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Portable Careers for Military Spouses

By Victoria M. Parham

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"Pack your Career and Let's Go"

How many times have you relocated? How many jobs have you held in the past 10 years? Do these questions sound familiar? I bet they do. Military spouses face unique challenges when it comes to their professional careers. Many have made the decision to forego the careers of their active duty spouse before their own. However technology is opening doors and creating opportunity for military spouses to establish careers that travel with them.

Portable careers are a growing trend among the military spouse community. Frequent relocations once frowned upon, are now being welcomed with open arms thanks to the wonderful world of technology and the Internet. Military spouses can now utilize their talents, skills, and abilities to launch viable virtual companies at home and/or in cyberspace.

Fast dialup connections and high speed Internet access enable spouses to conduct business online in real time on the web from anywhere in the world, literally. From Alaska to Japan, from New York to Florida spouses are able to sell products and services to clients around the globe.

Why is this new way of working so appealing to military spouses? Great question! Spouses look forward to those three little words every three to four years, "Honey, we're moving. In times past this meant quitting a job and starting all over, portable careers however allow a spouse to take not only their career/business but also his/her clientele, this benefit alone eliminates the reduction in household income.

Portable careers are especially appealing to spouses who are self disciplined, enjoy working alone and are comfortable using technology. The types of careers a spouse can start include: writing, editing, secretarial support, virtual assistance, translations, transcription, information research and retrieval, photography, interviewer and the list goes on and on. Creativity is key when considering a portable career or virtual business.

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Important facts to keep in mind when starting any type of business: be sure to check your local laws (business licensing, zoning, etc.), if you are thinking about starting a business from government quarters be sure to check with your base housing and/or JAG office for authorization.

Remember, the next time your spouse announces those three little words "Honey, we're moving", simply pack your career and let's go. Until the next time, happy virtual officing!

To learn more about the Virtual Business Owners Initiative go to: www.vsscycyberoffice.com/vbo.

Victoria Parham is the president and chief technology officer for VSSCyberOffice.com, a forerunner in the virtual support services industry, an advocate of portable careers for trailing spouses and family

members. Its web-based Virtual Business Owners Training Program(tm), the first Virtual Careers program for Department of Defense ID Cardholders, is available and accessible at military bases around the world.

Transitioning portable careers for global military families

By Victoria Parham

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Mention virtual business or portable careers in the military community and typically you think of the military spouse, veteran, or military retiree jump-starting their own business – keeping in touch with clients, colleagues or a combination of both. How? Electronically of course.

The evolution of home office technology presents a wealth of opportunity for the military spouse to develop businesses that can be operated from virtually anywhere. Examples of the types of businesses that could fall under the virtual or portable realm could include the following:

- Technical or business writing
- Editor
- Proofreader
- Web Developer
- Secretarial Support
- Travel Agent
- Translator
- Interpreter
- Graphic Illustrator
- Freelance Writer
- Researcher
- Technical Support Agent
- Consultant

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Deciding which business is right for you could seem a little challenging at first, however, a wonderful exercise to help get you started is called the self-awareness and skills evaluation. In this exercise you'll ask yourself a series of questions. Note: it's important to be honest with yourself.

1. Are you a self-starter?
2. Do you enjoy working independently or as part of a team?
3. Are you trust-worthy and honest?
4. Are you comfortable communicating by email and telephone?
5. Have you always dreamed of starting your own business?
6. What are you passionate about?
7. Do you enjoy serving others?
8. What software proficiencies do you possess?
9. Can you set goals and follow them through to completion?
10. Are you comfortable with rejection?

If you answered, Yes to the majority of the questions chances are you've got the skills, attitude, and motivation of a business owner.

Starting a business in general, regardless of the type requires much planning, research, patience, and preparation. Working for yourself means making decisions on everything. An example:

- Equipment purchases hardware to run your virtual business efficiently
- Software purchases required to serve clients and run your business efficiently
- Business structure setup – (sole-proprietor, corporation or LLC)
- Hours of operation establishing the hours which you'll work
- Loans preparing loan packets (if you'll require startup capital)

Do you plan to operate your virtual business from government quarters? If so, you'll need to contact your base housing office for authorization to operate a business from government quarters. Note: regulations on operating a business from government quarters varies base to base, be sure to verify with your local housing office first.

Working for yourself doesn't mean you're all alone, there are organizations that can provide assistance and support in the startup phases and during expansion:

Small Business Administration www.sba.gov

Service Corps of Retired Executives www.score.org

Small Business Development Center www.sba.gov/sbdc/

SBA Women's Business Ownership www.sba.gov/womeninbusiness

We've covered the preliminaries of setting up your business now let's focus on the virtual aspect. Developing a presence on the Internet will be a key factor in the launch of your virtual business this can be done by conducting a domain name search and purchase.

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Maintaining your site by keeping the content up-to-date will be just as important. An Internet presence allows clients and prospective clients access to information about your virtual business 24 hours a day.

Building sustainable relationships with your clients will be critical to the longevity and success of your virtual business. Regardless of where your military transfers take you, you'll always be connected to your clients and industry colleagues through use of the Internet, email, instant messenger and telephone (cell phone).

For VBO program participation and eligibility visit: <http://www.vsscyberoffice.com/vbo>.

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