

## INS & OUTS OF OUTSOURCING

Partnering with a virtual assistant may not be for everyone. Here are some things to consider before opting in for outsourcing.

➔ **GETTING PERSONAL:** If you're squeamish about handing over personal information like user IDs and passwords, you may want to think twice about using a VA, or at least limit any personal tasks you hand out.

➔ **TECH ISSUES:** You may have to familiarize yourself with programs like ClientSpot or Skype in order to pay and communicate with your VA.

➔ **TIME INVESTMENT:** You'll have to spend some time filling out request forms and signing agreements. You'll also have to train your assistant, and there will likely be a learning curve before you get your work rhythm down.

➔ **LANGUAGE BARRIER:** You'll need the time and patience to be extra clear about your expectations, and keep in mind that slang or shorthand might be lost in translation.

➔ **TIME DIFFERENCE:** Your VA may not be at your beck and call. If you need someone who's available during US business hours, make sure he or she can accommodate you. — G.E.

### SOME USEFUL SITES

➔ **International Virtual Assistants Association** ([ivaa.org](http://ivaa.org)). Allows you to post a free "request for proposals" outlining your needs, to which VAs can respond.

➔ **Find Virtual** ([findvirtual.com](http://findvirtual.com)). Offers a virtual assistant directory that you can search according to criteria like pay rate and skill set.

➔ **Alltop** ([Virtual-Assistant.Alltop.com](http://Virtual-Assistant.Alltop.com)). An aggregator of virtual assistants' blogs and Web sites.

➔ **Assistant Match** ([Assistant Match.com](http://AssistantMatch.com)). An agency that, for a fee, connects clients to assistants who've been screened and background-checked.

## As virtual assistants multiply, our writer goes global and enlists one

By GAIL EISENBERG

**A**S A FREELANCE WRITER, I spend a lot of my time summoning an elusive muse. Meanwhile, the things I keep meaning to catch up with generally catch up with me. Whether it's doing research for article pitches, tracking down reference materials or just completing personal tasks, there's always more being added to my to-do list than being crossed off.

With deadlines looming and clutter that could be declared a dependent, it was clear: I needed some help. But what kind of assistant could I afford on my mac-and-cheese budget?

Answer: a virtual one. For the uninitiated, virtual assistants are independent contractors, typically from overseas, who've found a niche in the global economy by offering themselves as unseen, wireless-enabled Gal or Guy Fridays. They do anything from creating spreadsheets to researching vacation spots, for fees that might be considerable where they live, but are a serious bargain for Westerners, especially us New Yorkers.

I wondered, would such an arrangement work for me? So began my foray into the \$130 billion virtual assistant industry.

### Search terms

The first question: how to find one? A Google search leads me to the International Virtual Assistants Association (IVAA), a nonprofit "dedicated to the professional education and development" of virtual assistants. There are many things to consider as I peruse their site. Do I want to work with an independent VA or go through an agency? Male or female? Do I care if my VA is accredited by the association, and, if so, do I want a Professional or a Master?

One thing is certain: A slew of industrious VAs are standing by. There are VA coaches and networking sites; there's an annual Online International Virtual Assistants Convention and an International Virtual Assistants Day. (It's May 15, for the record.) They're ready to handle dastardly administrative work, answer e-mail, maintain your Web site, plan your events, provide specialty



VILNIUS,  
Lithuania

Gail Eisenberg found Jade, her Gal Friday, 4,000 miles away.

# FOREIGN AID

services such as bookkeeping — even ghost-write blog entries and Twitter posts.

And every pay structure imaginable is offered: PayPal, check, credit card or wire transfer; hourly or by retainer; upfront or when work is completed.

One popular way to enlist a virtual assistant is to go through agencies, which typically use workers in India. The ease and security are appealing, but there are

more rules to abide by, such as minimum numbers of hours and money paid upfront. My work is of a more personal nature, so I'm inclined toward a cozier one-on-one partnership — plus, I like the idea of all my money going directly to the individual.

So I put a post on the IVAA site, saying I want someone to do mainly Internet research, as well as light phone correspondence and Web site maintenance. A half-dozen individuals and agency owners

See **ASSISTANT**, p. 34

CAREER  
COACH

## Q&amp;A

## [GO TO GREG]



**Q** I recently graduated and have been unable to find a full-time job. The only positions I've been offered are summer internships. If I take one, will prospective employers view my resume negatively? Should I wait until the job market picks up, hopefully in the fall, and tell employers that I opted to take the summer off after graduation like so many other grads do?

**A** Sounds to me like someone's trying to rationalize slumming it this summer! Dude, if you want to take the summer off and just chill, travel, go on an adventure, whatever, by all means do it. Once you get started in a career there will likely be fewer opportunities to do this kind of thing, so now is the time.

On the other hand, if you're sincerely worried about how a postgrad internship will look on your resume, you've got no reason for concern. Employers know how difficult the job market is, so there's no shame in having a hard time finding a regular full-time job right after graduation. The fact that you've been able to land an internship, particularly if it's in field related to your desired profession, will actually be viewed positively by prospective employers. Whatever you call it, it's a job, where you're gaining experience. Employers don't care how much it pays or whether you're getting benefits, they just care that you're working. And internships very often lead to full-time positions, or at the very least to valuable networking contacts that can help in your job search. So get working. Or take the summer off if that is what you really want to do — just don't play me like that, OK?

**Q** My wife and I were hoping you could resolve a little debate we're having. Our son recently graduated college without a job and has moved back home. I feel the free room and board is a disincentive to find a job, and for his own good I'd like to give him a deadline for finding something and moving out. His mother thinks that's applying too much pressure. What say you?

**A** While professionals far more skilled than I have tried with little success to resolve domestic disputes since the beginning of time, this is one problem that offers a good compromise. Insist that junior spends a significant portion of every day on his job search, researching companies, making calls, contacting his and your family's network (with your help), sending out resumes, going on interviews, etc. At the same time, make him earn his keep by pitching in around the house, running errands, babysitting, even doing home improvements if he's handy. That alone may be more incentive than anything else for him to find a job and a place of his own!

➤ Follow Greg on Twitter, at [gotogregnypost!](#)

Got a question for Greg?  
E-mail [gotogreg@nypost.com](mailto:gotogreg@nypost.com)



AFP/Getty Images



[COVER STORY]

**GOING GLOBAL:** While Eisenberg slept in NYC, Jade did Internet research and other assigned tasks from her home office in Lithuania's capital city.

Gavin Hellier/Alamy

# VIRTUAL REALITIES

**ASSISTANT**, from Page 33 immediately respond, touting their services, experience and love of Internet research. Alas, all are US-based, and would run \$20-\$40 an hour.

Meanwhile, the starting rate overseas is \$4.52. I definitely have to think globally.

I run a search at Find Virtual, a networking site with a VA directory, and moments later I'm scrolling page after page of mostly female VAs, whose thumbnails include their name, city and pictures as diverse as the services they offer: with their kids, with their pets, just their pets, at their desks, wearing headsets. (There's also an occasional shot that suggests something, uh, more personal than VA services are on offer.) They tout their experience, list a price range and often link to their blogs.

So, there were plenty of fish

overseas. What criteria would I use to catch mine? I remember that a friend once scored a cheap apartment simply because the owner liked her voice when she called. Forgoing referrals, I look for candidates with clever business titles, personal names I can pronounce, funny icons next to their profiles or who live in places I might like to visit.

It's here I find my gem. Literally. Her name is Jade. She lives in Lithuania, which seems more exotic than India or the Philippines, where most VAs live. She's posted a pleasant photo, has a modest Web site ([jadesvirtualoffice.com](#)), is up-to-date on technology and has good command of English. I write her, and hear back within a day.

*Thank you so much for your message! I would love to help you with Internet research and your website.*

Her rate for these services is \$7 an hour, paid through PayPal after the work is completed. I weed through a few other candidates with comparable skills, but they either want payment upfront, are more expensive or require a minimum number of hours that exceed my need.

So Jade gets the job — 40 hours over a two-week period. She asks to be paid after one week to ensure payment. (Aha! Trust is also a concern for her.) I agree, and she draws up a simple contract, and creates for us a MyClientSpot account, which, she says, will allow me to log her progress and tally hours worked on each assignment.

She also issues a disclosure: *Need to mention that my official name is Jurate Druseikyte, but all my friends and clients from USA calls me Jade, so, you are more than welcome to*

*call me Jade as well :)*

Cute, but it does make me consider how little I know about this person whom I'm about to give sensitive information about my Web site, my ideas and my life. And my apprehension doesn't end there. Am I worried I'll get what I'm paying for? Absolutely. Am I nervous about identity thieves intercepting my info? You bet. Am I concerned about making an online relationship work between me and an assistant based 4,000 miles away? Totally. I don't even know where Lithuania is.

Still, I tell Jade I'll open a PayPal account and get her first assignments ASAP.

## Week ONE

For Jade's first assignment, I send some PDFs of published articles I'd like

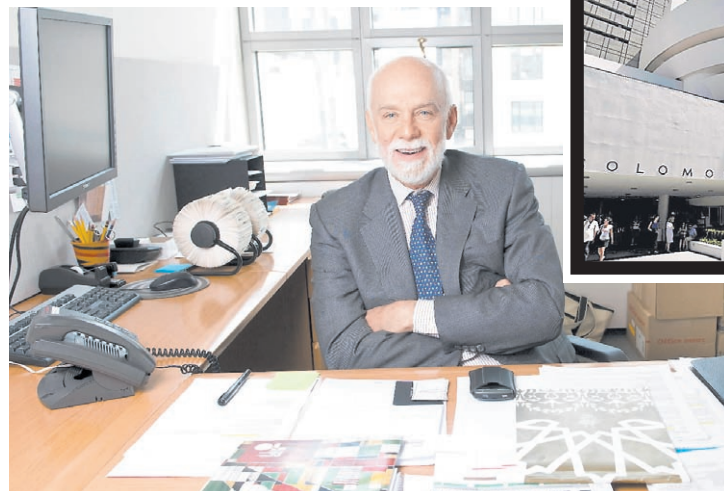
## [WHERE I WORK]

### RICHARD ARMSTRONG Guggenheim head leaves flash for the galleries

By VICTORIA GRANTHAM

**JOB:** Director of the Guggenheim Foundation and Museum.

Neither the man nor the office is what you'd expect. With his white beard, conservative suit and Ferragamo tie, Armstrong, 60, fits the part in that he's patrician-looking, but he counters the stereotype of the imperious arty type with



Michael Sofronski(2)

a surprisingly low-key vibe. And his office, housed in the famed Frank Lloyd Wright-designed museum on Fifth Avenue and 89th Street, is bland and completely art-free.

**DÉCOR:** Armstrong's office sits at the building's oculus, at the top of the dome, which makes it sound grander than it is. A wall of windows provides good



EPA/Justin Lane

light, but the view, obstructed by neighboring buildings, isn't so great. Asked to describe the room's aesthetic, he gamely takes a stab: "Grad school-style disheveled."

When he's not here or in the museum's Hudson Street offices, he's globetrotting to its outposts in Venice, Bilbao and Berlin, or to the site of a

her to add to my site, point out a typo I'd like her to fix, and ask her to coordinate an interlibrary loan for reference books I need for a book project. I also give her directions for the first batch of Internet research, telling her how much information I need and how much time to spend on each item. The topics include media portrayals of Cupid (for a Web series pitch), the health benefits of coconut water and US pet cemeteries (for articles I hope to pitch).

After a minor glitch accessing my site, Jade fixes the typo that had nagged me for months. So far, so good. Then I get her next e-mail.

*Subject: Bad News about Web Update*

*Gail, I spend almost all day trying to figure out how I can put PDFs on your website. And, shame on me, have to admit — I cannot do that. I hate such cases when I cannot complete the tasks and I am really sorry.*

She explains that the update involves a code different from the one she's used to working with. Her technical explanation makes my head spin; she might as well be speaking Lithuanian. We chalk it up to a misunderstanding and move on.

We quickly establish a rhythm, and thus begins a new morning ritual, of waking up to find Jade's research in my inbox, the project title in the subject heading. Her research on coconut water yields links to information ranging from its vitamin and mineral breakdown to the history of the drink. I usually get what I'm looking for;

other times I ask for more, and she turns it around later that day, er, night.

What soon becomes clear is that the more time I put into making clear what I want, the better the outcome. This is a blessing and curse, since time is what I'm trying to save. For example, when I contemplate whether to delegate an important call, I decide it's not worth the time commitment of filling her in on the particulars.

Jade has impressed me with her resourcefulness, however. And while I wonder if she's being as thorough in her research as I would be, she's saving me a lot of time.

Also, I come to enjoy the daily contact. Writing can be isolating work, so it's nice to have an online companion wishing me good morning, emoticons abounding.

## Week TWO

Jade continues to be efficient, conscientious and organized. She's good with direction, and excellent with skills such as using Excel (one of my requests is a cost comparison for cars-on-demand that allow dogs), and attaching screen grabs when she thinks a visual is important. Though I don't check her progress on our MyClientSpot page often, she appears to be hitting her deadlines within the time frame I've allotted.

Still, I can't shake the oddness of working with a voiceless person about whom I know so little, who mostly works while I'm asleep and whose affect is expressed solely by exclamations and

emoticons. She could be anyone, anywhere. But does it matter as long as the work gets done? Charlie's Angels never saw their boss.

Ten days in, I boast to friends: Guess what my VA did for me today! She tracked down pepper spray keychains, and found piano tuners on Craigslist! And, her English is really good, though she thinks otherwise.

*Please don't say that my English is good, as I have no idea what "this should be squeezed in next" means :) Could you please explain?*

OK, so she's not perfect. For that matter, our partnership isn't perfect either. Explaining the assignments and keeping up with the material she sends each day is taking more time than I'd anticipated. It turns out that partnering with a VA is like any other relationship: it's not likely to thrive without clear communication and a certain amount of effort.

In the end, though, Jade's legwork has allowed me to concentrate on my writing and given me a head start on future projects. And I've made a huge dent in my to-do list, which is something I could get used to. I opt not to extend our deal beyond the agreed-on two weeks, but having found someone who is conscientious, resourceful and affordable — and who actually seems to enjoy her work — I'd consider calling on Jade again.

First, though, she has an assignment for me — an evaluation form she sends along with her second invoice, and asks me to complete. I put it on my to-do list.

future Guggenheim in Abu Dhabi. "I spend a lot of time at JFK," he says, opening a nearby Atlas. "I'm trying to find out how everything fits together."

**DESK:** A big strawberry blond wood piece with a rounded side and a matching conference table nearby. A slim vase of irises on the table is the only nod to beauty.

Armstrong keeps an old school Rolodex on his desk. "I like having the tangible cards. Over time you tend to memorize them."

**DETRITUS:** A bell tucked into a built-in shelf speaks to Armstrong's past life as the director of the Carnegie Museum in Pittsburgh, where he worked for 16 years. "They had a giant bell, and I had an annoying habit of ringing it to get attention. They gave me this replica as

a parting gift."

A sketch entitled "Let's Make a Deal," which proposes a merger of New York museums and suggests the outcome will be the Guggenheim and the Whitney, is propped on another shelf.

**CURRENT PROJECTS:** The Guggenheim will celebrate its 50th anniversary in October, with three big shows, the current Frank Lloyd Wright exhibit, a Kandinsky retrospective in September and a show by the German performance artist Tino Sehgal.



## My assistant: You can call her Jade

THEY LIVE HALFWAY around the world, are rarely spoken to and do your bidding while you sleep. Who are these unseen people? Curious about my virtual helper, I asked her about her life, via e-mail.

Now 28, Jade (real name Jurate Druseikyte) grew up in Rokiskis, a



village near the Latvian border, and now lives in Vilnius, Lithuania's capital and biggest city. She lives alone, and works out of a small office that holds a computer, printer, scanner, and client

paperwork neatly organized in binders.

Does she work in her pj's like many of us self-employed do in the US? "Are you kidding?"

First rule for working at home — get up early as you would if you worked at regular job, take a shower, and put on some nice clothes (not sweatsuit or pajamas!).

Jade, who has a master's in business administration, spent 10 years as a project manager for several companies before becoming a virtual assistant last fall.

"I wanted to start my own business, and I liked the flexibility of working at home," she says.

When she's not on the job, Jade tends to her collection of African violets, checks fashion blogs, goes shopping and to movies with friends, and reads biographies

and marketing books. As a student, she spent a summer in South Carolina as part of a work-travel program, and she hopes to visit the US again.

For the moment, though, she's focused on her new business. She loves the work, she says, and has thoughts of one day expanding, and delegating work to other VAs. "But not too soon," she says.

So how would she rate me as a client?

"I liked that you explained all the tasks clearly. And, that you know how to say 'thank you' in the nicest ways and that really motivates a lot."

And she learned at least one useful thing while completing some of my personal tasks.

"Now I want that keychain pepper spray as well!" she says.

— G.E.

New Store

# HIRING EVENT

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