



AT YOUR SERVICE

No time to shop, cook and plan your holidays? We take a look at the latest trend in lifestyle management: concierge services.

You work long hours, you come home to a messy house and you need to eat. Surely there's an easier way to manage your life? Enter a new phase in lifestyle management: concierge services.

"My main clients are women in executive roles," says Abbie Martin of Adelaide's Lifestyle Elements. "They usually have primary school-aged children and try to juggle their [children's] activities with their careers."

Clients for these services range from the "mainly single" professionals who use Sue Cox's My Valet and Concierge in Brisbane to Catharina Vaag's varied client base. Vaag, the president of the International Concierge & Errand Association (ICEA) Australia & New Zealand, says her Sydney business, Busy Lifestyle Managers, attracts everyone from "busy mums to chairmen of the board". And what they all want is someone to do the grocery shopping.

"We're able to shop when there's no one at the supermarket," says Martin. "It's about one-and-a-half hours from when I walk into the supermarket until I deliver the groceries and unpack them. I charge \$40 an hour, so that's \$60 plus the groceries."

The other businesses include shopping in their packages. At My Valet and Concierge, Cox tailors services to her clients' needs. "On a standard package, we might come in and clean the home, which is two to four hours per week, do the washing and ironing and provide six meals for around \$200 per fortnight. In that package we offer two errands a week and extra errand running at \$15 per 15-minute increment."

Vaag works on a time system where clients buy blocks of 10, 20 or 40 hours at various discounted rates and then use them over a 12-month period. If the shopping takes a few hours, that is debited off your time.

Organisational activities, such as planning for the school holidays, can be given over to your concierge too.

"I'd talk to the client and get the kids involved," says Martin. "I'd find out their ages, what they're interested in and what they've done, then I'd do some research. The length of time [spent] would be negotiated with the client and then I can suggest a few ideas and book the activities." The other businesses offer similar services.

If you've been held up at work trying to organise a function, concierge services can help there too. They can contact caterers and book waitstaff on your behalf. Cox's service even has a dedicated catering team.

"We're not a big believer in outsourcing," she explains. "We have a catering business, so we'd cost that out and work on a 'price per head' basis."

Your return? In a nutshell, more time and less stress. Concierge services also provide a wealth of contacts, from tradespeople to babysitters, as well as a number of extras.

"I offer a free key-holding service and a reminder service for events like anniversaries," says Vaag. "And I offer lifestyle gift vouchers, for example, a handyman for the day."

Cox uses her fashion background to offer wardrobe organisation, assisted clothes shopping and even a wedding service. "My background is in bridal, so I have all the contacts," she says. "We did a wedding recently where the whole organisation took just seven hours. My clients were thrilled."

"I've spent a long time researching and you pay for that research," adds Vaag. "These services aren't a luxury any more—people are now putting money aside for them." ■

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