The Digital Portfolio in the Conservation Field

Presented By

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Introduction

The conservation field regularly embraces new technologies, continually updating and improving how we approach the preservation of cultural heritage. This is especially prevalent in the documentation and presentation of our work. Portfolios, however, have taken a bit longer to catch up to this digital revolution.

Portfolios are important tools for all conservation professionals. Traditionally, portfolios have been presented in large-format binders full of printed images and documents. Though this format continues to be the first choice of many professionals in the field, a number of conservation professionals have successfully presented their portfolios in digital formats. Digital portfolios offer some notable advantages over traditional printed portfolios, but new technologies bring new challenges. This poster explores portfolio formats from the perspectives of both the portfolio creators and reviewers, looking at the current status of the digital portfolio within our profession.

The authors of this poster initially associated the term “digital portfolios” with websites created through online platforms such as Weebly, Squarespace, and Wordpress. Through communication with many ECN and AIC members, we discovered that the current definition of a digital portfolio is much broader than just websites. Portfolio creators are now using a variety of platforms and software to create digital portfolios.

We also have compiled information regarding some of the most important and complicated aspects of the digital portfolio format, including copyright and privacy issues, advantages and disadvantages of digital versus traditional portfolios, and information about the variety of platforms and software available to portfolio creators.

Creators Results

(30 respondents)

| Digital portfolio creators who plan to continue to update and maintain their portfolios for future professional use | 82.8% |
| Digital portfolio creators who did not create an accompanying website | 86% |
| Most difficult new skill to master | Website design/layout |
| Most popular platform for digital portfolio creation | Weebly |

Comments:

“I am in private practice and people today do not take you seriously without a website.”

“All of my digital files are organized in one place and are easy to access. When I needed to make a hardcopy portfolio, I could just go to my website and print everything out!”

“It’s lower cost than making a hard copy portfolio and is easy to move from place to place. Also, no special printing equipment is required.”

“You cannot showcase the skills associated with printing and processing of images.”

“It was as time consuming as a paper portfolio and needs to be backed up!”

“I still need to create a hard copy portfolio for one interview, so I had to do twice the work really. Many of my colleagues have also run into this situation.”

Supervisors Results

(27 respondents)

| Supervisors who said that they prefer digital portfolios over traditional portfolios | 69.2% |
| Supervisors who said that they plan to continue to update and maintain their portfolios for future professional use | 97.2% |
| Greatest advantage to digital portfolios (most common answers) | Ease of access, review, and sharing; more time to consider|
| Greatest disadvantage to digital portfolios (most common answers) | Difficulty to review during an interview; technological problems; different screens may change appearance of images |

Comments:

“I think this is a very positive development for the profession and I’m grateful for the efforts of those who have pioneered it and coached others.”

“I strongly feel that a digital portfolio is the way to go, for the reasons mentioned previously: this can be strengthened by the applicant bringing with them a small folder that contains one or two treatment reports with images (or other relevant materials) to provide the experience a hard copy portfolio allows without lug"ing a bulky massive thing around with them.”

“It all depends on the portfolio and how it is presented. If it is clear and easy to navigate and the images are crisp, then it helps. It detracts when there are technical difficulties, files won’t download, or there are ‘bugs’ on the webpage.”

During an interview time, interviewers are subservient to existing technology and IT policies within their institutions.”

Educational Institutional Property/Copyright Results

| Digital portfolios created who did not obtain special permission to use content in their portfolios | 50.0% |
| Supervisors who granted permission to portfolio creators to use images or reports from a specific institution or practice in their portfolios | 50.0% |
| Supervisors who said that their institution or practice has a digital content usage policy in place | 47.8% |

Intellectual property and Copyright issues

Sharing portfolios online through websites or email means that treatment reports, images, and scientific data are more accessible than ever. This can be great for sharing information among colleagues. However, the fact that such information can be studied, downloaded, and/or printed at any time raises important questions about intellectual property, fair use, copyright, and permissions.

What does the Copyright Act say?

When working for an institution such as a museum, treatment reports and photographs created or edited by a conservator are considered ‘work made for hire’ under the Copyright Act. As such, the author of the work is considered the employer of record. Even when not expressly requested, requesting permission is considered. However, seeking permission may lead to self-censorship, and a lack of clearly defined rules may result in prohibition of the use of legitimate content.

Protecting your content online

Creating a password for your website and pdf files, or implementing digital watermarks and/or Dickinson options provides some protection for content. Adobe Acrobat X provides methods to password protect pdf files to limit downloading, printing, copying, and editing capabilities (see handout). Passwords are not infallible, however, and password protected pages or documents are not always “safe.”

To upload or not to upload treatment reports?

The main objective of treatment reports is to share work for potential employment reviews by others. It is imperative to offer access to these reports. However, this does not necessarily require that each report be available directly on a website. Instead, files can be shared directly via email or a downloading service like Dropbox to limit circulation.

Be aware of AIC’s Guidelines for Practice

AIC’s Guidelines to the Practice for Documenting intellectual property and fair use of digital content. They acknowledge the need to share information among colleagues and the public while respecting the confidential nature of certain types of information for example.

Information that is obtained or uncovered in the course of examination, treatment or scientific investigations conducted at the property or on the content of the object, must be considered confidential and must not be disclosed or otherwise made public without prior written consent (2).

Does your digital portfolio need special permission?

Whether or not permission is required for digital presentations depends on the type of platform, content, audience, and intent. As digital portfolios become increasingly popular, these questions will need to be addressed more clearly. Portfolio creators should strive to obtain permission for their content, but the lending institutions are also responsible for creating standards of best practice for sharing digital content.

Conclusion

Many in the conservation field appreciate the advantages offered by digital portfolios such as ease of creation and sharing, opportunities for professional promotion for job seekers or private conservators, and environmental friendliness. Disadvantages such as the lack of comprehensive policy on copyright and privacy issues, technical glitches, and the loss of the tactile and visual experience associated with traditional portfolios remain a source of concern. Despite the disadvantages, conservation portfolios, much like everything else in today’s world, are becoming increasingly digital, and this trend does not seem likely to reverse. The officers and members of ECN hope that the information presented in this poster will inform a dialogue within the AIC community about how best to address the most prominent challenges surrounding digital portfolios. We hope that these discussions will lead to the development of solutions for some of the remaining issues, and will allow the profession to move forward with the use of changing technologies to continue to expand and develop our field.

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