

Web Design - Ian Simmons

Things to consider when designing your website;

Let the work do the talking

First up. The best portfolio sites simply frame the actual work. The less distracting that 'frame' is, the better. More often than not, over fussy, loud, cluttered portfolio sites are over-compensating for mediocre work. Simple is always best. Perhaps the only exception to this rule is illustrators — when those extra characterful touches here and there can make a big difference.

Determine your web site goals

You are creatives. You are promoting your skill set and services to potential clients. Show your best and most relevant work. Treat your website as you would your physical portfolio. If you want to make money from your site, consider linking it to a shop front page (e.g. etsy). Show the kind of work you want to be doing or that will attract the kind of clients you want to work with. This may sound obvious but you would be surprised how many portfolio websites are cluttered with work that just isn't relevant.

Value quality, not quantity

Consider the phrase: 'You are only as good as your last project...'. A user will likely only view one or two projects, so lead with your best work, not all your work! Especially digital has a short shelf life, so showing work from a few years ago isn't valuable, unless it's a high profile project, in which case it's certainly worth highlighting that you worked on it. The bulk of your portfolio is best served to show the breadth of what you do, but it's unlikely people will click through all of it — so consider that in your layout, order of projects and presentation.

Style

Make it part of your overall look. This could be colour schemes or the branding used on your business cards for example.

Keep it simple

Don't over complicate the page. Make it easy for visitors to navigate. A home page and sub-categories if appropriate. A contacts page. An 'About' page; this can be an artist's statement or something similar. People will spend seconds looking through your website! Make it easy to scan and view your (best) work.

Show real work!

Unsolicited redesigns of existing products are very common. But be careful of how much of this sort of thing you show. Demonstrate that you can respond to real briefs, working with constraints, budgets, deadlines and actual assets.

Show personal work (and pro bono projects)

So you didn't get paid, who cares?! If it's great work, then show it off! Personal projects show passion for what you do, and most importantly that you are a 'self-starter', which is a very important quality! Don't show too much personal work though, you should strike a balance between personal and professional.

Share your process.

Design is more than making things pretty. Showing that your work is considered and well thought out is important for three reasons:

- It demonstrates the value in what you do. How many times has a client asked you to 'just do something, like it's nothing?! You know exactly what I mean. There is more to what you do...
- It's interesting to clients and other creatives to see or read about how and why something was created.
- Creatives hiring creatives want to see your thinking. Designers are problem solvers. What was the problem, and how did you solve it?

- This is applicable to all creative fields, only the best way to showcase your process will be very different. Some examples include:
- Explain (write-up) your thinking behind elements or features.
- Time lapse videos or photos at different stages.
- Sketchbook work and initial ideas to show progression, whether it's a logo, a typeface, page layouts for print, digital UIs etc...

Connect with your social media accounts

Following on from the last point, make sure there are clear links directing visitors to your 'socials'. You may not wish to clutter your website with pictures of works in progress. Directing them to Instagram, for example can give the viewer an insight into your process.

Give credit. Or at least specify what you did

It's astonishingly rare how often designers give credit where it's due. It's respectful, but it also helps the person reviewing your portfolio to know exactly what you do. Because it's not always clear.

The majority of agency or in-house based projects will have involved a few, several or a dozen (+) people. If you did it all, or most of it, then great — sing your own praises — that's impressive! But, if you only worked on the wireframes, for example, then don't take credit for the final design, branding, art direction, photography, copywriting, illustrations, front and back-end build etc... that also made up the project.

By not giving credit, or not specifying what you actually did, you are implying you did it all, which is dishonest, misleading, and can be embarrassing when later brought up in an interview!

Image size and page loading

Be aware of the size of your images. Larger images and animations, for example, will take longer to render on the page. People don't like to wait!

Have a personality

This is a professional portfolio. But creative industries are generally very personality driven. Passion for what you do and personality can be as important as raw ability, experience or technical skill. Your ultimate aim is to work with the people who are viewing and considering your portfolio. So... How do you come across? Would you want to work with you? What sort of language are you using? Is it down to earth, friendly, approachable?

Make it accessible

Make sure your website looks great on all devices, especially desktop and mobile. Creative Directors (for example) are busy people — they are just as likely to skip through your portfolio on their phone, out and about, as they are sat at their desktop. Or at least, they will skip through and shortlist portfolios on their mobile to study later in more detail on desktop.

Make it easy to follow you

I often don't have time to study portfolios in as much detail as I'd like. But if I like what I see, then I'm very interested to see more of your work in the future. So make it easy for people to do that, with clear links to your networks or social profiles (e.g. Instagram, Behance, Dribbble etc...). If you don't, this brief visit to your portfolio could be the last time they ever see your work, or name. You don't want that.

Be Prepared to Change

Six months or a year from now you may feel your website is not adequate. This may be down to the page layout or even the content. If so, change it. Maybe even find a new web-building page (you can transfer your domain name easily enough). Or change your work. After graduating you will be producing large amounts of new work that you feel has moved on from your graduate portfolio. This is OK and definitely to be expected. Don't hang on to past glories, move with the times!