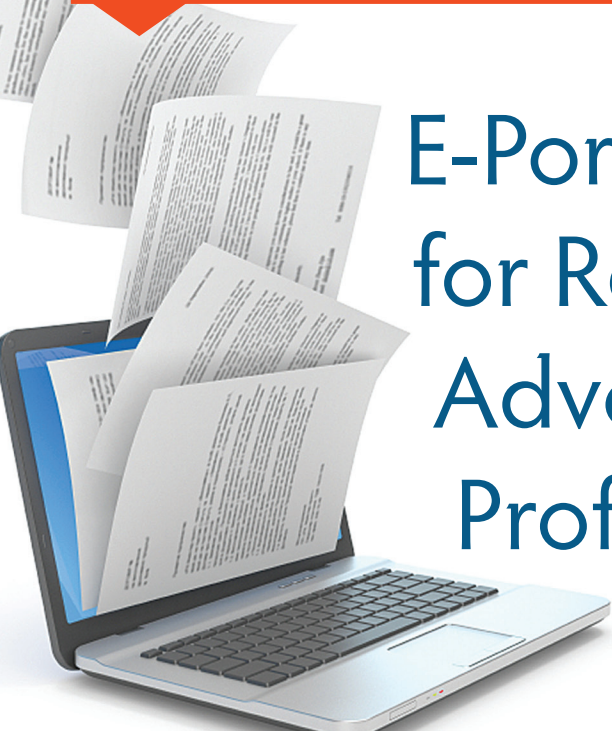




E-Portfolios for Reflective Practice, Advocacy, and Professional Growth

by CYNTHIA KELLER

A **N E-PORTFOLIO IS** an organized collection of professional work (artifacts), selected and reflected upon by the author, that represents a person's best efforts. Over time, an e-portfolio will reflect professional changes and growth (Heath 2004, 1 and 9).

WHY CREATE AN ELECTRONIC PORTFOLIO?

There are a number of reasons for a school librarian to create an electronic portfolio (e-portfolio). The school librarian may use the e-portfolio as a strategy to advocate for the school library program and for the school library position. The proactive school librarian can use the professional e-portfolio to demonstrate and highlight his or her work for school administrators, classroom teachers, students, and parents/community (Dickinson 2004, 21).

By creating and promoting an effective and attractive e-portfolio, school librarians can showcase what they have done, how they have grown and will continue to grow professionally, what they do in the school library to support students' learning with technologies and professional skills, and link to their personal learning networks. School librarians can use the e-portfolio as the professional repository to store evaluative data collected from performance-based evaluations and artifacts that demonstrate continuous professional improvement (Church 2012, 39).

WHY ELECTRONIC AND NOT PRINT?

Creating an e-portfolio is exciting and challenging. There

are advantages and disadvantages as well as similarities in creating either an electronic portfolio or a print portfolio (see Figure 1, page 9).

Online access to an e-portfolio (through an existing webpage or server) makes it very easy for a varied audience to evaluate and assess the e-portfolio content. The school librarian can determine if the e-portfolio should be public or private and if a private domain is preferable. By creating an e-portfolio, the school librarian can:

- ▶ Demonstrate teaching skills and knowledge,
- ▶ Store and facilitate the distribution of numerous documents in multiple formats, and
- ▶ Increase accessibility to items that reflect professional growth in both educational and high-tech skills and abilities (Campbell et al. 2004, 20).

THE "WOW" FACTOR AND E-PORTFOLIO USE

The school librarian needs to consider and plan for a "wow" factor that will impress the audience (end users). The e-portfolio should be designed so that it immediately captures the attention of any end user. Use of color, font, graphics/photographs, and the organization on the pages affect the overall "wow" factor. An e-portfolio can be used to demonstrate that the creator of the e-portfolio has the technology skills to create the site. The e-portfolio is a visual tool and record that the school librarian can use to showcase self-selected artifacts that demonstrate professional growth, competencies, and accomplishments. The artifacts serve as

evidence of knowledge, dispositions, and skills. They serve as a looking glass into oneself (Martin-Kniep 1999, 13). The e-portfolio encourages reflection and thoughtful analysis of professional growth and goal setting.

The “wow” factor keeps the end users on the site so they want to explore the links, download documents, and view videos and presentations. In other words, the end user wants to “know” the person and why he/she created the e-portfolio. Margaret Heath has identified four types of e-portfolios:

- ▶ Resume e-portfolio: documents knowledge and skills
- ▶ Showcase e-portfolio: highlights exceptional work
- ▶ Evaluation e-portfolio: portrays competencies for evaluation, advancement, tenure, and promotion
- ▶ Professional Development e-portfolio: documents and enhances professional growth (Heath 2004, 3)

The e-portfolio is also an advocacy tool that provides evidence of what is happening in the school library and how students are learning and applying information literacy skills. A dynamic e-portfolio can be used to market and promote the school library program and to demonstrate the critical need for a school librarian position. Keep in mind that before deciding on the type of e-portfolio, it is important to determine the purpose and the audience (Heath 2004, 17 and 26).

FREE RESOURCES FOR EFFECTIVE E-PORTFOLIOS

The choices on the Web for creating an e-portfolio are numerous and sometimes confusing. Some of the platforms are free, some have a fee scale, and others may have hidden costs. When choosing a program, librarians need to know what can be created using a specific program and the difficulty level in uploading media and updating files. Costs for developing the website with all the available features, as well as the cost to host the site or create a personal domain should also be considered. The features, the options, and the fine print should be examined. It is also important to choose a program that will “stand the test of time” (Joyce Valenza,

phone conversation with author, September 2012). Before creating an e-portfolio, librarians should “check out” the following programs that have “stood the test of time.”

COLLEGE LIVE TEXT

College Live Text is a fee-based subscription program that is renewable every five years. This program is used by a number of universities for both graduate and undergraduate students. It is password protected, but the e-portfolio can be easily shared. A demo can be requested at the Live Text website (<https://college.livetext.com>).

YOLA

Yola is a tool that can be used to create websites quickly and effortlessly. Yola offers easy-to-use tools and Web hosting can be free or fee. It is easy for the end user to upload documents, videos, pictures, and graphics. A video is available on the Yola website that explains design basics and stresses that the end user does not need any specific skill sets to create a customized e-portfolio or website (<https://www.yola.com>).

GOOGLE SITES

Google Sites allows the end user to create and share websites easily, which can be private or public. This program allows the end user to create websites or wikis for free and provides a number of helpful templates. All types of media can be uploaded to Google Sites (<http://www.google.com/sites/help/intl/en/overview.html>).

WORDPRESS

WordPress is free Web software that can be used to create websites or blogs. On this site, the end user can download and install a software script called WordPress. A Web host is needed that meets the minimum requirements stated on the program (<http://wordpress.org>).

WEEBLY

Weebly can be used to create free websites and blogs. The software program is designed with a drag-and-drop interface which makes designing an e-portfolio very easy. Templates are provided, but the end user can use his/her photographs to de-

Fig. 1. Comparing electronic and print portfolios.

Electronic Portfolio	Print Portfolio
Time and effort needed to design the portfolio and to reflect, select and post the artifacts	Time and effort needed to design the portfolio and to reflect, select and post the artifacts
Use of free or fee-based online programs	Use of paper, binder, etc.
Cost of software program and possibly Web hosting site or private domain	Supplies and printing costs
Ease of access and ability to duplicate and distribute	No technology issues to address
Active and ongoing change and development	Limited to the confines of a binder
Easy to maintain, edit, and update	Time consuming to maintain, edit, and update
Variety of artifacts in electronic formats	Paper and three-dimensional artifacts only
Technology skills showcased	Technology skills are not showcased

sign banners. All types of media can be quickly uploaded to a Weebly e-portfolio. Free and fee domain hosting is available from Weebly (<http://www.weebly.com/features.php>).

WIKISPACES

Wikispaces allows the end user to create and edit a number of interlinked Web pages via a Web browser. The wiki can be a public or private space on the Web. Documents, pictures, graphics, links, videos, and media can be easily shared. Free and free options are available (<http://www.wikispaces.com>).

LIVE BINDER

LiveBinder provides the platform for the end user to collect and organize a variety of resources using tabs and sub tabs. Free and pro (fee) options are available (<http://www.livebinders.com>).

NEW PROGRAMS TO INVESTIGATE BRAVENET

Bravenet provides an easy Web page builder, Web tools, Web services, and free website content. There is a Web hosting fee for private domains (<http://www.bravenet.com>).

WEBS

Webs provides templates that can be easily customized. A free Web builder is available, but there is a fee for a private domain (<http://www.webs.com>).

MOONFRUIT

Moonfruit has an online shop builder for the user to publish once, be everywhere, and have total design control of the free or fee site (<http://www.moonfruit.com>).

WEBSTARTS

This is a free website builder that includes web hosting (<http://www.webstarts.com>).

DESIGN BASICS

- ▶ Time commitment—an e-portfolio is always a “work in progress” requiring continuous updating and revising
- ▶ Purpose (reason for creating the e-portfolio)
- ▶ Structure based on goal and objectives
- ▶ Layout (the look and the “wow” factor to capture the interest of the audience)
- ▶ Alignment (consistent alignment on the Web pages)
- ▶ Proximity (relationship among the various parts of a page)
- ▶ Repetition (unity of the e-portfolio—font, color, graphics, links, layout, etc.)
- ▶ Navigation (consistent and clear navigation buttons and drop down menus)
- ▶ Color palette, pictures, and graphics
- ▶ Limited white space
- ▶ Type/Font (simple and clear fonts)

- ▶ Easy uploading of multiple formats
- ▶ Links to personal learning network (Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, blogs, etc.)

FINAL TIPS

- ▶ Experiment. It is important to remember that the e-portfolio is not dependent on static content. All types of media can be easily uploaded.
- ▶ Use good Web development techniques:
 - ▶ Name files so that they are easily recognizable.
 - ▶ Keep file names short and use the underline symbol between words (e.g., Keller_PLN_Sp2013) instead of blank spaces.
 - ▶ Place graphics and photographs in a separate file.
- ▶ Plan the design (horizontal space versus vertical space) with consideration for the end user who is going to be navigating the site.
- ▶ Design the e-portfolio to capture and maintain the interest of the end user.

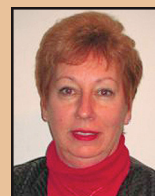
SUMMARY

Before creating an e-portfolio, librarians need to have a specific purpose in mind and know how the e-portfolio will be used. They should determine the audience and decide if the e-portfolio will be public or private. Various programs, their features, ease of use, hidden costs, and Web hosting should be investigated. Decisions need to be made on design basics, creativity, and the “wow” factor. Finally, it is important to understand that an e-portfolio is always a “work in progress” that must be continually updated to record professional development, address competencies/standards, demonstrate skills, collect and self-reflect on accomplishments and/or personal learning, and advocate for a position or program.

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