If it does err towards the VA sector my apologies – if you have any queries about any of the content or would like more information, please email me at [dawn@virtualbusinessinabox.co.uk](mailto:dawn@virtualbusinessinabox.co.uk).

In the current economic climate, many people are looking to start their own business and be in control of their own work life. Many, mistakenly, think that they can conduct the role they are currently employed as such as secretary, plumber or electrician, as a self employed person and that it can't be that hard to make it work. True, you will have control over your own destiny and the amount of money you make, but

like all businesses, it takes grit and determination to make it succeed.

I have been running my Virtual Assistant (VA) business, Your Office Online, since 2006 and I want to share some of the things I have learned along the way, to help you decide whether this is the industry sector for you. Although some sections are aimed specifically at the VA sector, it should in the main appeal to anyone setting up a new business.

There is more to being a self-employed than doing the work for yourself and not just earning a wage, you need the strength and confidence to run your own business with the trials and tribulations (and red tape) that brings. Do you have what it takes to find your own clients (no clients = no money), do your own administration and accounts, market the business and make all the decisions on your own? If so, read on...

I hope this guide will give you the tools on how to set up your business, but I will also point out the sometimes-negative side of working for yourself, and I hope ultimately help you decide if being self-employed is for you.

Enjoy reading this book, and if you have any questions or comments, please do let me know.

*Dawn Lane.*

[Your Office Online & Virtual Business in a Box](#)

## Disclaimer

This is a basic guide written by someone who has 'been there and done that.' I am by no means qualified to give financial advice – seek an accountant/IFA for that.

I use all contracts, terms & conditions, and other templates included in this guide but this does not indicate that they would stand up in a court of law. I am not trained in law, so your own due diligence is required BEFORE entering into any contracts with potential clients and/or associates.

Whilst I have endeavoured to check and verify all information within this guide, I do not claim responsibility for any omissions, errors, or contradictory interpretation of the contents contained in this guide.

As with most things in life, you get out of it what you put in to it. Virtual Business in a Box cannot be held responsible for your results and/or earnings or lack of. Earnings and income statements are only examples of what you could earn. These should not be taken as a guarantee of the earnings you will make. Your earnings will depend upon your skills and experience, the number of clients you engage, the rates you set and charge, and the number of hours you are willing to work.

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DREAM OR REALITY

## Table of Contents

### 1. Virtual Assistant – Definition

What is a VA?

The mind set to be self employed

Is it for me – pros and cons?

Qualifications/Certification/Experience/skills

Register with HMRC

### 2. Where do I Start?

Business name

Domain name and Email address

Logo

Website – design, build, and publish

Email

Contact Details

Business cards

Promotional items

Personal branding

### 3. Business Plan

Do I need one?

How do I write one?

4. Business Structure

Sole trader

Partnership

Limited Liability Partnership

Limited Liability Company

5. Trademarks and Copyright

6. Setting Up Your Office

Having a dedicated space

Equipment needed

Computer – Laptop/PC/Mac

Fax/printer/scanner

Business phone vs mobile

External hard drive and off site backup

Policies and procedures

Deadlines and turnaround

Communications

Systems: Inbox management

Tasks and appointments

Files

7. What to Charge?

Setting your rates

Pay as You Go vs Retainer

8. Timekeeping and Invoicing

Timekeeping: how to track your time

What and how to bill

Accepting payment: cheque, BACS, PayPal, Google Checkout

9. Accounting

Cash flow and Kashflow

Tax returns: accountant, bookkeeper, do it your self

10. Marketing and Networking

Promotional materials

Advertising: paid and unpaid

Editorials

Elevator speech

Networking

11. First Client

Meeting your prospective client

How to work with clients

Boundaries: yours and your client's

Not sure about a client

Firing clients: yes, you can!

Following up leads and clients

12. Contracts and Terms & Conditions

Do you need them?

How to set them up

Associates and sub contractors

Appendices

1. [Branded Email Example](#)

2. [Business Card](#)

3. Business Plan

4. Contracts:

Client PAYG

Client Retainer

Terms and Conditions

Associates/sub contractors

Job description

5. Financial:

Quote

Invoice

# DREAM OR REALITY

Cash flow

## 1. VA – A Definition

### 1.1. What is a VA?

There are a number of definitions floating around within the industry and here are a few of them:

[VAnetworking.com](#): “A **Virtual Assistant (VA)** is a highly-trained independent entrepreneur who provides a myriad of business support services virtually via phone, fax and internet based technology to support and meet the growing needs of businesses worldwide. Collaborating with a **VA** reduces stress, protects cash flow, eliminates administrative hassles, and enables business people to find the success they originally set out to achieve. A VA is your right hand person helping you to succeed in your business. The irony is you may never meet your VA as odds are they live nowhere near you!”<sup>3</sup>

[A Clayton’s Secretary](#): “A VA is a self-employed professional business services operator providing almost any type of admin support service you require on a remote basis from their own office using their own equipment and software.”

[Alliance for Virtual Businesses](#): “Virtual Assistants (VAs) are independent entrepreneurs providing professional administrative, creative, managerial, technical, business office and/or personal support services. VAs use the most advanced means of communication, and the newest and

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<sup>3</sup> Source: [Virtual Assistant Networking Association](#) - Virtual Assistant Definition. The Largest Global Meeting Place Online for Aspiring and Successful Virtual Assistants

most efficient and time saving office products and work delivery, regardless of geographic boundaries. Virtual Assistants work from their own offices, on a contractual basis, and abide by an established Code of Ethics requiring integrity, honesty, and due diligence.”

## 1.2. How and when did the VA industry begin?

The following is an extract from [A Clayton's Secretary](#)<sup>4</sup>:

No one knows the exact date of the birth of the industry. We do know that [Thomas Leonard](#), founder of CoachU and the ICF, called his remote assistant his Virtual Assistant, and Stacey Brice is therefore credited with being the first called a Virtual Assistant. However, there were people all over the world operating home based businesses and providing support on a similar basis, either local or remotely, to clients in different areas. For example, Robyn Green in Melbourne, Australia had a network of home based secretaries in the 1980s and [Kathie Thomas](#) purchased a book Robyn wrote for ideas for her own business.

You may have already noted that many claim to be the first network, or the original 'VA'. The UK/European magazine Executary International noted this very same thing in an article about the Industry in the spring 2000 issue. It is probably very difficult to ascertain when things really did start but you can be sure that there were several operating home based secretarial services around the world in the 1980's, although very few networked, with the first online operators in the mid 1990's, along with the first online

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<sup>4</sup> Courtesy of A Clayton's Secretary, founder Kathie Thomas

networks. With the change in technology and shifts in what can be achieved on a computer, home based secretaries updated their skills and service provision to that of Virtual Assistants.

The introduction of the Internet to this service industry has meant changes in the way we operate and in the services provided. It means that clients can be much further afield but easily serviced via email and web, as well as fax, phone, mail and courier, than has been done previously. It often means that projects can be delivered more quickly and more efficiently.

Kathie M. Thomas pioneered the Virtual Assistant industry in Australia and established the first VA network in the southern hemisphere. She started operating a home based secretarial business in March 1994 and first went online in January 1996. In April 1996 she started a network of operators as her workload grew, bringing on board other women who also wanted to work from home as she was doing. When the group became aware of the new title 'Virtual Assistant' being used in the US, they soon adopted that, alongside the title 'Homebased Secretary' and gradually phased out the latter title in the late 1990s.

Today there are many people, men and women, who work from home providing a number of different services ranging from telephone answering services to web design and desk top publishing, and who can be called 'Virtual Assistants' as they may never see their clients and are always working virtually.

### 1.3. Who uses a VA?

With changes in the economic climate, large corporations downsizing their staff numbers (particularly office staff), and with more and more people working remotely, the types of industries outsourcing their secretarial and administration services is growing. Sole traders, business start-ups and larger organisations are finding that using the services of home based secretaries is very cost effective – they get high quality professional work when they need it, only pay for the amount of hours spent on the project and there are no overhead costs or employment red tape to worry about.

### 1.4. So, now you know the ‘what’ and ‘how’ of the virtual assistant world, what is a typical day like in the life of a VA?

A day in my parent company, [Your Office Online](#), begins around 6.30am when I get up, take the dog out for a walk, and have breakfast. Whilst getting breakfast ready, I turn on my PC and get Outlook up and running so that emails are downloaded and ready for me to action.

After breakfast, I sort out the house with a quick whip around to ensure the bed is made and the kitchen sorted – I cannot get my head in gear to work until I know that’s done. Then around 8:30am, I am ready to action any emails received over night.

At 9:00 am I put all my phones on, 4 mobiles at current count, but I also answer calls for two other clients on my landline plus my own number (courtesy of [Callagenix](#)). Sometimes I also take calls for a few ad-hoc clients when they take a few days off.

## DREAM OR REALITY

During the morning, I action any emails received over night. These may include booking appointments for one client (she runs a massage business), appointments and reports for another client (a GP who does private medicals), amending website pages/organising events for another client (a not-for-profit organisation) and arranging locum doctors for the Army for another client (he provides a locum provision service for the MoD across the UK).

Once overnight emails are cleared, I check my 'to-do' list and get on with the priorities on that. These may include sourcing a doctor to work at one of the Army medical centres for one client, updating a website for another client, taking and auctioning telephone calls, and making medical examination appointments for another client's clients. I may also assist other VAs with their client workload.

At sometime during the day, I will also check Google Analytics to see how my website stats are doing, and once a month or so will produce a newsletter to be emailed out to my database to remind people (potential clients) I am still around.

During the course of the day, I may also arrange network meeting agendas for my local network group (The Business League) where I am secretary, and will take part in discussions on twitter or other VA forums. I stop for lunch and another quick walk with the dog around 1:00 pm and end my day, usually, by 5:30 pm (although I do

sometimes work until hubby gets home, which may be a little later than that).

No two days are ever the same and because I am home based (not all VAs work from home but that will be discussed in another section) I can stop work if I need to get to the bank, get my hair cut etc – I can then catch up outside of normal office hours. Working as a home based VA offers the flexibility to set your own hours (see section 1.6 –Is it for me).

#### 1.5. Having the correct mind set to be self employed

Working for yourself and from home, is not for everybody. There are pros and cons to working for yourself and it requires determination, dedication, and hard work. Starting a new business can actually mean longer hours and less income initially than working for someone else. Working from home also means that you don't necessarily have the work/home boundary that you have with going out to work every day. It can be very easy to fall into the trap of working when the rest of the family wants to do something together. Because the 'office' is only in the next room, you will stick with it and get the job done when really you should have shut the door and left it for the night (believe me I know – I've been there).

As a new business owner, you will probably set up your business as a Sole Trader (see section 4 for explanations of the different types of business structures) and will therefore be responsible for all aspects of the business. You will have to be the managing director, marketing manager, finance

director (even accountant or bookkeeper) and employee as well as run the home and look after hubby/wife and children (not applicable in all cases!). See – longer hours and more work.

However, you will also be in charge of your own work pattern, decide on the hours you want to work and with whom you will work, and also be able to decide on the type of work you like and want to do. Don't like audio transcription – fine, don't offer it as a service; love doing presentations – offer as a skill to companies who have many conferences.

If you have always wanted to work for yourself, or perhaps have become disenchanted with employment life during the recession, being self-employed may look very attractive. It gives you the flexibility to choose your own hours, and to work from home and around family commitments. You will however, need to research thoroughly how to set up and run your business before you jump in feet first. If you don't, you could be setting yourself up for failure. There are so many things you need to do like registering with Her Majesties Revenue and Customs (HMRC) as self-employed (even if starting up part-time whilst still paid as an employee), choosing your business, taking any further training you may need, sourcing equipment and funding, setting up your office, logos, website, accountant, insurance etc. The list sounds endless, but this guide will help you through it.

Support from friends and family is essential if working from home but there are boundaries to be set otherwise they will

be constantly interrupting as they may think that you can be disturbed at any time (sometimes they don't see what you are doing as 'work' when you are at home all day).

1.6. Some of the pros and cons of self-employment:

### **Pros**

- ❖ You are your own boss
- ❖ You reap the rewards of your success – the more you put in, the more you will get out
- ❖ Flexibility in your working routine
- ❖ Variety of work and clients
- ❖ In charge of your own destiny
- ❖ Better work/life balance.

### **Cons**

- ❖ No company pension scheme – you will need to arrange your own
- ❖ No holiday or sick pay – not working = not being paid
- ❖ Longer hours in the start up phase
- ❖ Possibility that you won't engage any clients
- ❖ Clients may leave you without you having anyone to fill the gap and therefore a drop in income

- ❖ What income comes in is not all your own – overheads, expenses, tax, NI etc needs to come out before you take any drawings
- ❖ You will be responsible for any losses.

You will need to take all of the above into consideration before deciding whether being self-employed is right for you and your family.

### 1.7. Qualifications/Certification/Experience/Skills required

So many times, I hear people saying, “I can type and have a computer and printer, I can be a VA.” It actually takes a lot more than being able to type to run your own VA business, and funnily enough, typing is one thing I don’t do a lot of as a VA. Before setting up your business, as a VA or in any other industry or sector, you need a set of skills, experiences and personal attributes to ensure you can make the business a success.

In my opinion, the minimum qualifications, experience and skills you should have to start up as a VA are:

Experience:

- ❖ Five years or more as a secretary/PA or office manager
- ❖ Experience of setting up an office, policies and procedures

- ❖ IT savvy – you will need to sort out small IT problems, probably on a daily basis, your self
- ❖ Computer savvy – Office – Word, Excel, PowerPoint (minimum), European Computer Driving Licence, other software programs as necessary

### Qualifications/Certifications

Formal qualifications and certification is not essential to starting up as a VA – it certainly helps though as it will give your potential clients the confidence that you can do what you say you can.

I would suggest you make a list of the services you are looking to offer: write down what you want to do, what you are good at, what you don't want to do. Now look at where you may need training to bring your skills level to the require standard. It may be that you want to offer PowerPoint presentations as a service but you haven't done any for a while – check out Learn Direct<sup>5</sup> or the European Computer Driving Licence<sup>6</sup> to bring your skills up to scratch, some of these may even be offered free in your local area.

Also, look at what skills you may actually need to develop in order to run your business, which may be transferable to your clients' line of work – bookkeeping (for your own accounts), web design (again for your own/clients sites).

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<sup>5</sup> [www.learndirect.co.uk](http://www.learndirect.co.uk)

<sup>6</sup> [www.bcs.org](http://www.bcs.org)

I am sure you have already carried out online research into certification for VAs and there is a huge variety of VA training companies advertising their programs. I don't encourage or condone any of them but suggest you take a long hard look at what they are offering, what you will get out of the program, and what it will mean to your potential clients. If a training program is not accredited, what it will actually mean to you and your clients? Many of these courses are expensive, take many hours to complete, are not accredited to give out a formal qualification on completion, and may therefore not be of much use to you. I started one when I decided to set up my business but didn't finish it as I was too busy working. I eventually attended a 12 week course in business start up<sup>7</sup> at my local college, attained an accredited certificate in business start up and made a great many friends and wide network of women who were also setting up their own, but very different, businesses. I found this a lot more beneficial and practical.

### Personal Skills

Personal skills are as important as, if not more so, than qualifications – you may have the skills to do the job but not have any formal qualification, that bit of paper that many people demand. These are some of the ones I think are important:

- ❖ Determination
  
- ❖ Ability to focus on day to day activities and also see the bigger picture

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<sup>7</sup> Chartered Managers Institute [Level 3 Certificate in Business Start Up](#)

- ❖ Computer and internet literate
- ❖ Confident
- ❖ Dependant
- ❖ Forward thinking
- ❖ Professional
- ❖ Good communications skills both verbal and written – you will rarely, if ever, see your client face to face and so need to be able to communicate without the body language we normally take for granted when interacting with our clients and colleagues
- ❖ Have attention to detail
- ❖ Be a ‘completer, finisher’
- ❖ Be able to prioritise
- ❖ Happy to work alone – you will rarely see anyone once you start work except for those you communicate with online – forums, emails, networks etc.

### 1.8. Register with HMRC

No, I’m not swearing at you. Everyone who works self-employed has to register with HMRC. Even if you are not intending to work full time as self-employed to start with, but offer your VA business part time whilst being employed, you will still need to register within three months of starting your business.

## DREAM OR REALITY

It's easy – pick up the phone and five minutes later you are registered. You can register online or fill in a form and post. Whichever one you find easiest, but it must be done. Find further information at [www.hmrc.gov.uk/selfemployed](http://www.hmrc.gov.uk/selfemployed).

In addition, there's no need to worry about paying class 2 NI because you don't have any money coming in yet – you can file a [CF10](#), Certificate of Small Earnings Exception if your income from self employment is below a certain threshold.

## 2. Where Do I Start?

### 2.1. Business Name

Choosing your business name can go two ways – you'll think of an original name quickly which has a domain name available, or you will think of a name but no domain name can be found no matter how much you search. Whichever way it goes for you, a business name is important – it tells your potential clients and everyone in your industry who you are and what your branding is. Once selected you don't want to change it because it can prove expensive – new logo, new business cards, new web site etc – all costs money to change if you haven't done your research fully in the initial stages.

You will want your name to be easily remembered and easy to say – anything that is difficult to pronounce or doesn't roll off the tongue easily may be forgotten quickly. One business name I have seen locally which I think is a really good one for the industry the company is in is [Bytes Back](#) – a computer repair specialists. On the other hand, a name that doesn't let you know what the company is about can be forgotten easily, such as The Quezal Group, (an IFA company). Unless you know that the feathers of the Quezal bird, a native to Mexico, was used hundreds of years ago as money and therefore the more you had the wealthier you were, you wouldn't know what the company was involved in.

## DREAM OR REALITY?

Your name will also need to look good when a logo is designed with it. Your logo becomes part of your branding and you will want it to be unique, rather than just having your name written on your business card or website.

Business Link has a very good article on how to choose a business name and can be found in the appendices or downloaded here: [Business Link – Choosing a Business Name](#).

Some things to think about when choosing a name for your business:

- ❖ Select a name that will appeal to the market you are hoping to attract
- ❖ Select a name that is easy to remember
- ❖ Select a name that reflects the services you are going to provide
- ❖ Check Companies House ([www.companieshouse.gov.uk](http://www.companieshouse.gov.uk)) and the National Business Register (<http://www.start.biz>) before you finalise your business name
- ❖ Once selected, register on The National Business Register so that no-one else can use the name.
- ❖ If you have plans to trademark the name, check the name out on The National Business Register also

## DREAM OR REALITY?

- ❖ Don't pick a name that people won't understand, is an acronym or is initials only - don't think that because you understand it others will also – it needs to be easily recognisable and understood
- ❖ Don't include Ltd or Inc unless you are a limited or incorporated company – it's against the law.
- ❖ Make sure that the web domain name is also available and register it as soon as possible even if you are not getting a web site done straight away – you don't want to have a different web and email address to your business name.

### How I Chose the Name/Brand for my Business

Choosing a name for the business was quite a daunting task. All the names I could come up with seemed to have been taken, and all centred around the term VA or Virtual Assistant. Eventually I decided that I would need to work backwards – see what domain names were available and then check whether the business name was taken (I checked the [National Business Register](#) and [Companies House](#) to make sure it wasn't being used by anyone else).

My thought process eventually went down the lines of:

What will my business be about? – office work/administration

How will I provide it for clients? – online?

Your Office Online came from there.

## DREAM OR REALITY?

When it came to the branding, I knew that I wanted something that reflected office documents and telephone answering services. I met and discussed requirements with a designer my then employer was using to brand the project I was working on. For some strange reason I decided on blue as the colour for the logo and my first logo was born.

After 18 months or so, I decided that it needed changing and a second version, through a different designer who knew more about me and what I did, was born.

This still wasn't quite right, so I made the final change about 9 months ago to reflect the fact that my services were done online via a mouse. Again, the second designer made the changes for me.

My businesses cards have also changed each time I have made a change to my logo and I now have a bi-fold business card, which utilises all four sides of the card to tell a story about what Your Office Online does for its clients.

### 2.2. Domain Name and Email Addresses

When choosing your business name, check that the domain name is also available. There are many companies available to check this out which include:

❖ [www.daily.co.uk](http://www.daily.co.uk)

❖ [www.123-reg.co.uk](http://www.123-reg.co.uk)

❖ [www.1-and-1.co.uk](http://www.1-and-1.co.uk)

You should also check The National Business Register when you check for your business name. I would personally recommend that you register your business name with The National Business Register so that it shows as 'taken' when other businesses do their searches.

Once you have your business domain name, set up an email address which ends with your domain name, eg enquiries@.....co.uk or info@.....com. In my opinion it is imperative that a business uses an email address which reflects their business name and is not a freebie address such as @googlemail.co.uk or @aol.com. You are aiming to portray a professional image within your business and to potential clients/customers and this WILL NOT be the case if you do not use a professional email address. Without a professional email address, your potential clients/customers will think that there is something dodgy about your business and look for their product/service needs elsewhere.

So, you've registered your business name, you've registered your domain name and set up an email account, now you need to brand your email with your company details. When people think of branded emails, they think of the newsletters that are sent out in such numbers they could be thought of a spam. Branding your email is all about getting your company known and isn't about spamming people. Branding your emails can be as simple as adding a signature block with your contact details and a logo to the bottom of your emails, or rather more exciting by customising your emails so that there is more information about your

business on each email that leaves the company – see [Appendix 1](#) for an example of my branded email. I use the branded, customised version for initial contact with new/potential clients and then use a ‘plain’ html email with details in my signature block – again shown in [Appendix 1](#).

### 2.3. Logo

Okay, you have a business name, a domain name, and an email address, you now need a logo. You can design your own logo in Publisher or Word, or you can find companies online that can design one for you. My suggestion though would be to find a graphic designer who you can talk to face-to-face or via the telephone, someone who will find the ‘you’ behind the business, and will design a logo that reflects you, your vision, and your business. You may spend a little more than doing it yourself but again, it looks more professional and reflects the standards you set yourself and therefore lets your potential clients know that you are serious about your business.

Virtual Business in a Box has collaborated with a Mark Lawson Design ([Mark Lawson Design](#)) who strives to get inside his clients’ minds to find out what drives them and what they are really looking for. Virtual Business in a Box has vouchers on offer on the web site, which can be used towards having a logo professionally designed. Visit [www.virtualbusinessinabox.co.uk](http://www.virtualbusinessinabox.co.uk) for further details. The voucher is also included in The Box for those who have purchased the entire package.

#### 2.4. Website – design, build and publish

Having purchased a domain name, set up your email addresses and had a logo designed, you now need a website. Personally, I believe that a web site is necessary for any business. It doesn't have to cost a fortune to have a start up web site of say 4 pages (home page, about us, services/products, and contact us page). Your website should have your logo and your company name as well as your contact details on EACH page. If you don't have your contact details easily available, people will not be able to contact you and will go elsewhere.

Most hosting companies have a number of templates available if you want to design your own website. If this seems too daunting, find someone who is able to design one for you. Make sure you have the website hosted and registered in your name because if the company who has bought/registered it for you goes bust without giving you ownership, you may find it very hard to prove ownership and will lose everything.

Before you start designing your website you will need to think about how you want it to look, why you want a website – to sell services/products, as a brochure, to inform etc, and what you want viewers to get from it.

Virtual Business in a Box has collaborated with [Clarihon Web Services](#) to provide website design and hosting for the first year of business. Clarihon Web Services offers web design without the 'technobabble' and speaks plain English with its clients. A voucher is included in The Box for a website to be

designed and hosted through Clarihon Web Services and comes with two options. Full details available at [www.virtualbusinessinbox.co.uk](http://www.virtualbusinessinbox.co.uk).

Important information to include on your website would be:

- ❖ Services/Products
- ❖ Samples of work (without breaching client confidentiality)
- ❖ Contact information – use a contact form
- ❖ About Us – who you are, your experience, why people should buy from you, a photo (people buy from people and like to see who they are dealing with)
- ❖ Opt in form – capture people’s details to use for newsletters etc (opt in so that they are in control of what they receive. Also include an 'opt out' option on your newsletter for people to unsubscribe).

Having a website designed and published is not the end though. There is no point having a website if no-one can find you, so you also need SEO (Search engine Optimisation). This can be very daunting for people who have never dealt with it before and it took me ages to work out the SEO for my site [www.your-office-online.co.uk](http://www.your-office-online.co.uk). However, I am now at the top of the first page for my main keyword.

Search engines such as Google and Yahoo! have software which scours the internet looking for and categorising

websites by keywords to enable people who search to find what they are looking for. Therefore optimising your website with the correct keywords will make the difference between being found or not; for instance, if a client knows my name they can Google '[Dawn Lane](#)' and they will find me. If they know my website address they can also find me. However, because my site is not optimised for Bookkeeping they won't find me.

Think seriously about the SEO of your site and the keywords you use. The more you are able to use the tools of SEO the more likely you are to be found. There are plenty of sites available, which will give you the basics of SEO, and there could be seminars and college classes in your local area to learn more about it. Google Analytics has a very good guide for basic SEO – [Google SEO Start Up Guide](#).

## 2.5. Contact Details

Your contact details need to be easily available to anyone who is looking for you or even for your competitors. A Google search by a potential client for one company/product/service can often turn up another company name and you need yours to be visible.

You could be found on Google through many sources – online directories, your website, links back from other websites etc. A simple Google search for [Dawn Lane](#) turns up numerous links to me and other women with the same name – therefore I need to ensure that my details are correct so that I can be found instantly. I can be found via my website, Ecademy (I am a member) LinkedIn, twitter and

## DREAM OR REALITY?

other forums I belong to. By joining a number of forums your name will be visible to many people searching the Internet.

Your contact details should include:

- ❖ Your name and business name
- ❖ Website and email address
- ❖ Telephone numbers – landline and mobile
- ❖ Postal address

We've covered business names, website and email details in earlier sections. Telephone numbers and postal addresses are also important.

The information you are required by law to display on any correspondence sent from your business depends on how you set up your company - sole trader, partnership, ltd company etc.

Brief details for the types of set up you will probably be looking at initially are:

- ❖ Sole trader - If you are going to [trade](#) under a name different to your own personal name you must display the name/s of the owners and an address where documents can be served on all business stationery and at your premises. Design letterheads, business cards and signage accordingly.

## DREAM OR REALITY?

- ❖ Limited company – as a limited company you must display your business name, place of registration, company registration number and registered address on all information, including electronic documents, web site, order forms etc. Further information can be found at [Company Law Club](#).
- ❖ Limited liability partnership – a hybrid of a private company limited by shares and a partnership. Further information can be found at [Company Law Club](#).

Telephone numbers are an important way for people to contact you. Not everyone uses the Internet or has access to emails. If you only display a mobile phone number, many people will not contact you for fear that your business is dubious and that they could end up losing money. If you are working from home and want a separate number to your home phone number, it is quite easy to set up a business telephone number, 0800/0845/local number, on your landline at little extra cost. There are a number of companies around who can provide these numbers from as little as £0.40 per day and they come with full answer phone services and the ability to receive fax to email and emailed voice messages. I use a company called [Callagenix](#) for my number and also for some of my clients, whilst another of my clients uses [Switch](#).

Displaying your postal address is another sign of your reliability to your potential clients/customers. Many companies show a PO Box address which can be rented from Royal Mail from around £65 per year (add

approximately another £65 for redirection of mail to your home/office address). However, if you set up as a limited company, you cannot register the business with Companies House at a PO Box address and must show the registered address on all correspondence. Also, some courier companies will not deliver to a PO Box nor will some companies take orders for PO Box deliveries.

## 2.6. Business Cards

You've secured your business name and web address, your logo has been designed and you have decided on your email address, mailing address, telephone and fax numbers, you now need a business card.

Having an attractive business card which has been professionally printed will add professionalism to your branding in a visual way. First impressions count and many times someone will make a decision on how you conduct your business through their first visual impressions of you and your business card.

Many people will tell you that it is okay to design your own business cards via Publisher or Word and to print your own using products like Avery business cards. Whilst these have improved in quality over the years, they are still not as good as professionally printed cards. You don't have to spend £££s on them – I recently used a company called [CardsMadeEasy](#). I did design the cards myself and uploaded my artwork to their website. I ordered 500 matt laminated folded cards (4 sides) on 17<sup>th</sup> of the month and they were delivered on 27<sup>th</sup>. The quality was excellent as was the

## DREAM OR REALITY?

customer service and all at a cost of less than £83.00. Other companies to consider are [Printing.com](https://www.printing.com) and [Solopress](https://www.solopress.com). I have used both these companies for various printed items and quality and customer service are good for both companies.

Your business card needs to be able to stand the test of time – hopefully clients, potential clients and colleagues will be referring back to your card for many years. Therefore you need to spend time and energy on making sure the design and quality is right.

I use a folded card to give me more space to describe what I offer. The front and back cover tells people who I am and how to contact me, whilst the inside tells them about my products and services – see [Appendix 2](#).

A number of items to put on your card which are essential are:

- ❖ Your name and business name
- ❖ Logo
- ❖ Email and web address
- ❖ Telephone numbers

Optional items to include:

- ❖ Tag line
- ❖ Fax number

## DREAM OR REALITY?

- ❖ Mailing Address
- ❖ Any instant messaging accounts names
- ❖ Social networking addresses, such as twitter, IF you use them professionally to let followers know what services/promotions/events you may have.

### 2.7. Promotional items

Your business card is one of the most important promotional items you can use but they come in many guises – pens, calendars, sticky pads, mouse pads, leaflets etc.

Why use them? They are a great way of getting your business name out in to the wider business or consumer community. It is a reminder of who you are and what you have to offer. They are particularly useful if you are exhibiting and want to give people ‘freebies.’

Many times people pick up items from stands at exhibitions and shows, and put them away somewhere and forget about them. However, there comes a time when they or someone they know may need the services/products that the ‘freebie’ was publicising and the contact details on them come in handy – the potential client/customer is then able to contact you easily.

## 2.8. Personal branding

Branding is relevant to every business, and to every part of your business. It is a lot more than just a name and a logo. It is also about the people within your business, how you/employees they present themselves and your company. It portrays the company ethics and corporate image and improves sales success.

Research shows that first impressions are based on what we see – a person will make a judgement on meeting you within the first 30 seconds, and we don't get a second chance to make that first impression.

Our personal branding, and that of the people we employ or work with as associates, is very persuasive and one which can be maximised to make an impact on your business.