



Virtual Years

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Special Commemorative Issue

ELIX Newsletter

A Growing Outsourcing Industry

By Elsie Lee



This year marks the fifth anniversary of ELIX Virtual Management in the Virtual Assisting industry.

The founding of ELIX was based on the concept of Virtual Assistance (VA) – an emerging industry created with the advent of the Internet and the growing trend in business process outsourcing (BPO).

The workplace is no longer confined to the premises in a commercial building. Telecommuting enables the shift of ‘bricks and mortar’ workplaces to the cyberspace – the virtual workplace. This has given rise to the growth of entrepreneurship in all forms and at the same time, revolutionizes the work processes of traditional industries.

Among many of these entrepreneurs are professionals from various industries and senior executives with extensive corporate work experience. Some of them have started their own independent consultancy practices from their homes or small offices – small office home office (SOHOs) – to save on startup and operating costs.

VA = Outsourcing?

When we talk about outsourcing, most people would think of the IT industry, as it is one of the earliest to embrace it. However, outsourcing is not limited to IT processes and large companies.

Small businesses and SOHOs can also outsource many of their non-core functions such as admin, accounting, contact and database management, translation, management support and ad hoc projects to independent virtual service providers by any name – virtual assistants or professionals, freelancers, or free agents.

Depending on the type of services required, many virtual assistants are able to provide general or specialized services at a contracted fee – a variable cost to the client. SOHOs can now tap on the services of a VA as an outsource partner for management support services.

The VA industry is a global industry – many cross-border work relationships have taken place to take advantage of the time-zone difference between regions. Clients in the US or UK can expect to gain at least 8 to 12 hours in turnaround time for a project done by a VA in Singapore.

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“Our clients include global top 50 multinationals and we cannot afford to compromise. ELIX never fails to deliver. Whether it is a brochure, a presentation or a 100-page report, ELIX has always met our deadlines and delivered first-class product.”

– Steve Puckett
Managing Director
TRI-ZEN International
www.tri-zen.com

Any business that is looking to go international will have the advantage of gaining ground knowledge through a virtual service provider, located in or close to the target country.

The translation industry – one of the oldest professions in the world dominated by freelance translators scattered across countries has benefited greatly by embracing the virtual work concept. This is a natural progression from the traditional work method via faxes, phone or courier services.

Marketing and translation agencies are examples of companies taking advantage of the global services provided by translators and linguists to conduct surveys for their research on global acceptance of brand names via online surveys.

Another traditional industry that has adopted the virtual business concept is

the desktop publishing and printing industry. More and more industries are tapping on the Internet to revolutionize their business processes for greater efficiencies and cost-effectiveness.

Thus, we may conclude that globalization and the Internet are not mutually exclusive. Without one another, neither has the potential to reap benefits for the world economy. ☺

Doing it right from start

By Elsie Lee

Assisting startups and small business owners write their business plans is one of my core services. Many startups and small business owners do not see the need for a business plan until they are seeking funding.

In the course of my work over the past few years, I have come across many business owners who found themselves in a dilemma when they need to get their financial reports into their business plans done up for scrutiny by prospective investors or banks. What is their common problem?

Most of them have been in business for about one to three years and are now planning to expand their business by seeking new investors or financing from banks.

Proper accounting

Their common problem is the inability to keep proper books of accounts for their business. They either underestimated their profits or showed no profits at all, even though the business had generated good income.

Improper accounting will put the business in a difficult position, as investors will not invest in a business that is not viable or shows no potential of making money through past performance.

On the other hand, banks need the assurance that the business in concern is capable of repaying the loan by a future stream of income generated by the business. Therefore, a healthy financial report for past performance is critical to the success of securing a loan by an existing business.

Keep your books clean

In order to secure grants or subsidies from the government, all transactions must be properly accounted. Legal obligations should be strictly observed to ensure that any misdoing would not cripple the business.

Get help from a professional

Besides keeping proper books of accounts, effective cash flow management is also vital to the survival of a business. If you do not have an

Facts & Figures

The Internet Statistics: World Internet Usage

In 1995, there were 25 million Internet users. By year 2000, there were 358 million users and the latest figure as of 30 April 2004 is 757.5 million.

Asia – 236 million users

South Korea has the highest percentage of population (penetration) rate of 62% followed by Hong Kong – 61.8% and Singapore – 60%.

China ends 2003 with nearly 80 million Internet users – a dramatic jump from the 620,000 users recorded in 1997. *Source: China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC) – www.cnnic.net.cn*

North America – 226 million users

N. America has the highest penetration rate of 69.3% (by region)

Source: Internet World Stats (www.internetworldstats.com)

The wired world



accounting background, it is imperative that you engage the services of a professional bookkeeper or accountant to manage your accounts. You will be glad you did. ✚

What lies behind the facade of a website?

By Elsie Lee

Having a corporate website is no longer the prerogative of a dotcom or online merchants. Companies that do not engage in online transactions are also finding it necessary to have an online presence for many reasons.

An interesting aspect of the **World Wide Web** is that all companies



compete on equal ground. For the small businesses, the Internet provides a growing market for their products and services. Having a web presence is a cost effective method to reach a global market place. It is a lot cheaper and faster than direct mail and phone calls. Order-taking and customer service are also more efficient and cheaper.

I believe most of us are well aware of all the aforementioned. The purpose of this article is to highlight a few important points to readers who are not yet familiar with the technicalities lying behind the facade of a cool looking website.

You may have had a web presence for years now but it is not bringing you new customers or any leads. Have you ever wondered why?

Apart from effective contents, did you know that page titles are crucial for the search engines? Make sure that your website contains the meta tags for the page titles, site description and keywords. Your page title and site description should show up in the title bar at the top of your browser (next to the IE icon).

You can do a check on your website by viewing the source codes – in your browser, click on the **View** menu for the **Source**. Within the <head> and </head> tags, the following should appear:

```
<title>your page title</title>
<meta name= "description"
content="your site description">
<meta name= "keywords" content=
"keyword1, keyword2, keyword3, etc">
```

Q & A

Q: What is a favicon?

A: Favicon (pronounced fav-eye-con) is short for 'Favorites Icon'. You can customize the icon(s) in the browsers 'address box window' and 'bookmark listing'. Hence, when people look at their browsers bookmarks they will be drawn to your web page because of the beautiful logo next to your bookmark. When they view your web site, they can confirm that they are viewing your website by seeing your customized icon(s) in the browser 'address box window'.

<http://www.favicon.co.uk/> provides a FREE On-Line Icon Generator that you can use to generate icons for your website.

Example:

 <http://www.elix.com.sg>

Useful Links

World Resources Institute

www.wri.org/wri

World Resources Institute is an independent nonprofit organization with a staff of more than 100 scientists, economists, policy experts, business analysts, statistical analysts, mapmakers, and communicators working to protect the Earth and improve people's lives.

SingStat Express

www.singstat.gov.sg

If you need data on a regular basis and find it a hassle to remember release dates, subscribe to SingStat Express now and you will receive the data as soon as they are released. The service will also notify you on publication releases which might be of interest to you.

Future of Work

www.dol.govt.nz/futureofwork

The site provides info on the changing economy, the changing workplace, the changing workforce, work/life balance, skills, education and training.

International Labour Organization

www.ilo.org

The site features reports on global employment trends, statistics, training and skills development programmes for the labour force.

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Wired Media Pte Ltd
Singapore – www.wm.tm

Connecting business online

A One-Stop solutions provider for web applications backed by state-of-the-art network infrastructure...For more information, call 65-6348-8783 or email info@wm.tm



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Search engines may not be able to properly spider a framed site. Using frames either prevents them from finding pages within a web site, or it causes them to send visitors into a site without the proper frame "context" being established, in particular, if you have your company logo kept in one frame that is constantly visible.

Therefore, if a visitor comes into the website from a search engine link, the webpage may be on its own without the 'header' where your company logo and key information might appear.

Bookmarking a framed page within a website generally would not work, and typically, only the main page of the website can be bookmarked. For more information about frames, read this article, "Search Engines and frames" by Danny Sullivan of Search Engine Watch [see link box below page] and <http://www.htmlhelp.com/design/frames>

Flash may look cool on a site but not everyone has the plug-in installed. Moreover, bear in mind that there are

still a large number of people in less developed countries using a 56K dialup modem to access the Internet. Make sure you have an alternative no-flash option. Even if their browsers have the plug-in for flash, in most instances, people would skip the flash animations by clicking on the skip flash option to save time on browsing, particularly the time-conscious business visitors.

Another important detail that should not be overlooked is the insertion of meaningful alternate text for images. Many partially sighted or visually impaired rely on the ALT tags on your images to find their way around. If you use a big image file for the front page of your site with no alternate text, then the likelihood of your site being listed by search engines is very low.

If you outsource your web design job, make sure that your designer observes these basic rules or details. In the course of my work—rewriting web contents for clients—I have come across many sites that were not listed by the search engines due to the lack of important details such as meta tags, framed sites or flash on home pages that did not contain enough description of the sites.

Besides good designing skills, it is important that your site designer have the basic knowledge of how search engines work and what design works best for your business.

One common mistake in selecting a proposed web design is to go for the lowest priced and the aesthetics, often overlooking the three basic selection criteria for a good website, which are accessibility, usability and functionality.



[<http://searchenginewatch.com/webmasters/article.php/2167901>]

Are you blogging?

What is a blog?

Derived from the term "weblog", a blog is a journal that is available on the web, a diary style site in which the author links to other web pages he or she finds interesting.

The activity of updating a blog is "blogging" and someone who keeps a blog is a "blogger". Postings on a blog are usually arranged in reverse chronological order.

The term "weblog" was coined by Jorn Barger in December 1997. The shorter version, 'blog' was coined by Peter Merholz in April or May of 1999. This was interpreted as a short form of the noun and as a verb, to blog, meaning 'to edit one's weblog or a post to one's weblog'.

Usage spread during 1999 and the word was popularized by Pyra's creation of their weblog service Blogger (now acquired by Google). The Oxford English Dictionary has considered including it in their dictionary.

Creating and publishing weblogs

Since their introduction, a number of software packages have appeared to allow people to create their own weblog. Blog hosting sites and Web services to provide editing via the Web have proliferated.

The various types of weblogs are personal, topical, collaborative, political and directory. Many businesses have started using blogs for both internal and external communications with their customers. For more information about weblogs, visit www.wikipedia.org

Source: Wikipedia
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Weblog#History>

Want to create a blog?
Get one at www.blogger.com free!

Tech Tips

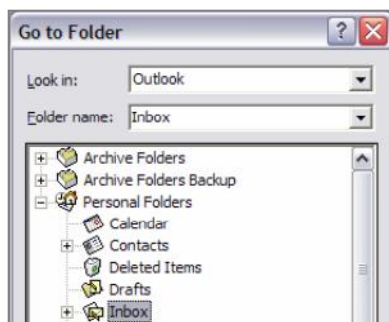
MS Outlook – more than just an email program

NAVIGATING FOLDER LIST IN OUTLOOK

The folder list (navigation pane) makes it easy to move around between mail folders and to drag and drop messages from one folder to another. If you have many nested folders, it is usually impossible to view all your folders at once in the list.

Instead of clicking your way down through the folder tree, use the keyboard for quick access:

1. Press Ctrl+Y to open the **Go To Folder** dialog.



2. Navigate quickly by pressing the first character of a folder's name; press the same character repeatedly to cycle through folders that begin with the same letter.

* Use the right-arrow key or + key on the numeric keypad to expand collapsed parts of the folder tree (those preceded by a + sign);

* Use the left-arrow key or - key on the numeric keypad to collapse expanded branches;

* Use the up and down arrow keys to move up and down, the Home key to move to the top of the list, the End key to move to the bottom, and the

PgUp and PgDn keys to move by intermediate jumps.

3. Hit **Enter** to open the highlighted folder.

PRINT A CALENDAR FROM OUTLOOK

1. Select Calendar in the Folder List.
2. On the **File** menu, click **Print** and then in the **Print style** box, click the print style you want.
3. To print the details of appointments and meetings, in the **Print Style** box, click **Calendar Details Style**.
4. In the **Start** list and the **End** list, enter the first day and the last day to print.
5. To set other print options, such as the paper orientation or the fonts used, click **Page Setup**, and then select the options that you want.



CREATE A MEETING REQUEST FROM A CONTACT

1. In Contacts, click the contact, and then on the Actions menu, click New Meeting Request to Contact.
2. In the Subject box, type a description.
3. In the Location box, enter the location.
4. Enter start and end times.
5. Select any other options you want.
6. Click Send

CREATE A TASK

A task is a personal or work-related errand you want to track through completion. A task can occur once or repeatedly (a recurring task). *To create a task from scratch:*

1. On the **File** menu, point to **New**, and then click **Task**.
2. In the **Subject** box, type a task name.
3. Complete any other boxes on the **Task** and **Details** tabs for information you want to record for the task. For help on an option, on the **Help** menu, click **What's This**, and then click the option.
4. To make the task recur, click **Recurrence**, click the frequency (**Daily**, **Weekly**, **Monthly**, **Yearly**) at which you want the task to recur, and then do one of the following:

* *Make the task recur at regular intervals*

Select options for that frequency. Do not click **Regenerate new task**, or the task will not recur at regular intervals.

* *Make the task recur based on completion date*

Click **Regenerate new task**, and then type a time frequency in the box.

5. If you want, set start and end dates for the task.

6. Click **OK**, and then click **Save and Close**.

Milestones

Sep 1999

Conceptualization

Research and study into the feasibility and benefits of Virtual Assisting concept.

Nov 1999

Founding of ELIX

ELIX Virtual Management was set up to provide business support services through virtual assistance.

Feb 2000

Launch of website

www.elix.com.sg was launched

Feb 2000

Publication of article

Today's Manager

First article on VA published in Today's Manager (Feb/Mar Issue)

May 2000

Publication of article

The Straits Times, Recruit Section

Second article on VA published in The Straits Times over two days (May 1 & 2) in two parts.

Aug 2000

'Above & Beyond'

Staffcentrix Citizenship Award

Received the Staffcentrix 'Above & Beyond' award for exceptional contributions to the Staffcentrix community.

Sep 2003

Host of 'Expert of the Month' Session at IVAA

Hosted 'EOM' sessions on Business Planning for members of International Virtual Assistants Association (IVAA).

About the firm

ELIX Virtual Management – a Technopreneur Home Office endorsed by EDB, Singapore – provides business support services through virtual assistance. The firm is owned and operated by an independent professional service provider, Elsie Lee who specializes in:

- Business writing and editing – business plans, company profiles, web contents, sales literature, etc
- Translation (English/Chinese) – company profiles, web contents, marketing collaterals, etc
- PowerPoint presentations – keynote speeches, company & sales presentations, workshops, survey results, etc
- Financial projections – for business plans – cash flow, income, sales, balance sheets, startup budget, operating expenses
- Research & Survey assistance – design questionnaire, collate & sort data collected, presentation of survey results, internet research

"Thank you for always providing reliable and high-quality services. We enjoy working with you very much. Congratulations on your 5th Anniversary!"

– I-Chin Lin
Translating Services
Coordinator

Choice Translating, Inc.
www.choicetranslating.com



News

Organized by Internauts Association and Panda Software, the aim of the **1st Worldwide Internet Security Campaign** is to make the Internet a safer place for all users.

The campaign is available at <http://www.worldwidesecondure.org> and in the eight most widely spoken languages, covering 86.4% of Internet users.

The 1st Worldwide Internet Security Campaign has been set up with clear objectives.

*The first is to create a more secure Internet for all users.

*The second objective is to make users more aware of the basic preventive security measures that they can take to help keep their computers free from viruses and intruders.

Finally, the campaign aims to provide access to content, tools and free applications, designed to keep computers free from the effects of viruses or any other type of intruder. Internet users can access the information, training and solutions they need to protect their PCs against Internet threats until July 31 on the campaign site.



If you have any comments or feedback, please send to info@elix.com.sg