

Portfolios and Presentations

Introduction

An exasperated portfolio advisor once quoted in the CSD magazine "I could sit every one of those graduates down together and tell them exactly the same thing in half the time!" It is an opinion regularly echoed by those who have grown used to seeing a procession of similar presentations from eager graduates.

The problem is that after many years of preparing work for academic appraisal, many graduates are forced to restructure their portfolios so that they reflect the realities of a commercial client driven industry. There are no "quick fix" solutions to making this transition. Remember this;

Your portfolio is an intensely personal testament to your talent which is subject to continuous review and scrutiny. Those who review it have a significant power over your career development so it is vital that you assess your portfolio from their perspective.

1 What size Portfolio?

The size of your portfolio might be a critical factor. At college an A2 or even A1 might be well suited to your needs. "The Writers and Artists Yearbook 2000" (A & C Black, London: 2000) states that. "Your folder should never be larger than A2 size as clients usually have very little desk space". I would go as far as to say that A3 or A4 is far more preferable for these environments. Ex student feedback supports this....

"Maximum A3"

Colin Higgins (Century Group)

At one time I took an A2 folder into the interview. Don't! They are too big. It is far better to use an A4 or A3. I had an interview with an agency who told me that this is far more professional.

Mark Goulden (Businesslink)

As for size - yeah, it does matter.... they ain't gonna want to be drowned in paper, and won't be impressed by a wall to wall self portrait, so clean, simple but cover the salient points! Jody

Joseph Dickens (Studio manager, Sapphireselect)

I would say an A3 portfolio as you can get most stuff in that.

As well as looking more professional a smaller folio is much more manageable. A couple of days on the tube in London with your A2 portfolio is not what I call fun... I speak from experience!

Lee Stinton (Future Media)

Floor space is expensive in central London, you should have seen how tiny their office is. Thank goodness I had that small portfolio and CD.

Tanya Allen - Dreamscape Films

A statement from Interiors Consultancy McDaniel Woolfe sums it up:

"There is nothing more unprofessional than struggling red faced through a prospective employer's door with a cumbersome portfolio."

2 What about the interview environment?

A short phone call sometime before the interview can do two things, importantly it can establish contact. Secondly you can ask about where you will be interviewed, what size of room and desk, what facilities etc.? A bit of research not only helps you out, but lets the interviewer know that you are taking this seriously... more on this later.

Many employers will have the usual desk full of papers and other important items. They won't take kindly to having to move it all beforehand if they are busy people, so help them to help you. Keep everything firmly attached with no loose papers to add to their pile / to be lost.

3 How should the folio look?

Simply put, fresh and inviting to look at. Easy to peruse and helps the interviewer to pick up on salient points that you want to put over. As you get more professional you will learn to keep it simple with primarily examples of printed work and montage layouts. As a recent graduate the latter will be of far more use than pages and pages of print outs. You are after all designers!

First of all think "Presentation"!

Try to be flexible with the content, tailor it to the job in question.

Maybe include a little freebie that can be left behind... always a good move, shows willingness and forethought.

Many graduates make the mistake of focussing on final product and overlooking the developmental process. Employers will want to know about your working methods as much as your finished pieces and how they were done.

Emphasise Live Projects and back up some successes with whatever evidence you can accumulate. If others have entrusted you to get something done it instils confidence.

Remember how much advertising costs, good PR such as newspaper / magazine articles are excellent promotional tools.

How much time have you spent / would this take, are very popular interview questions so be prepared.

Think about the order of your work, are you showing it off in the right sequence, logical and informative.

Think about the quality of your work, should you re-do a project? No amount of presentation will cover up bad work.

Don't forget to check out your grammar and spelling, a sure way to be shown the door if you get it wrong!

Some more comments....

"Graduates need to concentrate on the development of their ideas, it emphasises the creative's ability to follow through different ideas in a project."

(Yvonne Fuchs, Designer... in CSD magazine)

"Structure your work to show it to best advantage, I strongly advise avoiding collating your work in a chronological order, unless you want your interviewer to nod-off!"

(Richard Woolfe, McDaniel Woolfe)

Always put your best work in there, never anything bad. Your standard is judged by your worst piece of work!

Put everything in good logical order.

(Martin Stopher, Kingston Technology, Mexico City)

4 Alternatives

After the lecture you will realise that the plain portfolio is not the only way to go. More advanced systems are available which will display your work far more professionally. (The mini exhibition site was a real portfolio piece incidentally.)

The other things to consider these days are the new media alternatives. Websites are extremely useful and can be modified quite easily, even different URL's for each type of job should be considered.

CDs are increasingly popular. Often termed as "show-reels" they sell your design skills through a series of interactive pages, these in turn carefully designed for the purpose. Likewise business card sized CDs are now available to be passed over and put in a wallet, very useful!

Most companies will have internet browsers on their computers so html based presentations could be used. Self packaging programmes such as Director produce stand alone "Projector" files that need no other software (though be sure to create both a Mac and a PC version) PDF files will need an acrobat reader, freely downloadable from the internet. The same can be said for Flash or Shockwave (which is made from Director files) Powerpoint from Microsoft was used for these classes and has the advantage of being a standard office package.

Be prepared to talk through your presentation, be led by it but don't rely on it doing everything for you.

Before any of this of course, you have to check out that environment and appropriate facilities as before. A CD that doesn't work is of no use whatsoever!

You might be sitting there thinking "but I don't know about computers??" Take a look around, where else will you find so many creative people looking for work experience to show off their skills! This can work well for both parties and create links that last way beyond college.

5 Ex Students Comments

I had a CD made by another student which he also used for his portfolio. I learned a lot just by working with him. The CD was really useful and I found that the agencies especially, took me far more seriously.
Anthony Bridge (Apricot Agency / Freelance Illustrator)

Thanks for the continued help and support... my web site (designed as a part of the module at Swansea Institute) now receives over 55, 000 hits per month. I am now hoping to develop the content into an interactive CD ROM. Without my experience on the course none of this would have happened, not bad when you consider that I studied painting and drawing eh?
Nigel Williams (Artist / Editor Welsh Arts Archive)

Digital formats are the way, especially if it can be sent by email. Interviewers love presentations, if you can create one you can use it as a portfolio, it shows that you can handle new media. I have a presentation done in Director which I've had burnt onto one of those new business card size CDs. It only cost a few quid and what an impression it makes.
Mark Goulden (Businesslink)

My first effort on leaving was to spend a hectic two solid weeks throwing together a website or 'online portfolio' which I was actually happy and confident about. To back this up I had to collate the portfolio. This was time consuming and I found it hard to rationalise the content (too much can be overpowering, too little is embarrassing). The response is usually pretty quick so you have to be ready to 'up and go' when the interview dates start rolling in.
Ben Hutchins (Teletext New Media)

At this stage I was more curious about the job than considering it as a serious possibility, having said that, I did what you said and prepared my portfolio well. I put together a couple of html (web) pages to showcase my work.

Stuart Palmer (Manchester United Interactive / Phones 4U)

I got thrown in at the deep end (discussing websites) I had to pay over £100 and I probably could have got it done for free in college couldn't I?

(Neil Cunningham - Print Evolution)

My website saved me, tell them to get it done at college if they can... its cheaper!!

(Ian Simmons - Freelance Illustrator)

It's so simple and rather obvious (bringing a large portfolio), when you arrive at my office you may as well shout out "hey, look at me, I am new to this"

(Eddy Wouters (ed) - Art Scene International Magazine)

I got my job because I was the only one with development work in my portfolio... it really is important to make a neat job of it... only three of us were invited in for an actual interview.

(Stacy Taylor, Red Top)

The portfolio advice was spot on.

(Richard Carr - Command Publicity)

6 Professional help

Many agencies and societies such as the CSD (Chartered Society of Designers) and the Society of Illustrators offer portfolio surgeries and can give excellent advice and help.

7 Your task

Following the lecture prepare at least three A3 or A4 folio sleeves in the manner discussed. Montage techniques are recommended in order to give you some experience of this, and to prepare some of your work for presentation after graduation.

8 Final quote

"I missed the portfolio lecture and got myself into a twist after only a few minutes of an interview. I read the notes carefully after that experience!"

Third Year Illustration Student, 2002.