Creating a Framework for an Artist's E-Portfolio: A Literature Review

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Abstract

Professionals in the creative arts are increasingly using e-portfolios on websites to exhibit their work. Although much has been written about how to design an e-portfolio, less is known about designing them specifically for creative professionals. The purpose of this literature review is to examine why an artist needs an e-portfolio, and to give them detailed steps in how to create a very dynamic and creative e-portfolio. To create an e-portfolio the artist needs to determine his or her objective for creating an e-portfolio, select a website-builder and design a functioning and dynamic website. This process could be intimidating to those artists that lack strong technical skills. Therefore, current literature was reviewed to determine three-step website building process that would benefit non-technically skilled artist who desires to build his or her own e-portfolio.

Keywords: e-portfolio, artist, website, design, digital

1. Introduction

An e-portfolio is an online virtual selection of an artist's work. It contains evidence of a user's work by displaying digital images, hyperlinks, and text ("Electronic Portfolio," 2012, para. 1). Before the internet, a traditional artist's portfolio was a collection of actual pieces of art (Fitzsimmons, 2008). This type of portfoliotypically could only be shown to a limited audience due to the static nature of the art. In comparison, the e-portfolios of artists today are dynamic and have the ability to reach an unlimited number of people (Rowley, 2008). An e-portfolio is dynamic because it is a collection of an artist's work presented in a digital medium (Fitzsimmons, 2008).This literature review will explore e-learning building resources and be an introduction to basic website creation concepts.

The artist e-portfolio has many benefits compared to a traditional portfolio. An e-portfolio allows artists to display art without the restraints of a physical location. In addition, when constructed properly, an e-portfolio can be an extremely cost effective way to advertise compared to traditional marketing methods (Rowley, 2008). This can be associated to minimal costs for advertising on digital multichannels. With all the benefits of ane-portfolio, it is not surprising that in today's world a professional e-portfolio is now becoming an industry standard as well as a customer expectation. However, keep in mind;while an e-portfolio is just a website, not all websites are created equal. For the purpose of this literature review, an artist is anyone who is adept at something ("Artist," 2012). No matter if an artist is a painter, musician, photographer, sculpture, graphic artist, or jewelry maker, anyone who wishes to sell their art can profit from having an e-portfolio.

If an artist has a goal to have a dynamic and profitable e-portfolio,it is important to make choices that promote good design during the e-portfolioconstruction process. Design works on a sub-conscious level, "people will be impressed by good design without knowing it, but great design will thrill them. They'll love what they see, and they'll come back for more" (Stocks, 2009, p.85).A design's influence was a focus of a Stanford University study that determined that 46% of respondents indicated that the design of a website is an important factor on how they determine the credibility of a business (Richards, 2011, p. 50).

Once a creative professional has determined that having an aesthetically pleasing e-portfolio would be a necessary and complementary addition to displaying their artistic talent in today's digital world, they may feel intimidated by actually building the e-portfolio from scratch on a website. Parts (2012) suggests that "personal websites have become an indispensable tool for artists, it's now almost impossible to build a reputation and a career without one.

But the task of setting up a website can be challenging and daunting" (p. 65). To help build a successful and profitable website for an artist, they will need to become familiar with the specific requirements andunique challenges of designing a creativee-portfolio. A useful way to overcome these challenges isto follow specific steps within a website design model.

> Lawrence and Tavakol agree with this view:

> Without a structured approach, it is likely that the delivered aims and scope of the site will be incomplete. Intuitive skills and deep experience can sometimes offset any damagebrought about by not adopting a structured approach, but the risks are high. If there is a lack of detailed analysis and design, it is unlikely that the style, scope, and content will be satisfactory. (Lawrence & Tavakol, 2007, p.6)

The artistmight heed this advice to have a structured approach because they already believe they do not have the expertise and knowledge to build an e-portfolio. In these instances, the artist can just hire a web designer to build their e-portfolio website for them. However, there are numerous software programs and online website builders available that allowindividuals with limited or no programming skills to create their own websites (Richards, 2011, p. 50). In many cases, some of these online resources are free to use, while others are available for nominal monthly or annual fees.This literature review willprovide threespecific steps geared towards buildingan e-portfolio for an artist.

Step One: Determine E-Portfolio Objectives

The first step on the road to creating an e-portfolio is to determine an individual's needs and objectives. The artist needs to determine what they want to accomplish with their website (Garrett, 2003). Although every artist will have different objectives, there are three indispensable ones that an artist needs to consider while building an e-portfolio.These objectives are brand establishment, determining the target audience, andfinally putting the e-portfolio online.

2.1 Branding

The first objective is to establish a brand.A brand is a marketing term that relates to the emotional response that a person has to a product or an individual (Deckers & Lacy, 2012). For an artist, the emotional response sought after would be how people viewthe creative workdisplayed on the e-portfolio. For example, if you are an artist you may want your brand to be viewed as "creative" to onlookers (Deckers & Lacy, 2012). Personal branding can be defined as a conscientious effort to show the world your best self and to make a positive lasting first impression (Chritton, 2012).Personal branding is a great tool for a creative professional to distinguish themselves from their competitors (Aruda, 2003).

An artist may assume that branding would not be a good fit to their e-portfolio. However, literature indicates that this viewpoint might not be advisable.

Hand's (2011) study found the following:

> It would appear that art audiences do indeed behave like consumers and that the level of loyalty to a particular art form depends on the size of that art form. In other words, at the macro-level, arts appear to behave in the same way that brands do. (p. 95).

Overall, the best brand strategies reflect that the artist isauthenticand true to himself or herself (Arruda, 2003). The artist should create ane-portfolio that reflects his or her genuine personality. It is vital to be "honest about who you are. If you're creative, dynamic, outgoing, and whimsical, you won't succeed by presenting yourself as predictable, steady, and focused"(Arruda, 2003, p.59).

2.2 Target Audience

A second objective is to determine a target audience. A brand benefits from targeting a specific consumer and can actually grow an e-portfolio's audience. Bechthol writes that "one of the biggest stumbling blocks to deciding on your target market is the mistaken belief that if you specialize, you will lock everybody else out" (Bechthol, 2012, p.64). Hand (2011) suggests that "when it comes to growing the market (growing the size of the audience), the arts would have much to gain from treating it as a marketing exercise" (p.95). Building ane-portfolio for a specific target audience can establish credibility and trust. For instance, if an artist were to open a traditional brick and mortar gallery, they would certainly design the interior with their customer in mind (Wells, Valacich, & Hess, 2011). The same is true when building an e- portfolio.

A helpful way to establish to target an audience is to link social media websites to the e-portfolio website. To establish a brandand to target an audience, it is necessary tokeep LinkedIn.com, Facebook.com, Twitter.com and the personal blog updated with new content, and then integrate them with each other (Leigh, 2010, p. 13). Byintegrating social media with an e-portfolio, the ability to market the creative assets of the artist is enhanced without having to resort to more traditional and costly advertising methods (Chordas, 2009, p.75).

If an artist is unsure of their own personal branding before the e-portfolio building process begins, they may be able to identity their own brand while they are actively building their e-portfolio (Walker, 2008). The process of choosing color schemes and graphics for an e- portfolio may help define the artist's personality (Walker, 2008). As eclectic as the artist may be, the personal branding can become an extension of the artists themselves.

2.3 Getting Online

A third objective is to put the e-portfolio online. This is accomplished by registering a domain name on the Internet. A domain name is the web address that a person uses to find a website. For example, the domain name for The University of Alabama would be www.ua.edu.A good way to simplify the concept of what a domain name isand how toregister for one is to think of it as the tools needed to obtain space on the internet (Concepcion, 2011). More succinctly, an e-portfolio is a website,and a website needs space on the internet to be seen. A domain name and the registration process are "interrelated, the two are actually different pieces of the puzzle. When you set up a domain name, you are buying the rights to use that name for a specific period of time and you do this through a domain name registrar" (Concepcion, 2011, para. 1).

There are hundreds of domain name registration companies and some are more reputable than others are.It is vitally important to research any registration company before doing business with them. Spanbauer (2007) states that "all registers are approved by the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (see the list at find.pcworld.com/56808), but thatdoesn't guarantee that you will enjoy a specific level of service, or even that the registrar is safe to use" (p.131). Three of the more popular registrar companies are Godaddy.com, Register.com, and Networksolutions.com.During the registration process, there is the possibility that a chosen domain name may be already registered and cannot be used. In this case, another domain name would have to be used.

2.4 Before Purchasing

To help determine if a domain name is already being used, many registration services will allow people to check the availability of a specific domain name(Stauffer, 2002). The database that houses this information is called WHOIS. The WHOIS database makes an excellent resource to see who registered a particular domain name (Spanbaur, 2007). A consideration of selecting a domain name is to choose one that reflects the personality of the artist. A unique, catchy, or descriptive name can contribute to a site's success (Rowley, 2008).Even large companies, try to have a catchy and descriptive name. For example, Twitter.com was the result of employees wishing to name the company that matched the sound of a cell phone buzzing a message in someone's pocket (Kessler, 2011). Regardless if an artist uses a descriptive domain name or their own name, the name has to include three key ingredients. The three key ingredients to a great domain name are that it is pronounceable, memorable, and legal (Elias, Stephen, Gima, Patricia, 2000).

Using an artist's name as part of the domain name is recommended. If an artist does not register a domain name in their own name, they are at risk of someone else purchasing their name. (Carroll, 2012). If a person does an online search for an artist by birth name, they will be directed to a site not owned by the artist. If an artist finds out someone else has already registered his or herbirth name, he or she may want to consider registering a variation of his or her name or nickname (Carroll, 2012).

If an artist does not want to use their own name, they can create a unique domain name. Professional marketers often "favor suggestive names because they evoke an image or idea that customers are likely to associate with the product or service being marketed (Elias, Stephen, Gima, Patricia, 2000, p.4). An example of a descriptive site would be Google's Picasa.google.com, since the name incorporates an artist famous for his imagery and the site promotes organizing images (Elias, Stephen, Gima, Patricia, 2000, p.12).Once a domain name has been chosen, it would be wise to register it quickly. Unfortunately, "hackers have been known to intercept WHOIS queries and register the domain name, offering it to you at a significantly higher price than if you had registered it yourself (Goldsborough, 2007, 9.17).

Step 2: Choose a Functional Website Builder

The second step to building a successful website is to create a detailed description of what functional specificationsare desired within a website (Garrett, 2003). Once an artist determines how they wish their e-portfolio to function, they can start the process of choosing a website builder.Artists can create stunning e-portfolios by using one ofseveral sites that include a website builder program. Five sites that include a website builder are Wix.com, Bludomain.com, BigFolio.com,Zenfolio.com, and Jux.com. These websites allow anyone to build an attractive website without having any programming knowledge. Although there are numerous sites with website building capabilities, some sites are more conducive to meetingan artist's unique website needs. For instance, artist e-portfolios depend on imagery and not text. An artist needs a website buildingservice that allows for multiple photo galleries, and the ability to upload new photosas often as needed. Parts (2012) warns thata "big mistake is artists having expensive sites that they cannot use or that they have to pay to update. You want to be able to make changes as quickly as possible; otherwise your site will just sit there" (p.73). In addition, a website builder should allow the artist to use their own domain name and allow for integration of any social media sites or blogs belonging to the artist. Below are a few websites that have met all or most of the criteria to produce a dynamic and attractive artist e-portfolio.

Wix is a do-it-yourself website builder that can be found at Wix.com. This website offers free hosting and offers hundreds of attractive templates (Wix.com Inc., 2012). It allows an artist to build a Flash or HTML5 website without programming knowledge (Empson, 2012). The website's HTML5 site building tool has been used "to create more than one million sites, titled heavily towards offerings by photographers, artists, and designers" ("Wix", 2012, p.46). Their HTML5 builder allows "users to build sites that would display across both PC and mobile browsers in a drag and drop format that co-founder Avishai Abrahami compared to HTML5 for Dummies" (Empson, 2012, para. 2). The web-service is an excellent choice for those artists who wish to create an e-book or want their work to be easily seen on mobile tablets and phones ("Wix," 2012).To have access to Wix's tablet friendlypremium features, there is an upgrade charge ("Wix," 2012).

Flash websites have always been popular with artists because they display images beautifully. Unfortunately, Apple's mobile devices and Adobe's Androiddo not support a Flash Player needed to show images in Flash (Arthur, 2011). In the future, the focus "will be in HTML5 as mobile world shifts towards non-proprietary open standards" (Arthur, 2011, para. 1). If an artist wants a site that has the look of Flash, but does not want to alienate mobile phone and tablet users, they may want to consider a company called BluDomain. The company is located at Bludomain.com and it offers a do-it-yourself site builder and hosting servicesaimed at the creative professional. BluDomain offers a mobile and an HTML add-on to allow flash websites to be viewed on iPads and other mobile devices (Blu Domain, 2012). The company also offers video add-ons, watermarking, front-end shopping carts, and color shifting per image (Gidman, 2009).

Another site dedicated to offering online solutions for creative professionals is called Big Folio, at Bigfolio.com. It has a selection of unique and creative website templates. To purchase a template,Big Folio requires a one-time setup fee and a monthly hosting fee (Big Folio Inc., 2012).A nice feature of Big Folio is that the company allowsanyone to create a 14-day full-feature demo website (Big Folio Inc., 2012). The demo allows an artist to build and preview their site before they commit to purchasing the site and hosting plan. In addition to customizable sites, the company offers SEO services to professional photographers(Big Folio Inc., 2012). SEO is the abbreviation for search engine optimization. SEO is the process of influencing the visibility of a website in a search engine's results ("Search Engine Optimization," 2012).

For the artist that needs unlimited photo storage, a company called Zenfolio is recommended. The company offers easy to create websites and itcan be found at Zenfolio.com (Zenfolio, 2012). If an artist wishes to sell their prints, a Zenfolio created website has shoppingcarts and print-fulfillment features.The shopping cart feature is setup to offer more than five hundred products and their websites can be integrated with Facebook, Twitter, and Flickr (Zenfolio, 2012). Choco Studioco-owner and photographer Valik (2008) states that Zenfolio's "setups were simple, and we loved Zenfolio's custom shopping cart. I'm not the most technical person, and I was able to find my way in setting up the site relatively easily" (Valik, 2008).

Another creative website builder is Jux. Itis a "full-on website builder for artists with a serious e-portfolio of multimedia with sharing" (Griffith & Duffy, 2012, para.1). The website can be found at Jux.com.

Websites that are created with Jux offerfull screen imagery that is displayed the same on all desktops, iPads, and iPhones (Jux, 2012). Jux is a mix between an image-based landing page and a comprehensive e-portfolio (Griffith & Duffy, 2012). Jux offers blogging features such as a RSS feed and time-stamped posts (Griffith & Duffy, 2012, para.1).

Mitchell (2011) describes Jux as the following:

"Today, a NYC-based startup called Jux has launched a personal publishing platform that kicks a field goal right over the heads of Tumblr and the post-blogging crowd. It's big, beautiful, dynamic tool full of splashy images and sharp Web fonts. It offers six kinds of basic posts:BlockQuote, Article, Photo, Video, SlideShow, and Countdown. You start there and build huge, full-screen posts that suck the viewer in" (para.1)

Jux websites offer dynamic full-screen images that can be created with simple to use editing tools. (Mitchell, 2011).

In addition to the creative website builder platforms previously mentioned, many other companiesoffer do-it-yourself website building. The best website designers understand that "websites have attributes (e.g. Visual appeal, navigability, security, response time, etc.) that can influence perceptions of product quality, these website quality attributes can function as a signal, influencing consumers independent of the intrinsic product attributes conveyed on the website" (Wells, Valacich, & Hess, 2011, p.78).Therefore, an artist should take their time and research several companies to find one that matches their aesthetic vision.

Step 3: Designing the E-Portfolio

Once an artist' e-portfolio needs are determined and a functional website builder template is selected, it is time to approach the design portion of the e-portfolio building process (Garrett, 2003).Design consists of three stages. During the first stage, a successful website is "given structure on the software side through interaction design, in which we define how the system behaves in response to the user" (Garrett. 2003, p.14).A goodwebsite template should have a predetermined structure, so artists do not have to concern themselves with this first stage. The second stage is interface design and the third stage is visual design (Garrett. 2003). These stages address how a website allows a customer to interact with the e-portfolio and the look of the finished site (Garrett. 2003). A good website builder should offer a template that an artist canmanipulate toreflect their design preferences.

A great place for an artist to begindesigningtheir template isto place their logo on their e-portfiolioand thenchange the template to match the branding (Srocks, 2009). For instance, branding choices would include the template's color schemeand typography. The e-portfolio can be built in such a way to display an artist's authenticity and communicate their personal brand. An e-portfolio's logo, written content, photos, and color scheme can covey the personality of an artist (Walker, 2008). Furthermore, an e-portfolio's logo and typeface can "convey what your work is about. It is a reflection of your personality and style, and it helps recognize and distinguish you from your competitors (Walker, 2008, para.10).

A rule of thumb when building an e-portfolio is to think quality, over quantity. Hodge (2008) recommends keeping the e-portfolio "simple and organized. You can apply this mindset to all areas of your e-portfolio. Less is more" (para.8).When a potential client visits an artist's website they are interested in viewing the artist's art, so unless an artist is marketing themselves as professional writers, it may be best to keep text to a minimum. People visit "your website to see your art, not read your life story (Bamberger, n.d., para. 8). It is helpful to remember that "the first rule of marketing is this: Find out what your audience wants, not what you want" (Bechthold, 2012, p.62). If an artist feels the need to write a great deal of content in their bio section or to describe their art is all about, they should consider linking "to pages where people can read more rather than placing boatloads of text on high-traffic areas like your home page" (Bamberger, n.d., para. 8).The homepage should only focus on art and should not feature biographic content (Rowley, 2008).

An artist should take special care in selecting the content that will be featured on the homepage of theire-portfolio.

Rowley (2008) recommends the following:

> If you are a visual artist, make sure that an image of your best artwork is the first thing a visitor sees when your home page loads. If you are a craftsperson or a photographer, your best work should be placed front and center on your home page. If you are a musician, do not make your Web site visitors hunt for samples of your music-instead, place an embedded media player with your best song or composition near the top of your home page so visitors can hear you music right away (p.49).

It is recommended to show only the best examples of an artist's work throughout the e-portfolio (Baron, 2009). Although the artist may be tempted to show all their creative projects in their e-portfolio, they may be doing themselves a disservicewhen a potential client is viewing it. Clients want "to know quickly about the artist's style and how it plays out is some example projects. This need is best served by a small, exclusive collection of highlighted images" (Baron, 2009, p.16). Another detail to add to the e-portfiolio would be to include a biography and contact page. A biography page is important because "people like to buy from someone they fell like the know (Rowley, 2008). The biography page should inform potential clients why they should buy the artist's work and what separates them from the competition. To help a client become familiar with the artist, an artist should add a portrait of themselves on their bio page (Rowley, 2008).

The biography page should not be lengthy, too serious and pompous (Luci, 2012). In the biography portion of the e-portfolio, it is best to "avoid over the top, superfluous words, phrases, and sentences (Luci, 2012, para.4). People want to know whom they are buying from and how to contact the artist. The artist does not want to give "the impression that you're hard to communicate with by showing nothing or just your email address, and not even telling them where you live" (Bamberger, n.d., para.14). An e-portfolio also requires contact information that is easily accessible to a client. If an artist uses a feedback or comment form on the contact page, they should include a working email address or phone number (Bamberger, n.d.)

3. Conclusion

As people become more familiar with using the Internet to search out and discover art, any self-respecting creative professional who desires to reach out to their fansshould embrace using e-portfolios. Just as an artist brings life to their imagination, they can also bring into existence a part of themselves through a creative e-portfiolio.This is because an artist's creation is in essence "beauty" and they need an e-portfolio that reflects this beauty.During all threesteps of building an e-portfolio, it is important to make site-building decisions that add to a portfolio's design.

> Steve Jobs (2002) said these inspiring words:

> In most people's vocabularies, design means veneer. It's interior decorating. It's the fabric of the curtains and the sofa. But to me, nothing could be further from the meaning of design. Design is the fundamental soul of a man-made creation that ends up expressing itself in successive outer layers of the product or service (para.26).

> The artist's e-portfolio is not just veneer of an artist's work. It can be an expression of the artist's soul.

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