

# Virtual Assistants Help Generate More Revenue

BY BUCK WARGO

Can't afford to keep that assistant to do the busy work these days? For many, the answer is contracting the work out.

A growing number of REALTORS® are turning to virtual assistants to free themselves up to generate leads and focus on more productive aspects of their businesses.

REALTORS® are finding it more practical to use assistants on a contract basis for day-to-day tasks, especially with the slowdown in the housing market. That has placed a greater premium on generating leads.

"I have been at other companies and seen top-producing agents who have done really well in this environment who feel comfortable walking with 10 to 15 files in hand tracking this and that down," says David Korr, a REALTOR® with Keller Williams Real Estate in Quakertown. "I just don't think it is a wise use of their time. The Donald Trumps of this world – the reason they are so successful – is that they have outstanding people who do the work for them."

Korr says that as his volume picked up, he hired a virtual assistant to handle communications between the lender and buyer, set up inspections, do tax certification and convey closings and other tasks.

Korr says fees vary for services such as \$175 for a buyer file and \$150 for the seller.

"I look at the dollar per house and what I'm worth – what I am paying here is one hour's pay for me," Korr says. "That way I can go out and get more clients and more business. All REALTORS® have peaks and valleys, including me. We do



lead generating but then you get caught up with deals on the table and you stop lead generating. When you have the deal done, you have nothing in the pipeline."

Virtual assistants aren't for every REALTOR®, Korr says. It works for him because he earns all of his commission on transactions. In other agencies where the split is as low as 50 percent, it may not pay off.

Nowadays it doesn't matter where the virtual assistants work. They are located across the country and are able to do the work by phone, fax, e-mail and mail.

"I see the e-mails go across and everything is fine but I am kept in the loop," Korr says.

One in-state virtual assistant real estate professional turn to is Kim Bartells, the owner of TC Business Management in Perkasie. Bartells started her business a year ago after working as an assistant to REALTORS® and as an agent herself.

Bartells didn't like the sales side of the business but noticed a need among REALTORS® and business owners to have their paperwork handled by an outside source. Her company also offers ancillary services, including creating

brochures, direct mailings, mass e-mails, newsletters and other marketing and handling of listings.

"REALTORS® don't have the time and should be spending it selling and contacting people rather than sitting behind a desk doing paperwork," Bartells says.

The use of virtual assistants in real estate is quickly growing, says Pam Ivey, the owner of Canadian-based My Creative Assistant and co-founder of the International Real Estate Assistants Association — [www.ireaa.com](http://www.ireaa.com) — where Bartells and other Pennsylvania-based virtual assistants are listed. For a fee of \$45 an hour, Ivey says her firm works 20 to 40 hours a month for most clients and with experienced people, they are more productive than a brokerage.

"It sounds like a lot of money but there is a return on your investment," Ivey says. "Paying virtual assistants helps you generate more revenue."

If an agent is doing less than 20 transactions a year, they may have the time to handle the day-to-day activities, she says.

After letting go of one office assistant because of the housing downturn, Paul W. Meyers Inc. of Souderton hired Bartells at the end of 2007.

"We were slow and wanted to cut back on our costs," says Barb Finley, the brokerage's office manager. "We decided to try it and we would never go back."

Finley says it saves thousands of dollars a year by contracting out instead of paying someone salary and benefits and not needing them full-time when the market slows. There wasn't enough work to keep another full-time employee, she says. ▾

## PA RE Commission Q & A: Are Defendants Notified of Complaints?

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**Q:** If a licensee files a complaint, is he notified that an investigation is underway or is that information confidential? Also, is the defendant notified that a complaint has been filed against him?

**A:** The filing of a complaint is not considered public information. Complainants (licensees included) receive a letter acknowledging receipt of their complaint and the complaint file number (if a complaint file is opened). If a complaint is not within the commission's jurisdiction, the complainant receives a letter to that effect.

Complainants are not notified that an investigation is underway, however, the subject of a complaint may be contacted by a legal assistant in the Complaints Office or by a representative of the Bureau of Enforcement and Investigation for an interview or for more information pertaining to a complaint and would then become aware of the investigation.