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Career E-Portfolios Part II

Creating an Online Career Development Tool

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E-portfolios, short for electronic portfolios, are increasingly being used as powerful career advancement tools. As discussed in the article “Career E-Portfolios: The Next Standard in Career Development” (*Library Worklife*, December 2005), e-portfolios are easy to distribute, cost effective, and can empower job candidates by providing highly detailed descriptions of their qualifications to potential employers, allowing them to gain greater insight into candidates’ personalities and career ambitions. Additionally, e-portfolios can help professionals document and organize their career and educational experiences and achievements.

Online e-portfolios, which are accessible via the internet, can have a tremendous impact on career development. Not only do they provide users access to candidate information anytime and from anywhere, they also suggest technical knowledge and expertise. The purpose of this article is to break down the creation of online e-portfolios into a sequence of manageable tasks that will turn any professional into a savvy web designer and developer.

The first step to creating an online e-portfolio is planning. Since web site design and development can include an infinite amount of choices, from layout to functionality, web site creators must begin by deciding what purpose they want their e-portfolios to serve. Do you want to provide an overview of your best work? Perhaps a “gallery” of linked images would best suit your purposes. Maybe you would like to include personal reflections of your work or show achievements in relation to particular work or developmental goals? Sorting information by subject or theme might be in your best interest. Do you want to include interactive web applications, such as contact forms or blogs? These advanced features could demand an entirely different layout and design. By establishing the purpose prior to creation, the designer will have a better idea of how the web site should look.

Tips for planning a web site:

- Search for and evaluate other web sites that you like (and why you like them). Remember, the best ideas are often borrowed.
- Sketch out your future web site on paper, paying close attention to how users will navigate through the individual web pages. A navigation toolbar, which includes hypertext links from one page of the site to another, creates a sense of organization and continuity and helps users easily access information.
- It may be useful to create a written hierarchy of the information you would like to include, starting with most important and ending with least. This hierarchy will single out information that should be accessible via the index, or first, page of your site from information that can be embedded deeper. See last month’s article, “[Career E-Portfolios: The Next Standard in Career Development](#),” for ideas on what information to include in your online e-portfolio.

Now you are ready to start creating the actual web site. This task may appear challenging to beginners, especially if the web site they envisioned goes beyond what their knowledge and pocketbooks will allow (a topic that will be discussed later). If you fit in with this novice group, never fear; no matter what your budget or experience with web development is, you too can have a great web site.

Web sites, regardless of their complexity, can be created for free using a simple text editor such as Microsoft Notepad, which is commonly available on most personal computers or at the public library (ask your librarian about any computer usage restrictions). The ability to use mark-up languages like HTML or XHTML is required, but these skills can be self-taught using any number of instruction books and manuals that are also often freely available at the library.

Another option for creating web sites is to use a WYSIWYG editor (pronounced “wizzy-wig” or “wuzzy-wig”). WYSIWYG is an acronym for **What You See Is What You Get** and is used in web design to describe an application in which “content during editing appears very similar to the final product.”¹ These programs can hide the details of HTML code from users, allowing them to create and edit web sites without extensive programming knowledge. Many WYSIWYG editors, such as Macromedia Dreamweaver and Microsoft Frontpage, include the added benefits of being able to test web pages for browser compatibility and disability accessibility. These programs, however, often require extensive usage training and can be expensive (although free WYSIWYG editors are available via the internet). Some versions of Microsoft Word will also allow you to create Web documents without knowing any coding.

To simplify web site creation even further, you can use templates that allow you to insert content into a ready-made web design template. Available on countless websites on the internet, templates range from free to fairly expensive, depending on the complexity. Some templates may be customized using WYSIWYG or text editors.

Perhaps the most hassle-free method to creating a web site is to contract a professional web-developer’s services. Typically, a web designer and developer can handle all aspects of web site creation for you by using your pre-existing content to assemble impressive web pages. Ideally, they know the ins-and-outs of web design and can work with you to build a web site that fits both your needs and the needs of your users. Additionally, they may be willing (for additional fees) to update and maintain your web site, allowing you to focus on creating more content. Professional web design and development services are usually the most expensive of options, however, and, like a haircut, you may not get what you really want. Always do your research before committing your time, money, and content to any service.

The final step in creating an online e-portfolio is to acquire a domain name and contract web hosting services. A domain name, also called hostname, consists of a unique name by which your web site will be identified on the internet and corresponds with a numeric IP address of a computer on the internet.² Since internet users will use your domain name to access your web site, a domain name must be unique. A common domain name, especially when associated with an e-portfolio, is *www.yournamehere.com*. Since many names, such as John Smith (i.e. *www.johnsmith.com*), are most likely taken, variations, such as *www.yournamehereonline.com* or *www.yournamehere.net*, may be used instead. In order to obtain a domain, you typically must pay a registration fee to a domain name registrar such as www.godaddy.com or www.ipower.com.

Web hosting services provide users with an space to store web site content and are required for you to get your web site online. These services may be contracted for a monthly fee that varies depending on the amount of content that will be consumed by your web site’s users. Web sites that offer rich graphical or audio content will require a larger amount of space, or bandwidth, and will therefore be more costly. Also, web sites that utilize dynamic, interactive web applications may need to be hosted by special web hosting services that support the scripts used to create the applications.

Both domain names and web hosting services can be obtained for free using any of the numerous resources available via the Web. Yahoo! GeoCities, for instance, will provide you with a GeoCities web address as well as web site design tools and templates, add-ons, and a specified amount of bandwidth- and all for no cost.³ (For an extensive list of free web hosting, see http://dmoz.org/Computers/Internet/Web_Design_and_Development/Hosting/Free/Personal). Drawbacks to

using free services include the heavy presence of banner ads on your web site, an inability to use your personalized domain name with the site, and limited amount of features, bandwidth, and script support.

As information becomes increasingly available in digital format available on the internet, online career e-portfolios are proving to be essential for today's professional. With a bit of ambition and persistence, you too can harness the use of these powerful tools for career development.

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