

AI and VAs: what to automate, and what to hire a person for

The question is not whether AI replaces a VA. It is which parts of the job should never have been a person's job in the first place.

About 7 minutes to read

Owners ask us fairly often whether they should just use AI instead. The honest answer is that a good VA using AI well beats both a VA who does not and an owner trying to prompt their way out of an operational problem. But some tasks genuinely should not be a hire.

Do not hire a person for this

- Copying data between two systems that could be connected. Use an automation tool, not a human
- Transcribing calls and meetings. This is solved, and cheaply
- First-draft formatting, summarising a long document, tidying a spreadsheet's structure
- Generic first drafts of routine copy where accuracy is checked afterwards anyway
- Scheduled reminders and follow-up triggers

Automate before you hire

If a task has no judgement in it at all, automating it is cheaper than delegating it and it never resigns. Hiring someone to do work a tool should do is how you end up with an expensive person who is bored by month three.

Hire a person for this

- Anything where being wrong has a cost you would have to apologise for
- Work requiring judgement about your specific customers, suppliers or history
- Chasing people, a human following up gets answered, an automated sequence gets ignored
- Anything needing a phone call with a real person on the other end
- Work where the requirements change mid-task and someone has to notice
- Managing the automations, and noticing when one has silently broken

The combination that actually works

The highest-leverage version is a VA who uses AI as a first-draft engine and applies judgement on top. Drafted by a model, checked and corrected by someone who knows the business, sent by someone accountable for it. That is a genuinely different output from either half alone.

Task	AI does	Your VA does
Inbox	Drafts replies to routine enquiries	Decides which are routine, edits tone, handles the exceptions
Meeting notes	Transcribes and summarises	Extracts the actions and chases them
Reporting	Pulls and formats the numbers	Notifies the one that looks wrong and checks it
Content	Produces a first draft	Fact-checks, adds specifics, makes it sound like you
Bookkeeping	Codes transactions by rule	Reviews the exceptions and reconciles

Before you put AI near client data

Check what your tools retain and train on, and whether that is compatible with the confidentiality you owe your clients. This matters more in regulated work, a clinic or a law firm cannot paste client detail into a general consumer tool. Write down what is allowed and give your VA that list; do not leave it to their judgement.

Setting your VA up to use AI well

- ☐ Written list of what may and may not be pasted into an AI tool
- ☐ Accounts on the tools you want used, on your billing, not their personal ones
- ☐ A worked example of a good output versus a mediocre one
- ☐ Agreement that AI-drafted work is always reviewed before it leaves
- ☐ A standing task to review whether any automation has silently stopped working