

Your personal concierge service in Hong Kong: How to manage your task list the smart way

In our increasingly time-pressed, goal-oriented lives, it can be a challenge to manage our lifestyle tasks as efficiently as possible. If you're feeling like there's not enough hours in the day, delegating some tasks to one of the new wave of on-demand personal assistants might work for you. But with so many different options on the market, what is the best way to find the right fit for your needs? We chat to Caroline Basham, founder of Caroline B. Personal Management to get the lowdown on everything you need to know about outsourcing your "to do list" to the pros.

The market for personal services appears to be split into a four distinct categories; the most impersonal of which is the overseas virtual assistant. Usually based in India or the Philippines, these on-demand workers can complete simple, computer-based tasks at a very low cost, however they are not considered a secure way to handle confidential or sensitive documents such as bank details.

An employment agency is another option if you have specific short-term needs, for example, a temporary helper to deep clean your apartment when you move, or to walk your dog while you are at work. This type of "middle-man" works by matching your requirements to an appropriate service provider. The downside is that agency services may lack flexibility and service quality may vary considerably as agency workers are not direct employees.

Text-based "on-demand" providers are increasingly popular worldwide, with new launches popping up constantly as users enjoy the instant results that such companies provide. A quick way to achieve straightforward tasks such as collecting dry cleaning, agency sourced helpers are less well-suited to complex, ongoing tasks as there is no relationship built, or any understanding of their clients' unique preferences and needs.

Membership clubs that offer concierge services are more personalised, often helping to source hard-to-find items like limited concert tickets and pulling strings to get you a table at a restaurant. While these concierge services are far more flexible than, for example, employment agencies, they often favour their own network of sponsor service providers, meaning that your options may be limited to who offers the club – rather than the client – the better deal.

For the ultimate in bespoke service provision, a personal manager such as Caroline B offers all of the above services, plus unparalleled flexibility and understanding of its clients' needs. Founder Caroline Basham explains, "*Caroline B focuses on giving a tailored long-term service, which usually involves a degree of collaboration and sensitive information sharing between us and the client.*" This can involve anything from utility bills to salary and medical expense claim management, requiring the very highest levels of security and trust. Caroline elaborates, "*Because we offer a retained client account service, we are flexible to use client credit cards or monies deposited into our account. This is quite different from other services.*"

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Another area that Caroline B delivers requiring maximum confidentiality is their Analogue to Digital service, where their experts convert client data into digital media on site. *“In previous years we outsourced this task,”* Caroline explains, *“but our experience was that there was no way of knowing exactly who was working on the material. Keeping the digitisation process in-house with only our trusted staff working on it is our solution.”*

This principled stance extends throughout Caroline B’s business practices. Operating a transparent “by the hour” fee structure – more akin to a professional service such as accountant or lawyer – none of the company’s services are subsidised by sponsorships or rebates from suppliers, meaning that the company only offers impartial sourcing of the suppliers most appropriate to your needs. The client effectively contracts directly with the service provider, effectively removing any “middleman” from the equation.

A service invaluable to Hong Kong homeowners is assistance in managing tenant relationships, including property maintenance and even dealing with the admin tasks that arise from hiring and training domestic helpers. Operating in the most flexible and personalised way, Caroline B can help to source the right person or product, whatever the job, often looking outside Hong Kong to deliver the right solution.

So how would Caroline sum up her company’s services in a nutshell? *“We provide intelligent help, seeking a genuine understanding of our clients’ specific issues to solve problems.”* She adds, *“Both Caroline B and the client invest in this relationship to make it work.”* This commitment, above all else, this is what makes personal management service Caroline B stand out in an ever-crowded marketplace.

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