

ExecQua, the easy way to find Virtual Assistants

As part of our quick founder questions series - or QFQs - we spoke to Danielle Armstrong, Director of ExecQua about recognising the potential of AI, empowering Virtual assistants and being named as a finalist in two UK StartUp Awards categories.

Temps de lecture : minute

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In early 2023 I knew that I had to start paying attention to artificial intelligence (AI), in particular, to how it might change business support and administration services.

I met and spoke to dozens of people involved in AI and business and, whilst I felt excited about the changes that were happening, I also felt plagued by the thought that new technology was likely to make the world of outsourcing more complex and confusing.

By the end of 2023, I had the start of what would become ExecQua, and wanted to make sure that the solution was simple and involved a sense of recognition.

Tell us about the business - what it is, what it aims to achieve, who you work with, how you reach customers and so on?

ExecQua is a pioneering platform connecting exceptional self-employed administrative professionals, commonly referred to as virtual assistants, and businesses seeking their expertise. Our primary objective

is twofold: to empower these remarkable VAs by enhancing their visibility and to simplify the journey for businesses in need of exceptional administrative support. I hope to forge strategic partnerships with individuals and businesses capable of further enriching the platform and its community members.

How has the business evolved since its launch?

Originally, the concept was to offer an AI training programme tailored for virtual assistants (VAs). However, as time progressed, it became clear that the market was becoming evermore saturated with excellent AI training solutions. Plus, it dawned on me that truly exceptional VAs take charge of their own ongoing development, selecting how they keep on top of their training needs and meeting business goals.

The missing puzzle piece, therefore, lay in facilitating connections between these outstanding business support professionals and the prospective clients in need of their services. This realisation led to the launch of ExecQua in 2024, a platform designed to effectively bridge this gap. By meeting my target audience where they are, I'm looking forward to seeing how the platform evolves with further feedback and learnings.

Shortly after its inception, ExecQua was named as a finalist in two UK StartUp Awards categories - North East, Yorkshire and the Humber 2024 finalist for AI StartUp of the Year and Innovative StartUp of the Year. This recognition reflects the transformative impact AI is having on business support services, and it motivates me to continue working to strengthen VA businesses for the future.

Tell us about the working culture at ExecQua

The working culture revolves around ExecQua's four core values; client-focused, human and honest, AI aware, and continuously improving. As the sole individual driving the business forward, I prioritise efficiency and effectiveness in every aspect of operations. Flexibility is key, allowing me to adapt to changing circumstances and embrace new opportunities. Collaboration and communication are also key to the working culture, as I actively engage with partners and industry experts to foster mutual understanding and drive collective success. Ultimately, the working culture at ExecQua is defined by a commitment to making a meaningful impact in the business support community.

How are you funded?

ExecQua is funded through a combination of savings accrued from my husband's employment and the revenue generated by my own VA business, Edge EA, which has been in operation since 2021. Being resourceful in managing expenses and prioritising investments has been key.

What has been your biggest challenge so far and how have you overcome this?

The biggest hurdle has been navigating the startup phase with limited resources. From the outset, a lean and agile approach to business operations was adopted, meticulously scrutinising every expenditure and looking for creative solutions to maximise impact. Strategic prioritisation and careful decision-making have been key in moving forward from idea to a trading business.

How does ExecQua answer an unmet need?

ExecQua provides a central platform that streamlines the process of connecting businesses with exceptional self-employed administrative professionals (VAs). In an increasingly digital and AI-driven world, the solutions available to business owners are vast and complex, and it's likely that their needs will be ever-changing. Likewise, VAs face challenges in effectively showcasing their expertise and attracting clients in a crowded marketplace.

ExecQua bridges this gap by offering a curated directory where businesses can easily discover and engage with VAs who possess the skills and expertise needed to meet their unique needs. ExecQua empowers both VAs and businesses to thrive in an evolving business landscape.

What's in store for the future?

Remaining committed to enhancing the platform's functionality and expanding its network of self-employed virtual assistants and business clients is a priority. Additionally, I'm exploring opportunities to further leverage AI and automation to optimise services and deliver greater value. The vision is to establish ExecQua as the premier destination for businesses seeking exceptional administrative support, and for VAs looking to showcase their expertise and grow their client base. I'm really excited to be part of shaping the future of business support services.

What one piece of advice would you give other founders or future founders?

"1, then 1, then 1" reminds me of the importance of focusing on one task

at a time, completing it thoroughly before moving on to the next. I've found myself caught up in multitasking far too often - dabbling in a bit of this and a bit of that. However, I've learned that dedicating my full attention to one task not only helps build momentum but also allows for a deeper understanding and improvement based on the learnings gained.

And finally, a more personal question! What's your daily routine and the rules you're living by at the moment?

Each morning, I block dedicated time for implementation, which I've aptly labelled as "IMPLEMENTATION" in my electronic diary. During this period, I focus on taking action to move my business forward, and steering clear of day-to-day tasks. Whether it's watching informative videos or refining business processes, this time has been invaluable to moving ExecQua forwards.

Also, I've adopted the practice of setting three business goals every 90 days. Each goal is outlined using a project planning tool, with detailed tasks listed underneath to chart the path toward achievement. This method acts as a compass, guiding me back to the essentials and preventing me from getting caught up in longer-term planning. The 90-day timeframe is a great balance between having ample opportunity to achieve the goals, while maintaining the flexibility needed for an agile business approach.

Danielle Armstrong is the Director of *ExecQua*.

