

How To Build Up Your Samples for your Portfolio Without

Professional Experience

By Rachel Goldstein

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What should you do if you have no professional examples to place in your portfolio? If you are in a situation where you don't have any professional samples to place into your portfolio, then you obviously have a lot of work to do. You might be able to get away with placing classroom projects into your "book", but you would have a much better chance with "real world" samples. Below, please find suggestions on building your sample-base.

There are several ways that you can build up your portfolio:

****First Time Give Away** - Offer your services for free first-time orders. Seek out small business owners and offer your services for free. Explain that if they like your services the next consultation will come with a fee. If the client likes your work, you might have found yourself steady work or better yet, he might refer people to you. Remember to always finish a project by asking the client if they know of any potential clients that you could contact.

****Nonprofit Organizations** - Volunteer your services for free to local community organizations where you live. This is a great way to build up your portfolio. Look in your phone book for religious, educational, social, and political organizations. Most nonprofit organizations would be thrilled to get something for free considering their budget is probably pretty tight. Try to negotiate into the deal that as payment you would like to have your business name and phone number on the finished piece (and if you have a website url, this should be printed on the finished product too). This is very fair. This might be a great way to drum up business and get a great sample for your portfolio at the same time.

For example, if you offer your design services to a church. There are probably a dozen small business owners in the congregation. Maybe one or two will take notice and ask about you.

****Friends and Family Members** - Who better to help you than people that you love and trust? On a sheet of paper, write down all of your friends and adult family members. Do any of them own a business? Do any of them control the hiring process with the company that they work for? Volunteer your skills out to your friend or family member. Make sure not to get yourself into a situation where this friend expects you always to work for free. Explain up front that this is for free only with the first

project. Again, try to negotiate that your business name, phone number, and website url are printed somewhere on the finished product. If your friends and family members don't have any business for you, ask them if they know of anyone who could use your services.

****Hire Yourself First** - Surely your own business could use your services so hire yourself. If you are a designer, you can create promotional materials for your business such as business cards, promotional brochures, letterhead, etc. If you are a writer, maybe you can write up promotional literature for your business. Of course, I don't know what your profession is, but try to find a way to put yourself to work.

****Dummy Samples / Mockups**- As a last resort, you can create fictitious examples of your work. This could work for all professionals, but I am more familiar with this in the design industry. Create dummy brochures, newsletters, logos, and other pieces to demonstrate your range of skills. If you can show a potential client with mockups that you have the talent that they are looking for, then go for it. (For Designers) Even though this seems such a waste of your time, you can use these documents as templates for real projects that you will have in the future.

****Personal Things** - (For Designers / Illustrators) for special occasions you can design your own cards. If you have a yard sale, you can design the poster. Even if a neighbor is having a yard sale or a party, etc. ... why not ask them if you can design the cards or posters that go along with the occasion.

****Web Search** - Do a search on the web for websites that you feel could use your service. Look for bad design layouts. If you consider yourself a web designer offer to redesign the website for free. If you are a graphic designer, offer to design this company's brochure or flyers. If you are a web marketer, look for nice sites that are hard to find in the search engines. Look for bad copy if you are a copywriter. Don't offer your free services out to everyone until you get a "yes" or "no" response; otherwise you might get ten "yes" answers.

****Write Articles** - Write articles about your expertise and submit them to heavily trafficked web sites. Make sure that you are referenced in these articles. Something like this works best:

John Smith
Fake Company
Expert Web Designer
<http://www.fake-company.com/>
fake-company@server.com

Some web sites won't let you have all of this information written as a signature on the article, but they will let you have a summarized version. If not, at least insist on your name and website address being added to the article.

****Become an Expert** - There is a web site called All Experts (<http://www.allexperts.com/>) and a lot of similar sites as well. That is a great place to network. This site is a hub where people ask advice of experts. Take advantage of this marketplace where others in your field can ask advice of you. If these people are pleased with your expertise, you might receive future gigs from them.

****Message Boards and Chat Rooms** - Message boards and chat rooms attract individuals in need of advice. Take advantage of this. Just make sure not to blatantly market your services. This might infuriate people and you could get flamed or kicked out among other things. The way to network in this situation is to be as helpful and knowledgeable as you possibly can. If you are in a graphic design message board and someone is baffled about how to use layers in Photoshop ... explain the process. You could maybe mention that you use Photoshop daily when running your design

business. THEN at the bottom of the page use a signature. Find out about signatures below.

****Signatures -** Every email that you send out should contain a signature. A signature is at the end of your emails and should look something like this ...

John Smith
Fake Company
Providing Professional Brochures at a Discount Price! <http://www.fake-company.com/>
fake-company@server.com

You never know who will need your professional services, why risk missing out on a potential client?

****Post Your Resume and Profile -** Yes, posting your profiles or resume on the freelance and full-time job sites is a perfect way to network. We have a listing of freelance sites here. Listing your profile with Allfreelancework.com is where you should begin, of course. :-)

****Reciprocal Link -** If you have a web site, ask for a reciprocal link from others in your profession or similar professions. For example, if you are a graphic designer, ask for reciprocal links from fellow graphic designers, illustrators, photographers, etc. I get more traffic to All Freelance from reciprocal links than I do from search engines.

****Introduce Yourself -** Search and find other professional's websites and email them. Introduce yourself and your services to them. Let them know that you are available for work if they ever need to outsource. Ask questions. How long have you been freelancing? Where do you find clients? What is your specialty? Would they want extra work you have in the future? Etc.

****Place your site in directories and search engines -** It is good to get your name out in searchable directories ... this is much more preferable than to search engines that don't really pick up any good matches. I recommend going to the following web sites to get listed

*<http://www.dmoz.org/>
*<http://www.looksmart.com/>
*<http://www.mamma.com/>
*<http://www.yahoo.com/>
*<http://www.selfpromotion.com/>
*<http://www.overture.com/> (a pay-per-click search engine)
*<http://www.kanoodle.com/> (a pay-per-click search engine)

For a listing of search engines to get listed in go to:

*<http://www.searchiq.com/>
*<http://www.beaucoup.com/>
*<http://www.searchenginewatch.com/>
*<http://www.siteowner.com/dgdefault.cfm>

Next week, our topic is "Putting all of Your Best Samples Together". See you next week.

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