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News & Info from ...



**Newsletter: Vol. 10, Issue 5 - October 2010**

**Quote: "Thank you for your message, which has been added to a queuing system. You are currently in the 352nd place and can expect to receive a reply in approximately 19 weeks."**

**- Best 'out of office' automatic email replies #4**

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#### WELCOME!

Dear [subscriber-firstname],

Welcome to our new subscribers!

Remember you can also view this newsletter online. If you would prefer to receive notification of when the newsletter is online - rather than receive the whole thing in your inbox - please, just [let me know](#) and I'll change your subscription.



The release of this month's newsletter was delayed as I waited for some exciting news! See below for more info.

In this newsletter there is another look at cloud computing, a reminder about holiday gifts, and an interesting discussion on what VAs should be calling themselves.

Virtually yours

*Lyn PB*

*PS: Don't forget: **Click here to be unsubscribed immediately** if you have received our newsletter in error. If you have a friend/colleague who may be interested in the content of our newsletter pay it forward and **forward the newsletter to them**. You can also [click here to view this email online](#).*

#### Tis the season...



With only 10 weeks till Christmas - yes that's a TEN - and even less time than that till cut off for overseas gift delivery, do you have your client seasonal thank yous organised?

Baskets and hampers should be ordered by **11 November at the latest** for delivery by 22 December. If you're planning on sending corporate Christmas cards - particularly those embossed with your logo or corporate message - these will need to be ordered by the end of October.

[Contact us](#) for help with your database or to order your special gifts now.

#### Special Announcement: ICA

Regular readers of my blog will remember that in the lead up to the August 21 Federal Election I was keeping readers abreast of what had been happening with regard to personal services income and other small business tax matters. For those who may have missed the must-read info for small business and independent contractors see:

PSI Criteria - Changing or Not?  
Update - PSI Criteria Position - Aug 18  
PSI Criteria Update - Sept 25

If you'd prefer not to wade through the written info there I have summarised the position in a 13-minute podcast on [The Virtual Business Show](#) that may be easier to digest.

My interest in the subject drew the attention of Australia's not-for-profit association looking after the interests of independent contractors and the self-employed: [Independent Contractors Australia](#).

ICA was formed - ironically - the same year that eSOS was started - 1999 - primarily to

*"protect the rights of independent contractors to be treated fairly, justly and equitably in Australia and to be allowed to work free from intimidation or harassment from bureaucrats, the Australian Taxation Office, political parties, unions and others."*

Readers of the newsletter will remember that part of the VIVA convention this year was to include an "open" discussion on whether there was a need for a not-for-profit association for Virtual Assistants specifically. I was unceremoniously dropped from facilitating that discussion by the organising committee the week of the convention when I asked too many difficult questions. My main problem with having an association just for Virtual Assistants was that we would be reinventing the wheel particularly when a national association already exists covering the interests of ALL independent contractors - of which virtual assistants form just a small part.

Subsequent to all of this, I was invited by the Executive Director of ICA to join the board as Queensland representative. I spent a number of weeks considering the offer and eventually decided to accept this voluntary position. My board position nomination was accepted during the October AGM of ICA.

I am pleased to be able now to effectively represent the virtual assistant industry as a whole on an association that has already-established connections with State and Federal government representatives - to the highest levels - and can now effectively have the concerns of what is really a very small segment of the IC industry heard where it matters!

This is exciting news for the VA industry across Australia and I hope that VAs and other self-employed business owners will send me any concerns they see in their local areas for small business, independent contractors and work-at-home service providers. ICA is the place from where we can have these issues heard and addressed - and get our industry recognised on a national scale as part of the broader self-employed and independent contractor industry.



## Dropbox - Cloud Computing in Action

Regular readers of the newsletter will recall in June I reproduced an [advisory from OfficeWatch](#) on cloud computing which discussed inherent dangers particularly with regard to online storage of your email.

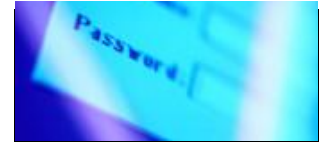
Recall 'cloud computing' simply means having your documents and software stored on servers away from your office and accessible by members of your team.

Over the past few months I've been trialling one such system - [Dropbox](#) - which is a cloud-based file storage and synchronisation service. I've been using this for transmission of documents and audio files amongst my transcription team. I've been amazed at how effectively it works with pop up messages appearing in my system tray (like the Windows Updates messages we're used to) whenever a file is changed.

But what about security? Peter Moon, partner in Logie-Smith Lanyon Lawyers was recently quoted in the [Australian Financial Review](#) as saying "Too many security skeptics forget to compare apples with apples. The same folk who have never encrypted a sensitive email in their lives, or passworded a confidential PDF file, or who



happily transmit documents to shared fax machines can be highly demanding of a service like Dropbox. ... A more useful question is whether [Dropbox] is more, or less, secure than practices we already regard as acceptable".



Dropbox uses the same secure methods as banks and the military to send and store data. It encrypts its online data using the AES-256 standard which can be trusted with highly confidential information - as long as the password is strong. Data transmission is over an encrypted (SSL) channel. Shared folders in your dropbox are only viewable by people you specifically invite. Online access to your files and folders is only available with a username and password.

Peter Moon says his firm is happy to rely on Dropbox's built-in security for the majority of their documents, but when more care is warranted they use strongly password-protected PDF files.

[Want to try out Dropbox for yourself?](#) Basic accounts offer 2GB of storage and are free. For \$99/year you receive 50GB of storage and \$199/year will get you 100GB.

### A rose by any other name...

To call yourself a 'virtual assistant' or not to call yourself a 'virtual assistant' ... that is the question...

Recently there's been some discussion again on various virtual assistant network lists about whether VAs should call themselves VAs or ... something else.

This isn't the first time this question has been raised - I blogged about this back in June 2009 ([What's in a Name?](#)) again in August 2009 ([Confusion Continues](#)) and finally in March 2010 ([What's a Virtual Assistant?](#)).

It seems that virtual assistants have a need to **define** themselves. I think this need comes from the fact that for many years whenever we were asked what it was we did we were met with 'deer in the headlights' stares from befuddled and confused prospects who thought we were talking about virtual reality games or some other strange technical thingy they didn't quite understand so into the too hard basket it went.

Enter Tim Ferris and the *4 Hour Work Week* and the term 'virtual assistant' went viral - unfortunately to describe off-shore cheap labour available to businesses who wanted to increase bottom line and feel entrepreneurial all at the same time.

As I say in my blog, a quack is a quack and doctors didn't stop calling themselves doctors just because someone showed up in town selling snake oil.

So here's a workable, understandable definition of a real virtual assistant. Please feel free to use it, share it and get it out there virally so we can put this to bed ... once and for all! :)

***"A Virtual Assistant is a highly-skilled independent professional who provides secretarial, administrative, technical and/or creative business support functions, remotely from their clients."***

### Cafe Press Store





Okay - so just as a bit of fun we've [opened a store](#) at CafePress where you can purchase eSOS items! T-shirts, coffee mugs, coasters, bags and notebooks! If you like the support we give and want to spread the word, this is a unique way to do so!

If you want your own CafePress store [click here to set one up](#) - or we can do it for you. [Just ask.](#)

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