

## **The Effective Use of Creative Portfolios**

### **July 2005 - Karen Desko**

#### **Who**

If you are a student of any of the creative arts programs: Graphic Design, Digital Arts, Multimedia, Fine Art, Theatre, Music, and Dance; you should create a "**Creative Portfolio**" of examples of your work. This portfolio is an effective way for you to quickly showcase your talent and easily exhibit your best work.

#### **Why**

Presenting a creative portfolio to a prospective employer or graduate program recruiter provides concrete examples of your work, demonstrates progress in your skills, and showcases your unique talent. It gives the person considering you an opportunity to see your work instead of evaluating you merely on your resume alone. It is typically one of the initial opportunities you will have to create a first impression about you as an artist and your work.

#### **When**

You can show a portfolio during a talent showcase, during an informational meeting, a portfolio 'drop' or in an interview. The targeted event and/or audience greatly dictate best way to show your portfolio. Give thought in advance to who will be looking at it and in what setting to be sure you are prepared to show your portfolio to the best advantage.

#### **How to Create your Portfolio**

Throughout your academic and working career, you should collect samples of your work to show in your portfolio. It is always a work in progress and will change as you and your work evolve and grow. Students should include group and individual classroom assignment projects and professionals should include commission and independent samples.

It's best to keep your portfolio to a maximum of 10-12 pieces. You should be able to easily move through it in 20 minutes. Think about how you want to present your portfolio, stay away from the huge leatherette cases which look dated. A nice way to standardize the presentation is to photograph all the pieces, rather than showing the actual pieces —though you can throw a few of those into a side pocket if you like. That way, everything you show is the same size and configuration. Start with your strongest piece and end with your second strongest piece. Never do things chronologically. It's always nice to show your artistic process, and you can include some sketches or thumbnails. Before and after shots are also good.

Review and update your portfolio often. It should reflect where you have been to show our artistic development, but also mainly emphasize your best work. Consider carefully the format of your portfolio and take great care to be sure the physical portfolio is clean, well-organized and easy to access. Remember that it is a reflection of you and your work as an artist.

#### **Cautions**

Make sure your portfolio is clearly labeled with your name, address, email and phone number. Never use "only one copy" samples of your work and make sure you have copies of everything. While it is rare, portfolios have been lost and you don't want this to mean you lose all samples of your past work.

## How to Show your Portfolio

Depending on the situation, portfolios can be effectively shown in different ways:

- **Talent Showcase**

Talent showcases can be sponsored-by guilds, associations, or universities. They typically are organized for artists to present their work in an informal setting as part of a competition or an exhibition. It is a great way to show your work to prospective clients and establish a network in your specific artist community for future referrals. The set up of the showcase will dictate specifically how you show your portfolio, but typically you would have some of your work mounted to be seen by individuals approaching your table. Other examples of your work, including your portfolio would then be displayed on the table for guests to browse at their own pace. The artist should be nearby and available to answer questions or point out interesting elements to the guest.

- **Informational Meeting**

Informational meetings can be scheduled with individuals who are already working in your desired field. Ask to meet with them briefly to ask them for general information about the field, learn more specific information about their organization and role, and get their input on your resume and portfolio. Sometimes these conversations yield additional names of people with whom you can do further networking. As these conversations are informal, it is good to have your portfolio with you in case your contact asks to take a look, but never force a portfolio review on someone in an informational meeting.

- **Interview**

It is important to be aware of your interviewer's preferences in reviewing your portfolio. Let them know at the beginning of the interview that you have it with you (it may be obvious if yours is the large size) and ask them to let you know when they would like to see it. When they ask to see it, open it for them so they do not fumble with fastenings and so they start to see it from the beginning. Ask them if they would like to look at it at their own pace, or if they prefer you to walk them through it. If they choose to look at it on their own, be present in the process. Notice what they are looking at and what elements seem to catch their eye. Talk to them about your design/artistic choices, the challenges of the projects, and the factors you considered when making your choices. Be prepared to answer questions and to defend (not defensively!) your design choices.

If they choose to have you walk them through it, move at a pace that matches their interest. If they look to the next page at a rapid pace, then match your pace accordingly. If they linger on the pages and have many questions, then stay at that pace. Again, discuss the challenges of the projects, any problems you had to solve and be prepared to talk about the reasons behind your design/artistic decisions.

- **Portfolio "Drop"**

Sometimes talent agencies or advertising firms may ask you to drop off your portfolio for review. They do this to make sure they have access to particular talent to meet an upcoming client need or contract. A review may take one day or as long as up to a week. Be sure your portfolio is labeled and be sure you have a point of contact through which to coordinate drop off and pick up.

## Final Thoughts

As you create your portfolio, show it to professors, counselors or established artists to get their advice and input. Consider carefully not only the samples of your work, but how you show them. All of these choices are reflective of you as an artist. Keep working on your portfolio through your entire career and it will become an ever changing history of you and your work.