

Make Every Interview a Show and Tell

Portfolio Materials Should Spotlight Your Successes

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Although it doesn't say so on the invitation, every job interview is really a Bring Your Own Success Portfolio — BYOSP — event.

What is a success portfolio? It's a collection of tangible materials that verify your qualifications and reputation. Graphic designers and those in similar jobs routinely use portfolios to showcase their work, but even job hunters who aren't artists should follow that model.

Diane Stark, a senior transportation planner in Alameda County, Calif., and a veteran of many hiring committees, explained: "Your portfolio strengthens your case because it provides objective evidence of your productivity. By contrast, most applicants base their employment pitch solely on uncorroborated promises of their productivity."

Also, because employment pitches that feature concrete, eye-catching materials appeal to multiple senses, they are more vivid and memorable than oral pitches alone, Stark said.

What types of materials should go in your portfolio? Work products that parallel the demands of your target job. These may include reports and articles, printouts of Web sites you created, programs of events you organized, or printouts of Powerpoint presentations you have produced. In addition, Stark urges students without work experience to demonstrate commitment to their target organization's mission by submitting relevant academic papers, preferably with praise from professors.

If your portfolio showcases group projects, clearly identify your contributions, said Shirl Nevas, who manages a federal graphics department in the District. Moreover, because computers make plagiarism easy, Nevas advises ap-



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plicants to authenticate their artwork by providing rough renderings and concise summaries describing how projects evolved. "D.C. can be a small town," said Nevas, who has reviewed some portfolios that contained work produced by other local artists.

In addition to featuring work products, your portfolio may also showcase positive feedback you have received, such as thank-you e-mails from executives, annual reviews, academic tran-

scripts and evaluations from trainings you delivered. Brad Fitch, chief executive of Knowlegis in Fairfax County, also recommended submitting unsolicited written references to hiring managers.

Fitch knows that such initiative can work because it once worked on him. Some years ago, he hired an applicant for a congressional staff position largely

because she had sent him an unsolicited glowing endorsement from her boss with her résumé.

By contrast, Fitch said, applicants who resort to gimmicks, such as submitting a résumé on brightly colored paper rimmed by blinking lights, probably get noticed but not hired.

Nevertheless, mere delivery of your success portfolio is unlikely, by itself, to vault you ahead of your competition. Rather, to be truly impressive, your materials must be organized and presented strategically, hiring managers said.

The first rule of portfolio organization is that less is more. "Most interviewers are busy, so just give them your most relevant highlights," Stark said. Likewise, Nevas said that she is more impressed by five strong design pieces that were used by the client and show a breadth of work than by 15 mediocre pieces.

Once you have selected your materials, package them in a typo-free, neat, easy-to-skim format, perhaps in a binder with dividers. Nevas recommends positioning your most impressive pieces first and last in your portfolio. Tracy Marshall, chief executive of Stratecomm, a D.C. web development firm, suggests also providing interviewers with electronic versions of your documents, on a CD, DVD or USB key, if appropriate.

But don't just dump your portfolio on an interviewer's desk as if it were a stack of junk mail. "Remember, everything you do should beat your competition," Stark said.

Artfully weave your portfolio into your conversation, she advised. "When you refer to your portfolio, position it for easy viewing by all interviewers, and point to it. Maintain eye contact. Look up! This takes practice," she said.

If your interview will include a software demonstration, bring extra copies of your software and hardware, said Robbie Rich, chief operating officer of Markquest, a Bethesda firm that helps companies compete for federal contracts. She warned, "You want your demonstration to show what you or your company can do without wasting time on help-desk calls."

The Best Use of Your Samples

- When you're invited to an interview, ask for each interviewer's name and title.
- Give each interviewer a portfolio containing your résumé (interviewers might not otherwise have it handy), business card, reference list and show-and-tell materials. Emphasize key text with a highlighter. Label and annotate materials so they're self-explanatory. Bring extra copies for unanticipated interviewers.
- Introduce your portfolio to interviewers with pride and confidence but without cockiness.
- Leave a portfolio for each interviewer to keep, if possible.