



## VA in Profile – Joanne Manville



### Joanne Manville Virtual Assistance

[<http://www.joannemanville.co.uk>] opened doors for business in October 2015. Joanne started her career after leaving university in 1998 and had roles in a wide variety of industries in both administrative and management positions. She worked in both the public and private sectors, in both small family and large corporate environments – in manufacturing, insurance, financial services, charities and the NHS; Between 2005 and 2015 she worked in senior Executive Personal Assistant positions, working for Managing Directors, Chief Executives and Boards but last year she decided that she wanted more flexibility and variety in her day and the opportunity to put all of her experience to good use so she took the step to start her own business as a Virtual Assistant, working both virtually and on-site with clients.

We caught up with Joanne to see how things had taken off for her in the last year:

**Did you do any specific training before you opened for business and was it useful?**

No, not a specific course but I did LOT of online webinars, and

reading as research.

### **How did you find your first client and what was the first job?**

My first job was minute taking for a HR hearing, it was referred to me by someone I met networking. When I left employment, I said to myself 'phew, I'll never have to do minute taking again' but I was good at it, and I was offered it. I do minute taking occasionally now, which is a far cry from the hours and hours I did it when I was employed. That's what I love about having my own business, being able to pick and choose my clients.

### **Have you developed a niche area and what is it?**

I decided my niche would be working with Mortgage Consultants as I used to be one myself, but it's not turned out that way as I have only one client who is a mortgage consultant.

### **How many clients do you work with now?**

I have four regular clients who use my services every week, and a few others that are more ad-hoc.

### **Do you work alone or with other VAs/employ someone?**

I currently work alone, although have a list of people to work with as things get busier.

### **What strategies have you used to grow your business and what has and hasn't worked?**

Networking is my main lead generator, I have had 35 leads since starting my business and 50% of those have come from networking of one form or another. When I started out I tried lead generators such as Time Etc and PPH but they were a waste of my time and I should have put my energy into finding my own leads right away.

### **What has been most difficult thing about growing your business?**

Starting my business has been a lot of hard work, and a steep learning curve. The first few months with no income is hard and it makes you wonder if you've done the right thing but if you work hard at it, it starts to pay off.

### **Tell us something about a typical day and what kind of work you do?**

My work varies between virtual work for clients, such as social

media and research and on-site work. Most of my work is on-site with clients, not working virtually. I hadn't expected it to work out that way but I really enjoy it and it gets me out of the house!

**What's one thing you've done that's made a client absolutely delighted?**

Two of my clients have said that I have totally changed the way they think about their business. I think when you are in a business, it's sometimes hard to see the woods for the trees and I help people think about what they are doing, and why, and then change direction or prioritise. This is my background as a senior-PA coming in. Whilst it is sometimes nice to do tasks like data entry where you don't need to use your brain, I like to question why someone does something that way and if there are better ways of doing things.

**Do you have any funny stories/anecdotes about jobs you've done?**

Only that I made a client cry – in a good way. After working with me for a few weeks, she said I'd given her an awakening and she found it quite emotional as she finally admitted to herself that she was taking her business in the wrong direction.

**What are your favourite applications/gadgets that you couldn't live without?**

My task timer, Toggl is a godsend. You really don't realise how much time you spend on tasks until you time them. It's also great to evidence work to clients so there is less chance of them challenging your invoices. It also has an app and links to my CRM, so I really couldn't be without it.

**What do you enjoy most about being a Virtual Assistant?**

I love the flexibility that it gives me, and the variety. I also love that I am in control – if I don't have enough work coming in, there is only one person to blame for that – I am accountable to myself.

**What do you enjoy least about being a Virtual Assistant?**

Sometimes if I don't have any work, I can get distracted, and find myself doing the laundry instead of marketing or scheduling some social media posts. I'll always be doing something though, you'll never find me in front of the TV!

**What's the best advice you've been given or would give to**

### others about growing your business?

Read everything going! There is so much free advice out there. Attend free local business networking, go to free training courses, sign up for webinars etc. And when you do get going, know your numbers. Know what you need to earn, where your business is coming from, how your leads are converting etc. without this you won't know if you're been successful or not.

### What do you think are the most important qualities a VA should have?

Flexibility, honesty and assertiveness. It's your business, run it the way you want to!

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**Joanne, Editor**  
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Joanne Sparkes is the Managing Director of Expedio Virtual Assistance [<http://www.thevirtualassistant.co.uk>] a leading VA practice in the UK since 2002

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