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August 12, 2010

## A Self-Fulfilling Prophecy of Working from Home!

When Marion Jackson worked in what she refers to as "the real world", her and a former boss would often joke about how they could do their job from home. When Marion left that job though, those comments got her thinking...so much so that she started her own virtual assistant business! Find out how Marion did it, as she shares her story with Bizoomi.

### What is your business?

You know how you sometimes experience the problem of not having enough time in your day, so you start getting frustrated and behind with your work? Well, ["My Virtual Assistant"](#) is an online personal assistant service, which means I can help out with all the jobs you don't have time for, aren't very good at or just dislike doing. The benefit of which, is, you get extra time to focus on the more important things – like revenue generating projects and growing your business, or just having more time to spend with your family and friends.

### How long have you been in business?

After doing a lot of research and time spent designing my website, I launched my company on 13 March 2009.

### How old are you?

I am 46 years old. I live with my partner in Auckland, New Zealand. We have two Maine Coon cats (largest breed of domestic cat in the World) and try to go away on our boat as often as we can.

### What were you doing before you started your business?

For 26 years I worked in the 'real world', first as a Travel Agent and then as an Executive Assistant, supporting some high flyers in the corporate world. I also got the chance to learn a lot about Marketing, Branding and Public Relations. For 14 of those years I worked in the Travel Industry, mostly as a Senior Business Travel Consultant and I also set up Air New Zealand's frequent flyer programme. The rest of my employment history includes working in the Retirement Industry; Infrastructure Maintenance; Prestige Motor Vehicle Industry and the Commercial Real Estate Industry. Something I did 'just for me' was complete a Diploma of Professional Interior Design with The Interior Design Academy and absolutely love anything 'house'!



### How did you get started in the business?

During my last job my boss would often comment to me, saying 'Marion, we could do this stuff from home!' We figured that both of us could work remotely and would just need to catch up for a couple of hours each week. And as much as we both quite fancied the idea, that's as far as it went. It wasn't until my boss left the company and I resigned from my job

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not long afterwards, that I started thinking about the conversations we used to have. The more I thought about it, the more I was convinced that a lot of the things I did in the office actually could be done 'virtually' (apart from doing the filing and making the coffee!).

During my research, I read that the George Washington University reported that "Virtual Assistance is fast becoming one of the top technological breakthroughs to occur in the business world and it won't be long before Virtual Assistant's are a widely accepted means of business support."

It didn't take me long to decide that I wanted to be involved in such an exciting industry, which, let's face it, is actually making business history.

#### What are the best things about being in business for you?

I get the chance to do the kind of work that I truly love doing. It's challenging and never boring because I work for a variety of people in different industries, and I get to do it at home! This creates quality time for me to spend with my partner (we are boaties and like to get away whenever we can), my parents and our friends. I also have a huge passion for interior design and we're currently renovating our home. Working from home means I can co-ordinate and keep an eye on those trades people!

#### What is your biggest goal for your business at the moment?

To build my business to an extent where my business model is successful, enabling me to franchise my brand out to other ex-Personal Assistants. That is, skilled, professional business people who wish to work from home because of a change in their circumstances, like family commitments, health issues, redundancy and sporting pursuits.

I would love to be able to create employment for ex-PA's to work as many hours as they wish, choose their own target market depending on their capabilities, and not only utilise, but enhance and grow their existing skills, rather than giving up everything they have learned and worked for because they have chose to have a family, for example

#### What is your biggest challenge in business at the moment?

Starting completely from scratch and doing all I can to get my name 'out there'. Most New Zealanders have never even heard the term 'Virtual Assistant', so at the beginning, I was not only trying to educate anyone I met as to what a Virtual Assistant is and does, I was also doing my utmost to convince them that their life would change for the better if they worked with one!

My biggest challenge at the moment is to create credibility for my brand and I am doing whatever it takes to get my name in front of the public eye. I believe my business has significant differentiation from that of other Virtual Assistants, in terms of products and services, marketing, investment and target market.

#### What has been your greatest achievement in business to date?

Launching a company in the middle of a worldwide recession, believing in myself and my product and making it work!

Making the decision to work from home and setting up my whole business on my own – which included building and creating my website (I'd never done anything like that before), finding ways to market my company on an extremely small budget and consequently finding clients who would become long term clients. I constantly surprise myself with the things I am doing and I'm excited at how far I've come in just over a year since starting my business.

#### Any developments/big news with your business that you would like to share?

I recently put myself 'on the line' and entered the David Awards. "The David Awards recognise home and small businesses throughout New Zealand, whose tenacity, courage and ingenuity place them firmly at the forefront of entrepreneurship in this country." The competition is pretty tough and I don't know if I'll even get a nomination, but you don't know if you don't try, do you?!

**My Virtual Assistant**

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**What would you like to get out of the Bizoomi website?**

Like I mentioned earlier, one of the biggest challenges about being a Virtual Assistant (especially in li'l ol' New Zealand) is getting my name out there, so I'm hoping Bizoomi will help me do just that. My clients don't necessarily have to come from New Zealand; in fact, my most recent client found me via my website and she lives in Geneva, Switzerland!

**What piece of advice do you have for those starting a business?**

Constantly remind yourself why you are doing what you are doing. Keep your eye on your vision. Be prepared to research and learn, and put into practice what you learn. Be open to new ideas and never turn down a challenge. It's an adventure worth participating in – just go for it!

**What motivational advice can you give to other small business owners like yourself?**

Join at least one networking group – more if you can. I am a member of BNI (Business Networking International) and we meet every week. You learn to stand up and verbally promote yourself and your business. Sometimes you might feel like you are out of your comfort zone, but it's so good for you and you will get better at it, to the point that you start looking forward to the next meeting. Surrounding yourself with like-minded people once a week is extremely therapeutic and very motivational.

**Connect with Marion:**

To learn more about My Virtual Assistant or to contact Marion directly, please visit the [My Virtual Assistant website](#).

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