



Career Center | Birmingham-Southern College

PROFESSIONAL PORTFOLIO

CAREER TIPS

Why You Need a Professional Portfolio

Years ago, only artists and other creative professionals had portfolios. These days, every professional can benefit from having one. For those not in a particularly artistic field, a professional portfolio doesn't have to be about showing pretty pictures of your work. The real purpose is to provide tangible proof of your value in the workplace, and there's a whole host of ways to do that. From outlining project descriptions and showcasing work samples to offering up letters of reference and customer reviews, a portfolio can document your professional accomplishments in any way that makes sense for your gig.

The Big Why

Think of it like this: As a professional (regardless of your field), you are a business of one. When a company chooses to employ you, it is "purchasing" your business' service. You can think of your professional portfolio as a marketing brochure for the services you're selling. By showcasing your skills, abilities, and achievements, your portfolio helps your customers (your employers) and prospects (your potential future employers) understand what services you provide and why they are special—and worth the purchase price!

A professional portfolio can help in any circumstance where you want to make a strong impression, provide proof of your value, and differentiate yourself from your competition. Here are just a few examples:

Job Interviews

Whether you're a copywriter or a consultant, take your portfolio to a job interview and refer to the items inside while discussing your work experience. Saying "I planned a fundraising event from beginning to end" is one thing—showing the event invitation, program, budget, and volunteer guidelines you put together is completely another.

In addition to acting as a handy reminder of the great things you've done in your career, having a portfolio on hand contributes to your professional image. You'll look prepared and organized, and your interviewers will see that you're proud of your work and take it seriously.

Performance Reviews

Your performance review is the time of year where you'll want to recount your specific accomplishments and accolades to your employer—and for many, this type of self-promotion can be uncomfortable. But with a portfolio by your side, you're able to cite objective, verifiable facts. It's not just your opinion that you've done a great job; you have profit-and-loss reports and client emails that prove it!

As an added bonus, your reviewer will be happy to see that you've been tracking these things on your own and that you're prepared for the discussion. You may even be able to draw your reviewer's attention to accomplishments he or she overlooked.

Salary Negotiations and Promotions

Getting what you want in a salary negotiation is all about leverage. The person with whom you're negotiating is doing a mental calculation that boils down to this: Are you worth it? Does your request make sense given your current and future

value? A portfolio full of work samples and lists of accomplishments provides the necessary leverage to help you get what you want, whether negotiating a starting salary or a raise in your current pay.

Likewise, promotion requests are bolstered by the presence of a portfolio. Your employer wants to know you're both capable of performing in the new role and deserving of the increased responsibility (and pay, and visibility, and so on). And a portfolio featuring the work you've accomplished over the years will provide evidence of your past performance (widely considered the best predictor of future performance) and your potential contribution in the new role.

What to Include

While the items included in a professional portfolio can vary depending on your experience, profession, and industry, there are a few things that anyone can include:

- Your resume or professional bio
- Letters of recommendation
- Client feedback, letters, emails
- Awards and recognitions
- List of trainings and courses completed
- Work samples, writing samples
- Project outlines or write-ups
- List of key accomplishments

Pull together the items that make sense for you—either by compiling hard copies or by putting everything online. No matter what you choose, I promise, it's a worthwhile investment of your time.

[Source: The Muse]

Building a Professional Portfolio

A professional portfolio, in either electronic or hard-copy format, showcases your skills, experiences and accomplishments to a potential employer. A portfolio can help guide your conversation with the interviewer about your professional goals. It can include pieces from your professional work, education and training, volunteer experience and personal interests, and should be updated as you complete more projects.

Examples of Portfolio Pieces

Professional Materials

- Résumé, CV
- Generic cover letter
- References
- Letters of recommendation
- Strong LinkedIn testimonials
- Performance reviews from your past or present employer(s)
- Projects you've completed with professional association/committees
- Examples of your work
- Project documents
- Sample forms/templates/processes you created
- Evidence of soft/technical skills
- Research assignments and publications

Education and Training

- Annotated list of trainings/workshops/seminars/conferences you've attended
- Brief course descriptions under professional certificate or specialized program title

- Degrees, certifications, licensures
- Awards or academic honors
- Internship information
- Transcripts (if you have a strong academic record)

Volunteer Work

- Nonprofit/charity/volunteer/community service work, with brief description of organization and your involvement with its mission or goals
- Leadership roles and community affiliations
- Photos from events you've produced/coordinated

Activities

- Training or independent learning, including new skills or languages
- Computer or other technical training
- Writing skills, especially if you're considered an "expert" in a particular area through a blog or Twitter feed
- Personal/professional mission statement
- Public speaking engagements in areas of personal interest or expertise
- Flyers/newsletters you've designed
- Research projects

Things to Keep in Mind

- Organization is key. Be mindful of logical organization so that you can find things easily as you reference them for a potential employer.
- Most times you will have control of the portfolio, but if you will be passing it around, use tabs/dividers to differentiate sections.
- Write a short summary about your major projects. This helps you recall details about the experience and gives an overview to the reader.

Portfolio Formats

- The most common is the comprehensive binder that you maintain.
- Create an abridged version if you would like the interviewer(s) to keep key pieces, such as your résumé; a few examples of your work; and an annotated list of training, skills, and relevant volunteer experience or accomplishments.
- Generate an electronic (digital) portfolio as a webpage or PDF that you can easily share by web link or email attachment.
- You might want to keep a comprehensive portfolio and then create more focused portfolios that highlight work done in a specific professional area.
- Your portfolio should be used to enhance your interview experience, but make sure the focus is still on you and not your documents! Generally, it is more effective if you refer to your portfolio to provide an example in response to a specific question.

[Source: UC Berkeley]

How to Build a Professional Portfolio

Once you've identified an internship or job, the common practice of applying is submitting your resume and cover letter. The resume is a professional document that briefly describes your previous educational and professional experiences.

While the cover letter will complement the resume by including information about specific experiences and interests that match up with the company's job description. When drafting a cover letter, it's important to show the company that you are familiar with their mission statement and other information included on the company's website.

By creating a professional portfolio, you will be providing the company with even more information and specific examples of your work. An impressive portfolio can often catch the interest of employers, which is your goal when applying for an internship or job, and then hopefully make them want to call you in for an interview. Here are some helpful tips on how to make a professional portfolio.

Collect Examples of Your Work

Creating a professional portfolio begins by collecting examples of your work. These examples may include evaluations, reports, surveys, specific materials you have designed for a college course or previous employer, graphs, press releases, artwork, examples of spreadsheets, etc., that you designed to complete certain projects or to improve the flow of the work.

If you are currently completing an internship, be sure to include some of the work you are doing right now. The information you collect to include in your portfolio primarily depends on the type of job you are looking to get. If you are interested in graphic design or art, your portfolio should be put together with specific examples of your artistic work.

Teachers can put together exceptional portfolios by highlighting projects they introduced in the classroom as well as the lesson plans they created for the class. Portfolios are a great chance to show your creativity and the nice thing is that no two portfolios are alike.

Include Photos of Yourself Working

Including photos of yourself working on specific academic projects or in previous internships or community service work will help the employer to see you in action. Sometimes these visual pictures can say a thousand words and don't often need any explanation. If you are currently completing an internship or volunteering for a company, be sure to take some photos to keep your portfolio current and to show employers what you're doing right now.

Include Info About Prestigious and Successful Companies You've Worked With

If you have previously worked for prestigious and successful companies, be sure to include information about them – such as new products, annual reports, brochures, press releases, and newsletters to further impress the employer by them just knowing that you played a part in helping the company achieve success.

Include Any Correspondence You Have Received in the Past

Any correspondence that you have received in the past from teachers, professors, previous employers describing your hard work and professionalism should definitely be included as part of your portfolio. Having professionals in the field commenting on the outstanding work you contributed to any project can make a real positive impact on any employer.

Be sure to include an example of the outstanding piece of work (college paper, artwork, lesson plan) so they can actually see it and evaluate it for themselves. I understand that students sometimes feel that this may be inappropriate and feel uncomfortable bragging about their work, BUT it's important to understand that if you don't highlight your successful experiences no one will know and nobody else will.

Demonstrate Your Skills

If your area of expertise includes computer technology, writing, etc., where you can demonstrate your skills through the work you've completed online, be sure to include the links to showcase the work you have done. Some students will include a DVD or CD attached to a plastic sleeve on front or back cover of the portfolio.

Create Clear Concise Documents That Are Organized

Last but not least, you want your portfolio to look professional. Creating clear, concise documents that are organized well will let the employer know that you are serious about the job. Be sure to always keep copies of your work and make sure that you keep updating your portfolio so that some of the examples of your work are recent which can also illustrate the growth you've made over the years.

This is important to do even after you've gotten the job. Down the road, you may be in the job market again looking for a new job and the last thing you want is to only have an outdated portfolio that needs to be re-created from scratch.

[Source: The Balance, Careers]

How to Put Together Your First Professional Portfolio

Creating and maintaining a professional portfolio is part of the price of admission to the creative industry whether you're seeking an in-house role, agency job or running a freelance business. But what exactly do you need, and what format is right for you? Here's a quick Q&A.

What is a professional portfolio?

Whether it's digital or print, your professional portfolio is essentially a collection of work samples that demonstrate your creative skills. Think of it as a "visual resume" that communicates the message "I have done great creative work for others and I can do the same for you."

Who needs a professional portfolio?

Anyone who wants to work as a creative professional, including graphic designers, web designers, UX designers, copywriters, marketing communications professionals and multimedia experts.

Should I have a digital portfolio?

Yes! Every creative professional should at least have a digital portfolio of some kind. Agency owners and hiring managers often surf online portfolios as their first step when determining which candidates to contact for interviews. If you want to be on their radar, you'll need a digital portfolio. You can post one on your website or use sites like Behance, Coroflot or Carbonmade to get up and running quickly.

A well-optimized digital portfolio lets you share samples with anyone, anywhere, which can be a great time-saver when you're talking to potential clients or employers. It also helps you to "pre-qualify" prospects so you waste less time talking to people who aren't a good fit for you. Some portfolio apps and websites also let you tailor what you show depending on the situation or the prospect's needs.

Do I also need a printed portfolio?

While digital portfolios are versatile and inexpensive, it's sometimes easier to communicate your skills by sharing a tangible item that the would-be client or employer can hold in their hands. Consider having a printed portfolio in addition to your digital presence if one or more of the following apply to you:

- You frequently present samples to more than one person during face-to-face meetings
- You regularly work in a larger format than the size of a laptop or iPad screen
- You want to show fine photographic detail
- Your work is three-dimensional, such as packaging
- Your samples feature specialty folding, die-cutting, pop-ups or other custom paper treatments
- Your samples use elements that don't display well on computer screens, such as metallic or neon colors, reflective surfaces and varnishes.

How many pieces should I include in my professional portfolio?

A safe range is eight to 12 samples. Aim to show the breadth of your abilities with as few samples as possible, so choose carefully from the best pieces you have. If there is something in your portfolio you don't love, leave it out. It's important to self-audit and be sure that your professional portfolio represents your best work and clearly demonstrates the type of skill the client or employer is looking for.

Some creatives maintain a larger secondary portfolio in Evernote or a similar tool. That way you can quickly access two or three appropriate selections when a client says, “We like what we see in your portfolio, but have you ever done X?”

And here’s a quick bonus tip for copywriters: Be sure to include work samples that your design colleagues have done an excellent job with. A little visual appeal makes your work more than just a “wall of words.” If possible, use pieces featuring a variety of design styles to reinforce your versatility as a copywriter.

How often should I update my professional portfolio?

Whether it’s digital or physical, you’ll want to update your portfolio regularly to keep it fresh. There’s no hard and fast rule, but looking things over at least once a quarter is a good general practice. Any time you complete a project that you’re really proud of, consider adding it to your portfolio sooner rather than later. You’ll also want to rotate out any samples that are becoming stale or dated.

[Source: Robert Half]

RESOURCES

Why You Need a Professional Portfolio

<https://www.themuse.com/advice/why-you-yes-you-need-a-professional-portfolio>

How to Build a Professional Portfolio

<https://www.thebalancecareers.com/how-to-build-a-professional-portfolio-1986901>

Creating a Powerful Professional Portfolio

By Julie Perrine, All Things Admin, allthingsadmin.com

Creating a Professional Portfolio

By Louellen S. Coker, Devil Mountain Views electronic newsletter

http://ebstc.org/newsletter/1108/Article_2.htm

Developing Your Professional Portfolio

UNCF Special Programs Corporation

https://www.uncfsp.org/userfiles/files/Resource_ProfPortfolio_2012.pdf



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