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tools, tips and interviews to help outsource your online business

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Subscribers-Only Special Report

HOW TO AVOID MISTAKES WHEN HIRING A FULL-TIME VIRTUAL ASSISTANT

In this 12 page special report I describe in full detail, the exact method I used to successfully find a full time PHP Programmer and Webmaster to work in my online business.

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- The Ad I used to find my Second VA
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INTRODUCTION

I made some big mistakes the first time I hired a full time virtual assistant (VA).

Despite having hired both technical and administrative staff in real world small businesses, I forgot one of the most important steps of the hiring process when I came to hire my first full time VA.

I failed to give the applicants a skills test!

Dumb, I know. As you may have guessed, it didn't turn out very well. You can read more about it at OutsourceToolbox.com

The second time I hired a full time VA, I did things very differently. This special report describes the exact method I used to advertise, test and select a technically competent PHP programmer and Webmaster.

A bad hire not only costs you money, but, more importantly, you lose valuable TIME. Lost time can put you behind in meeting your customer and client commitments, or the lost opportunity that a competitive marketplace extracts from those who do not respond quickly.

If you follow the techniques I describe, you too can greatly reduce the chances of hiring someone who is unable to do the job. This report can literally save you time and money.

I'd love to hear your experiences, problems and questions about outsourcing your online business at OutsourceToolbox.com

THE EXACT AD I USED TO FIND MY SECOND VA

Here is the exact ad that I placed at OnlineJobs.ph (via my ReplaceMyself.com membership) to find my second Virtual Assistant. I like this site as it has a fresh supply of candidates who are specifically seeking online work, and are likely to work out better than applicants expecting a more traditional physical workplace employment.

A carefully written job ad can make your job easier by helping to eliminate those who simply don't meet your requirements. An unclear or poorly written ad will have too many of the wrong people applying, and, even worse, may not attract the very person who you really want.

Always take time to carefully review your job advertisements before placing them!

I was advertising for a skilled PHP programmer and Webmaster and not a general purpose virtual assistant. I needed someone who already had solid technical abilities.

The job ad was clear about which skills would be essential and which skills would be desirable. The list of tasks is also very clear, so that someone who took the time to properly read this ad would have a very good idea of what was expected.

Webmaster / Web Designer with Advanced PHP Skills

US Company needs proficient PHP programmer and Webmaster for the following:

- *edit PHP code (Boonex Dolphin, PhpFox, JomSocial, ELGG or similar) on new and existing social sites in a LAMP environment*
- *install and deploy scripts such as those listed above and implement published 'mods'*
- *develop new sites from sketches, wireframes and data dictionaries*
- *install and customize WordPress or similar platforms to create membership sites, blogs, or static sites*
- *select, install and adjust website themes and visual elements*
- *evaluate and implement monetization strategies for our domain portfolio*
- *various other tasks required to develop, maintain, review and optimize site traffic, search engine position and revenues*

Essential skills and experience:

- *Fluent in written and spoken English*
- *PHP <- must have advanced skills!*
- *MySQL*
- *Microsoft Office*
- *cPanel/WHM*
- *WordPress*
- *html*
- *CSS*

Desirable skills and experience:

- *PPC and CPA advertising*
- *SEO*
- *Social Networking sites*
- *Photoshop or similar graphics package*

Strong PHP skills may compensate for weaknesses in other areas. Please provide details of your PHP experience in your initial email.

Applicants must be prepared to prove their skills by completing a brief test. Additional training will be provided by access to the latest courses on Internet Marketing, Traffic Generation, Link Building, Social Marketing, Niche and Keyword Research, etc.

You must be organized, with good attention to detail and problem solving skills, able to work independently and with initiative. Daily email reporting required.

Salary will be based on your skills and experience, paid every 2 weeks, and will be increased as your productivity improves with two reviews annually. I am seeking a long term employee and will reward your growth in skills and abilities.

I may consider a part time contractor but only if you are VERY capable and productive.

Salary: *dependent on experience*

Start: *this week*

Duration: *permanent*

Employment Type: *full time*

After the ad was posted, I wrote a brief individual email to each of the candidates I could find on OnlineJobs.ph that seemed to have skills I needed.

NOTE: The **single most important skill** for any programmer or virtual assistant that you hire in a foreign country is their ability to read and write in English.

Without this ability, it is frustrating and extremely inefficient to carefully and clearly communicate what you want, only to have the wrong things done.

No matter what their other skills or abilities may be, if they cannot understand you or you cannot understand them it just won't work.

This is one of the reasons I prefer to use OnlineJobs.ph through the ReplaceMyself.com program. I have found the English skills of the Philippine workers to generally be much better than those from India or Europe.

Only those people with an Advanced level of English writing AND Intermediate or Advanced PHP were considered. Thanks to the way that OnlineJobs.ph works, it was easy to find only those who matched these requirements.

Subject: still looking for work?

Are you still looking for a job?

I have a full time position available for a Webmaster with advanced PHP skills: <http://www.OnlineJobs.ph/jobseekers/job/1341.com>

Let me know if you are interested.

Michael

I referenced the job posting in my emails, and soon had a number of replies.

Now for the tough part: who (if any) of the applicants is qualified to do the job?

By failing to test or verify the skills for my first full time virtual assistant, I made a bad hiring decision. I was not going to let this happen a second time!

THE VA SKILLS TEST

Every person who responded to my ad was sent the following email. I have XX'ed out the actual domain names used, but apart from that, everyone got the same thing. (I had a number of domains that were being parked and generating little income, so I used a few of them as test sites for my applicants to work on.)

Thanks for your interest in the position advertised. All applicants must complete the following set of 3 tasks that will allow me to determine your skill in areas that I need.

Please read the instructions carefully and be aware that not all steps may be explained, as this too is part of determining your eligibility for this position. This test must be completed within 48 hours, but sooner would be better.

NOTE: All tasks to be done on 23.xxxx.com !

cPanel/ftp login

user: xxxx

password: u.}zse6AdO~

PROGRAMMING TASK:

using PHP, construct a webpage in the home directory called grab23.php that will

- 1. ask for a user name and email*
- 2. add this info to a database named grab23*
- 3. display contents of the database, one line per user, on a page called dump23.php*
- 4. add five imaginary users and email addresses to the database*

<<record the time taken to complete this task>>

WEB DESIGN TASK:

create a an html page called test23.html

horizontally and vertically center a 2 column table with 100 and 300 pixel wide columns

divide the table into 2 equally sized rows

set the color of each cell to be in four different shades of green

enter one randomly chosen sentence into each cell

*use an external CSS style sheet to render the page in a light blue background with dark blue text
beneath the table, place a pdf document icon that will download a copy of the 2010 IRS W4 form
in a new window when clicked*

<<record the time taken to complete this task>>

WEBMASTER TASK:

*install WordPress on 23.xxxx.com/trial
site title = 'My Trial #23'
admin username = 'user'
admin password='password'
change to any 2 column theme
make one post of 20 words or more with an embedded YouTube video*

<<record the time taken to complete this task>>

*advise me of your task completion by sending me an email from
trial23@xxxxx.com to michael@mydomainname.com
please include the time taken for each of the 3 tasks above*

This simple, step by step process deliberately omits a couple of steps as I wanted to test not only their English and technical skills, but their ability to work out some things for themselves.

- I do not specifically say to "login to cPanel and create a sub domain called 23.xxxx.com"
- I did not say how to create, name or connect to a MySQL database
- I do not say exactly how to find or explain what the linked pdf is (remember these people are not from the USA, so may not be familiar the IRS or their form numbers)
- I do not say to create an email address on the domain, login to the webmail, and email me from there

All tasks are typical of what I might require my programmer/webmaster to do, and are easily checked by me for completion and accuracy.

I call this a results based test, as I will be evaluating the candidate on the results they achieved rather than a multi question quiz to determine what they know.

The difference between what they can DO versus what they KNOW is the thing to remember when conducting a skills test.

My experience has shown that someone with good classroom or book knowledge may do very well at a traditional quiz or exam style test, yet not be able to apply that knowledge to create the RESULTS you are wanting

THE COMPLETED SKILLS TEST RESULTS

Of the 23 people I had originally emailed, 8 had responded, and only 3 had completed the test I set for them.

My hiring decision just got a whole lot easier!

Any one of the three who finished the test would have been capable of doing the job, but one person really stood out.

His emails showed a great conversational grasp of English, and I would not have known that he was in the Philippines.

He completed all of the above tasks, exactly as requested, and recorded his times as 1hr20, 10mins, and 20mins (just less than 2 hours from start to finish). Even if these times weren't totally accurate, he completed all tasks overnight and accurately.

Wow!

What a difference the simple skills test had made. I was easily able to find the best qualified candidate with very little of my time required to do so.

Instead of reading through resumes and making my choice based on the skills they claimed to have, I was able to make a choice based on what they could actually do.

This is similar to the process I have used when hiring in the offline world, and I would recommend this approach whenever it is appropriate.

I should also add that I am NOT a programmer or webmaster myself, but know enough to know what I want and how the finished result should appear. Such is the advantage of a RESULTS based test.

The following are screen captures show completed tasks for my chosen VA. Compare what you see with what I had asked for and you will understand how I knew that I had found a very capable virtual assistant!

Figure 1: Index of sub domain

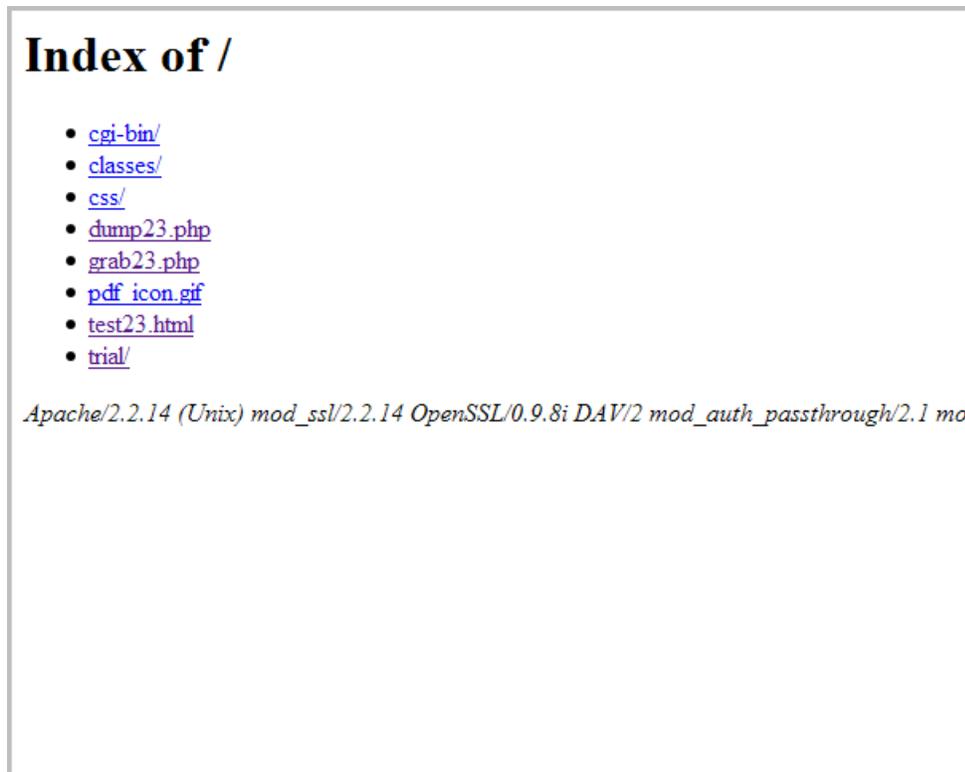


Figure 2: grab23.php

Username:

Email:

Figure 3: dump23.php

Username	Email
scroggs	scroggs_1988@yahoo.com
gillies	scroggs@gmail.com
shelton	scroggs@mail.com
scroggs	scroggs@yahoo.com
scroggs	scroggs_scroggs@yahoo.com
scroggs	scroggs@yahoo.com
scroggs	scroggs@hugh.it

Figure 4: test23.html

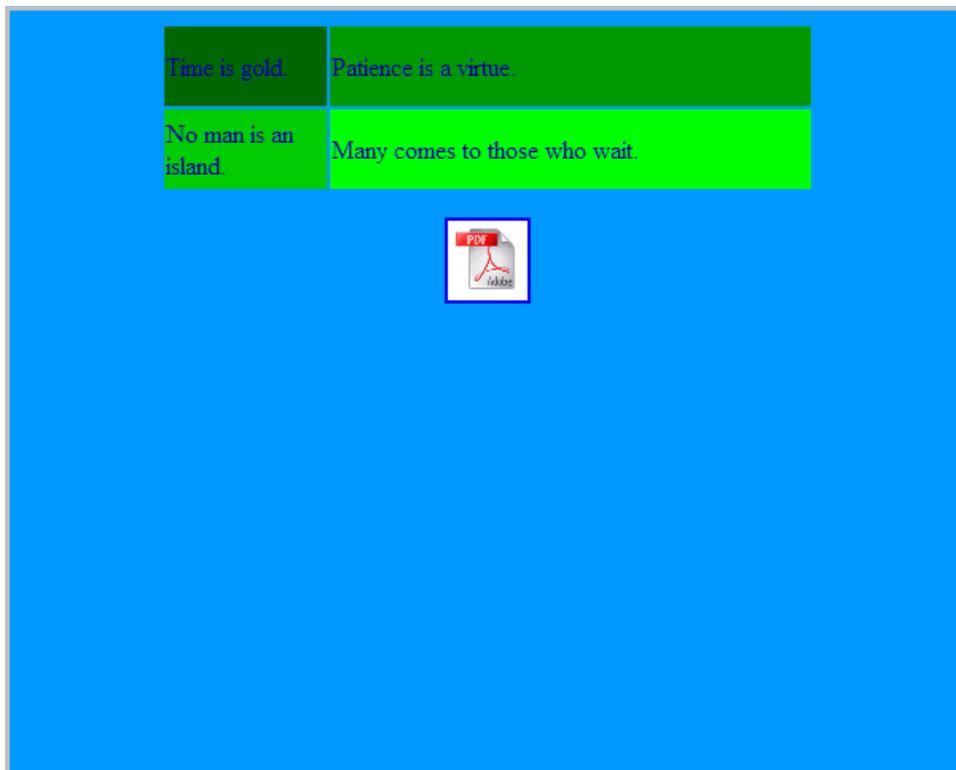
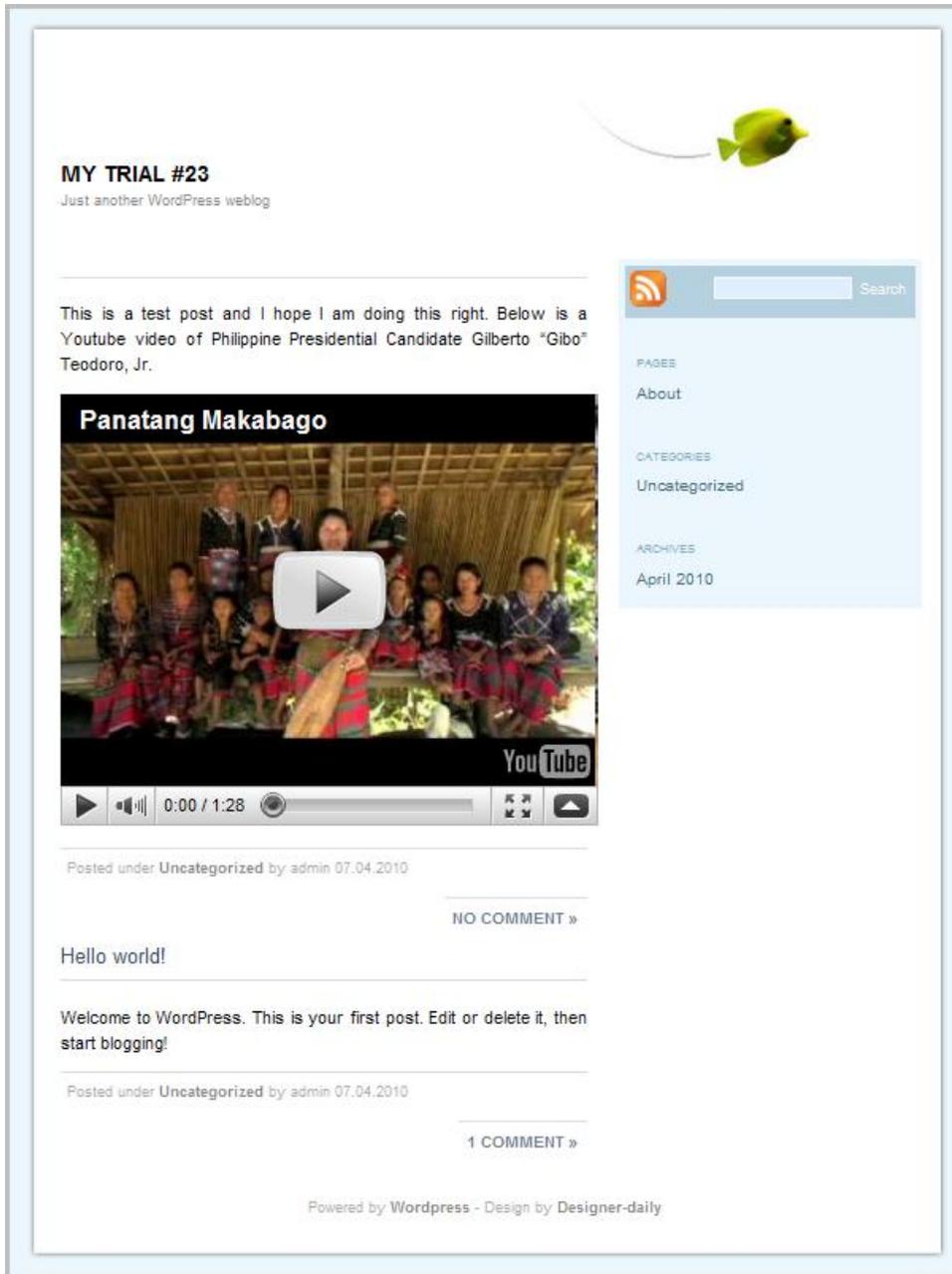


Figure 5: trial WordPress site



SUMMARY OF THE SKILLS TEST PROCESS

To summarize, here are my suggested steps to follow when hiring your full time Virtual Assistant:

- 1** Be clear what tasks you expect your VA to do – write them down
- 2** What skills will your VA need to achieve these tasks? – write them down
- 3** Create a reasonably demanding RESULTS based test that your ideal candidate would be able to complete – write it down
- 4** Write a clear but not excessively detailed job advertisement using the tasks and skills list you have already written down in steps 1 and 2
- 5** Does your results based test match what you have described in the job ad? Revise one or both until they are consistent with each other
- 6** Place your ad in an appropriate online forums, or sites
- 7** If you listed at OnlineJobs.ph or a similar site, invite appropriately qualified job seekers to view your ad and respond if interested.
- 8** Cut and paste your results based test and email to all responding applicants
- 9** Choose your new VA based on their English ability and technical skills and start them on a probationary period.

Feel free to adapt my ad and skills test to match your own requirements. The most important thing however is to understand that you should always find a way to test and verify that your applicants have the skills and abilities that you require BEFORE hiring them.

It is OK to not hire anyone if the replies you get do not match what you are looking for, but if that happens you really should look again at what you are expecting, and see if it is reasonable or practical.

A desirable skill set may be perfectly achievable at a higher salary than you are offering, but almost impossible to find otherwise.

My new VA's are told that they will be on a 2 week trial or probationary period prior to becoming permanent full time. That is usually long enough to know if someone will work out.

Although extremely important, English and technical skills are only part of the mix that contributes to making someone a good hire. Other issues such as internet reliability, consistency of work, and simple attendance can only be learned after they have started working for you.

Always remember that a Virtual Assistant or any other outsourced contractor is not a virtual person but a living and breathing individual like you or I. Treat them with the same respect as you would show them if meeting face to face. Just like your Mom told you – remember the Golden Rule: do unto others as you would have others do unto you.

Its good business and good Karma.

And one last thing: after advising the other candidates who had completed the skills test that they were unsuccessful, I sent an unannounced \$5 USD PayPal payment to their email address with a message thanking them for taking the time to complete what I had asked for. I really did appreciate the effort they had made, and may even want them to work for me in the future.

I hope you find this special report is useful as you outsource your own online business. A link back to my site, a testimonial, favorable mention to your friends or in an online forum would also be appreciated.

I would like to hear of your outsourcing success, failures, questions and suggestions by visiting OutsourceToolbox.com and leaving me a comment.

Regards,

Michael G.
OutsourceToolbox.com
May 2010

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I welcome sample or discounted products for review but will always give an honest review, unaffected by the price I may have paid for those products or services.

How well will my recommendations work for you? I don't know. You will have to try it for yourself. Or not. It's entirely your choice.

Just because something worked for me is no guarantee you will have the same or even similar results. Either way, I'd love your feedback as that is what OutsourceToolbox.com is all about.

There is no such thing as "typical results." Most people will never act upon the information they learn, and so any positive results are actually rather uncommon.

You alone are responsible for determining what is appropriate to you and your circumstances, and you should perform your own investigations as to the suitability of any recommendations or suggestions made by OutsourceToolbox.com

I think that covers everything – now go and USE what you have just learned. ☺