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Gal Fridays

Sherry Huff, Akron, Ohio
by Shelley Pyne-Hanley

Downsizing means the end of the world for some people, but not for Sherry Huff. Around the same time that she discovered her job was being phased out, Sherry realized that she wanted to turn her part-time secretarial work into a full-time home business. After researching her market (with the cushion of a nice severance package), Sherry was able to take the leap and start Gal Fridays (virtual office services) in September 1997. It's been an eventful period, as Sherry has recently remarried (her husband also has a home business) and is now home-schooling her son and daughter (ages 15 and 13). She loves the time she now gets to spend with her family and wouldn't have it any other way.

WFH: When did you start Gal Fridays?

SH: I started it part-time in Sept. 1996, but knew that I wanted to go full-time. I was a single mom at the time and couldn't make the transition right away without more security. Soon after I got married and found out that my company (Roadway Express Trucking) was about to start downsizing. I was doing secretarial and accounting work and thought to myself, "Why not do this at home?"

WFH: What types of services do you provide?

SH: I do bookkeeping, general administrative duties, insurance work, applications for doctoral students, secretarial work -- it really depends on the client's needs. There are so many small businesses that are just too busy to deal with day-to-day administrative things. That's where I come in.

WFH: How many "Gal Fridays" do you have working for you?

SH: Well, I do most of the work myself. When I'm overwhelmed I farm things out to another telecommuting mother. My daughter also helps out, which is great. She's such a big help with my newsletter.

WFH: How do you market your business?

SH: My strategies change all the time. In the beginning I sent out business newsletters. They're great for existing customers but weren't a great marketing ploy. I now have a [website](#) -- a great investment. I also have classifieds running on AOL, and they receive great responses. Some of the best marketing strategies are the most basic. A lot of clients have found me by word-of-mouth and through ads placed in the local newspapers and telephone book. The telephone book is great!

WFH: Did you have a lot of start-up costs?

SH: Well, I was pretty lucky because I received a severance package from my last job. But even if I hadn't been in that situation, the start-up costs were low. Basically I needed a good computer and printer which cost me about \$3,000. I also spent some extra money (\$300-\$400) on business cards and stationery. This is the first impression a potential client will have of your business, and it should look as professional as possible.

WFH: What are your rates?

SH: I either charge by the hour or use a flat fee. For basic administrative tasks I charge \$20 an hour. For bookkeeping it's \$30 and when I'm just typing, it's five dollars for a single-spaced page and \$2.50 for double space. I usually work a three-to-five-day work week because I home school my children and choose to work less than 40 hours.

WFH: What's the best thing about working at home?

SH: It's great to be with my kids. I can work and know that if they need me I am there. As I mentioned, now that I work at home I home-school them and together we've worked out a productive schedule. It's just so great having them around.

WFH: What's the hardest part about working from home?

SH: It was hard to balance family and work in the beginning. I still get sidetracked by household chores and gardening. Also, customers sometimes feel like they can come by unannounced at any time. I especially don't like that.

WFH: What advice would you give people who want to start their own home-business?

SH: Research, research, research. Also, make sure you have enough money in the bank. Even though it's a home business, make it look as professional as possible. First impressions go a long way.

Have a question for Sherry? [Ask her!](#)

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