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Home
News
Money

Inside Small Biz

[Small biz home](#)

[Small biz briefs](#)

[Business Blueprints](#)

[Readers' tips](#)

[Survey](#)

[Resources](#)

[Ask an Expert](#)

[Entrepreneurial](#)

[Tightrope](#)

[Strategies](#)

[Sports](#)

[Life](#)

[Tech](#)

[Weather](#)

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Entrepreneurial Tightrope

Gladys Edmunds

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Office support is just a click away

In spite of the dot-com shakedown last spring, the Internet's staying power and tremendous growth potential for entrepreneurs lives on.

One Internet benefit is electronic outsourcing to a virtual assistant. The virtual assistant is known as an administrative assistant in the traditional office. But VAs work from their own offices, use their own equipment and provide support services to businesses, entrepreneurs and busy people. They can do everything from handling your bookkeeping to event planning. All of this occurs via e-mail, fax, telephone and overnight mail.

Sunday morning found me surfing the Web for information on the virtual assistant. In minutes I found myself in a world of hundreds of professionals who were ready to relieve entrepreneurs inundated with tasks that can drain productive time. I met terrific and energetic people who used the strength of the Internet to create businesses designed to fit their lives and our needs.

Andrea Pixley, the mother of three and a military spouse, told me: "I wanted to have my own business. But the business had to allow me to stay home with the children. And, since my husband is in the military, it had to be a business that could move across the country or around the globe."

She turned to the Internet in search of something that would fit her needs. A visit to iVillage.com listed a virtual assistant as one of the Top 10 home-based businesses. "I enjoy every moment of my VA business, and I've helped many entrepreneurs reduce their paperwork," she says. Check her out at www.andreapixley.com.

After 15 years in corporate America, Jackie Eastwick took a leave of absence to give birth to her daughter. Several months into motherhood, Jackie realized that she missed working. Her mother-in-law suggested she consider working from home. Jackie took her advice. Using the skills from her job as an administrative assistant, she started a home-based secretarial service and got several local clients. To increase her business, she surfed the Internet for places in her locale to promote her clerical service. During her search, she stumbled upon staffcentrix.com, a Web site devoted to the training and endorsement of virtual assistants. This discovery started Jackie's VA business. Jackie had her first client



within five days.

"I believed that I could make a virtual assistant business work for me," she says. "And it's working." Jackie's talents as an entrepreneur and a mom are growing nicely. Click by her VA site, which is named for her daughter: www.allisonlane.com.

Take a look at the flipside. Your kids are grown and you're ready to launch your own business. That's what Meri Siersema and Carolyn Peterson did. Meri was office manager for a television station and responsible for recruiting and managing freelancers. Carolyn worked as executive assistant to the president of a marketing company. The women combined their talents and started a part-time freelance business while maintaining their full-time jobs. In May 2000, they quit their day jobs and launched the Virtual Freelance Network. They have more than 100 men and women around the country who get freelance work through their network.

Meri said, "I knew we were on the right track when I learned from an International Data report that outsourcing services are estimated to grow from a \$51 billion industry to \$81 billion by 2003." Visit Meri and Carolyn at www.virtualfreelance.net.

These women are an example of how powerful the Internet can be for earning a living while providing a service.

Next week, I'll return with Jackie and Meri to share information on how you can start your own VA business or use your skills to partner with an existing VA freelance network.

About Gladys Edmunds

Entrepreneurial Tightrope appears Wednesdays. You can write to Edmunds [here](#) and visit her Web site at www.gladysedmunds.com. Click [here](#) for her previous columns.

Gladys Edmunds was a single teenage mom in early 1960s Pittsburgh. She posed as an adult to make money by doing other people's laundry, whipped up chicken dinners in her grandmother's kitchen for taxi drivers and stared down snarling dogs to sell fire extinguishers and Bibles door-to-door. Today, Edmunds, 52, is an evangelical entrepreneur preaching the value of self-employment. The founder of a successful travel agency, Edmunds Travel Consultants in Pittsburgh, she is the author of *[There's No Business Like Your Own Business](#)*, a six-step guide to success published in February by Viking.

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