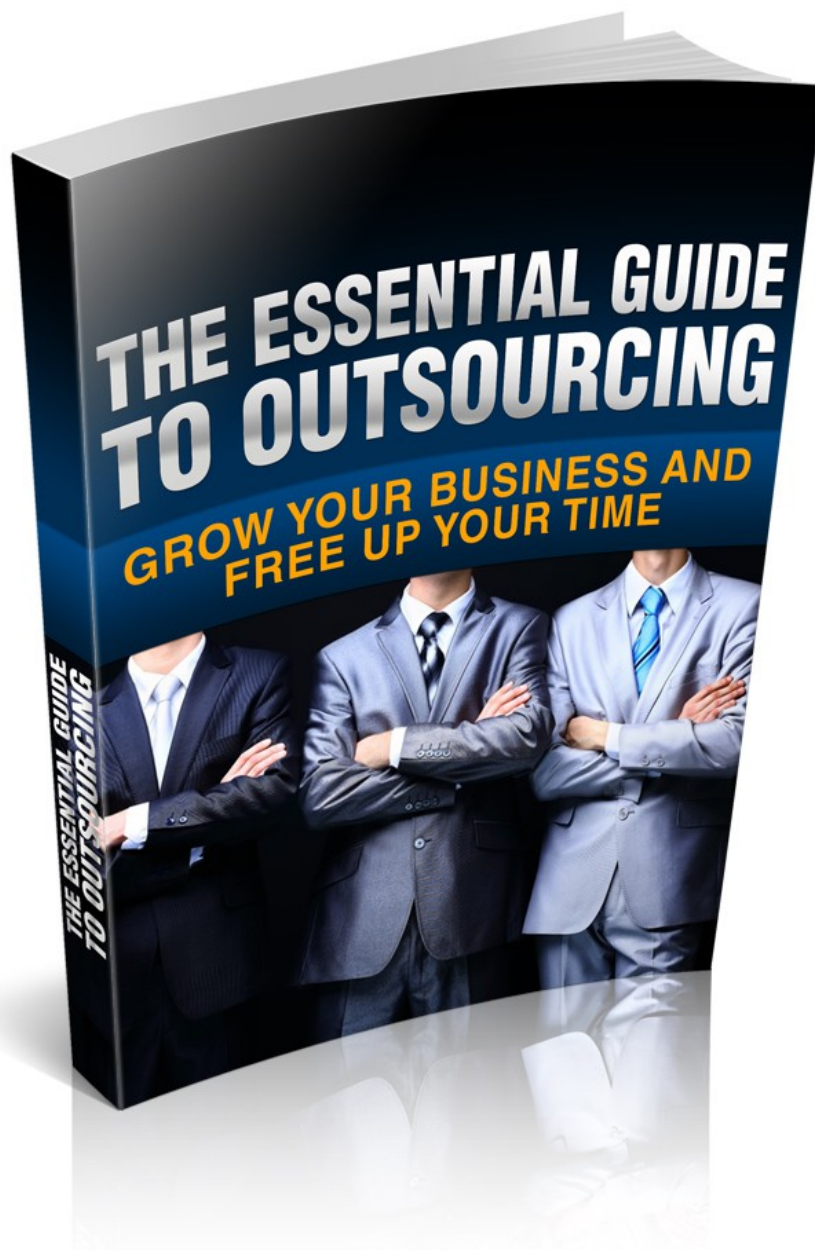


The Essential Guide to Outsourcing



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1 INTRODUCTION

It's no secret running an online business is hard work. It's also no secret that many online businesses are a single-man effort, which makes handling all the tasks associated with the business not only difficult to manage, but incredibly time consuming, as well.

Isn't the point of owning your own business creating freedom for yourself, while building financial security? If you're a constant slave to your business, then you're defeating the purpose! That's where outsourcing comes in to help you out.

With outsourcing, you don't have to worry about the hassle of officially hiring an employee, which is excellent when you only need a little help to get through what seems to be an insurmountable task on your own. It's the perfect way to get the help you need, when you need it.

Outsourced workers are considered independent contractors, so they are responsible for their own office, taxes, etc., and you are not required to provide any sort of benefits because they are not your employees.

Over the course of this book, I'll teach you how to:

- [Determine when your business is ready for outsourcing
- [How to find (and hire!) the right contractor for the job
- [How to cultivate mutually beneficial relationships with the contractors to help your business flourish

While this isn't going to be the book to end all books on outsourcing for your online business – you'll get everything you need to know to bring your business to new heights, and to help the contractors who are doing the work for you do the same.

Without further ado, let's get started!

2

WHY OUTSOURCE TASKS IN YOUR ONLINE BUSINESS?

SAVE TIME

I know what you're thinking: "I don't have the money to pay someone else to do the work for me. I can do it myself – even though it takes time, it will be worth it. I have all the time in the world!"

I've been there. The truth is, any Internet marketer you ask, has been there. But, the reality of the situation is that we all have many hats to wear and tasks to accomplish. And we're better at some of them than others. While it does help to be a Jack or Jill of All Trades, most of us really aren't.

Isn't your time better spent focusing on the things you're good at... things you know will bring your business revenue? Let someone else handle the things you know you need help with, and the things that only indirectly produce income.

When you spend two hours doing something you *know* how to do, and how to do well, you will be far more efficient than if you spend

two hours on something you barely understand. Your time is worth money, too, you know... which brings me to my next point.

SAVE MONEY

It takes money to make money, right? Well, spending money on outsourcing can save you money in the long run. Let's take a look at a potential situation you may find yourself in as an Internet marketer.

You've got a website up and running, but you built it yourself.

Granted, there are a lot of tools out there like WordPress that make the job exceptionally easy compared to coding the whole thing from scratch, but even still, sometimes it takes a level of expertise you think you have, but you don't really *know* to get the site looking and behaving just like you want it.

After spending hours building this glorious achievement, you find days later, your website has been hacked. You don't have the skill and expertise to get the website back up and running 100%, but you decide, due to a lack of money, to give it your best shot. After several more hours, some frustrated hair pulling, and copious amounts of coffee - the website is still down. Now, you've wasted time, (which could have earned you money in other ways) and you still need an expert.

At this point, you're far better off spending the money to hire a web development expert to go in and find the troublesome files or pieces of code to restore your website to good working order so you can make money again. The longer you spend trying to fix it on your own, the more money you're "wasting" because your earning potentially has essentially come to a screeching halt. And... it could have been because you didn't have the knowledge and expertise to take extra security measures when you built your website in the first place.

FACTOR IN FOR BUSINESS GROWTH

Who starts a business with intention of remaining so stagnant they can always handle everything on their own? As your business grows, it will require more attention – and thus, more time. But, we all have the same 24 hours in a day, no matter who we are, what we do, or what industry we're in. When your business reaches a certain point – you're going to need people to help you.

Sure, you may be spending only 30 minutes a day replying to customer service type emails now, but when you hit a growth spurt, or right after you launch a new product or service, you could feasibly see a large increase in email volume, which means even more time spent there – and if you do it yourself, that time has to come from something else – be it new product/service creation,

customer acquisition, or from your family time. If you have to spend four hours replying to email, what happens to the tasks you were doing with the three and half hours before the surge? There are plenty of things you can do to speed up the process of replying to email – such as canned responses, but therein lies a personal touch – the personal touch your brand needs to be successful in this market. Even if the surge is only expected to be temporary, your outsourced assistance can be either one-off, or long-term. You have the freedom to choose what works best for you!

That said, don't expect to be able to outsource *everything* in your business. There will always be things that must come from you – such as email blasts to your email list, blog posts written for your personal blog, new products and services, etc. Without *you* in there to some degree – you won't be building your brand, and your brand is what carries you through to success.

3

HOW TO KNOW WHEN YOU'RE READY TO START OUTSOURCING AND HOW TO DECIDE WHICH TASKS TO OUTSOURCE

Unfortunately, there's no clear-cut answer as to when you're ready to outsource, and what to outsource. What works for me may not be what works for you – but I can share some tips to help you make the decisions you need to keep your business moving in the right direction.

When your business has grown so much you can no longer focus on all the tasks that need to be handled – outsource what you're not good at. Outsource the tasks that you hate, or the ones that take up the most of your time. Spend that time you save on managing your freelancers, and handling the tasks only you can do.

WHAT ARE SOME TASKS YOU CAN OUTSOURCE?

The most commonly outsourced tasks include:

- [Writing
- [Graphic Design
- [Blog commenting
- [Social Bookmarking
- [Link building
- [Article submission
- [Administrative Tasks/Bookkeeping
- [Keyword Research
- [Customer Service/Technical Support
- [Social Media management

The list of course does not end there. You can outsource nearly everything in your business in some capacity. Plus, you're never obligated to use the contractor's work exactly as it is delivered. You can always make adjustments where you see fit, to develop a better return on investment. The more you work with a particular freelancer, the more you'll be able to "get on the same page" so there's less editing and re-working of their work as time goes on – as long as you provide adequate feedback with each project.

IS IT WORTH IT TO OUTSOURCE?

An important consideration is whether or not it is truly worth it to you to outsource. Can you afford the money you'll pay the worker to do the job? Can you afford to spend the time on the task?

The answer to these questions isn't always easy. But, like in the above scenario with the website fiasco, or in the growing pains of customer service email response, the answer is usually a resounding yes!

Think about your skills, expertise, and time availability. Sometimes, if you have a family emergency or you need a vacation, it is well worth it to outsource the tasks even you have left dedicated to yourself, to get them done so you can live (relatively) stress free for a few days. On the other hand, if it is a crucial task only you can do – no amount of money or time off can save the potential crisis you could land your business in by not doing it yourself.

For example – if it only takes you 10 minutes to pin something to Pinterest – it's not necessarily worth it to pay someone to do that for you. But, if it takes you three hours to craft a single blog post, and another hour to edit it, it's definitely worth the money to pay someone to do it for you.

Ultimately, it's your decision – and it may vary from day to day, and from task to task, on a variety of factors. But – if you can afford to

outsource it, and it is better for your business in the long run to do it – then do it.

OUTSOURCING OPTIONS

HIRE SOMEONE PERMANENTLY

Here you can hire part time or full time, based on your needs and budget allowance. You can hire someone to meet with you physically in your office, or someone who telecommutes.

HIRE A VIRTUAL ASSISTANT

Here you can hire someone to do a specific task, or set of tasks every so often - on a weekly, monthly, or semi-annual basis. This person doesn't meet with you in your office, but rather works completely telecommute.

HIRE "AS NEEDED"

Here you hire someone to do a certain task when you need the task done – or when you cannot do it yourself. This is how most online business owners handle their outsourcing requirements, because the business landscape and circumstances can be quite unpredictable at times.

Each has its merits. As needed workers fill a small void, whereas permanent workers learn your wants and needs over time, and can

give you a more efficient workflow. To get the best of both worlds, you can always hire the same contractor (when available) for the same types of jobs, on an as needed basis.

4

WEBSITES TO USE WHEN LOOKING FOR OUTSOURCE WORKERS

There are plenty of online marketplaces to find outsource workers – but an important thing to consider is the standard of the workers. Some of them will work well for cheap, while others will do a poor job for what you consider decent money. You could end up in a situation where you spend more time editing the work, or going back and forth with revisions, than if you would have just done the job yourself in the first place.

This is why you must take some time to focus on finding the good workers for the job. It will likely be a process of trial and error, but when you do find that good worker who delivers quality work at a rate you can afford (and they are happy with receiving) hold on to them!

FREELANCE MARKETPLACES

There are variety of freelance marketplaces you can use to find qualified freelancers to get the job done. I've listed several, and

they all have their own merits. Check them all out and decide which one (if not all of them) you want to place your job on. It's free to post a job ad, but keep in mind several freelancers use more than one marketplace to locate work.

- [ODesk/eLance
- [Freelancer.com
- [AgentsofValue.com
- [PeoplePerHour.com

Odesk.com is an excellent platform if you're planning on paying your freelancer by the hour. Because of the software freelancers are required to use, you can see that the freelancer is working on your project, and not wasting your time or money. The software takes regular screenshots, counts keystrokes, mouse clicks, and more. Freelancers have the option to add manual time (which honest freelancers will only do if they've forgotten to start the clock) but you, as the client, have the option to deny pay on any manual time.

Elance.com, which recently merged with Odesk.com, requires freelancers to "pay" for job applications in credits. They get a certain amount of credits for free each month, and can pay for additional credits as needed. This helps ensure freelancers aren't blindly applying for every single job they find on the website, and results in a better quality applicant pool for you.

WARRIORFORUM.COM

Not a freelance marketplace, this is a forum for Internet marketers. It's often overlooked when it comes to finding qualified freelancers to get a job done. There's a special thread here, "Warriors for Hire" where you can see people who are looking for work. You can also see reviews from previous warriors they've worked with. There's also a "Wanted: Members Looking to Hire You" section where you can post your job, as well. There is a \$5 fee for your ad to go live.

WORD OF MOUTH

As you make connections in the Internet marketing world, you'll no doubt find people to ask about contractors. Just as freelancers work together to share work and job leads, us Internet marketers stick together. When we find someone we like and know can provide quality work at an affordable price, we'll let you know. Ask any of the marketers you know for recommendations, and you'll likely get a good place to start. You may even get a personal introduction.

5

HOW TO FIND SUITABLE CANDIDATES

After choosing the platform you want to use – and you are free to post the job in multiple locations – it’s time to post your job. The actual steps may vary slightly from platform to platform, but you’re doing the same thing – posting a job and taking applications.

BE SPECIFIC IN YOUR JOB DESCRIPTION

To save yourself time and frustration, and to help the prospective freelancers out, be as specific as possible in your job listing. Make sure you cover:

- [Your ideal end result
- [Any guidelines, resources, and other help you’ll provide
- [The project deadline
- [Your budget/pay guidelines
- [The specific skills and expertise you are looking for
- [Whether or not this is a one-time job. Freelancers love to know ahead of time whether a position has the potential to lead to ongoing work – so be sure to tell them!

As you outline what you want – make sure you’re using clear, concise language. Include as much detail as you need to, without divulging proprietary information. If necessary, you can always have the freelancer sign a non-disclosure agreement before work begins.

For example – say you’re looking for a freelance writer. In your job ad, you’d say something like:

“I’m looking for a freelance writer with a background in [niche] or excellent research skills that allow them to write like an expert on the subject. The articles will be about [whatever you want the articles to be about] and I will supply a list of keywords. I’d expect the articles to be at least [x words] in length, written with [type of tone] and in [type of English – American, UK, Australian, etc.]. I will be using these articles [describe the purpose, could be blog posts, article marketing, etc.]”

Then, when you hire the freelancer, provide a list of article titles and keywords for the writer to use.

The more you give your freelancer off the bat, the more successful both of you can be. You won’t have to spend time going back and forth hammering out details.

If you’re hiring a freelance graphic designer – provide a list of links to styles and designs you like, HEX color codes for your color

requirements, and if your logo is already designed and required to be part of the work, include a file with that, as well.

You always need to be clear about your deadline, but it should always be realistic and achievable. In other words, don't post a project 24 hours before you're trying to get the final product. If you need the project done in a rush, that's okay – but you need to realize two things: rushed work doesn't always produce quality; and quality freelancers will expect higher rates of pay for the fast turn around time.

Communicating your budget keeps you from finding freelancers who won't work for your budget – and prevents you from wasting time to find the “perfect” candidate only to find they expect more money than you're willing or able to pay.

Communicating the skills you need is essential, because it stops freelancers from applying for jobs they aren't qualified for (sometimes!) and helps save you time. For example, if we go back to the freelance writing ad, and say you want articles written about Forex, this is a complex subject. You'd want to include in your ad something like:

“Only candidates with a strong financial background, and a working knowledge of the Forex market are encouraged to apply. Please include samples of your work on this topic.”

If you can promise more work for the right candidate - do it. You'll often find the freelancers will bid lower amounts on your initial project, based on the fact that ongoing work makes more money (and saves time hunting for more work) when they know they're going to have something from you on a regular basis. If possible, allude to the volume of future work, i.e. 10 articles a week, month, etc.

NARROW DOWN YOUR APPLICANT POOL

Many freelance platforms allow you to set parameter on who will see the job listing. Save yourself time – and do this. Parameters include things such as:

Skill and expertise – it won't show anyone who isn't a writer your freelance writing job.

Feedback score – if your job is of high importance and you don't want to risk hiring a newbie, you can narrow it down based on people who only have a feedback score of a certain level

Location – if you want someone who lives and works in the same time zone as you do, location is a wonderful feature. This also works well if you're only willing to work with a native English speaker.

While being a native English speaker is not necessarily important for graphic design or link building gigs, for example, it is a crucial point

in any freelance writing gigs geared toward an English speaking audience.

When you limit the applicant pool to only people who meet your basic parameters – you'll get fewer applicants, but those applicants will likely be more qualified. Freelancers can set parameters when looking for work as well, based on *your* feedback score as a client, and your budget as well, so make sure you consider these things as you write your ad.

6

HOW TO ASSESS CANDIDATES

CHEAP DOESN'T EQUAL BEST AND EXPENSIVE DOESN'T EQUAL QUALITY

Unusually low, and unusually high prices are warning signs, but don't make the call on price alone. Consider what you've asked for, and compare it against the worker's previous portfolio of work. If a price seems high to you - consider your turn around time, and the amount of research you'd expect to go into the work. Shorter deadlines and in-depth research translate to freelance writers who quote higher rates. Also, consider the fees – while you aren't necessarily charged anything, the freelancer usually is. Many times, they will quote slightly higher rates so they still get paid what they want for the job.

If someone quotes you \$1/100 words – this is fantastic pricing for you as the client – but, if that \$5 article isn't grammatically correct or well researched, then you've wasted your time. And, for most quality English speaking writers (not all!) it means rushing through the work to get the job done so they can make enough money to

live. You're better off paying more to ensure you'll get a high quality, well written and researched piece of work. How much more? That all depends on the freelancer's previous experience, qualifications, knowledge, and of course feedback from clients. Definitely ask to see previous examples of their work – and if they can't offer something in your niche – anything they've produced will at least help you gauge quality of their work. Seeing previous work helps you determine whether or not you feel the rate their asking for is a good value, and whether or not their style matches what you're looking for.

FEEDBACK FROM PREVIOUS CLIENTS

Look at what other people they've worked with in the past have to say. If you notice the person is always late on their deadlines – or takes a long time to produce even the smallest of jobs – this indicates an issue with reliability. You definitely want someone who can produce quality work, in a timely manner, and who will communicate regularly with you.

FEES AND TURNAROUND TIME

Freelancers will all have different fees for the same work. And, they'll all have a different turn around time, too. It could be because they have more work on their plate - or a lack of work on

their plate. It could be because it takes them longer to work because they aren't as skilled. It could be it takes them longer to work because they have less time every day to dedicate to work (not all freelancers do it full time.) Weigh what they're asking you to pay against their quality, as well as their turn around time. If they offer to rush it to you – but you don't need it in a rush, don't pay the premium they may be charging for the quick turn around.

CHOOSING YOUR APPLICANT

There's no "right" formula for choosing your applicant. That is all a personal thing based on what the applicants show, your budget, the quality you need, the turn around time you expect, etc. You'll have to weigh everything from all the applicants you are most interested in. The first time you hire a freelancer you've never worked with before, it is a shot in the dark. Both of you are taking a leap of faith – you're banking on the fact the freelancer will do your job well, and the freelancer is banking on the fact that you'll approve and deliver payment in a reasonable amount of time.

If there are two applicants who have similar qualifications, price expectations, etc. you could always provide a test gig to each of them – to see which one produces better quality. Then, you can either choose to hire one or both of them on a more on-going basis.

You are never obligated to hire just a single freelancer if you really feel there are several who could do the job well.

Because you never really can anticipate what's going on in the lives of the freelancer you've chosen, it's also a good idea to have more than one you can work with in the event that one of them is not available for your project at any given time.

If you have multiple projects to outsource, such as writing, graphic design, and SEO, you'll definitely need to assemble a team of freelancers since not all freelancers can handle all of those tasks. Even if you do find a freelancer who can handle all of those things – putting the bulk of your business on one person is always a risk.

7

TIPS FOR SUCCESSFULLY WORKING WITH AN OUTSOURCE WORKER

COMMUNICATE

Always communicate with the freelancer –as the freelancer needs to communicate with you. If they have questions, answer them in a timely manner. If the question affects their ability to continue working on a project – you’re delaying the project by not helping them.

If you notice the freelancer hasn’t turned in the work on time, reach out and ask why. Don’t automatically assume they’re being lazy. Things happen unexpectedly, and while the freelancer should communicate issues like that with you, depending on the situation, they may have been unable to.

I once worked with a freelancer who was always on time with her work. She was one of the best freelancers I’d ever worked with, and then suddenly, she was late. She hadn’t emailed me, so I began to worry – it was very much unlike her.

I emailed her, and waited. Within a couple of hours, “she” responded. She’d been in a car accident – and was in the hospital. Her husband was the one who replied to the email. He hadn’t emailed sooner because he couldn’t get into her email account on the computer and had just grabbed her phone to check it. He didn’t know what the situation was for the first few hours. He just didn’t know what to do.

Now, I realize most of the time, dire things like this aren’t going to be the reason your freelancers are late. I am not one to believe every excuse I’ve been given. But with her? When her husband offered to provide a copy of the hospital admittance paperwork, I knew it was the truth, and I was more than willing to understand.

The point is – communication matters. The reputation she’d built with me led me to trust her. You’re not going to get that kind of trust from the beginning with your freelancers – but without proper communication, you’ll never build it.

MUTUAL RESPECT

You are a business owner, and your freelancer is a business owner, too. While they are doing work for you - they have their own business to take care of, and you are not a slave driver. Treat them with the same kindness you’d expect from anyone else in your business. If you don’t get that in return, it’s time to re-evaluate the

relationship. However, in most cases, in environments where freelancers feel respected and appreciated, they will go out of their way to ensure you feel the same. It's the mutual respect between client and freelancer that leads to successful relationships that last years. When you find that one (or three) golden freelancer, you can literally grow your businesses together for mutual prosperity.

REALISTIC EXPECTATIONS

Realistic expectations are always key. As a business owner, you're likely very hard on yourself in terms of expectations – I know I am. However, it's important to recognize that not everyone, no matter how hard they try to be is a super woman or a super man.

If you're asking your freelancer for a quick 100-word product review on Amazon, for instance, make sure you give them ample time to review the product itself. It's only fair – and honest. Don't say, "I expect this done in an hour." If the project is digital, give it a few days – maybe a week. If the project is physical, you'll need to include time that accounts for shipping and delivery.

If you're asking your freelancer for a logo design – again, make sure you're providing ample time for the job. Sure, it's possible to get a logo design done in a few hours – but you are not your freelancer's only client.

At the same time, don't give a freelancer three weeks to complete a set of articles – unless you know the freelancer well and expect those articles to be written at a scholarly quality level. If you've established a long term working relationship with the freelancer and you know the project only takes a few days, but the freelancer is so busy it will take him or her a few weeks – either factor that into your expectation, or send the work to another freelancer.

When setting your expectations, factor in buffer room. If you need the project done by next Thursday, tell the freelancer you need it by next Tuesday. That way, if the freelancer is late, or if you have to edit the work – or send it back to the freelancer for more work, you are still on time for your original deadline.

ON-TIME PAYMENT AND RELIABILITY

If you want your freelancer to be reliable and produce quality work for you, you too need to be reliable in terms of your project communication and payment. Freelancers will not continue to work for someone when they have to wait a long time for payment – or if they never get paid at all. When you are reliable and pay on time, you make the freelancer happy, and as such, they are continually more eager to work with you, and continue to produce high quality work for you.

8

CONCLUSION

If you still think you can do it all on your own... let me ask you this. Did Bill Gates start Microsoft all on his own? No! He had help. Did Steve Jobs start Apple all on his own? No! He had help. Even the biggest and best names in every single industry had help getting their business off the ground. Yes, they poured blood, sweat, tears, and more importantly, time and money into getting started, but the moral of the story is: to be successful, at some point, whether it's through hiring employees or through the use of outsourced contractors, you will need help.

When you do your homework and find the best and most reliable outsourced workers in the marketplace for the task or tasks at hand, you can not only grow and strengthen your business foundation, but you can create priceless relationships with those workers.

You cannot and should not do everything on your own – one person can only do so much - and even Superman needed time to sleep!

Outsourcing business tasks isn't only about freeing your time – it's about making smart business moves.