

# Reduce Your Stress by Delegating Tasks to a Virtual Assistant



Courtesy of:  
Out of the Office  
Virtual Assistance

# Reduce Your Stress by Delegating Tasks to a Virtual Assistant

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Now. Immediately. ASAP. Like Yesterday.

Society, information and business moves at break-neck speed. What once took days, now takes a nano-second. Though once a luxury, then for emergencies only, cell phones in modern day rarely leave our person. We sleep with them next to our bed, some even placing them under their pillow, so that no notification goes unmissed. The continual bombardment of information has transformed the way we do business, the way we live, and the privacy that we trade in order to "be social."

### But at what cost?

The stress from being continually plugged in takes a devastating toll on our health and well-being. Poor diet, obesity, lack of exercise, stress, divorce – it's a vicious cycle.

### How does Stress Affect the Body?

Headaches, ADD/ADHD, chronic fatigue, irritability, jaw tension, increased heart rate, stroke, heart disease, weight gain, obesity, decreased sex drive, muscle tension, fibromyalgia, alcoholism, suicide, drug & tobacco addiction are all effects of stress on the body.



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"It's not stress that kills us, it is our reaction to it."

Hans Selve

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### Did you know?

- Your body doesn't differentiate between "a little bit" of stress and "a lot" of stress?
- Stress can impair your judgment. In other words, it can make smart people do dumb things.
- Stress is dangerous for all of the reasons above, but more importantly, we can build a tolerance to stress so that we don't realize that we are in a stress moment.
- Your response to stress can be controlled.
- Handling stress in the moment, is the best way to manage stress.

## It's Time for a Change

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## I. Need. Help.

- Is your productivity is low?
- Your to-do list out of control? Do you have a task called "Clean up to do list"?
- Is your desk accumulating so much paper that your office has been confused for the local recycling plant?
- Are your email inbox pages and pages long? What about your desk's inbox?
- Are you frustrated because no matter how hard you work, you seem like you're getting nowhere and everything is still incomplete?



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"Nothing is so fatiguing as the eternal hanging on of  
an uncompleted task."

William James

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The amount of stress accumulated from missed deadlines, lost opportunities, incomplete tasks and a cluttered inbox has significant health issues.

Have you ever considered hiring someone to help you, to assist you in reducing your minutia and letting you get back to the passion of your business? Have you ever considered a virtual assistant?

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## What exactly IS a Virtual Assistant?



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A Virtual Assistant (VA) is a highly-skilled, independent professional who remotely provides administrative, technical and/or creative business support services.

Virtual Assistant Networking Association definition of a Virtual Assistant

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As an independent business owner, a virtual assistant (also known as a VA) provides a variety of administrative and technical support services to clients remotely from their home office.

## Why should I hire a virtual assistant when I can just do it myself?

Admitting that you need help in maintaining your productivity isn't a sign of weakness. It is a sign of passion for your business. Yes it's true, you *can* answer your own phone line but there is a reason the role of a receptionist was created. Adding and subtracting numbers is something that you *can* do, however there is a reason to have a bookkeeper.



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"Even if you can do everything, that doesn't necessarily mean you should."

Sarah Haselkorn

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Contract in a virtual assistant is other professional on your team providing services that they excelled at, which in turn, allows you to maintain the productivity on the things that you excel at.

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Why should I hire a virtual assistant when I can just hire a traditional employee?

Simple: **Money**

With a traditional employee, you are responsible for paying their wages, benefits, paid time off, sick time and so on. Should you make a poor hiring decision, you're still required to pay that employee 40 hours a week even if they're doing a sub-part job.

With a virtual assistant, you are responsible for paying for the time that they work. Nothing more, nothing less. If they work 10 hours during the week, you pay for 10 hours of work. Since a virtual assistant is a small business owner, they already own all of the equipment needed to do their job (computer, printer, phone, etc.). In addition because they are contractor, you are not required to pay them for time that they do not work, offer paid leave, or other benefits.

While the hourly rate of a traditional administrative employee will be much lower than the hourly rate of a virtual assistant, you will save far more money by contacting with a virtual assistant. Many virtual assistants also provide discounts if you sign a retainer agreement.

Here is a quick comparison:

	Full Time Employee	Virtual Assistant
<b>Hourly Rate of Pay</b>	<b>\$15.00</b>	<b>\$35.00</b>
<b>Benefits Package: 35%</b> Medical Insurance   401(k)   etc.	\$5.25	\$0.00
<b>Overhead: 50%</b> Office Space   Equipment & supplies   Worker's Comp   OT Pay   etc.	\$7.50	\$0.00
<b>Total Effective Rate of Pay</b>	<b>\$27.75</b>	<b>\$35.00</b>
<b>Annual Hours</b>	2,080	480
<b>Annual Labor Cost</b>	<b>\$57,720</b>	<b>\$16,800</b>

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## Retainer vs. Ad Hoc Invoicing

What is the difference between a retainer and ad hoc invoicing? Retainer clients paid in advance for a block of hours for a month. Generally, a standard retainer block of hours used 10, 15, or 20 hours a month. Depending on the number of hours you choose, the rate will go down as the number of hours you commit to rises. For example, a retainer of 10 hours a month will generally equate to a 10% discount from the virtual assistant standard rate. Likewise, a retainer of 15 hours may provide a 15% discount and a 20 hour retainer would be discounted 20%. While it may vary from VA to VA, many virtual assistants allow you to roll over unused hours into the next month for up to three months.

Ad hoc invoicing, is submit it to the client weekly, biweekly, or monthly, depending on the client's needs and the virtual assistants policies. There is no discount on the virtual assistant's standard rate and the client is billed after the work has been completed, unlike the prepayment of retainer hours.

A wise virtual assistant will monitor and track time for each client, by each task, and provide a report along with their invoice so that they may see how the virtual assistant's time is being utilized.

## Now that you're convinced that you want a contract with a virtual assistant, how do you find one?

There are firms that have many virtual assistance for hire, like the "old fashioned secretarial pool," there are web sites dedicated to the virtual assistant industry, bid for hire sites, social media, LinkedIn, and word of mouth referrals.

If you're located in a populated area, it might be relatively easy to find a virtual assistant who is physically located near your location. Some virtual assistants do come on site to assist with needs that could only be met while in the physical office, such as archiving of physical file folders.

Interview prospective virtual assistants in the same way that you would interview a potential employee. Keeping in mind that a virtual assistant is also a small business owner, you'll need to also include questions about their operation and how they do business. For example, what are their standard business hours and do those align with your standard hours?

Be sure to read the bonus section at the end of this eBook for questions to ask a potential virtual assistant.

## About that 4-Hour Work Week Recommendation...

If you're one of the millions of people who have read Tim Ferriss' book, "[The 4-Hour Workweek](#)," then you're familiar with his suggestion of using foreign labor virtual assistants. These virtual assistants are located in countries such as India, Pakistan, and the Philippines. Their labor is low cost, generally \$2-5 dollars an hour.

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Setting aside the language and communication differences, as well as any time zone differences, many of these virtual assistants are part of larger businesses with unethical practices, shoddy workmanship, and a mentality of *"if this person doesn't work out, we'll just swap them out for another."* This is clearly not someone you want to entrust you're sensitive personal and business information with. That will add to the anxiety and stress you are already experiencing, and completely within your power to control. While this may not be the practice of every virtual assistant and virtual assistant business in these countries, your peace of mind is worth *more* than \$5.00 an hour.

Bid for hire sites, such as Elance, oDesk, and Freelancer are all locations where you can find a virtual assistant. From a virtual assistant standpoint, wages on oDesk range from \$3-\$5/hr, Freelancer from \$5-\$8/hr and Elance from \$8-\$10/hr. A virtual assistant living in the United States cannot sustain a livable wage at these rates, or if they choose to, they will not do so for long. So why look there? Why waste your time?

If you know anyone who is currently using a virtual assistant, ask them for an introduction or a referral. Seek out a virtual assistant on LinkedIn. Start a dialog with a VA on Facebook or Google+.

Once you have hired your first virtual assistant, keep in mind they can help you find a second virtual assistant should the need arise. Perhaps your original virtual assistant is missing some technical skills. A second virtual assistant can complement the first.

## Start Small

Email has been accepted as one of the main forms of communication in business for well over 20 years. Not only is it used as an inexpensive form of communication internally in business, it is also a way for marketers to send their advertisements to you inexpensively. Plus, let's never forget all that spam.

On average, American spend **23** hours a week staying up-to-date on email social media and other forms online communication. That's equates to 57.5% of a traditional work week.<sup>1</sup>

Sometimes email and social media just seem overwhelming with the constant bombardment of information and the immediacy expected in responses. Because of this, people have the tendency to become overwhelmed, stressed and procrastinate simply because they are receiving too much information for them to process in a professional manner while providing a thorough reply. This is where a virtual assistant can help you.

There are two ways a virtual assistant can help with your email - a one time spring cleaning, or an ongoing masterpiece of organization. Let's explore each.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.businessnewsdaily.com/4718-weekly-online-social-media-time.html>

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## Spring Cleaning

When was the last time you look in your inbox? How many emails are in there? Five? Twenty? 200? Over a thousand? The key to having an effective e-mail system is to have a clean inbox using filters, folders, and rules to maintain a clean inbox. Depending on the e-mail client that you use there are couple of different ways to handle less but regardless of what application you use this system can be adoptable to any client.

Let's start big and assume you have thousands of emails in your inbox. While CTL+A and Delete will clean things out, this probably isn't very effective. Chances are you just deleted something you might need in the future.

Scheduled some time to sit down with your virtual assistant using [Skype](#), [Join.Me](#), or [Google+ Hangouts](#), using one of your screen sharing options. Pull up your inbox in share your screen so that your system can see it. As you scroll through the emails to explain to your VA what is important in your opinion and why. The "why" is just as important as knowing what your priority emails are because down the road they are going to understand how you work.

As you begin to go through your list of e-mails, your virtual assistant and began to filter out the various emails into either labels (Gmail) or folders (Outlook/Thunderbird). For example, if you received the weekly e-mail from L.L. Bean that probably isn't a high priority e-mail for your review. That can be filed away into a folder or label called "Weekly Advertisement," which you can read at your leisure.

There is no limit to the number of filters or rules that you can use in your e-mail. So take advantage of the software's technology to make your inbox manageable.

As previously mentioned marketers like e-mail because it's an inexpensive way to advertise products and services to a broad customer base. These are also easy to pick out and move into a folder specifically designed for all these advertisements. This may only get rid of 15% of your inbox emails so we're making progress but we're not there yet.

Do you receive notification via e-mail from FaceBook, Google+, Twitter, LinkedIn, or Yahoo e-groups each time someone replies or a comment to a thread you have started? Do you need those emails? Probably not. Your assistant can move those emails to a temporary folder and then log into those respective accounts to turn those notifications off.

Now we're making real progress and it's time to attack the actual emails that deal with work, with *YOUR* business. This will be your assistant's largest learning curve when it comes to e-mail. Again, keep in mind that knowing **why** something is an action item or priority is good knowledge to share with your assistant. In the near future, they are going to help you maintain your inbox.

As you begin going through the most recent emails and working your way backward chronologically, tackle only a handful of emails at a time no more than 75 at one given time. The

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reason for this? You don't want to overwhelm each other in this endeavor. Your relationship with your new virtual assistant is new they are getting to know you and how you do business, while you are getting to know them and how they do business.

Depending on the severity and amount of emails in your inbox it may take some time for an assistant to go through and completely clean about. In addition while they are cleaning out your inbox they are also applying that the rules and filters for any new e-mail that's coming in.

### A Rembrandt of Maintenance

Picasso, Rembrandt, Van Gogh. When you hear these names, you think of masterpieces of art. Your virtual assistant can paint an inbox picture of clarity, simplicity, and de-cluttered as part of their services to you.

Right now you're probably thinking, *"I don't really want someone looking at all my e-mail."* While this is a rational thought, the ultimate goal is to be more productive and this is just a step in making you, the client, more productive. When you contract with a virtual assistant there an underlying need for trust, as they're going to be handling sensitive information. This is a prime example of when you need to trust your virtual assistant.

A virtual assistant experienced in the management of their clients e-mail, will leave only the most important action item emails for you. In addition, the daily status updates will generally advise you if you are, or are not, on track with your action items. Each client has different requirements for their task management and an open communication on how big prefer to receive their status updates is required up front. The process can be modified as your work relationship develops, or with technology changes.

### Meetings - Meetings - Meetings

The common thread, contained within emails, is the need to sit down and have meetings with colleagues whether face to face, on a conference line, or on video chat. Your virtual assistant can ensure that you are only attending the meetings that are an effective use of your time or required. At the beginning of a client-VA relationship, learning which meetings are priority is another learning curve to overcome.

Regardless of whether you use a desktop application for your calendar such as Outlook or Thunderbird, or a web version such as Google calendar, your assistant should be able to process your meeting invitations, schedule meetings, set up a conference call lines, and provide agendas to all parties on your behalf. Don't forget, a virtual assistant can also take meeting notes should the need arise.

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## Time Management & Productivity

A healthy time management system varies from person to person, as each person is a unique individual. What works for one, may not work for another, and definitely won't work for someone else. Because of this, it's important for a new client to communicate their existing time management system to their virtual assistant. Your VA might have some suggestions on ways to improve your system to be more streamlined and more effective.

Are you someone who manages their time exclusively on the calendar? If you are, then blocks of available time are important to your virtual assistant. Also, if your VA is coordinating a small dinner reservation, adding that to your calendar is part of their responsibility.

If you manage your time ad hoc, and prefer to have a more direct line of communication for knowing your availability, the time that you can be available to you have meetings or calls, and when your prime productivity time is.

Prime productivity time is a time of day when you are at your best, when you're on your game. This time of day when you produce the highest quality of work, are the most creative, and full of energy. This is the time when all you do is work. There should be no scheduled meetings, interruptions, distractions, or disruptions during this period of time and this needs to be communicated to your virtual assistant.

## Social Media Distractions

Unless you're a social media, marketing, or advertising professional, social media can easily distract you for large tracts of time and significantly decrease your productivity. Status updates, recommendations for you, friends and family notifications all equal reductions in productivity. Here is where a virtual assistant can take back some of your time.

A virtual assistant who understands social media, will know the prime posting time frames for each of the respective social media sites. They use that information to assist their clients. By doing so, they alleviate your need to be on those respective social media sites and the temptation to squander your productivity time, while maintaining your social media posting presence.

There will always be a debate as to whether you should outsource your social media engagement to your virtual assistant. If you are someone who writes long engaging posts, has long interactions with your various friends, connections, circles, or followers, then outsourcing isn't an effective use of your virtual assistant's time. They can be utilizing their time more effectively on other aspects of maintaining your business tasks. However, if your social media presence is simply posting your latest blog post, retweeting or basic in nature, these tasks can easily be outsourced to your virtual assistant.

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## Ring - Ring: It's the Telephone

If social media and e-mail aren't a big enough distraction from productivity, instant messenger and the telephone shouldn't be dismissed. While many modern businesses still have traditional landline telephones, most people also have a mobile phone attached to them 24/7. If someone doesn't get you on the landline, they call your cell phone. If you don't answer your cell phone, they text you.

All these interruptions during your prime productivity time equals money lost. Consider having your virtual assistant answer your landline (many phone systems can forward calls to another phone number), forward your mobile phone to your virtual assistant, or simply mute your phone and have your assistant return voicemail messages.

## I Simply Assign my Virtual Assistant the Tasks to do?

Just as in the traditional workforce, delegation is key. Mastering delegation is, especially for those who have never delegated before, can be a learning experience for both you and your new virtual assistant.

## Don't be the Capone Delegator!

Just like a Tommy gun from the 1920's spewing bullets from its chamber, don't pile all of your tasks to your VA on Day One. You are building a relationship with a professional. Think of it like dating - you need to work at the relationship before running to the altar. Build one task upon another. Go slow and keep delegating. Soon, you will have a stress-free, de-cluttered business life.

## Provide Feedback

If something is, or isn't, working the way you expected, let your VA know. A seasoned virtual assistant will continually ask if things are running better, so be honest with them. They will also ask if you need help with anything else.

# Thank You!

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Thank you for taking the time to gain some insights on how a virtual assistant can help you get your business and personal life tasks back on track, while reducing stress and improving your work-life balance.

## About the Author

Denise Dukette, owner of [Out of the Office Virtual Assistance](#) has been a virtual assistant since 2006. Insanely curious and super enthusiastic, she loves helping solopreneurs and small businesses. She is your silent weapon, your office ninja, your partner.

Out of the Office Virtual Assistance offers ideas and ways to increase your productivity, decrease your workload and work more efficiently. We nurture a successful business relationship, while continuing to grow as your business partner.

Focused on streamlining your administration, social media planning and execution, as well as creatively offering solutions to your business minutia.

Take the time to start slowly with an outsourced partner. Overwhelming each other is not healthy for you, for a virtual assistant, or for the industry. Take it slow. Baby steps slow. Build on it. Then we'll rock!

*If you succeed, we succeed. **So let's make it happen!***

## Feel free to connect on social media



Google+ <http://gplus.to/oof>



LinkedIn <http://www.linkedin.com/in/denisedukette>



Twitter <http://twitter.com/oofva>



Facebook <http://www.facebook.com/oofva>



Pinterest <http://pinterest.com/oofva>



RSS Feed <http://oofva.com/blog/feed>

## Bonus Material: Questions to Ask when Interviewing for a Virtual Assistant

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1. How long have you worked as a Virtual Assistant?
2. What's your administrative background?
3. What is your experience and do you have a niche skill set?
4. What are your strengths and weaknesses?
5. What is your personality type?
6. How many clients do you have?
7. What sort of work tasks do you perform for your current clients?
8. Do you have any references I can contact?
9. What kind of commitment do you want?
10. What are your main communication methods?
11. What is your communication style?
12. How often do you like to communicate?
13. What do you enjoy the most about your work?
14. How quickly do you usually respond to emails during your working hours?
15. What are your working hours? Do you work weekends?
16. What happens when you are sick or go on vacation?
17. Do you have children? Who takes care of them during the day/afternoon?
18. What is your standard rate? Do you offer a discount for a retainer?
19. Is there a minimum hourly requirement?
20. Do you bill by the minute, 5-minute or 15-minute increment?
21. What fees are not covered in your standard rate? (Example: postage)
22. Do you charge a rush fee? What determines a rush fee?
23. How do you invoice and on what day of the month?
24. What forms of payment do you accept?
25. What equipment (hardware/software) is in your office? Tell me more about your office.
26. What security measures do you have in place?
27. Have you had a Client who had difficulty in describing his needs/ requirements?
28. You have a deadline when your computer suddenly crashed. What would you do?
29. What were some of the trainings you've had the past six months?
30. What are your plans for the next 5 years?
31. Do you subcontract any work to other virtual assistants?
32. Are You Willing To Sign a Non-Disclosure Agreement?
33. What do you know about me and/or my business?

After you have had the opportunity to talk with a virtual assistant, ask yourself "**What is your gut feeling?**"

As with a traditional job search, interview *at least 3* virtual assistants before deciding. Your personality and theirs must be a good match - not only to work well with each other, but also to gain trust. Without trust, hidden or nagging anxiety will creep into your life.

## Bonus Material:

# 75 Tasks you can Outsource to a Virtual Assistant

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1. Any form of data entry
2. Assembling and mailing information and presentation packets and press kits
3. Backing up mailing lists on a weekly / monthly basis so that asset is safe and secure
4. Booking travel and managing point reward systems
5. Brainstorming for new business ideas and streamlining
6. Coordinating team meetings
7. Coordinating of speaking engagements
8. Copywriting the sales pages for website
9. Creating a procedures manual for business
10. Creating and maintaining database for classes, workshops, seminars, teleclasses, teleseminars and webinars
11. Creating surveys
12. Designing and formatting workbooks and course documentation
13. Designing simple graphics for website
14. Downloading bridge line audios, converting them to MP3 and uploading the audio files to website so that customers may have access
15. Embedding links into PDF files
16. Follow up with late payment clients
17. Form creation for any aspect of the business
18. Formatting blog
19. Formatting eBooks for publishing
20. Gathering testimonials from customers for use on website
21. General correspondence - letters, emails, memos, documents, etc.
22. Ghost writing special reports and eBooks
23. Handling customer support e-mail account / help desk account
24. Invoicing clients and keeping track of outstanding payments
25. Issuing payments to affiliates
26. Keeping website fresh and up-to-date
27. Keeping track of domain names, renewal dates, hosting, etc.
28. Listening to and summarizing voice mail messages
29. Making changes and tweaks to website
30. Making dinner reservations and notifying everyone
31. Managing blog's feed
32. Managing contacts in a CRM (or email program)
33. Managing eBay auctions and corresponding with customers that come through the eBay service
34. Managing expenses and coordination to have info sent to the bookkeeper
35. Managing list and taking care of unsubscribe requests
36. Managing personal budget and setting up a payment schedule for regular bills
37. Managing team's employment information

## Bonus Material:

# 75 Tasks you can Outsource to a Virtual Assistant

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38. Managing user names and passwords
39. Managing the details of next project in a project management system
40. Monitoring and approving comments that come in to blog
41. Networking via forums and group discussions of products and services
42. Paying bills
43. Posting articles to various article sources
44. Posting blog entries
45. Posting job opportunities to various job boards
46. Posting opt-in boxes and other such forms on website for the purpose of collecting names for mailing list
47. Preparing mailing labels and envelopes for a direct mail campaign
48. Preparing one sheets, bios, event calendars and list of services
49. Preparing presentations
50. Proofreading autoresponders, broadcasts, e-books, special reports, website copy, etc.
51. Providing quotes for services to potential clients
52. Putting together proposals for next big business venture / idea or collaboration
53. Receiving calls traveling, OOF, vacation, etc.
54. Reconciling bank accounts
55. Registering new domain names
56. Research - both online and over the phone
57. Screening e-mail, deleting spam and responding to inquiries
58. Screening candidates for other openings in company and providing me with a list of the top candidates
59. Sending and receiving faxes; forwarding & filing as appropriate
60. Sending me monthly traffic reports for website(s)
61. Sending thank you notes, holiday cards, etc.
62. Setting up appointments with clients and colleagues
63. Setting up e-zine for mailing to list
64. Setting up autoresponder lists and messages
65. Setting up broadcasts that are sent to mailing list
66. Setting up e-commerce shopping cart and updating it with new products
67. Setting up the bridge lines for conference calls and teleseminars
68. Taking care of customer refunds, purchases and other related purchase inquiries
69. Taking care of Google AdSense or AdWords accounts
70. Tracking how time is utilized
71. Tracking shipments & follow up if something wasn't received
72. Transcribing teleseminars and teleclasses into useful info-products
73. Troubleshooting any issues
74. Uploading new website content via FTP server
75. Writing press releases and distributing them to the best PR sites on the web