

UX Design Portfolio Research

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About this Research

This research work was originally conducted in June 2015 to support the creation of my personal UX portfolio.

While originally intended only for personal use, I found that I kept sharing the information out as a resource for my UX colleagues. This encouraged me to more formally package the info and make it available for public consumption.

In December 2015, [Kate Rutter](#) from [Intellecto](#) offered additional assistance in sourcing a broader range of portfolios to include in my analysis. This research has now been updated with an expanded selection of portfolios and re-licensed via [Creative Commons](#).

Version 2 Release Date: [January 1, 2016](#)

Questions?

[Reach out and say hello!](#)

Ad Hoc Personas



Key Characteristics

- Female
- 29
- Single
- Has an undergraduate degree in Marketing
- Recently moved from a recruiter for a contracting firm to a full-time recruiting position in a Fortune 500 company

Goals

- Quickly locate and present to supported hiring managers a slate of solid candidates worthy of their attention.
- Further understand the UX domain to better help her support locating quality resources.

Frustrations

- Due to the popularity of the UX discipline, everyone now claims UX skillsets - making the process of finding UX candidates more difficult.
- The market of “junior designers” has grown, but locating experienced practitioners is still difficult.

Work Life

Laine is typically juggling 10-20 open positions at a time. Although she has at least 1-2 recruitment assistants that support her and the other recruiters, it still falls to her to make the initial cut of incoming resumes and also go out and recruit for hard to get positions. As the point of contact for applicants, she also needs to make sure she keeps a good attitude and always enable the company to put its best foot forward.

“When it comes to UX, I look for more than just a nice-looking portfolio; I want evidence of their organizational skills and process; it is so much more than appearance.”

Alex UX/Design Manager



Goals

- Keep an open mind when looking at candidates and adjust expectations for the role he is hiring.
- Challenge himself to look beyond the “basics”; hire someone who will add skills/experience to his organization that is not present today.

Key Characteristics

- Male
- 37
- Single
- Has an undergraduate degree in graphic design and almost 15 years of web design experience
- Has worked in a variety of environments (enterprise, startup, and digital design)

Frustrations

- Lack of “big picture” thinking - he respects designers that can take a step back and think through an experience holistically.
- Candidates who forget that they are part of a business - ability to stay positive when tempering expectations.

Work Life

While Alex understands the importance of the recruitment cycle, he has to struggle to fit it into his always-full worklife. Because of this, he relies heavily on his recruiters to “cut the chaff” from the wheat. Alex has also viewed a lot of portfolios in his career, and can usually tell within half a minute if he wants to move forward with a candidate.

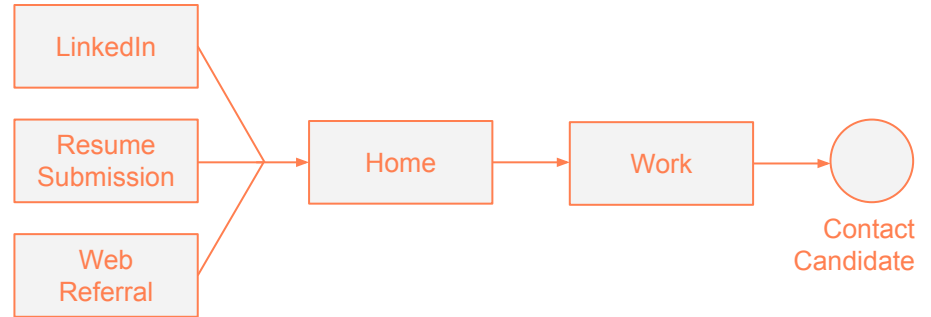
“If I’m going to hire someone, they must be able to make my organization measurably better than it is today.”

Contextual Scenarios

Scenario 1 : Screen Portfolio

(Laine)

Laine has an open position for a Sr. UX Designer role. Although she knows she will have plenty of applicants, she wants to cast the net to see if there are any longer-term designers in the area that might be worth targeting. Laine locates a person and scans their LinkedIn profile. She quickly finds a link to the candidate's online portfolio and visits it. Upon first glance, it looks to be solidly designed. She then dips into the candidate's reported work. Again, it looks good, so Laine puts together an e-mail to send to the candidate.



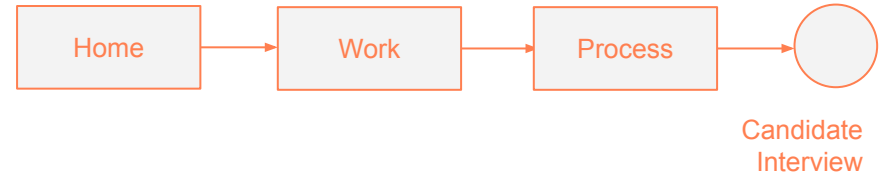
Process Flow

- Laine gets to Portfolio site from either LinkedIn, a submitted resume, or referral by a contact.
- Upon arrival, Laine looks around the main page and makes a value judgment about quality.
- If quality seems sufficient, Laine looks for the candidate's portfolio
- At the portfolio, Laine makes another scan for quality or something that catches her eye.
- If Laine is intrigued or feels the quality is sufficient, she will continue to look at the portfolio - scanning for evidence of user-centered design process understanding and UX keywords (sketches, scenarios, wireframes, prototypes, usability testing, etc.).
- If Laine doesn't already have the candidate's resume, she will look for it.
- After obtaining the resume, Laine double-checks qualifications against position requirements.
- If candidate meets requirements, Laine will send an email to the candidate to talk with them about the position.

Scenario 2 : Review Portfolio

(Alex)

Alex recently had a candidate's resume and portfolio passed along to him with a recommendation to interview this candidate. Alex jumps immediately to the candidate's portfolio to get a sense of whether or not the resume is worth a look. He gets to the candidate's portfolio site thanks to the link from his recruiter. He immediately begins to scroll around, reading little, but evaluating the basics - navigation, flow and visual design. Since it looks good, he spends a minute looking at the candidate's design process a little more deeply, where he sees evidence of the critical thinking and fundamental skills he requires for the team. Alex looks very briefly at the candidate's resume, but trusts Laine's judgment and doesn't obsess over the details. He asks the recruiter to set up a phone interview, and is off to his next meeting.



Process Flow

- Alex follows link to portfolio provided by recruiter.
- Alex takes a look around the main page / landing view, evaluating the site's IA, core design, etc.
- Alex then locates candidate's portfolio of work/projects. He views one or two of these to see if fundamentals are present.
- If process is not represented as part of work, Alex looks for the candidate's perspective on process. He reviews this quickly.
- If candidate seems to meet basic requirements and holds his interest, he signals the desire to interview the candidate.

Research / Competitive Analysis

Overview of Process

Review Industry Best Practices for Portfolio Design

1. Locate and read advice from other industry professionals.
2. Capture and [summarize key points](#).

Conduct Competitive Analysis of UX Portfolios

1. Locate recommended UX portfolios (research and Google high-rankings).
2. Supplement discovered UX portfolios via colleague recommendations.
3. Conduct a [Quantitative analysis](#) of the portfolios; what are the trends?
4. Conduct a [Qualitative analysis](#) of the portfolios; what content, visual concepts, or interactions are trends? What elements might be unique or effective?

Resources Reviewed

[10 UX Portfolios Done Right](#)
Chris Bank (2014, Creative Bloq)

[10 Inspiring UX Portfolios](#)
Sarah Hawk (2014, UX Mastery)

[Top 5 Dos and Don'ts for your Ux Portfolio](#)
Frank Gaine (2014, UXswitch)

[Best Portfolios on UXswitch](#)
Franke Gaine (2014, UXswitch)

[The Foundation of a Great UX Portfolio](#)
Brittany Mederos (2015, enchant.co)

[Creating Professional Portfolios & Presentations](#)
Troy Parke / Patrick Neeman (2014, UX How)

[Great Design Portfolios Are Great Stories](#)
Simon Pan (2015, Medium)

[Fill Your Portfolio With Stories](#)
Jared Spool (2011, UIE)

[Thoughts on Design Portfolios](#)
Jon Kolko (2012, Austin Center for Design)

Portfolio Best Practices

Key Discoveries

- **Portfolios need to deliver compelling content extremely quickly.**
“You have about 10 seconds for an arrogant, over-extended, tired creative director to poke at your material before they find something they don’t like and leave.” - *Jon Kolko*, [Thoughts on Design Portfolios](#)
- **Portfolios should deliver information in a visually compelling way.**
“Demonstrate your ability to communicate concisely with words and imagery—showing the *what* and telling the *why*.” - *Simon Pan*, [Great Design Portfolios Are Great Stories](#)
- **The best portfolios communicate with stories.**
“What can you put into your portfolio when your work is all locked up? The simple answer: Fill your portfolio with stories.” - *Jared Spool*, [Fill Your Portfolio With Stories](#)
- **Content is the important focus; keep the framework simple.**
“Your portfolio should be simple. It should reflect your ability to structure information in an easily digestible format. Forgo fancy transitions and layouts...” - *Will Evans*, [7 Steps to a Kick-Ass UX Portfolio](#)

“What makes a winning portfolio is the same thing behind a winning design: a riveting visual story. Remember, someone wants you to solve their problems and needs to know how you'll do that - quickly.”

Chris Bank

10 UX Portfolios done right

Portfolio Best Practices

Reprinted from:

[The Foundation of a Great UX Portfolio](#)

Brittany Mederos (2015, Enchant.co)

Main Components of a Portfolio

1. Describe yourself as you want to be seen, meshing a future version of you with a smidgen of background context.
2. Clear ways to contact you: social media or email is good.
3. A curated collection of case studies: structured stories about the work you did for a project.

Work / Use Case Components

1. Overview: what's the elevator pitch?
2. Problem definition: what's the problem you were trying to solve? what were the success metrics?
3. Audience: who are your target users/audience for the project? Personas go here.
4. Team / Role: who did you work with on the project? What was your team structure?
5. Constraints: Talk about the constraints; time, access to users, undefined problem
6. Design Process: what was your design process? Did you facilitate any design exercises? What deliverables were you responsible for? Speak to messiness.
7. Retrospective: did you reach success metrics? Solve the right problem? What would you do better if you could do it again?

Competitive Analysis - Quantitative

25 Portfolios Reviewed (in alphabetical order by last name)

Review Dates: 07/05/2015 and 01/01/2016

Anthony Anderson

Stefan Hiienurm

Kel Sanford

Susan Baittle

Hiroshi Kawada

Cody James Sielawa

George Cockerill

Dominic Kennedy

Juhi Singh

Lucy Dotson

Zach Kuzmic

Frances Soong

John Ellison

Eva-Lotta Lamm

Sophia Voychehovski

Erica Firment

Christine Lee

Lin Wang

Suzanne Ginsburg

Simon Pan

Edmund Yu

James Grant

Gabrielle Parsons

Cathrine Lindblom Gunasekara

Melissa Perri

Special thanks to [Kate Rutter](#) from [Intellecto](#) for her assistance in improving the breadth of portfolios reviewed.

Competitive Analysis - Quantitative

Data Summary

Competitive Analysis - UX Portfolios

Key Discoveries

- *Most common observations:* Projects less than 3 years old (19), key concepts communicated in portfolio (18), process explanation (14), and writing on UX and UI Design (7)
- *Absent concepts:* Address NDAs (1), Discuss “toughest challenges” (1), Cross-functional collaboration (2), Tool mastery (3, not counted when limited to PDF resumes and not located on site)
- *Most common names/terms for Navigation/Pages:* About (16), Resume (9), Portfolio (8), Contact (8), Work/Recent Work (7), Home/Hello/Welcome (7), Blog/Thoughts (7), “Who am I”/unnamed intros (6)
- *Common features/design approaches:* LinkedIn link (18), Twitter link (18), visible e-mail address (17), Location of residence (13), Facebook link (10), Instagram link (7), visible phone number (7), Contact form (7), Use of a [one-page website](#) (4), Google + link (3)
- *Common platforms* (if easily detected): Squarespace (4), Wordpress (1), Slideshare (1)

Competitive Analysis - Qualitative

Key Discoveries

- The best portfolios deliver information visually and with minimal text (at least until the user self-selects to review a case study more thoroughly). A common design practice was to represent individual projects at a high-level within a portfolio, and then allow the user to view the deeper details of the case study upon demand.
- Almost all portfolios show multiple forms of connectivity to the greater design community - Twitter, LinkedIn, Facebook, etc. On a more limited basis, this is seen through client listings and professional recommendations. Google+ and Dribbble references are decreasing, Instagram and Medium references are increasing (between June 2015 and January 2016).
- It was difficult to detect “off-the-shelf” templates/approaches (Squarespace, Wordpress); most appeared to present custom (or customized) designs.
- Almost all of the sites viewed offered an adaptive/responsive experience. Most of the sites relied on 2-3 primary navigational elements; it was rare for sites to go to 4 or more primary navigational elements. It was common for the home page of the site to be a functional page - Work/Portfolio or (less commonly) About.
- Most of the sites use an informal tone of voice and the majority showcase recent work. Projects almost always include an explanation of the research and design process that supported the effort.
- Many of the sites only showed 2-5 work samples / case studies (i.e. “their best work”).



About the Author

Gary J. Anderson is an experienced UX Researcher and Designer focused on helping large organizations execute user-centered design. Gary resides in the greater Seattle metropolitan area with his better-half and precocious hound.



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