

The Media Center: Yes! You should create a professional portfolio

Mary Alice Anderson
Winona Area Public Schools
Winona, Minnesota

Note: The final version of this article was published in *Multimedia & Internet@ Schools*, July, August 2005.

Media specialists enrolled in the online graduate course I teach are required to create electronic portfolios. They begin the process with uncertainty and feeling overwhelmed. They finish the process proud of their portfolios and of their accomplishments as media specialists. Even without the requirement of a class project an electronic portfolio is a worthwhile pursuit.

What is a portfolio?

A portfolio is a collection of artifacts documenting your professional your professional work. It demonstrates your accomplishments, contributions, and professional growth. A portfolio is more than a resume; it contains representative samples of documents you have written, multimedia presentations you have created, and projects you have managed. A portfolio is dynamic. Today's portfolios are typically electronic, but they still may be a collection of print documents.

Why create a portfolio?

Portfolios represent you at your best and are tools for professional growth. The creation process is an opportunity to stretch your technology skills, writing skills, and creativity. The creation process is one of substantial personal and professional self-reflection. It affords an opportunity for you to look at what you do holistically and perhaps more objectively. Cyndi Bowman, a Kansas media specialist, wrote "Creating the portfolio made me think about what I do that is significant to the life of the library in my school. While I need to back away and look at the big picture to see how the library fits in to the fabric of the school. The portfolio forces me to put things together as a whole."

A portfolio is an opportunity to showcase your educational beliefs, works in progress, your role as a media specialist, and your considerable accomplishments. The collection also serves as a type of resume that can be used if you are applying for a leadership position within your district or if you are applying for another job.

By going through the electronic portfolio process yourself, you will be well prepared to assist others such as pre-service teachers who are often required to complete a portfolio as a graduation requirement or practicing teachers working on additional requirements for relicensure. Sherri Wolf from Kaukauna Wisconsin wrote, "I wanted to be prepared to help new teachers create a portfolio, a requirement of the new teaching licensing laws in Wisconsin." You will also acquire skills and understanding that can be applied with your K-12 students who are sometimes asked to create portfolios.

Finally, developing a portfolio aligns with "Productivity And Professional Practice" defined in NETS for Teachers. Standard V encourages teachers to "use technology to enhance their productivity and professional practice." < National Educational Technology Standards for Teachers, International Society for Technology in Education, http://cnets.iste.org/teachers/t_stands.html >.

Portfolios are practical.

- A portfolio will help you keep documents you are proud organized in one place and ready for future situations when you may be asked to show what you have accomplished and know.
- Portfolios are easy to update and they are dynamic. They can be changed as you and your media program evolve. Bonnie Bjorkman, **a district media director from Illinois** commented, "This mini-portfolio was designed to follow the structure of this course while allowing some flexibility to input my administrative responsibilities. I look forward to keeping this portfolio as a dynamic document that can showcase the accomplishments and efforts of the district library media programs and staff." Anne Oelke was excited about updating the portfolio she created in 2004 with the presentation she gave at the Wisconsin media conference.

- A portfolio increases your visibility and will quite likely impress those who view it, especially if it is web based. **Wisconsin media specialist** Sherri Zahasky linked her course portfolio on her media center's web page. She shared it with the department and it was mentioned in the department minutes. What a great way for a media specialist to showcase their accomplishments!
- Portfolios force you to do things you just haven't gotten around to doing. Many students said the creation and compilation process forced them to clean up documents, develop a vision, or plan things more thoroughly than they would have otherwise. Many used the portfolio as an "excuse" for finally creating a school board or PTA presentation or as a catalyst to develop outreach proposals for working with their local historical societies or civic groups.
- Creating a portfolio keeps you on your technology toes. One student wrote, "I liked creating the portfolio. It has made me learn new web page creation strategies" and how to create PDF documents.

What should I put in my portfolio?

The students in the online class are required to include specific artifacts and encouraged to create documents they can actually use.

- An introduction to the portfolio. What will the viewer learn by viewing it?
- An introduction to you. What makes you unique?
- A plan for media program advocacy outreach to non-library media groups
- An overview of personal technology skills and technology leadership/management skills
- An overview of the media specialists role in technology staff development of a specific Staff Development activity
- A document that celebrates and documents collaboration with classroom teachers
- A reflection of what the student learned in the course and by creating the portfolio

The possibilities of additional items to include are only limited by your imagination, creativity, and job responsibilities.

- Policies and procedures you've developed
- Photos of students, staff, and the community utilizing the media center (Be sure to check for permission!). Show that that your media center is a lively place!!!
- Handouts for students and staff
- Links to your media center and school web sites
- Presentations you've given, professional articles you've written
- Sample curriculum including information/technology literacy lessons you've taught and sample student work that shows the influence of the media program on student learning
- Projects you've contributed to or collaborated with others about
- Media program newsletters
- Other artifacts that will showcase the strengths of your program
- Personal information to show you have a real life!

What technology should I use?

Easy to use and readily accessible tools are web authoring software, Hyperstudio or Inspiration documents or digital movies. All of the Microsoft Office components work well and can be hyperlinked to each other.

A web page is ideal. It is the most easily accessible to your portfolio viewing audience and is easily updated. Keeping as much of your content in html format will make it more accessible to a wider audience. Documents or multimedia files that do not lend themselves to html can be uploaded in a document library. Since you do not always know what applications your viewing audience uses it's a good idea to convert many files to PDF or save them out in more than one format. Many media specialists serve as district, building, or media program webmasters and have the tools and access at their disposal. Before you dive in with a web page make sure you are following your own district's guidelines about acceptable content and use of the district web site for your own portfolio.

If policies or technical restrictions make it difficult for you to use your school's web site, investigate other options. One option is Apple's Homepage to create a portfolio using the software and templates that are part of the Macintosh I-Life suite. Homepage can also be used with Windows XP. Home page is inexpensive and a 30-day free trial is available.

< <http://homepage.apple.com> >

Do a Google search for portfolio creation tools; you will find there are many resources available.

The traditional 3-ring binder portfolio is still worthwhile. I am impressed by university students who take the time to organize samples of their written documents in a binder. The collection shows you care and are proud of your work mention some sample documents that students created. Word-processed documents that contain pizzazz and special features make a better impression than a plain vanilla document.

A professional, adult appearance for a paper or electronic portfolio is a must and as important as the content. Consistency in fonts, colors, styles, and formats is more important than bells and whistles. Colors and graphics should complement, not clash. The portfolio must be free of spelling and typing and errors and avoid too much jargon unless you know your only audience is other media specialists. Active verbs and personal examples make it more interesting to read. If it's electronic, make sure all the links work.

The portfolio creation process is worthwhile. It forces you to think about professional strengths and weaknesses. Sally Cochran, a New York media specialist wrote an honest reflection:

□□□□□'Assembling this portfolio has been a wonderful (and frustrating!) learning experience.□The process of assembling and introducing all the components has caused me to do more thinking about other project ideas.□It has also given me a pat on the back.□I have done some good work at Greeley of which I can be very proud! It has been a meta-cognitive experience and I am now mulling over issues of how we teach and learn technology. Regina Luersen, Sally's colleague, also found the project beneficial.

“Designing this portfolio has given me practice using my technology skills and has also helped me focus my efforts for the coming summer and next fall.□I've been a library media specialist for 20 years and it's clear to me that there's enough I still want to do to keep me busy and out of trouble for the next 20 as well!”

Bowman began the process wondering why she would create a portfolio since it's not required in Kansas and she wasn't looking for a job. She concluded that it had been worthwhile as it forced her to think more about her role in the school, showcase her program and “think more outside the box. For instance, I need to do more advocacy within the community, not just with school personnel. As I worked through the details of an advocacy plan, it generated more ideas. Creating a portfolio was a great tool for self-reflection. As I thought about different lessons, booktalks, web pages, staff development plans and brochures I've worked on in the last several years I could see the growth in my own professional persona as well as the growth in our library program.”

More comments about the process selected samples from University of Wisconsin-Stout online students can be found @ <http://www.uwstout.edu/soe/profdev/eportfolios.shtml> Take a look!

This summer is a good time to begin creating your portfolio. Develop an overall plan. Gather supporting documents, and begin. By next June you will have showcase of your work that you can proudly share

Mary Alice Anderson is a frequent contributor to professional journals and available as a conference and workshop presenter. In addition to working for Winona Area Public Schools, she is an online adjunct instructor with the Online Professional Development for Educators program in the School of Education at University of Wisconsin—Stout. < <http://www.uwstout.edu/soe/profdev/issues/> > Communications to the author may be addressed to Mary Alice Anderson, maryalicea@mac.com