

Creating Your Skills Portfolio

Show Off your Skills and Accomplishments

Carrie Straub

A Crisp Fifty-Minute™ Series Book

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Carrie Straub

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Learning Objectives For:

CREATING YOUR SKILLS PORTFOLIO

The objectives for *Creating Your Skills Portfolio* are listed below. They have been developed to guide the user to the core issues covered in this book.

THE OBJECTIVES OF THIS BOOK ARE TO HELP THE USER:

- 1) Explore the functions of a skills portfolio
- 2) Understand the design and production of a skills portfolio
- 3) Learn useful strategies for using and presenting a skills portfolio

ASSESSING PROGRESS

A Crisp Series **assessment** is available for this book. The 25-item, multiple-choice and true/false questionnaire allows the reader to evaluate his or her comprehension of the subject matter.

To download the assessment and answer key, go to www.axzopress.com and search on the book title.

Assessments should not be used in any employee selection process.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Carrie Straub, MBA, has more than 15 years' experience in the field of human resources. For the past 10 years, she has focused on training and organizational consulting for industry and private industry. She has also been an adjunct instructor at UC Berkeley, South Puget Sound Community College and Clark College.

Carrie has published articles in *Training and Development Journal* and has spoken at Lakewood's Best of America and at national American Society for Training and Development (ASTD) conferences. She is a codeveloper of the model for the State of Washington's award-winning Career Transition Center for State employees.

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INTRODUCTION

Creating Your Skills Portfolio is about gaining the critical edge in your job search career or life transition. It offers ways to differentiate yourself from the competition—a key factor in getting what you want.

This book provides opportunities to:

- Analyze what you have to offer an employer based on your productivity—the employment buzzword of the 1990s
- Develop strategies for presenting your skills in a unique format
- Define your area of expertise and what makes work fun for you
- Use a step-by-step process for assessing your experience and building an image
- Gain new skills in personal presentation
- Build your morale and self-image

Any career move (employment change, job search or competition for promotion) is a marketing project, and the product is *you*. A portfolio can make you more visible when you market yourself to employers whether you seek traditional employment, project or temporary work or are starting your own business.

S E C T I O N

1

**What Is a Skills
Portfolio?**



PREVIEW

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DEFINING “PORTFOLIO”

Photographers, artists, crafts people, graphic designers, interior decorators, models and actors have used portfolios to present their accomplishments for many years. These portfolios often include photographs, drawings, slides, fabric samples, metal work or other objects in addition to written summaries of achievement. Business and government organizations expect a more traditional format, insisting on formal applications, or resumes (sometimes both).

A portfolio is *not a substitute* for a resume. A portfolio is different from a resume in four ways.

- #1.** Your portfolio may contain 15–30 pages or more. Resumes are expected to be one or two pages at the most.
- #2.** Your portfolio probably will not stand alone—it will be supported by at least some verbal introduction or explanation.
- #3.** If you incorporate work samples, photos or original certificates, your portfolio may exist only in the original.
- #4.** Your resume gets the door open, your portfolio demonstrates the product.

“There is a widespread belief that a great resume will get you a great job,” says Marci Mahoney, author of *Strategic Resumes*. “Opportunity will knock and your resume will open the door.” She’s right, but be sure to bring along your portfolio if you want to capitalize on the opportunities that come your way. Being able to package and market yourself means having the confidence to value your contributions.

WHY YOU SHOULD HAVE A PORTFOLIO

If you have changed jobs in the past 10 years, you know that the days of presenting your resume directly to a prospective employer are over. The information age has made it possible for employers to accumulate candidate pools by capitalizing on job fairs, on-line job posting or outside recruiters, among other strategies. Resumes go to a human resources department and are scanned into a database, sorted by topic and faxed to interested managers. You might get the feeling that your resume would get more notice if you tied it around a brick and tossed it in through a window.

If you are employed by an organization that is large, geographically dispersed or both and you want to grow or change your career path, you can count on competing for opportunities with your peers, outside candidates and possibly even your boss. The hiring manager in product marketing may have no idea of the creative plans your sales support group has implemented. It will be up to you to prove that your experience is transferable.

Current Employment Trends

- Organizations/agencies/divisions merge
- Jobs are transferred away
- Companies shrink/employees are laid off
- Temps are hired to replace permanent workers
- Add your own reason _____

#1. Can you prove that you have the special skills or qualifications that justify retaining you? _____

#2. Will you be able to show that your contributions are critical to the results of the group? _____

#3. If your company is bought out or your unit is transferred to another location, are you prepared to compete for your own job?

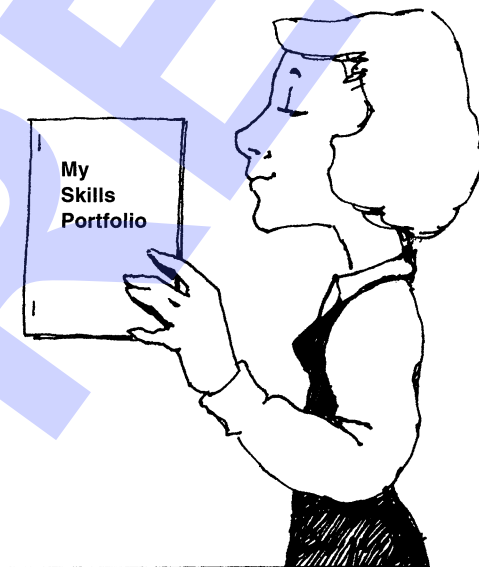
With a portfolio, you can *show* why you are too valuable to lose.

Evidence of skills, productivity and experience can make the difference between marking time or landing the position you want. If you are competing with 250 other candidates, you need something that sets you apart.

A portfolio can:

- Sample your work to show variety and quality
- Demonstrate work history or chart professional growth
- Be in print or electronic format
- Indicate the creative value you added to projects
- Empower you.

Your portfolio is a marketing tool you can't afford to ignore. It is a powerful strategy that will help give prospective employers ideas about your contributions to their future.



GIVE YOURSELF CREDIT

One question frequently asked about portfolios is, “I was part of a team—what can I take credit for?” The second is, “Was this really important enough to include?”

To build a portfolio and market yourself to a new employer, you must determine and value the contribution you made to your team and use those contributions to define your skills and attributes. The first step is self-awareness: giving yourself the credit you deserve.

After you have defined the elements you contributed to a team or any other effort, identify what would represent those contributions to a prospective employer. That’s what goes into your portfolio. Making a decision to hire is expensive and important. Prospective employers will want to see that you can contribute more than you cost.

Your portfolio will be made up of the samples or examples of work that show why you are the best investment a prospective employer can make. The exercises in this workbook will help you review your paid work and volunteer, educational or internship experience. Complete the steps by yourself, work with a peer who knows what you do or ask friends, peers and associates to help you brainstorm the answers. Talk through the exercises and have someone else record the key ideas. At first, include all the examples, ideas and possibilities you think of. Later, you will want to be more selective, depending on the focus of your portfolio.



**YOU NEED TO CLARIFY THE FOLLOWING
FOUR POINTS BEFORE YOU BEGIN.**

TYPES OF PORTFOLIOS

Defining parameters for key elements is critical to a successful portfolio. Focusing is frequently ignored or skipped in the rush to ready a portfolio for an interview. Lack of definition shows up in poor organization, inconsistency and frequent reworks of the portfolio. You will need to:

- ▶ Clarify Your Message
- ▶ Choose a Medium
- ▶ Set Your Budget
- ▶ Decide on a Static or Dynamic Portfolio

Clarify Your Message

What do you want your portfolio to show or prove? That you develop the best ad hoc reports in the company? That you simplified tracking forms or flow charts?

Clarifying your message and building your portfolio to get that message across will show in the end product. You will collect dozens—maybe even hundreds—of samples, awards and other “stuff.” But are they examples of experiences you want in your future? You may have developed a great management plan from the ground up, but if you never want to do that again in your lifetime, don’t show it to an employer as an accomplishment. Now is the time to ask: What’s my *Message*?

Message/Mission Statement for My Portfolio

Message: My portfolio shows that I use software programs to create business graphics, forms and documents. It proves that I am fast, accurate, creative and versatile and that I produce more than I cost.

Your Mission Statement:

TYPES OF PORTFOLIOS (continued)

Choose a Medium

What materials will best support your message?

- A newspaper clipping?
- A speaker's badge?
- A diskette with samples of programs you've written?
- Drill core samples that you analyzed?
- Drafts of designs?

Set up a file box or other container with file folders, compartments or other dividers depending on the nature of your tangibles. Dig into the file drawers or archives at work. Look for the photos you took of the conference where you received the Sales Rep of the Year award or the training certificates from your 10 most recent seminars. Gather as much as possible. Later, you can determine which are the best examples of your work. Edit the items you present: Use the clipping and a date line, not the entire page of a newspaper; use only a few pages of the manual you wrote. To help you remember why you wanted to include a specific item, keep the Portfolio Log supplied on page 68.

Note: Use what you can but don't use what you shouldn't. Protect proprietary information by changing names, dates, project titles or other sensitive data. Get *written permission* to use printed materials or copyrighted text.

CASE STUDY: Consider Consequences

A state employee had done a project for an agency while employed by a vendor. The project ended and the employee was interviewed by a competing vendor. The portfolio included a report that had been published throughout the industry and was public information. The company reps who saw the report in this context reported to the person's supervisor that they had seen it. Even though public, the employee was required to write a letter explaining why the report was shown.

- Is there anything you will need to get permission to use?
- Would a quote serve as well as the full report?

Set Your Budget

A very credible portfolio can be put together on a shoe string, or you can go for the leather binder with custom-printed dividers. Most portfolios cost about \$25 to \$50 by the time they are complete; the higher cost includes color copies, a photo, a videotape cassette holder, a leather binder and stationery-quality pages. Be creative.

- Shop the office and art supply stores
- Price-check color copies
- Use the binder you bought and never used
- Check business supply catalogs
- Use desk-top publishing with creativity and consistency.

Decide on a Dynamic or Static Portfolio

Most portfolios are dynamic documents, with things frequently added or deleted. Use a loose-leaf binder so you can rearrange the contents easily. If a diskette or videotape will be part of your portfolio, find out how to lock the contents so they can't be changed, develop an index to speed up the review process and create a colorful label to gain interest.

If this is a one-time-only product (or at least you think so now), you may decide to laminate the portfolio pages or have them bound with a spiral or other binding system. However you assemble your portfolio, don't fold, staple or otherwise mutilate your original—and valuable—documents. Instead, color copy them and keep the originals safely in your scrapbook.

10 WAYS TO USE YOUR PORTFOLIO

Since a portfolio should offer evidence of your experience, capability and skill, its use is not limited to a job search. Brainstorm other times when you could use your portfolio to communicate your skills, talents and accomplishments. Two ideas have been listed to get you started. Check your list with the ideas you'll find as you continue with the exercises in this book.

1. Use it to show what you love to do.

By keeping a spotlight on accomplishments that bring you personal satisfaction, you can put your best foot forward. Talking about the things you value brings a smile to your face and excitement to your voice.

2. Use it in your interview to emphasize your strong points.

By talking about work products and outcomes, you can stay focused on your strengths and skills.

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

6. _____

7. _____

8. _____

9. _____

10. _____

*Remember, your portfolio is a personal marketing tool.
Use it to sell yourself.*