

E-Portfolios as a Hiring Tool: Do Employers Really Care?

E-portfolios demonstrate students' learning and competency, yet higher education has not persuaded employers to use them in recruiting and selecting employees

By **Chris Ward** and **Chris Moser**

College students looking for that first job after graduation scan job postings, create profiles on career websites, and send out résumés. On the employer side, human resource managers advertise entry-level jobs and review the applications submitted for those jobs. They often narrow the candidate pool based on cover letters, resumes, and possibly reference lists. Job-hunting students would benefit, however, from having e-portfolios to share with the HR managers, who could review artifacts relating specifically to job expectations (such as presentations or written work). But would employers even look at the e-portfolios? What information would they want to see in candidates' e-portfolios to assist them in the selection process?

E-Portfolio Uses and Applications

An increasing emphasis on competency-based curricula has fueled the growth of e-portfolios in higher education. Colleges and universities use e-portfolios to assess pedagogical effectiveness and student learning, as a means of reflection, or to showcase student work. Nonetheless, little research has addressed the extent to which employers consult e-portfolios as part of their recruitment and selection process. We surveyed 5,310 employers on exactly this question, obtaining a 13 percent response rate. Our findings can help inform educational institutions in planning and

implementing e-portfolio initiatives that meet assessment goals, serve students' employment and career needs, and provide a valuable tool for employers.

Students can create e-portfolio artifacts from video/audio streaming of their presentations, examples of their writing, or demonstrated competencies in specific professional/regulatory standards for viewing by faculty and potential employers. Most students, however, have not yet connected the contents of their e-portfolios with the documentation appropriate for job applications¹; educational institutions can help with this process.

As students begin to consider internships or full-time positions, they could post examples of work reflecting their ability to perform specific job requirements. The same artifacts, when used in e-portfolios created for program assessment, can demonstrate student outcomes.

While most e-portfolios are housed in a university's content management system, they can be exported to an external storage device for access by potential employers and the university's stakeholders. External storage devices have two major disadvantages, however: limited space and fixed content. Why not have career services staff assist students in creating a user-friendly, professional site that could be used as a job-seeking tool? Our survey data support this proposal, as 95 percent of the employers who responded

preferred to access e-portfolio information on the web.

Results of the Employer Survey

Use of e-portfolios by HR managers was low for all majors, but the data revealed higher use in the fields of educational services and health care/social assistance. The reasons companies gave for not using e-portfolios were:

- Not familiar with e-portfolios (75 percent)
- Not valuable (14 percent)
- Time constraints (13 percent)
- Cost (12 percent)

Of those companies that did use e-portfolios, 16 percent used them in the initial screening stage, and a small percentage (<1 percent) used them after the first interview. When asked if they planned to use e-portfolios in the future, however, 56 percent of all respondents said yes. Higher education clearly has an opportunity to promote e-portfolios as a time-saving and cost-effective recruitment tool for recruiters.

The type of information employers believed would be valuable in an e-portfolio included the following:

- Resumes/references (93 percent)
- Written work (39 percent)
- Projects (37 percent)
- Presentations (33 percent)
- Lesson plans (23 percent)

- Case studies (7 percent)
- Artistic performances (6 percent)

In the educational services area, résumés topped the list of preferred information, followed by lesson plans, projects, and written work, while health care employers wanted to see résumés, references, and presentations. A resounding 95 percent of respondents preferred to access the e-portfolio via a web-based link, followed by those who preferred a CD (11 percent) or DVD (8 percent). (Respondents were encouraged to choose multiple methods for accessing e-portfolios.)

Implications of the Survey

Universities can use these data in several ways to support students and employers. For students, specific courses in general education and within their major could require them to develop and post artifacts considered most useful to employers—resumes, written work, projects, and presentations. Templates, by major or college, could be developed to help students organize the pertinent information. Students in business, for example, might want to illustrate their business-software skills or stream a presentation, while education majors could provide sample lesson plans.

A web-based link would allow students to access and update their information after graduation and as they progressed through their careers, with the university supporting these alumni by continuing to host their e-portfolios. Technologies could also be incorporated to permit limited access or to require permission for access to specific information. The same web link gives employers access to a potential employee's portfolio and lets them evaluate specific skills—a feature not typically available during the initial steps of the recruitment process.

Conclusions

Universities clearly have an opportunity to migrate to a web-based e-portfolio system and to educate employers on the value of e-portfolios. Based on the responses from our survey, faculty members, along with university career services staff, should encourage

students to post their résumés, references, samples of written work, projects, and presentations as a way to showcase their work for potential employers. Concurrently, universities should address employers' concerns by showcasing sample web links that contain student artifacts demonstrating the knowledge, skills, and abilities preferred by employers. This demonstration could be done during job fairs held on campus, for example, to reduce recruiters' lack of familiarity with e-portfolios and address the value, cost, and time issues noted in the survey.

Keyword search capability should be incorporated into the system to let recruiters match required skill sets with applicants. In addition, students could control access to their information in the same fashion as used by online job companies such as Monster, which employs a system that automatically forwards appropriate links to potential employers as soon as applicants fitting certain criteria and providing specific examples of relevant work upload information. The system requires approval by job applicants for others to view any or all of their information on the site. Even if not interested at that time, the employer could keep the links in an e-mail folder or request updates. This process would address the time and cost factor of storing paper copies of

resumes and other potentially pertinent documents.

Students would benefit from this process as well. They could focus on specific types of assignments to upload to their e-portfolios, determine the types of assignments specific employers could view, and possibly differentiate themselves in the job market.

For institutions worried about the cost and maintenance of a content management system capable of performing all of the functions necessary for creating, uploading, storing, and retrieving e-portfolios, adopting a web-based format is an easier, less-expensive solution. Job-hunting students, employers seeking candidates, and institutions assessing and reporting student outcomes to stakeholders would all benefit from using web-based e-portfolios. *e*

Endnote

1. Risa Blair and Lyndon Godsall, "One School's Experience in Implementing E-Portfolios: Lessons Learned," *Quarterly Review of Distance Education*, vol. 7, no. 2 (2006), pp. 145–154.

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Further Reading

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