

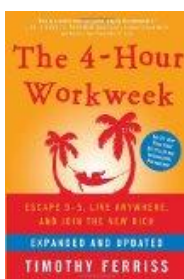
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## Five Years Since The 4-Hour Workweek

With *The 4-Hour Workweek* in 2007, author and entrepreneur Tim Ferriss introduced the world to the concepts of personal outsourcing and working with virtual assistants.



Since then, the industry has seen massive growth and also some important geographical shifts.

In 2011, the Philippines surpassed India (once the proud capital of outsourcing) in the number of call center employees. With ever-growing demand, the number of [Filipino virtual assistants](#) has exploded in the last five years.

[Outsourcing in India](#) remains strong, but the original firms face increased competition in what has quickly become a global business.

There is even a vibrant community of virtual assistants in developed nations, primarily comprised of work-from-home [freelancers](#).

## The Term “Virtual Assistant” Takes on New Meaning

When Apple introduced Siri in late 2011, the **voice recognition software** was labeled a “virtual assistant.”



In 2012, several major airports including New York’s JFK and LaGuardia installed **holographic customer service agents** they too declared to be “virtual assistants.”

While these digital agents stake a valid claim to the term, it is causing confusion among clients and muddying the waters of an already fragmented outsourcing industry.

Perhaps ‘virtual assistant’ was never an accurate name for remote workers. They are living and breathing human beings, after all!

## What People are Looking for in a Virtual Assistant

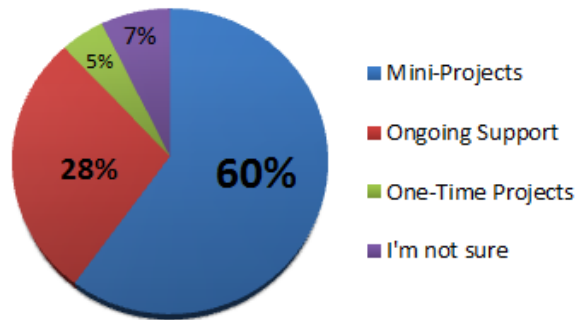
VirtualAssistantAssistant.com collected survey data from 150 respondents between June and November 2012.

The results paint an interesting picture of the marketplace, in terms of what potential clients are looking for when seeking a virtual assistant.

### Virtual Assistant Tasks

The majority of respondents (60%) were after support with “**mini-projects**” such as online research, scheduling, or travel planning.

## What Do You Need a Virtual Assistant For?



Another 28% sought some form of **ongoing support** in either their personal lives or their business.

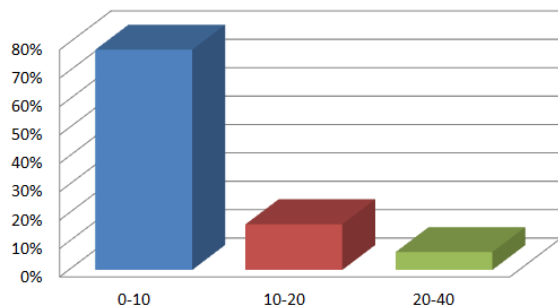
Roughly one person in 20 (5%) needed help with a **one-time project** like designing a logo or building a website.

Finally, 7% of respondents weren't quite sold on the idea of a virtual assistant, not completely sure yet what kind of tasks they could outsource.

## Virtual Assistant Workload

This data correlates well with how many hours of work a week respondents said they could use a VA.

### How Many Hours a Week Do You Need a Virtual Assistant?

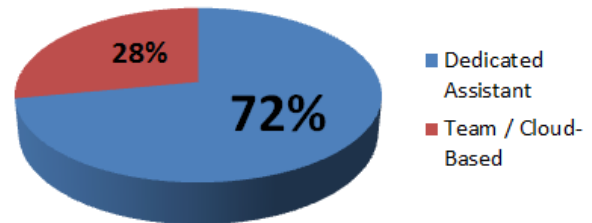


The demand is heavily skewed toward smaller virtual assistant workloads and an “on-demand” model rather than a “retainer” model with high hourly (and cost) commitments.

Still, a sizeable minority were looking for a part-time or full-time [virtual employee](#) to provide support for their business or just to free up their time.

## Virtual Assistant Relationship

### Do You Prefer a Dedicated Assistant or a Team of VAs?

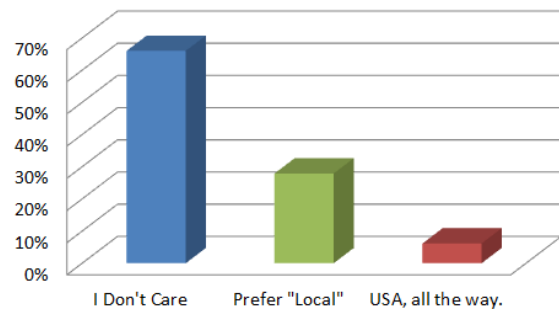


Despite not having much work for a virtual assistant (on an hours-per-week basis) nearly 3 out of 4 respondents said they would prefer to work with a **dedicated point of contact**.

## Virtual Assistant Location

Finally, respondents were asked where they would prefer their virtual assistant to be located geographically.

### Where Do You Prefer Your Virtual Assistant to be Located?

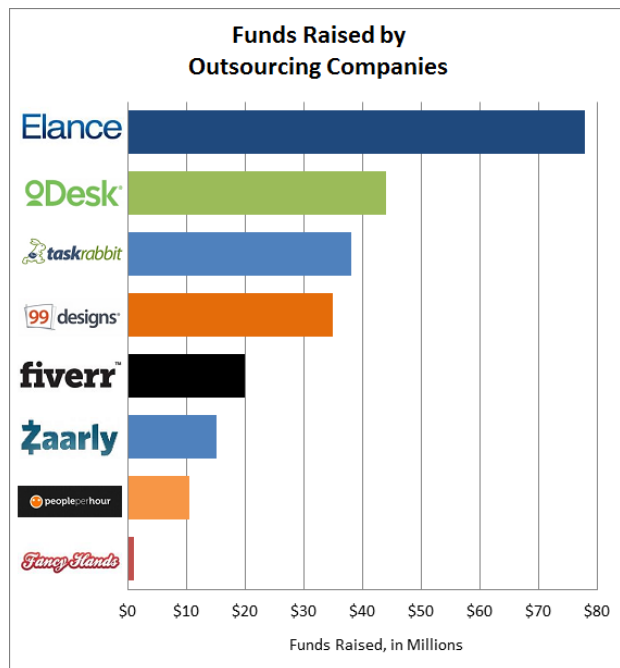


Here, the group was very egalitarian with 2/3rds saying they didn't care **as long as they could communicate**.

Another 28% indicated they would prefer to work with someone in their own country, or at least a native speaker of their language.

And finally, 6% said they would need a VA in the US and were willing to **pay a premium** for it.

## Big Investments Made in Outsourcing Companies



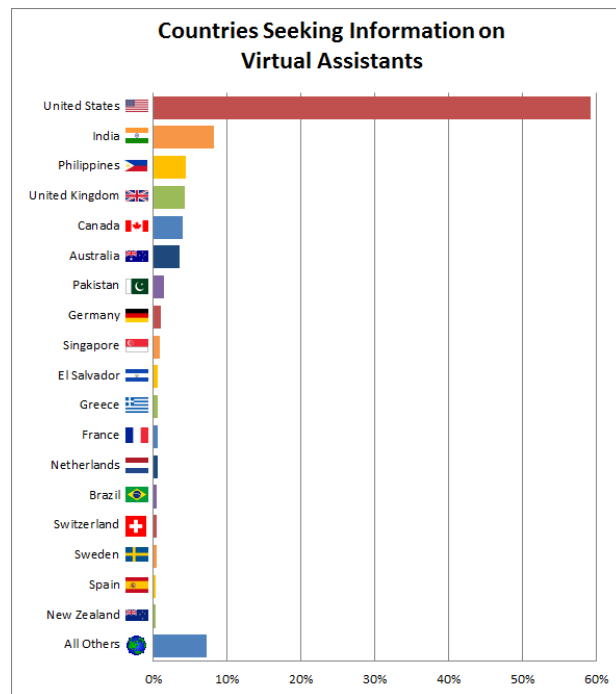
Venture capitalists have made some big bets on outsourcing companies. Naturally the giant freelance marketplaces of [Elance](#) and [oDesk](#) have raised the most, as they primarily cater to a business clientele.

A couple surprises on this list are the local errand-running service [TaskRabbit](#), and [Fiverr](#), the \$5 marketplace, which have raised \$38 million and \$20 million respectively.

The New York-based startup [Fancy Hands](#) has raised \$1 million to fuel growth of their low-priced, cloud-based virtual assistant service.

## Personal Outsourcing: a Growing Global Movement

VirtualAssistantAssistant.com collected web analytics data on visitors to the site in 2012.



Visitors from the United States doing research on virtual assistants made up nearly 60% of the total traffic volume.

Since a virtual assistant is something of a **luxury service** for most people, it makes intuitive sense that the demographic data skews toward countries with higher disposable incomes.

Still, the data indicates outsourcing is a truly global phenomenon, as the site drew visitors from **more than 140 different countries** around the world.

**Sources**

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