

Covering Maternity Leave Using A Virtual Assistant

When you hear that one of your admin staff is pregnant, your first thought is usually one of joy, shortly followed by a realisation that you'll have to cover maternity leave which can be anything up to 52 weeks. Compared with 2 weeks of paternity leave, maternity leave is much more of a problem.

If the job you have to cover is important, then you will need a solution that maintains the quality of work. Hiring a replacement on a short term contract often takes too long – hiring period, notice period and training period included – and Agency Temps are expensive and not always satisfactory. Temps have a reputation for inconsistency, being disinterested and not delivering. You need someone reliable and committed, who can slot into your business quickly and do a good job.



The third option is to use a Virtual Assistant, or VA for short. If you are looking to cover an extended period of maternity leave, the following sections should help you to better understand the Virtual Assistant option, what questions to ask and what to expect.

Different Types of VA

In recent years, there has been an explosion of people – mainly women - setting themselves up as a self-employed VA. For this new breed of home worker, most are equipped with at least a PC, Phone, Printer/Copier/Fax and Broadband, so they can support clients remotely, via the internet.

Looking at the different types of VA businesses, they appear fall into five broad categories:

- **Term-time Mothers:** Mainly offer typing and non-urgent admin work
- **Lifestyle Businesses:** Professional PAs & Admins, offering their own skills
- **Associate Groups:** Wide range of services based on their collective skills
- **Small Businesses:** Established services with in-house IT and tech. support
- **Virtual Organisation:** As above, offering more flexibility, with no office presence.

Individuals, whether mums at home or experienced professionals, want a lifestyle business only to find it extremely difficult to acquire new clients and grow their business to a sustainable level. More often than not, they often go back regular employment. However, others do manage to establish credible businesses, sometimes teaming up with other VAs and working as a team.

A small VA business, whether operating from a physical office or as a virtual organisation, will tend to offer the most robust and flexible solution for maternity leave cover.



What you stand to gain

Let's start with the benefits of hiring a VA. In addition to instant maternity leave cover you get:

- An experienced PA or Administrator
- A ready trained person
- New skills and ideas
- Holiday and sickness cover built-in
- Efficiency, you only pay for hours worked

What managers like most, is that an experienced VA is "ready to go". They have all the essential office and IT skills needed, and will pick up their work quickly and effortlessly. Better still, they need little supervision because they are self-motivated and take pride in the quality of their work. Managers find it refreshing that they simply give instructions and work gets done. It's how management ought to be.

An added benefit is that managers get to see what the true work content of a job really is. Because VAs time-record and only charge for the work they do, the manager instantly gets a picture of staff productivity (less the down-time, breaks and chatting). If anything, this tends to raise their expectations and the standards of permanent staff.

Selecting the right VA

Finding the right VA for maternity leave cover requires careful consideration, but once you've found her you have her for this and any other situation that arises in future – you'll be an important client, so she'll always be there when you need her.

We believe there are five important steps to finding the right VA... these are:

- Step 1:** Decide What You Need
- Step 2:** Do Your Research
- Step 3:** Qualify Each Candidate
- Step 4:** Evaluate Proposals Carefully
- Step 5:** Engage In Appropriate Ways

Our article [Admin Outsourcing Partner Selection...Getting It Right](#) explains about each step in detail.

If you would like to find out more about Office Lifeline [cover for maternity leave and other long term absences](#), you can contact me on 01926 659 120, or via email at anna@office-lifeline.co.uk.

About the author

Anna Isaacs is the founder of Office Lifeline, a Warwickshire based Virtual Office Services business, providing Virtual PA, Admin and Typing services. Anna had a successful career as an Executive PA in several blue chip companies before setting up Office Lifeline in early 2007. In 2010 she won the prestigious National Women On Their Way Award for Best Online Business.

