

The Digital Portfolio in the Conservation Field

Presented By

The Emerging Conservation Professionals Network

With Sara Levin and Heather Brown

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 conservators 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 portfolio” with websites created through online platforms such as Weebly, Squarespace, and Wordpress. Through communication with many ECPN and AIC members, we discovered that the current definition of a digital portfolio is much broader including non web-based software such as PDF or PowerPoint. Digital portfolios can be viewed online, presented during an interview, or shared through email or Dropbox.

To develop this poster, we created two surveys: one for digital portfolio creators and one for reviewers, helping us to better understand how digital format portfolios are being used and received by the conservation community. The majority of the portfolio creators were current graduate students who made a personal choice to create a digital rather than a traditional portfolio. Many reviewers evaluated portfolios as part of a hiring process for employees. Respondents for both surveys overwhelmingly preferred digital portfolio formats to traditional ones.

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 traditional portfolio	60%
Most difficult new skill to master	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 needed 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%
Greatest advantage to digital portfolios (most common answers)	Ease of access, review, and sharing; more time to consider content
Greatest disadvantage to digital portfolios (most common answers)	Difficult to review during an interview; technological problems; different screens may change appearance of images

Comments:

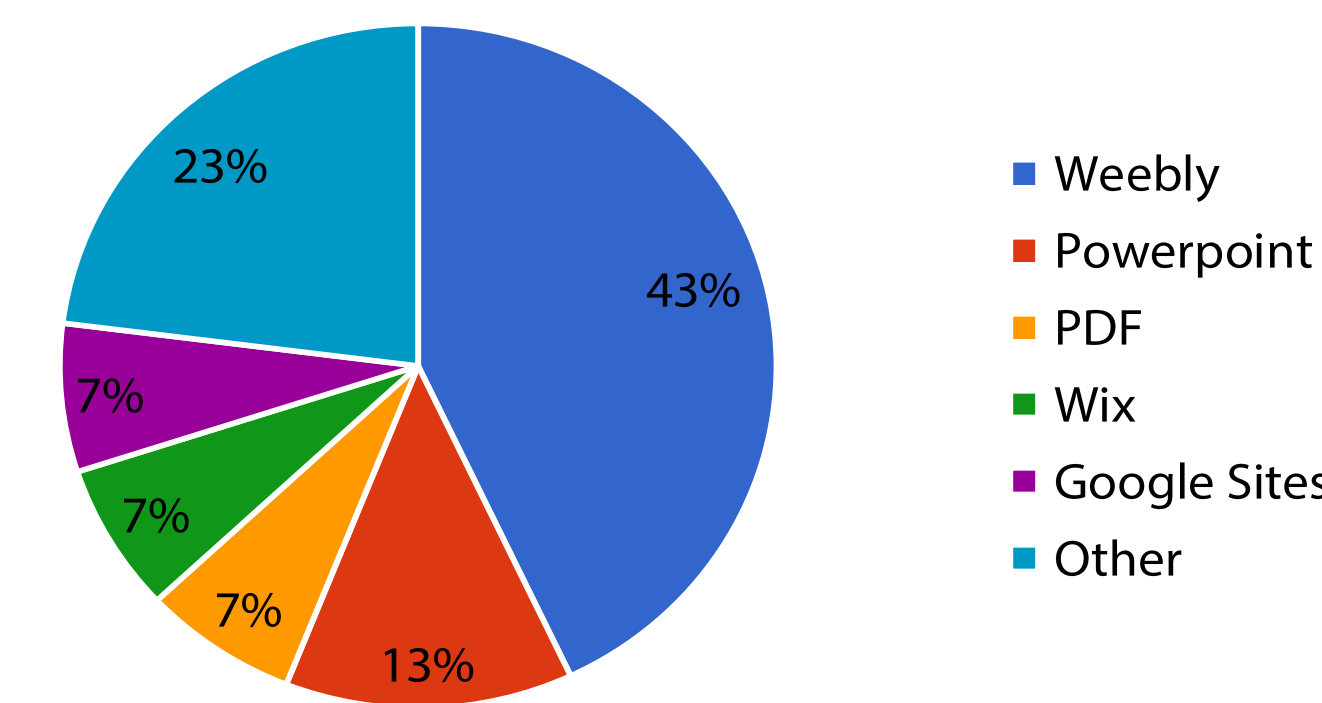
“I think that this is a very positive development for the profession and I’m grateful for the efforts of those who have pioneered it and coached others.”

“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 folio that contains one or two treatment reports with images (or other relevant materials) to provide the tactile experience a hard copy portfolio allows, without lugging a bulky massive thing around with them.”

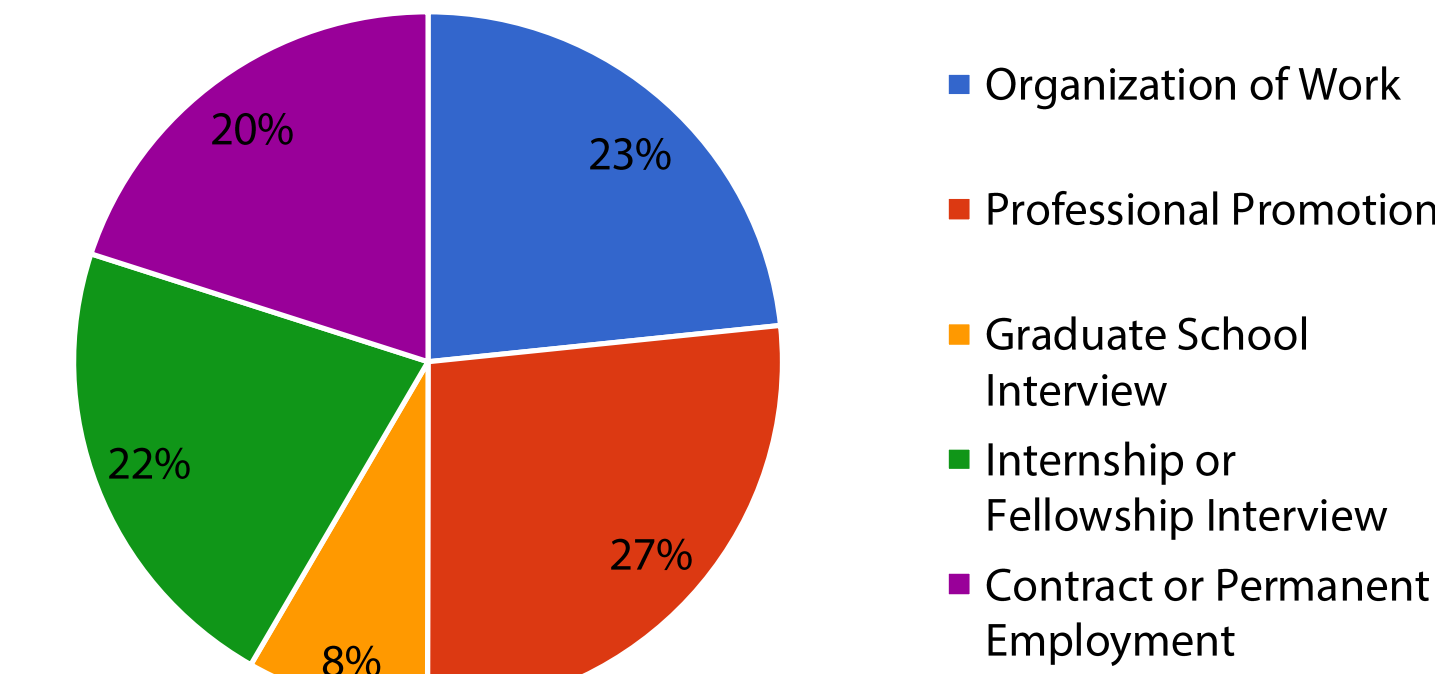
“It all depends on the portfolio and how it is presented. If it is clear and easy to navigate and the images are crisp, then it helps. It detracts when there are technical difficulties, files won’t download, or there are “bugs” on the webpage.”

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

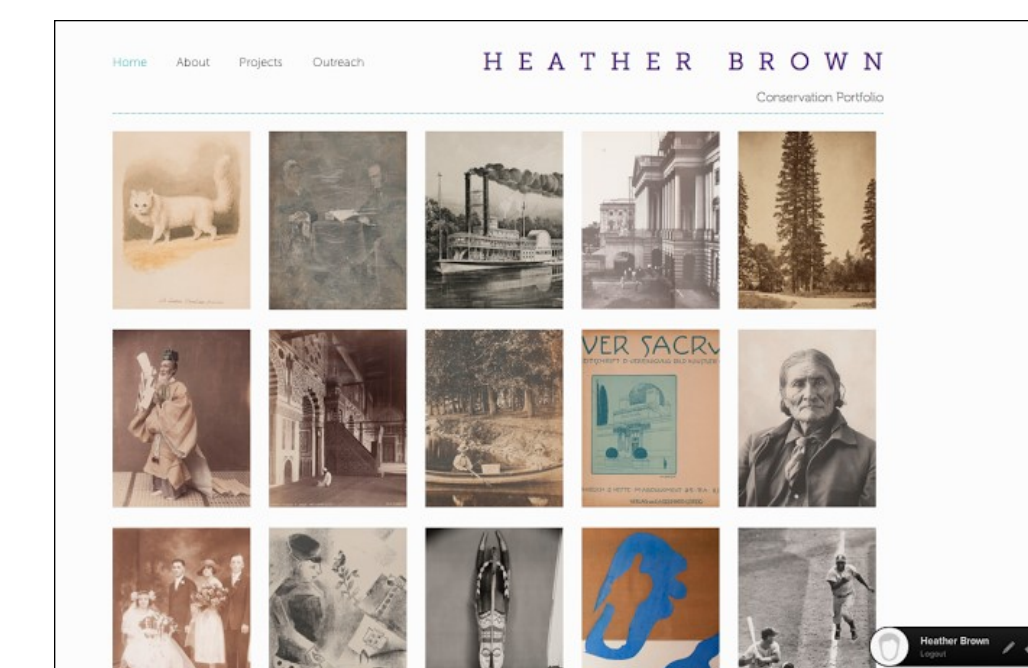
Platforms Used to Create Digital Portfolios



Purpose of Digital Portfolios



Traditional vs. Digital Portfolios



	Traditional Portfolio	Digital Portfolio
Format	Binder with printed images and documents	Website (can be published or unpublished) Powerpoint file PDF file
Associated Costs	Requires purchase of materials such as binders, photo paper, printer ink, sheet protectors, etc.	Varies widely; may require purchase of web design software, monthly or yearly web hosting or URL registration
Advantages	Ability to include high quality image prints Ability to include small experiments or artwork that showcase hand skills. Privacy issues are easy to control May be expected or required by some employers or educational institutions Does not require development of additional web design skills	Easy to share Easy to maintain and update Can enlarge images to see a detail Allows for adding hyperlinks to other work that has been done online Available to your interviewer for a longer period of time Requires less paper and ink- more environmentally friendly
Disadvantages	Can be heavy and difficult to transport Often have to make copies to share with multiple people in different locations Limitations on what can be shared (print and text only, no videos or links) Requires specialized printing equipment Requires a lot of ink and paper to produce- less environmentally friendly	Often requires the development of new skills Some formats require users to pay Consideration of privacy issues can be difficult to navigate Hard to control some formatting issues, including how the portfolio appears on each person’s computer Technological differences and “glitches” can make it difficult for some to view Some interviewers also require a small traditional portfolio

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 to be the employer[1], not the individual conservator. Even when not expressly required, requesting permission is considerate. 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 disclaimers offers some protection for private content. Adobe Acrobat XI provides methods to password protect pdf files to limit download, 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?

If the main objective of e-portfolios is to share work for potential employment or review by teachers, it is imperative to offer access to 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 Commentaries to the Guidelines for Practice discusses 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 investigation conducted at the service of, and with the consent of the owner, custodian, or authorized agent, must be treated as 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 be ready to obtain permission for their content, but the hiring institutions are also responsible for creating standards of best practice for sharing digital content.

Intellectual Property/Copyright Results

Digital portfolio creators who did not obtain special permission to use content in their portfolio	50.0%
Supervisors who granted permission to portfolio creators to use images or reports from a specific institution or practice in their portfolios	58.3%
Supervisors who said that their institution or practice has a digital content usage policy in place	47.8%

[1] United States Copyright Office. 2012. *Works made for hire. Copyright circular 9.* Washington, D.C.: U.S. Copyright Office.
[2] AIC. Approved November, 1999. “Commentary 7 – Confidentiality.” *Commentaries to the Guidelines for Practice.*

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 ECPN hope that the information presented in this poster will inspire 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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