FREELANCE ONFIRE

10 PROVEN TIPS FOR
BUILDING A PORTFOLIO
THAT ATTRACTS CLIENTS

IT'S TIME TO SHOW OFF YOUR STUFF!

A strong portfolio is one of the strongest tools a designer possesses when it comes to landing that job or freelance client. Your porfolio is a living representative of you and the skills, experience and value that you bring to the table.

It's time to take your porfolio to the gym and get it into shape. We offer 10 proven steps to make your porfolio competition-ready!

1 GET IT ONLINE

This one should be obvious. Every designer should have a portfolio visible online. There are a wide host of online options for building your portfolio online. And, fortunately, most options are free to use.

Adobe's Behance is a wonderful option and provides all the tools you need to build and host your portfolio.

There are many options for cheap and easy-to-use online web tools that will allow you to showcase your work. Wix, SquareSpace are a couple on top right now. If you are more technology-minded, consider building your own website. WordPress might take a few hours of YouTube lessons, but you can get up and running on a WordPress site relatively quickly.

Having your work online means you only have to send an email with a weblink to a potential client to give them direct access to your best work.

2 QUALITY OVER QUANTITY

We know you've done a lot of work that you're proud of. But as far as your portfolio is concerned, don't throw every piece that you've ever created in your portfolio.

It all boils down to time.

The person reviewing your portfolio has very little time. Estimate that you only 5-10 minutes to show off your work. Make sure those 5 or 10 minutes count for as much as possible. Your portfolio needs to include the top 15-25% of your best work. 15-20 pieces should adequate to showcase your skills and capabilities.

However, if you don't have 15 unique pieces, focus on your best pieces and turn those into mini-briefs, explaining the process and your role(s) (see #1).

3 BE A PROBLEM SOLVER

Now more than ever, employers and clients are looking for employees with good soft skills. Skills that aren't necessarily inherent with your design skillset. Soft skills are things like good time management and good communication skills. But one of the biggest soft skills is problem solving skills.

Most every design project revolves around solving some sort of a problem. As a result, your deisgn skill not only solves visual problems but business problems also. Your creative work fills a gap in someone's business and your portfolio should communicate how your work helped to solve your client's problem. So, as you display your excellent work, consider including a brief narrative that explains the creative/problem solving process. Businesses call these narratives 'briefs' or 'white papers', but they achieve the same goal. They explain in detail how a business problem was solved. As a designer, you play a vital part in solving business problems. This gives strength to your portfolio piece because the viewer can see your work in a greater context. In your project description, consider including the following:

1. Identify the specific business problem that your project solved and how
2. How you worked with the client to define the problem and the solution
3. The process (if relevant) that you followed.
4. The role(s) that you played on the project and/or team.

4 DISPLAY THE KIND OF WORK THAT WANT TO ATTRACT

Just because an opportunity presents itself doesn't mean you should take it. Evaluate every opportunity to be sure that the project matches your goals and capacity. Sometimes, you might need to do the work, but sometimes you might just need to say, "no thanks... I'll pass."

5 ORGANIZE CAREFULLY

Organize your content by style, media type or campaign. Align your pieces so that your viewer can easily see your diversity, but can also see how your pieces fit together. It allows them to see your skill when applied to different business scenarios or marketing campaign.

If you are a designer, you can organize by online, social media, apparel, print.

If you are a photographer, you can organize by feature, portrait, product. If you are a writer, you can organize by blog, sales, feature and biography.

6 SHOW YOUR DIVERSITY

As you choose your portfolio pieces, choose pieces that show your ability to tackle a wide variety of visual and business problems.

Choose pieces that show your ability to work in different media. (web, print, social). Choose pieces that show your ability to work in different visual styles.

Diversity in your portfolio tells the business owner that you have a lot of tools in your toolbelt and that you can build skillfully with them.

7 LEAD WITH YOUR BEST

Organize your portfolio so that your best work is up front.

Remember, time is precious during the portfolio review. Don't assume that the person reviewing your portfolio will have the time to view it all. Imagine a scenario where you only had time to show your 1-2 best pieces of work. Which pieces would those be and why?

This ensures that your most impressive work is the first thing they see.

8 DON'T REPEAT YOURSELF

No on likes broken records. If you have multiple pieces in your portfolio that are very close to one another (style, genre or purpose), you are better off to pick the best options disregard the others.

One exception would be if you have several individual pieces were actually a part of a work in a series or campaign (ex. ad design, product design or illustration). Showing multiple pieces of work in a series is powerful, but keep them together as one piece in your portfolio to show your ability to execute a branded campaign.

Repetition doesn't necessarily communicate your strength and diversity. What it does do is take up valuable space in your portfolio. And remember, you have limited time to make an impression. Make sure your pieces are laser-focused on your absolute best work.

9 USING PERSONAL WORK

Is it okay to include a work sample that was not created on the job for a business?

The answer is Yes!

If you are skilled in an specific area but don't have any examples of paid client work, you can still include these pieces in your portfolio, providing they showcase your skill and promote your ability.

Many times our client work isn't an accurate picture of our skills and/or passions. Perhaps you are an amatuer photographer and have a several great shots that you've taken for pleasure. If these shots show your skill behind the camera, and you would like to do more photography work, then certainly include these pieces in your portfolio.

This is an especially helpful tip if your portfolio is smaller or you are trying to attract work in a new or different format (print, online, video, audio, writing).

If your personal work is strong and can communicate your abilities, don't hesitate to include it.

10 TAKE IT WITH YOU

In addition to an online, consider storing your work on your phone or iPad, either in a special photo gallery, a Keynote or PowerPoint file or a PDF that is always on your device so that you always have your portfolio available to you, even when you might not have Internet access.

WANT MORE JUICY TIPS, HACKS AND RESOURCES FOR FREELANCERS?

Join my Free Facebook Group

facebook.com/groups/freelance-on-fire

GET FREE TRAINING ON MY FACEBOOK PAGE

Like my Facebook Page for free weekly free-lance training, tips, hacks and updates

facebook.com/freelance-on-fire