

## **The Secrets to Successful Outsourcing**

**Presenter: Nicole Hammett**

**Nick:** Okay. Okay it's time for the next presentation. I hope you all enjoyed lunch. Actually at the next session I'll give you a feedback form everyone to fill in including the food. Tree Tops are ... what?

**Female Speaker:** (0:30) on?

**Nick:** Didn't I? I outsourced it to my VA actually.

**Nicole:** Sorry. You've heard me complain Nick.

**Nick:** Right, so yeah, so Tree Tops are as interested as I am about the success of the day and their services so far, so please be brutally, brutally honest, well apart from about me. Nicole Hammett is the owner of a successful virtual assistant business, Little Miss Useful. After ten years working in the corporate world, boo, Nicole took a step back and decided to start her virtual assistant business. So whilst working part time and raising her beautiful son Charlie, Nicole slowly built her business into the success it is today. Little Miss Useful has clients all over Australia and overseas. Nicole has a passion for helping small business owners succeed and enjoys working with clients to help bring their dreams to life and making business easier for everyone, yay. Nicole has experienced a wide range of fields including marketing, social media Wordpress and blogging. She's also the mastermind behind the CCBiz networking group based on the Central Coast which I referred to before. I outsource a lot of my business to Nicole so I can speak personally that she's very good at this. So please welcome Nicole Hammett.

**Nicole:** Hi everyone. Thank you for having me Nick. You'll have to first of all just excuse my voice, I lost it on Friday so it's just coming back so hopefully it will last the 50 minutes. So as Nick said my business is called Little Miss Useful and I'm a virtual assistant business based here on the Central Coast. Basically I'm not sure how many people here know what a virtual assistant is, does anyone not know? Okay. So virtual assistants basically we help ... we do secretarial work. I provide that to small businesses on an ad hoc basis. People contract me in to just help their businesses like Nick. I've got quite a range of clients. Basically the majority of the presentation will be about virtual assistants but outsourcing in general, all the principles that I'll teach you today is actually ... they're very interchangeable to all the different business functions that you can outsource.

So firstly I just wanted to talk about the basics of what outsourcing is, so in its basic form outsourcing is about the contracting out of a business function to an external provider like myself. There are so many ... a lot of the big corporate companies have been doing outsourcing for quite a lot of years, albeit not very well, Telstra one of them, you know, they tend to actually outsource more of their call centre, so I'm not really talking about that at the moment, we'll mainly be talking about how small businesses can actually utilise outsourcing and it is actually a really powerful tool, but it has to be done right. There is an art to outsourcing and what I want to go through today is basically just how you can outsource and get the maximum benefit for you and your business. So what can you outsource? A whole range of things. As I mentioned primarily we'll be talking about administration but you can outsource accounts, your copywriting, social media, web design, anything that you really want.

You really need to find your weaknesses and outsource them. Everyone has them. I know mine are accounts, I really hate accounts, I outsource them, I don't do them, and that's really the basics of what it is. You're a small business. You really want to be doing what you love, so why do you need to do all the other stuff that you really hate doing, you don't need to, you can outsource it, you know, outsource what you want, whatever you hate doing in your business, just send it on out and you'll find that you enjoy your business a lot better, you'll be productive and you'll make more money. So who can outsource? Any business really can. Primarily today we'll be talking about just entrepreneurs, small business owners but again medium sized businesses such as real estates, you know, entertainment places can actually outsource as well.

Here is the main thing, why do we outsource? Firstly is really to work smarter. You're in business and you want to make money and you should be focusing on those things. You shouldn't be focusing on the things like admin. They might take you a long time to do, it might take me or someone else an hour to do, you don't need to be spending that time on doing business activities that you might not necessarily want to do.

Cost effective, this is a big one. A lot of people actually say, "I can't afford to outsource, I just don't have the budget", but when you actually break it down, the amount of money that you would save, so I'll use a real example. One of my clients actually outsources her email newsletter to me. It takes me an hour and it would take her four hours to do. So her wasting four hours when she, she charges \$100 an hour, right, so she would make \$400 in those four hours that it would take for her to do the newsletter. She would pay me \$45 an hour. So it's a huge saving for her, and it's a really, really important factor to consider. You can, you know, why, why pay all of that money when you can pay someone else a fraction of that cost and they can probably do it faster and more better than you can? It wasn't very good English there but anyway.

Right so more time for you. This is a really big one and particularly for me. We all have ... most of you would have families. Outsourcing really does give you back that time, so you can spend more time with your families, you can spend more time on you if you want to go and have a massage or anything like that, you know, it can be for yourself. The other thing it actually gives your small business, particularly if you're a solopreneur and you're working with yourself, having someone who can support your business makes you look big and it gives that impression of being a bigger business than you actually are. It gives you a support person so in particular with one of my clients I call them and I say, "It's Nicole, I'm Tim's PA", and it really does give the idea of that, whilst I'm not working with him constantly, people do think that I'm there and I'm a full time employee and that I work for that business. I never, ever tell them who I work for, it's always that I work for that client, and that really does make a really big difference to your business.

Diversifying your a business. It can actually add a lot of skill set that you might not have in your business, you know, diversifying perhaps you're not, you don't know how to use social media so you can actually outsource that function to someone who knows how to do it and without spending the money, too much money, you've already got a skilled employee who can help with that section. You don't need to wear all the hats. So how many of you small business owners feel like you have to do everything, anyone? I know I do, really bad, I know I'm a big advocate for outsourcing but it's easier, sometimes you feel like it's easier to just do it yourself and you feel like you're trying to do the marketing and you're doing the sales and then you're trying to do the admin and the accounts, you know, you're really trying to stretch, you're stretching yourself between all the different sections.

So once you start outsourcing you don't have to do that and it really does take a lot of pressure away from you and, you know, obviously it will reduce the amount of stress that you have. Sorry Nick it's saying replace lamp.

**Nick:** How long's it been saying that?

**Nicole:** Don't know, not long. Five minutes.

**Nick:** Everybody just try to ignore that.

**Nicole:** Just ignore ... that's not part of my presentation though, I don't replace lamps. I could try, I could find some for you but I don't do it. But I mean another one, this one actually comes back to the whole cost effective side of things. You don't need to provide the office equipment. Your VA or accounting person, depending on what you chose to outsource will actually have all of that on you so you don't have the extra cost of having to provide equipment for them. You actually don't need to pay for training, particularly ongoing training, they will have the skills, and if they don't, I mean they will be suitably skilled for the job so, and if they don't then you should find someone else. The other good thing is that you can actually use them when and as needed. If, you know, you have something or you want to use them and even for one hour per month, you can do that. The majority of virtual assistants actually work on an hourly basis. I know that I charge with 15 minute increments so if you want me to do a 15 minutes job that's fine. We can do that and it just really varies. Again I have clients that use me ten hours a week so it really varies and then I've got my clients who might use me once every three months so it really gives you that support where you might not need it and it actually gives you that flexibility to not have to consistently pay someone. So when it comes down to looking at employees you have zero employee costs, you don't pay for maternity leave at all, pay as you go tax, you don't do that, superannuation, all of that is covered by your contractor, so you don't cover any of that which is a huge, huge saving particularly for small businesses.

So where do we start? There's a few things that you really need to do. Once you've decided that you want to outsource, you need to be very clear on what you're trying to achieve because we can't tell you that so you need to know exactly what you're trying to achieve in your business. So going on you have a very, very clear idea as to why you are outsourcing. Are you trying to reduce the amount of hours that you're working? Is it more like an error that you don't actually want to do? You know I have a client who works a four day week and then I look after her business on the Friday. So and that's one of her life ... she has a family and just one of her goals in life is actually to work four days, and she does that because I'm there and that I'm supporting her business on a Friday and she can take the day off without worrying and I'm looking after her business for her.

The other, you know, other things that it could be, you might be really into marketing. You're the best person for your business and you really need to be out there marketing your own business and actually selling our business, and while you're doing the administration work you're talking away that time so you know, like you can use outsourcing as a way to actually be more focused on those activities and bringing more money into the business, and essentially, you know, that's going to cover the cost of outsourcing to begin with, so. If I'm talking too fast just tell me to slow down.

Okay, so what I actually suggest, a lot of my clients when they first start out they come to me and they say, "Right I know I want to outsource but I don't know what I can outsource". So what I actually say to them is to write a list. So for the two weeks, one to two weeks really, is that they sit down and they write a list of everything, every task that they don't want to do. Just write it down, they don't need to tell me, just write everything down, and then also there are activities that maybe you shouldn't be doing, I mean they're fairly similar but, you know, there are some things that really need to be done and if you don't need to do them why, why should you? Write them down and then just start from there, that'll actually give you an idea. So you might not want to do design, so you'll outsource to a designer. You know again if you don't want to do social media you outsource that. You just sit down and it really becomes clear within that one to two weeks as to what areas that you want to outsource to and then once you do that focus on those ... the things that you do well and then outsource everything else. It really does come back to that. You need to find your strengths and work on those and the outsource the weaknesses because you don't need to be doing them, and I know that as a business owner, like if there's something that I don't want to do, I procrastinate big time. So what's the point? Just send it out. Do you know what I mean?

Big one. This is really key. As much as I would love to tell you that myself as a virtual assistant would be suitable for everyone, I'm not going to be. You need to find a virtual assistant that is suitable to you. So you need to work this all out before you approach anyone, like now your quirks, you know how you work, we don't, we can't guess. You need to sit down, are you a phone person or are you more of an email kind of person, because if you are, you need to find a virtual assistant who works that way. If you prefer to do your job by talking on the phone and you have a virtual assistant who only works via email, then it's really not going to be a good fit. So you need to find someone who's a really a good fit for your business.

There's other things like I offer Skype so my clients have access to me on Skype, which, you know, that can be instant messages or they can have phone calls, depending on what they need to do, but there are some virtual assistants who don't actually offer this. I don't actually on Tuesdays and Fridays 'cause I have my son with me then, so it's really just not, it's not effective to have my son in the background trying to talk to clients, "Hang on he's crying, or throwing a tantrum or something like that", so you just really need to have a think. If you need that constant contact you need to find someone who can do that for you.

The other thing that you need to do is actually work out who your day is structured. Are you an afternoon person, are you a morning person, like it's just little things like this that actually help us know how you work and it really just gives us a better idea on how we can sort of help you and just ... sorry, I'm just losing my voice again. Yeah I mean it basically just lets us help you to support your business a lot better. And then the other thing you need to actually consider is your turnaround time. So if you're looking at a really quick turnaround you need to find a VA who can do that. A lot of them do offer 24 hour turnaround time, that's an average, turnaround time is 24 to 48 hours with the virtual assistant. Graphic design obviously a lot more than that, so you just need to sit and look at your turnaround times and just see if you can find someone to fit that. So there's a lot of things that you need to think about before you actually start finding a virtual assistant, but once you've done that you can actually try and find one. That wasn't me. That'll be the lamp.

**Nick:** (16:29).

**Nicole:** Did she. Well I don't know, I don't know my presentation that well that I can keep going.

**Nick:** Just keep going and I'll ...

**Nicole:** Yep. I'll have to ... yeah I'll ....

**Nick:** Sorry.

**Nicole:** No you're right.

**Nick:** They'll be paying more attention to you now Nic so that you're ...

**Nicole:** Right. Okay so finding a virtual assistant, not as easy as it sounds. There are a lot of them, and I mean a lot, both in Australia and in America. Mainly America's actually a really big area for virtual assistants, Australia's really up and coming. Probably over the last two years it's started growing, but what I ... so what I really would recommend is actually to go by word of mouth, speak to your colleagues, ask for referrals. If someone's, if they have a VA, you need to speak to them and find out, it's much easier to have someone who would recommend someone that they've dealt with before. So a really big thing with virtual assistants and outsourcing is trust, so automatically you're going to trust someone a little bit more if they've been referred to you, and it is a really big thing. Trust is a huge thing and it takes time to build up. So if you're starting on a little bit more of an even footing it just gives you a bit more, you know, just it gives you just a little bit more peace of mind to, in to what you're actually doing. The other thing, if you don't know anyone who can refer a virtual assistant to you, you can ... there's a lot of virtual assistant forums or associations. I think there's three, three main ones in Australia at the moment, so you can actually go to them and they offer free services and if you know what you're looking for you can actually submit that to them, and then they basically, they send it out to their associate network of VA's and then you'll start receiving proposals back from VA's and you can pick and choose. This is really hard without the screen.

Social networking, another big thing. When I very first started out I actually got 70% of my business from Twitter, which is a really big amount and actually my two main clients that I do a lot of work for at the moment, they were, both of them were from Twitter. So Nick from was Twitter, so Johanna who spoke before was from Twitter, they were all clients of mine that I met online. It has now gone back ... it's reverted over to referrals but social ... it is just a really good place where you can get to know people without actually having to approach them for work. So you can just get an idea of their personality and how they work and just see what they're doing. You can learn a lot from both their Facebook pages and Twitter. So just have a search around, there's a lot of them out there. You'll find them easily and just start following a few and just get to know them. Google is the other one. I really recommend Google to be honest. I mean obviously it's the number one search engine in the world for a reason, but there's a lot of VA's out there competing for that space, so you really, it's not targeted. You need to be ... just look at the other, try the other avenues first and then if all else fails, go on to Google and see how you go. But it is a good place to start even if you just want to just get an idea of what people are like and just (20:06). So it can be good just to start out by using Google and have a look.

Right so, what to look for. They must, must, must have a professional website. That's their shop front, they're virtual assistants and they need a website.

If they don't, then look for someone else. They really need one, and it has to be professional looking. I'm not saying it has to be, you know, flashy and it has to be ... it doesn't have to be the best looking website but it must be professional, and they should have all their information on there including a privacy policy. If they don't keep looking because they really need ... privacy's a massive thing and you need to have that peace of mind, so just have a look and see if you can. Look for testimonials or references. Their websites should have testimonials. I think I've got about ten or so. I've got more but I don't want to put them on 'cause it kinds of looks a little up yourself to have too many more than that, but, you know, you really do need that on there, and if they don't, speak to them about references. They could, it's quite possible they're very ... they're just in the start up phase and they actually don't have testimonials. So if you have a good feeling about them, just speak to them and see if they can provide you with a reference from previous employers or something like that who can attest to what they're like. Cool. We're up and running. That's good.

Right they must have a contract. When you're speaking to VA's, insist on a contract. It is so important. It protects both of you actually. Annalisa wrote a blog post about it. You have to have a contract. That was the very first thing when I set my business up, my contract was the first thing and I insist on everyone signing it and if they don't, I don't work with them purely for that reason.

**Female Speaker:** Would that be terms of trade?

**Nicole:** Yeah it's just for terms, terms and conditions. I actually don't call it a contract because I'm not locking them in to like pay me a regular amount of money. It's my terms and conditions and it sets out how I use their information, that's the main thing, my payment terms, how I charge them, just those, those kind of things. What happens if they don't make payment, all the late payment fees, anything like that. It just ... they really need it, even if it's basic, but it has to be, they have to have one. And again, confidentiality, huge. If they don't have a confidentiality and privacy policy, either ask for one and make them do one, or find someone else, because that's a big thing. You're handing over a lot of your business information, like the amount of information I actually have access to with my, all of my clients it's amazing, passwords, everything. They must have a confidentiality ... yep?

**Male Speaker:** Can I just say on that point, do you have a standard agreement on both the contract, or terms of service and the confidentiality if anybody ...

**Nicole:** Yes. Yeah if anyone wants them, yeah, I can send it through. It's ... it's very standard, I just alternate it depending on what they want done and if they buy a Wordpress package from me it'll obviously be a little bit different to what my hourly rate but I, as a rule that's all the same. I have both. I actually have a terms and conditions with a little privacy policy and I actually have a bigger one which is just my privacy policy and how I use it and they're both on my website actually, so if you want to have a look, you can.

Samples or a portfolio is also a good way just to see how it works. I actually haven't been asked for samples or my portfolio before, but, you know, if you really just want to see what they're like you can actually do that, and that goes on to the next part. Your VA is actually more like a business partner and you need to get that mindset right before you go out looking for a virtual assistant. They're not employees, okay at all.

So you really just need to like think of it, it's really an investment into your business because if you can find a VA that you can be partner with, you know, you could work with them for quite a long time so you really need to just treat them as a business partner. Share with them as much information as you can, obviously once you've signed all the contracts anyway, you don't want to go into too much detail. But you need to just find someone who really follows in your vision and what you see, where you see your company going. So if you don't have someone who can do that then it's not really going to fit, obviously they don't have to follow exactly what you're after but they need to see what you're doing and know where you're trying to head, because actually they can provide a lot more value to you that way.

I think I've had someone speaking to me about this before. There's been a lot of debate actually about going onshore and offshore, so outsourcing to India or Singapore, the Philippines ...

**Male Speaker:** Can I tell you a little story about that?

**Nicole:** Yeah.

**Nick:** Wait a sec.

**Nicole:** Mic, wait.

**Male Speaker:** My little story here we go.

**Nicole:** Yes.

**Male Speaker:** When I was designing my logo for my business card, I went (25:32) outsource to India and now I was looking for a picture of a Viking so I said I wanted a picture of a Viking. A picture came back of an Indian man of muscles. So there's bits ... a very basic analogy but essentially what you need to realise is they need to be on exactly the same wave length ...

**Nicole:** That's right.

**Male Speaker:** ... and you've got to be really clear with what you want and sometimes you have a gem of an idea but you haven't got the rest of the details and they can go one way and they can go the other way so you've really got to know what you want before you start looking.

**Nicole:** That's right. And like there is a place for going offshore, okay. Obviously I'm an Australian VA and I really support keeping things here, but there is a place for it. So there's a few things if you're going to think of doing it that you really need to consider. So how you're going to use your VA is a really big one. I do a lot of client contact so I work with my clients clients, so I would ring them and say, you know, "It's Nicole, I'm his PA", so he obviously needs me because I'm over here and I can understand the language. It wouldn't work if you went somewhere overseas, there's just too much of a language barrier, and also like it's just more of a professional looking thing, it's as much, you really just need to think about how you're going to use your VA. If you, you know, might just want some document formatting, that doesn't necessarily have to be done here, okay. I'd prefer it kept here, but it doesn't have to be, but then there are other things that you really need to consider like quality of work.

So whilst they might do it a lot cheaper, I think they charge about \$5 an hour, the amount of time you might actually have to spend checking that document when you get it back, transcription's actually a really big one. I've had a client who outsourced his transcription overseas and he spent nearly three hours checking over the transcription and checking for spelling mistakes, formatting errors, everything like that. There was just so much ... the difference in the quality of work is amazing. So for him he may as well have paid someone else that money because he ended up having to go through and check the work anyway, whereas you don't really have to do that with Australians. Or you know, you can go to England or the US, just someone where English is their first language. But obviously a budget is everyone's, a lot of it factors in. So a budget ... going offshore is obviously a lot cheaper, so as a rule you can get VA's in India I think for about \$4 to \$5 an hour, whereas someone like, you know, over here they vary from about \$25 to \$60 an hour. It just depends on the VA and what you really need, whether they're a specialist VA or whether they are just basic administration, so it really just depends on what you're looking for.

So, this is a really main part that I wanted to talk to you all about. Outsourcing can actually be very difficult. While it's really beneficial for your business, there's an art to doing it, so you really just need to ... these'd be the tips that I'd really like you take home, because it will help you, to be able to work with a virtual assistant. So as I mentioned trust is a huge thing and I always recommend to just start small. Handing over half an hour to an hour's lot of work just to get an idea of how they work and just to get an idea of how the work, and just, you know, it just really gives you that peace of mind as well when you're handing stuff over, you don't want to start with the really big stuff because if they make a mistake, you know, so you just want to get an idea of how they work. So starting small and don't be afraid to try a few different VA's. I've had clients do that a lot. They try a couple, just give them half an hour's work here and there and then they pick the one that they like, and that is a really good way to do it. Obviously I'd like you all to come to me, but you can go to other people if you want.

Learning to let go. This is really, really big guys and one of the main reasons that people actually don't outsource, so and it is, it is natural. It's your business, it's your baby, I understand that, my business is my baby, and I don't want to ... I am actually starting to outsource some of my business, I'm starting to get a team behind me, but yeah, like obviously in the beginning it was something I was hesitant about but with another one on the way I don't have much of a choice. So but like you really do, you might actually feel like you're just losing a bit of control, okay, but you're not, right. You're probably gaining more control in other areas so you need to think of it that way. You might be losing control of like the smaller things, but it really does allow you to focus on the more important aspects of your business. So, and your VA has done this before. We're professionals, we've done this many times, we know what we're doing and you need to have that in the back of your mind. That said, if you, you've got to go with your gut feeling, so if you feel like something's not going right, just stop and just say, "No this is not working" and find someone else or you can try again.

**Male Speaker:** (31:07).

**Nicole:** What?

**Male Speaker:** (31:22) outsource (31:24).

**Nicole:** You need to outsource this machine.

**Male Speaker:** (31:27). (31:31).

**Nicole:** I will, okay, no that's fine. So yeah I mean just keep in mind that your VA has done this before. If you're really unsure just talk to them, they can help reassure you. If you have any questions at all just have a chat. This brings me actually to my next slide, communication, okay. Big, big, I know I keep saying that but communication is huge. It needs to be ... the communication lines need to be kept open and you need to be honest, completely honest. If something's not working, you need to be telling people that, okay. I don't get offended. If someone comes to me and says, "I don't like the way this is working, we need to work out another process", that's fine, and generally quite often will say, "Okay well why don't we work out another way", and generally it actually turns out better in the long run. So, communication as well with your instructions for your tasks, it needs to be specific, they need to be clear. So you might be outsourcing but you just, you need to be very specific. Provide a deadline, huge. I don't know how many clients send me work and do not give me a deadline. It's just, you have to do it because, you know, you could have something that's due tomorrow at 11:00 am but you say, "Look I need it by tomorrow", like what if I get it to you at four o'clock? If I don't know the times, I'm not necessarily going to know ... I'll turn it off I think.

**Nick:** No, no it just cools down.

**Nicole:** No that's cool. So yeah, I mean that's basically, sorry I distracted myself. Deadlines are really important and just, you need to just keep those lines again really clear and open. Okay. So this is more really about how you're going to work together. You really just need to agree on the processes, on how things are going to work, so how information's going to be passed between each other, how you will monitor the tasks to make sure that they're done and they're completed. Obviously I guess that's, that's more important if you're going to be using it on a regular basis. If it's just a quick document formatting, you'll know when it's done because you'll receive an email. The majority of all the tasks are delivered to me via email. Actually that's pretty much the only way other than they might just give me a phone call and just have a chat about what they want, but again everything goes through email. You need, and you just need to work out processed and that so that you don't, nothing's missed, and also like will you be sending work to them just on an ad hoc basis or will it be ongoing, so and if it is ongoing will you save it up into a bulk so that they do it, you know, three or four hours at a time and will it just be as they go? How am I going for time?

**Nick:** Thirteen minutes, 15 minutes.

**Nicole:** Okay. I'll have time for questions. Expect the unexpected. Particularly, this is really important particularly in the beginning, things aren't always going to go smoothly, and they're just ... it's a good thing though, I mean you can't see it as a bad thing, it can actually help you see where things need to be improved with your relationship, so you really need to use mistakes and just learn from them and I guess that rings true with anything but it's really important with the outsourcing, and don't take your eye off the ball just because you've outsourced it, you do need to monitor what's going on. I mean they don't usually but you don't want the VA to become complacent so you do need to just monitor that and make sure, and if a mistake happens, call it up. I'm honest, if I make a mistake I'll just ring and say, "Look I'm really sorry, this has happened", I mean I fix it, like generally I don't make mistakes but they do happen, and it just also gives you an opportunity to actually systemise your business and I've sat down and worked out processes with a lot of my clients so we actually have, you know we go through all of the different things that they need to do on a regular basis and we systemise them.

And then they're documented as well, so if she ever does get a new VA, then it's transferable and all the instructions are there on how to do things.

Reviews. I guess this quite similar to if you were had an employee. You do need to have reviews. It's always a good thing. You just need to ... usually you have a trial period and just see how it goes. If it's not working or if something's not working again back to the communication, just tell them, you know, I have a regular review once a week with a few of my clients and we just have a chat and they basically tell me what's going on in the next week and we go through what's important for that week, and it's just really good that we keep in constant contact, because, you know, we just know what's going on and what's going on with each other. So he knows a lot about like what I'm doing with my business and again I know the same with his, so, that brings us pretty much to the end. So does anyone have any questions? I know I've kind of, I've got about ten minutes so.

**Male Speaker:** Questions?

**Nicole:** Anyone?

**Female Speaker:** I have something. It's probably more of a comment but going back to outsourcing and going to the overseas countries, with a totally different culturality, it doesn't always work if people really think, they might think, "Oh I'm paying \$5 an hour", but if you get all the work back and you've spent all that time doing it, you then actually paid \$5 an hour or \$25 that you might pay here, you've got to pay \$40 'cause your own time's worth \$40 an hour.

**Nicole:** That's right and that's what, what we actually try and push, that they steer clear of that ...

**Female Speaker:** But that's (37:31).

**Nicole:** Yeah I mean we do really recommend to keep it over here. Obviously, yeah the money is a factor but really if you look at it with the amount, you probably would have to maybe go through my work for five minutes, just to make sure it's okay. You wouldn't be fixing up anything but you'd be going through just to quality check it really. Whereas with someone overseas you'd probably be going through a lot more so are you really saving the money and that's just something that you need weigh up. Yeah.

**Female Speaker:** As a follow from that, only recently, or a while back the ANZ Bank, there was a lot of controversy, they said they were going to outsource their entire telemarketing, and there was a big controversy and in the end they didn't outsource all of them, outsourced a percentage. But recently they've had such poor feedback from the outsourcing, imagine how much they'd be paying maybe \$1 an hour ...

**Nicole:** Yeah it wouldn't be much.

**Female Speaker:** They're going to bring it back onshore because of the problems it has created ...

**Nicole:** That's right.

**Female Speaker:** ... with the customer service and the people can't complain to anyone up the line properly, so they've learnt the hard way and they're a big one to be monitoring how that's really, you know, (38:39) paying a couple of dollars an hour, but it's impacted adversely on their business.

**Nicole:** Yeah and that, it is a very big thing and the corporates do do it a lot, but they are starting to realise that it might not be a great idea, so I guess as small business owners you really want to be trying to keep everything over here. Obviously you'd prefer people to be buying with you and the same as us, we'd prefer people to keep things over here as well, so.

**Nick:** I think it's the peanuts and monkeys adage.

**Nicole:** Yeah, that's right.

**Nick:** Have you found that by specialising in something like you do in producing Wordpress websites for small business, have you found it helped boost that part of your business or are still doing ... do you still have to be something to everyone?

**Nicole:** Yeah I've got a real variety like big variety of clients so I do have those that are more project work where I will build their websites for them, and they will probably go on for say a month or so, but saying that I've actually had clients who have come to me for websites and then they've converted over. I now do their presentations or I do their formatting, I mean, but there's also others that I am literally their PA so I do the diary management, I do all of that kind of stuff for them, so it really, the internet is a great thing and there's so many tools out there I mean that it kind of feels like I'm next to you anyway. So it doesn't really feel like I'm ... a lot of my clients are actually in Melbourne and Queensland so I've only got three on the coast here who I can just see on a day to day business and everyone else is with Skype. We have video calls so it's like I'm working with them ... anyone, they don't notice the difference. So yep?

**Female Speaker:** In terms of, I mean we're, you know, our business is taking all our multi tasking, sometimes it's hard to sort of separate what we do. When you, when you get outsourced to, do you find that a lot of clients tend to go like, "Can you do this and do this and do that", ...

**Nicole:** Yeah.

**Female Speaker:** ... and where do you find, do you find it difficult drawing the line and sort of like, "Yep you need to pay me for that, that extra job".

**Nicole:** Ah well I am pretty ... with my clients, if they ask me to do something, they get charged anyway, so regardless of what they are asking me for. But yeah I mean there are some things where I'm not great at so I will actually say, "Look, that's not exactly what I can do". I can either find someone to help them or I'm actually starting to like grow my team so that I'm really, I'm trying to diversify my team so that if I can't do it then I've got someone who can. So but I mean it is hard. There are some clients obviously who try and take advantage and, you know, call you on Skype when they think that it's not, they're not being charged for, so but I mean I do. I charge for my Skype calls, I didn't but then it just really got too much where I had clients calling and I'd realise that hang on I've been on the phone for two hours today, so they really should be paying me for that. So, yeah, I meant that's something that I do but not a lot of them do, so. Any other questions?

**Nick:** Any more questions. Sorry (42:00).

**Female Speaker:** Just from a business point of a view, and probably a simple question that a Gosford person would personally ask, how would you convince me for example from a competitive point of view, from say from my industry if I was aware that a VA had a like company or a like business, and I was looking for a marketing strategy for example? Where do you sit in terms of you overcome that competitive concern, for want of another term, to take on another like business?

**Nicole:** Well I guess, like I don't really do a lot of marketing. I can do it, I don't do a lot of it. I knew someone would ask me a question that I'd stumble on. But look I mean I guess with me, my business is a very personal business so my competitiveness is where I am very personal and I'm upfront with my clients and they deal directly with me. There are a lot of VA's out there that they're multi, multi VA practices and you might not have just the one person. So particularly with my two big clients, they deal with only me, no one else, but everything does come through me and if I do need to outsource something I tell them and say, "I won't be the one doing this but (43:26)", so I don't if that, did that answer the question, yeah.

**Nick:** Can I (43:31) from a, from a different angle. If some people in the room who specialise in something that people might ask you to outsource but (43:41) whatever, is there a way that we can be in touch with VA's through a directory or something like that or a VA's go, "Oh gees I can't do that, or I can't do that right now", and outsource it directly to us? Is there a way that we can interact with (43:54)?

**Nicole:** Yeah well I guess like with me I sort of have my list of suppliers, so I guess for social media like I'd go to you. I sort of start introducing social media but it's not really, why do you want social media, like you should be really doing it, like helping to do some little strategy but then you're implementing it, whereas a lot of clients come to me asking if I can Tweet for them which I don't like doing because it really needs to be your personality, so things like that I would, you know, outsource to you. So I have a list of my suppliers who I refer people to if I can't do the job. But yeah, I mean there's not really any particular like website that they could go to. You'd really just be better off just trying to strike up a relationship with a VA and just seeing if there's something that you could do to compliment the services.

**Nick:** So that might be on a day like today, can someone (44:47).

**Nicole:** Yeah they can come up and talk to me if they want. If anyone has ...

**Nick:** Become of one your suppliers?

**Nicole:** Yeah absolutely. I'm definitely open to that so if they want to do that my contact was on the screen, but ...

**Nick:** If you press it now Nic it should come up, now that it's cooled down and that fan goes off. Sorry about that.

**Female Speaker:** Well you can kind of see it. So yeah if anyone does want to contact me for that you can either talk to me here today or contact me on those details. Email's probably best but yeah, all the others as well. So thank you very much for listening.

**Nick:** Any more questions? It's funny, this is another topic that five years ago we would never have been sitting here talking about.

**Nicole:** No, no, it's, you know, it's been one of those ... it's a really big growth industry at the moment, so, I've been in business for about two and a half, two, just over two years but there's ... the majority, we actually did an Australian Virtual Assistant survey not long ago and I think the majority of them have been in business between four and two years so it's really been a growth industry and there's a lot more newbies out there, so, yeah we're getting, it's going to be quite big.

**Nick:** Thank God for virtual assistants is all I can say. All right please thank Nicole.

**Nicole:** Thank you. Thanks guys.

**Nick:** Now we've got about ten minutes where we have to change tables 'cause the panel sessions next, so if you want stretch your legs, get a drink, go to the loo and I'll see you in ten minutes.

**End of Presentation.**