



INTRODUCTION TO GRAPHICS

Spice Up Your Portfolio

Information Sheet No.



Tips to Spice Up Your Portfolio

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The specific contents and formats of design portfolios vary quite a bit from one creative discipline to another. Regardless of your field, though, you should tailor the contents to fit the needs of each prospective employer. This means that you must carefully research each firm in advance to determine what kind of editing might be necessary.

Keep in mind that most studios and agencies have a drop-off policy. They will require you to leave your portfolio at the reception desk, then return to claim it a day or two later. You won't be there to explain any of the projects, so you have to make everything self-explanatory. Because of this, there has been a trend away from box-type portfolios filled with loose samples. Most designers now use a case study format. This usually resembles a book, with informative spreads about each project. The portfolio itself becomes an exercise in publication design, with selected images or tabletop photos of completed projects, along with captions and explanatory text. For each project, you should:

1. *Identify the client.*
2. *Explain the business or communication challenge they faced.*
3. *Describe the solution you developed.*
4. *Explain how well it succeeded; qualify the results of the project by describing the impact that the finished work had on the client's business.*

Organize your portfolio contents so that it's easy for the viewer to navigate back and forth at will. Usually, this involves grouping the work into categories, adding some sort of pagination or tabs, and developing a table of contents. For projects that were produced by a team, identify the key members and explain your role within that group.

When you drop off your portfolio, be sure to include a cover letter on your stationery and an extra copy or two of your résumé. Some job seek-

ers also include a small leave-behind item that can be added to the company's files. It might be a postcard or a small booklet with selected images from your portfolio. Be cautious about wacky self-promo items, though. It's best to let the quality of



your portfolio speak for itself. Any correspondence or other items that you leave with it should be businesslike. Novelty items or personal gifts (such as T-shirts or food) are not professional.

WEBSITE

You also need to set up an online version of your portfolio. Creating a website will take time, but it doesn't have to be expensive. Many internet service providers offer package deals for hosting small sites, including the ability to send and receive e-mail using your web address. When placing files on your site, remember that search engines cannot read text that's integrated into graphic files or Flash animations. To make it easy for people to find you, be sure to include full contact information somewhere on your site in a searchable text format.

If you've developed websites for clients, don't just list the URLs. Your portfolio should include images of those projects with captions. Again, sort the work into categories and make it easy for the viewer to navigate back and forth. Your goal is to keep prospective employers on your own site for as long as possible. If they follow a hyperlink to a client site that you designed some time ago, they

may encounter something that no longer resembles what you delivered. The quality of the site may have slipped under the direction of other people. If prospective employers see a bad site, they'll assume that you were responsible. They'll quickly move on to another candidate instead of returning to see more of your work.

When developing your online portfolio, be aware of download times. Keep them as short as possible. Before making the site available to the public, test it thoroughly to make sure that everything displays exactly the way that you want it to, and that visitors won't receive any error messages. You should also use META tags on your pages (keywords included in the HTML source code for the header sections—these are indexed by some, but not all, search engines). One final bit of advice: This is a career-related site, so keep it professional. Don't mix in family photos or vacation stories. They're irrelevant to your job search and could easily alienate potential employers.

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