

NO PLASTIC SLEEVES

LARRY VOLK
DANIELLE CURRIER

NO PLASTIC SLEEVES

THE COMPLETE PORTFOLIO GUIDE
FOR PHOTOGRAPHERS AND DESIGNERS



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To the artists in my community, who over many years have shared their ideas, and been supportive friends and inspiring colleagues.

—L. V.

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To C. P., my better half—thanks for all the love, support, and belief in me.

—D. C.

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For more information, including additional portfolios, interviews, resources, tutorials and articles please visit the companion website at
WWW.NOPLASTICSLEEVES.COM

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A C K N O W L E D G M E N T S

Author's Note

The process that we have described in this book has evolved over many years through our experiences as educators and professionals in the creative industries. This process has ultimately developed into a system that addresses all facets of the portfolio package. Each step has been carefully planned, organized, and simplified in order to

maximize the potential of your complete portfolio package. This book will guide you through a process of conceptualizing, designing, and developing all the interconnected pieces you will need. Professional and student work, diagrams, illustrations, and step-by-step visual guides will provide examples of and demonstrate key concepts, principles, and techniques.

FORM FOLLOWS FUNCTION—THAT HAS BEEN MISUNDERSTOOD.

Form and function should be one, joined in a spiritual union.

FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT

Have you ever heard the phrase “form follows function”? American sculptor Horatio Greenough is credited with the phrase, but it was the American architect Louis Sullivan who made it famous. The phrase became the guiding principle of modernist architects and industrial designers during the 20th century. It means that the structure and appearance of a thing should reflect and support what its purpose is. Let’s examine the purposes of your portfolio. Your portfolio of work is the evidence of your experience, knowledge, skills, creativity, innovation, and aesthetic and technical capabilities. In essence, it is the culmination of who you are as a creative professional, and can even indicate where your future interests and passions lay. It is a large part of your identity as a creative professional and will be used heavily to market yourself to potential employers and clients. Therefore, your portfolio, both in print and digital form, should reflect and support your specific goals as a unique creative professional.

Types of Portfolios

In the creative industries a *portfolio* usually refers to an edited collection of visual work that is comprised of separate pieces and projects, representing both range and depth within a particular field. Typically, this collection reflects the best a company or individual has to offer.

There is also a portfolio that is referred to as a “body of work.” This describes the collection of an artist, often unedited and presented in its entirety. Sometimes a “body of work” refers to a specific series, developed around a central theme or defined within a particular time period. Such a collection is often edited when exhibited or published in book or website form. Many artists create such collections, often serving as a portfolio of sorts, since they are intended for marketing and promotional purposes. In fact, most art and design students create a “body of work” as their senior project, including many interrelated pieces that are developed over several months time.

What are the goals and purposes of your portfolio? While the work in your portfolio is obviously a very essential part of your ability to market yourself and should be considered carefully, you should not stop there. Your comprehensive portfolio package has the potential to be so much more.

- The intention of putting together a portfolio is to present yourself as having a visual character, to differentiate yourself from the average creative professional, and make yourself stand out, supported by your own unique creative vision and the work you have done to prove yourself.
- Your portfolio package should be considered as a whole—from the first glimpse of your book’s cover, to the work included inside, to your website and related professional and promotional materials. All of these materials are essential to marketing and establishing yourself as a creative professional.
- Your portfolio is evidence of your experience, knowledge, skills, creativity, innovation, and aesthetic and technical capabilities. These should be reflected by the portfolio’s overarching design concept and backed up by the project work you choose to present.
- You should consider your portfolio not simply as a container for your work, but as a creative statement in and of itself that reflects the value you place on your work and craft. In the creative industries, our goal is very often to make work that captivates, engages, and communicates a point of view. What does it say if a creative professional’s portfolio does none of these?
- Ultimately, the goal is to get you the job you want or the types of clients for whom you want to work. You can use your portfolio design as an opportunity to express and characterize the kind of work you want to do in the future.
- A comprehensive portfolio is finally about self, with the end goal of promoting and positioning yourself within your industry.

The Comprehensive Package

While your portfolio book is an essential part of your ability to market yourself, it is not the only piece. As part of a comprehensive portfolio package, you will also need to include an online or digital presentation of your work, a resume, a cover letter, and perhaps even a business card and mailers such as postcards or brochures. The resume, cover letter, and digital portfolio or mailers will function as the first contact and impression you make. These items will work to get your “foot in the door,” so to speak.

Since your portfolio book will be built and designed by you, it will most likely be limited to one or two copies. It will be the book you mail to a limited number of select potential employers or clients and/or the book you bring with you to an interview. Along with your interviewing skills, your book must totally impress. Together, all these materials will ultimately be used to establish and secure working relationships with potential employers and clients. In order to do so, your portfolio package needs to function as a whole, with unifying visual elements that integrate the separate, but related pieces—all establishing and reinforcing a consistent, positive message about you.

Brands and Concepts

As previously stated, your portfolio book needs to function in some really important ways. For one, it needs to get you noticed, grab someone's attention, and distinguish you from "the crowd." It needs to communicate your unique talents and experiences in a positive and memorable way. To do this, you will need to develop a *brand statement* for yourself, capitalizing on your unique abilities and creative vision. You will then need to develop an *overarching concept that expresses this brand* through specific visual and verbal means. Some of you may even develop a subsequent *brand identity* that will inform the visual and verbal direction of all of your portfolio materials.

Your message will shape and influence how potential employers and clients perceive and remember you. Distinguishing yourself from hundreds of other similar candidates through a distinct brand concept will provide you with a vital competitive edge.

Therefore, it is important that your portfolio book is not simply a container for your work, but a well-thought-out and well-crafted creative statement, in and of itself. Creating your own unique book, related website, and supporting materials will demonstrate your commitment and dedication to your profession. This is especially true in our competitive creative industries where creative professionals distinguish themselves by taking the initiative to make sure that they show their very best right from the start. The first part of this book will guide you through a number of steps in order to achieve this very important first goal.

The Book

Driven by your brand statement and subsequent conceptual ideas, the two main design goals of your portfolio book can be thought of as interrelated structural parts. Namely, there is the exterior, or front and back cover design, and the interior page layout. While the exterior and interior of a book are certainly related and need to function together as a whole, they do serve different purposes, and separately, each addresses an important function of the book. The front and back cover design addresses the first goal by drawing attention to the book itself and by communicating, through visual and verbal elements, the nature of the content in the book—in this case, who you are as a creative professional.

Once you've piqued someone's interest with the cover design, the interior layout of your book communicates the body of the book—its content. In this case, this is a presentation of your work and related experiences. As the very first step in our process, you will need to take some time to evaluate and edit just what to include.

Your portfolio book and related website need to function by clearly and effectively presenting your work. To do so, the image of the work itself must be the focal point within the composition of each page. Information about the work and any other related visual elements should be secondary. In a visual industry, showcasing and showing off your work is ultimately what will get you the job! As part of our process, we will guide you through the organization and layout of elements within the layout of a page (both print and web based), including image relationships and typographic and compositional issues.

Visual elements, as established by your brand, will be prominent in your cover design and continue to a lesser degree into the interior layout of the book. This is done so that the exterior and interior parts don't seem like separate entities, but are visually related, creating a cohesive experience. Such visual elements could simply be the consistency of a typeface and color that carries over from the cover to the interior pages.

Book Construction

The next step in our process is to construct the actual book. We will guide you through a step-by-step process for creating the structure and form of your portfolio book. The form is, of course, driven by the functions of the book that we have already discussed. Thus, we will show you how to construct a book that can be customized so that it is unique to you, and can easily be updated. In addition, the craftsmanship of your portfolio book is very important as part of your professional presentation. Several tricks and tips will help ensure that you create a well-crafted, quality book presentation.

The Online Presence

Critical to the career of any design professional is an online presence. Having established a brand statement and related design concept for your portfolio book, you now need to transform and extend this to your online presence. Consistency of design and visual statement is key. There are numerous decisions to be made about the function and purpose of your web presence, as well as challenges in bringing your visual identity and work into an online form. The “Web Design” section in Step 6 will help you sort through the key issues as well as understand the key design concerns when developing your portfolio for the web.

Marketing

Your portfolio will only serve you if it is seen. You need to develop marketing materials as well as other ancillary materials to support your book and website. As always, continuity with the rest of your portfolio package is a must. There are, however, many routes to take with mailers, electronic mailings, leave-behind fliers, and business cards. In this part of the book, we walk through the considerations and possibilities of marketing, marketing materials, and resumes, as well as contacts and interviews.

Our Process

For those of you who encounter this book having already started this process in some form, the chapters are designed to allow you to enter the process at any point, to review, revise, and redesign if necessary. For those of you who are just starting this process, it is important to follow each step in the order that we have outlined, as each step informs the next. Since the creative industries are constantly evolving, you will most likely need to update your portfolio package several times throughout your professional career. You may even want to modify or change your brand statement at some point. Politicians and pop stars remodel their images all the time in order to stay current with the times and sway popular opinion. As long as the work in your portfolio reflects your assertions about yourself and your work, you can do the same. Once you have completed the process at least once, it will be easy to go back at any time and rework your portfolio.

Note: Appendices at the back of this book provide resources and information on all topics and materials addressed in the text. These can also be found online at <http://www.noplasticsleeves.com>. Visit the website regularly for updates, new resources, and to submit your own portfolio or promotional work for a chance to be featured.