

CREATING A PROFESSIONAL PORTFOLIO

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DO I NEED A PORTFOLIO?

Ask yourself the following questions.

- Will having a portfolio make you more employable?
- Do you need to showcase your skills/ talents?
- Do employers expect to see examples of your work?
- Are other jobseekers creating portfolios?
- Have you ever been asked to present examples of your skills or creativity?

If you answered 'Yes' to any question above, it may be in your best interest to build a portfolio!

Why is it important to build and maintain a portfolio?

- Job recruiters for certain positions expect examples of previous projects
- In some situations, an application may be simply overlooked if a portfolio is absent
- A portfolio is an opportunity to set yourself apart from the competition
- Projects speak louder than words!
- A portfolio can be an easy focal point in an interview setting

If a portfolio is not required for a job posting, it will still demonstrate a strong work ethic and dedication to your craft!



HOSTING YOUR PORTFOLIO

Web Hosting Services

Before creating your portfolio, it is a good idea to research hosting services. You need to find a service that will allow anyone with your URL the ability to access your website. Depending on the specific needs of your website, the host service price will vary. In the early stages, take advantage of free services. As your portfolio matures and your needs increase, you may consider switching to another platform.

Some examples of popular website builders include WordPress, Jekyll, Webflow, and Squarespace. Once your website is built, it can be hosted on one of the following services:

- **GoDaddy:** <https://www.godaddy.com/hosting/web-hosting>
- **HostGator:** <https://www.hostgator.com/>
- **Google:** <https://cloud.google.com/solutions/web-hosting>
- **Amazon:** <https://aws.amazon.com/websites/>
- **Additional Resources:** <https://alternativeto.net/feature/website-creator/> and <https://alternativeto.net/feature/portfolio/>



Examples of SSL Providers

Secure Sockets Layer (SSL) certificates protect both your site and your site's users. Your web hosting service may provide SSL certificate services as part of your hosting package or as an add-on service. Many providers require you to procure your own SSL certificate. Let's Encrypt is a free and open-source SSL certificate provider, but it does have a learning curve. Comodo, DigiCert, VeriSign, and CAcert are trusted certificate providers. Check out <https://www.sslshopper.com/> for a comparison of certificate provider features.

Be sure to keep track of your certificate expiration dates so that your site is not left unprotected.

Features to Consider - Free vs. Paid Services

Custom Domain Name

In many cases, free hosting services will allow you to create a custom subdomain name, meaning that your web address will be followed by the hosting service's URL (Example: <https://your-subdomain.hostsite.com/>). In comparison, paid services can offer custom domain names (Example: <https://your-domain.com/>). Whichever service you choose to use, be patient and choose a strong domain name.

File Storage

File storage is another consideration that should be made concerning your portfolio. Some free services limit image and static file storage, whereas paid services provide more extensive storage options.

Templates

You may decide that you want to use a template for your portfolio. Free services will frequently offer basic design templates. Nothing about these basic templates is inherently bad. However, you may consider designing your own template or using a more advanced template from a paid service. A more advanced template may help your portfolio stand out from others.

Getting Traffic to Your Portfolio

Once you have spent time, and potentially money, to host your website and projects, you should focus on getting traffic to your portfolio. Anywhere a recruiter may see your name should include a link to your portfolio, including:

- Email signature
- Business card
- LinkedIn profile
- Résumé

While they may seem outdated, business cards can still help build your network and boost traffic to your portfolio. Imagine an encounter with an old friend at a grocery store, or perhaps you are at dinner, and you recognize a former colleague who works at your dream company. If you carry a business card, you will never find yourself in a situation where you wish you had one to pass along.

Professional Contact Information

Because your website and portfolio represents you, make sure it is professional. When deciding what your domain name will be, consider every means by which recruiters can interact with you. Consider the following methods of contact:

- Your email address
- Your LinkedIn URL
- Default names for collaboration software (Discord, Slack, GoToMeeting, Zoom)

Consider this scenario: you have just been brought in for the second round of interviews for your dream job. However, the recruiter wants to meet on Zoom. The last Zoom call you had was with your fantasy football league. You used the name of your team for that Zoom call. Maybe that name is somewhat inappropriate, or even just goofy. Either way, when you join the meeting, that name is used to greet your recruiter.

While going through the process of building this portfolio, take time to consider all of the ways people in your network and prospective employers will interact with you and your resources.



WHERE TO START?

Gather Ideas

When you start building your portfolio, ask yourself the questions on the right.

To answer these questions, you may need to look at job listings for positions you are interested in and research the portfolios of others in your chosen field. Rather than duplicate projects in others' portfolios, you should use these as a guide to give you a general idea of the things you should include in your own portfolio.

What interests me?

What projects will motivate me to build something impressive?

What projects will demonstrate my newly acquired skills and my talents?

What do recruiters want to see in my portfolio?

What languages, technologies, or skills are the most important to show?

Might any of my previous projects pique the interest of a recruiter?

Build Projects

Once you have gathered ideas, it is time to start building your portfolio. The best projects to include in your portfolio are projects you are passionate about, that are unique to you, or that you can make your own. Because your portfolio should stand out from others, your projects should be something that only you could have created.

Projects created from student files and courses can be used to build your portfolio in the beginning, but these types of projects will not be unique and should be replaced as soon as possible.

Design Your Portfolio

When you have projects to put in your portfolio, you need to consider the design of your portfolio. To get design ideas, you can refer back to your research into others' portfolios. Look at your favorite portfolios and notice which elements of the designs you like most. You can mimic design elements you like, but you should avoid directly copying the design of someone else's portfolio. One element you will want to include is the ability for your portfolio to be viewed on mobile devices.

You should also research current trends in portfolio design. It is fine to ignore current trends, but you should at least be aware of them. Some trends are worth following, while others are better being skipped altogether.

Incorporate Personal Branding

You want your portfolio to stand out from the hundreds of other portfolios. One way to do this is to incorporate your own personal branding throughout. This includes things like a personal logo, consistent colors, scaling, typography, and a consistent layout.

No matter how you design your portfolio, the most important thing to remember is to make your projects and skills the main focus. Employers do not want to see how well you build a portfolio; they want to know what skills you have and how those skills will benefit their company.

Along with highlighting your projects and skills, your portfolio should make it easy for employers and recruiters to contact you. At the very least, you should include an email address, but you may want to include social media links and a phone number as well.



TIPS FOR DESIGN PORTFOLIOS

Know Your Audience

Different audiences will be looking for different things when browsing portfolios. If you are looking for prospective freelance clients, you should include projects that will appeal to those clients. The same goes for hiring managers or recruiters. Understanding your target audience will help you craft your portfolio with that audience in mind.

Display Only the Work You Wish to Be Hired to Do

What projects are you most passionate about? What brands or industries would you enjoy working with the most? Only include projects that align with these passions, brands, or industries.

Craft a Narrative Around Your Work

Include a short video or a paragraph or two with each project explaining your design decisions and the reasons behind them. This gives potential clients and employers a sense of how you work. Try to keep this brief as your work should speak for itself.

Display Your Work in the Real World

Nothing is more impressive than a design being put to work in the real world. Along with design comps, include photographs of your work in use, such as on product packaging or storefront signage.

Use Clean and Simple Layouts

Your portfolio design should not detract from the work you are showcasing. The pages should be easy to navigate, with a clean and simple design.

Include an About Section

Potential clients and employers will want to know about the person with whom they are considering working. An About section can showcase your interests and personality, explain why you are passionate about design, and show what makes you and your work unique.

Make it Mobile-Friendly

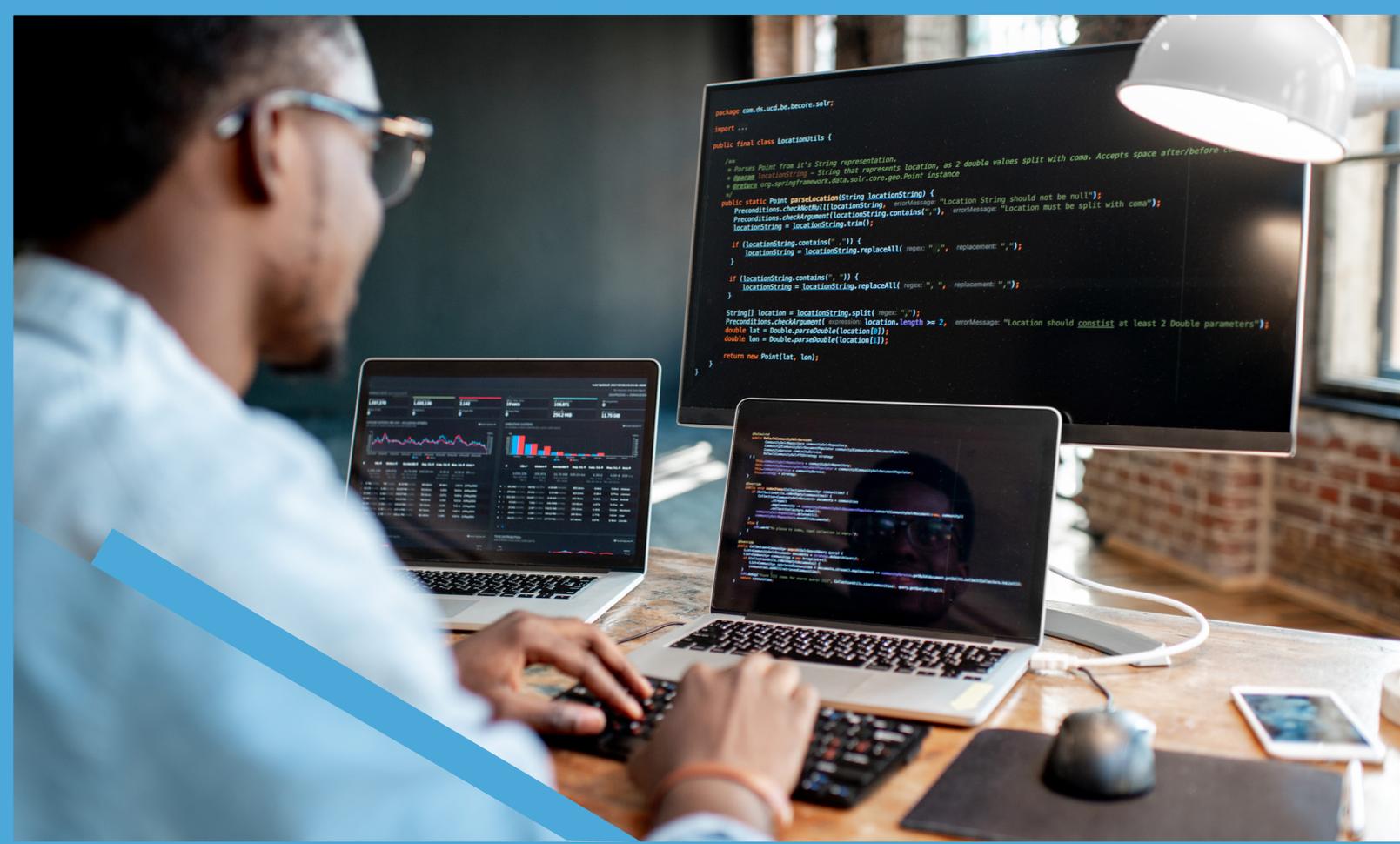
There is no worse user experience than landing on a web page that is difficult to read or navigate. Your portfolio should look good and be accessible for any device on which a user may view it.

Include a Call-to-Action

What do you want users to do after visiting your portfolio? Should they contact you? Should they follow you on social media? Write a concise call-to-action, and place it front and center for users to find.

Update Content Regularly

Unless it was a high-profile project with massive media attention, visitors do not care what you worked on ten years ago. Keep the content in your portfolio updated with your most recent and relevant projects.



TIPS FOR SOFTWARE DEVELOPMENT PORTFOLIOS

Demonstrate Relevant Skills

Before beginning a job search, it is imperative to know exactly what types of positions you desire. The job openings you seek should determine the content of your portfolio. For instance, if your goal is to become a front-end web developer, your projects should demonstrate proficiency with popular frameworks such as React and Angular. Including projects that focus on back-end programming or databases may detract from the skills that you are trying to demonstrate.

Be Creative

There is no shortage of programming projects across the web. Some recruiters will know the difference between a creative project and a project from a YouTube video or crash course. Using these projects is not discouraged; however, steps must be taken to make a project one's own. You may combine features from several resources or create your own based on an outline.

Include Source Code

In most cases, your portfolio should include a functioning application along with the source code. Source code is usually presented in the form of a GitHub repository. Often, hiring teams will have one or more subject matter experts on the panel. These individuals will be interested in seeing your source code. This is an opportunity to demonstrate your organization and style. Source code also provides hiring personnel with a certain level of transparency regarding the creation of your project.

Use Stock Images and Placeholder Text

When designing your portfolio, you may find yourself searching for content to fill your projects. This could mean looking for text content, photos, or databases. Using placeholder text—such as lorem ipsum—or stock photos is not inherently bad. You may consider taking a few pictures of your own or being creative with text content. With the cameras on today's mobile devices and basic image editing software, you may find that with very little time, you can fill your projects with even better material than you can find in a search engine. The decision regarding what content to use should always go back to the skills you are trying to demonstrate. If the content detracts from the main goal of the project, you will want to consider using different content.

Optimize Compatibility and Responsiveness

As an aspiring software developer, one of the most important aspects of a portfolio is the absence of bugs and compatibility issues. While this may sound like common sense, one of the simplest ways to set your portfolio apart from others is through compatibility and responsiveness. Compatibility refers to an application's ability to run in various environments. For example, if you are presenting a web application, you should ensure that it runs well in the most popular modern web browsers without errors. Responsiveness refers to a webpage's ability to clearly render on various screen sizes. Your portfolio and projects could be accessed from a desktop, laptop, tablet, or mobile device. It is important to ensure your portfolio and projects render cleanly on each of these types of devices.



PORTFOLIO REVIEW AND TESTING

Get Feedback

Once you have designed and built your portfolio, it is always a good idea to get feedback from others. These could be trusted friends, family members, LearnKey tutors or mentors, or professionals currently employed in your chosen field.

Test Your Portfolio

You should also test your portfolio to make sure everything functions the way you intend. If possible, test on multiple devices, operating systems, and browsers. Sometimes, what looks good in one browser will not function at all in another browser.

Pay close attention to the load time of your portfolio. If it takes too long to load, users will lose interest and move on to another job candidate. Website loading speed can be affected by a number of factors. If your portfolio is too slow, you can cut down on JavaScript, asynchronously load (defer) assets, streamline your HTML and CSS, and reduce the quality of your images. You may even need to switch hosting providers.

Security

Your portfolio should be secure from hackers and malicious software. While it is not possible to make your portfolio 100% secure, there are measures you can take to protect your website. The first step to protecting your website is to make sure your portfolio is secured with an SSL certificate. Your hosting provider may offer SSL certificates, but you may need to shop for certificates on your own.

Updates and Maintenance

As long as your portfolio is active, you should keep it updated with your most recent projects. Even if you aren't actively applying for jobs or seeking clients, you don't want someone stumbling across your older work and confusing it for your latest talents and skills.

It's also important to keep up with the latest technologies. You don't want your portfolio built with outdated software that is no longer supported by modern browsers.

Keep your contact information on your portfolio up to date. If you change your email address or phone number, update them on your portfolio and résumé.

Make sure your voicemail is not full and that emails from potential clients and employers will not be delivered to your Spam folder.

