

Job Seekers: Use A Work Portfolio During Job Interviews To Gain The Hiring Manager's Attention

By Lisa Quast, Forbes | July 6, 2015



Client: *"I've been receiving call backs and going to interviews, but I always seem to lose the hiring manager's interest half way through the interview. How can I hold their attention?"*

"Sarah" was in her mid-thirties and had worked as a graphic designer since graduating from college. She had also just finished her master's degree in communications at a prestigious local university. She had the skills, the experience, and the education, so what was her problem? Sarah hadn't created a work portfolio – a collection of examples that she could use to show hiring managers how her projects had benefited previous employers and clients.

Not everyone needs a portfolio of work examples for job interviews, but it can be helpful if you work in a career field where you've created tangible items and/or achieved measurable results that display your skills and expertise. This could include graphic designers, interior designers, communications specialists, marketing managers, project managers, advertising specialists, public relations specialists, social media experts, architects, painters, writers, etc.

After explaining the concept of a portfolio and providing a few examples, Sarah chose to create a simple website to showcase her work. One section of the website provided a brief background about Sarah, another included her contact information, and the other sections featured examples of client work, such as: logos, business cards, posters, banners, ads, sales promotions, web graphics, branding identities, monthly newsletter graphics, and so on.

For each example, Sarah included a brief paragraph about the client's needs and a paragraph explaining the solution she provided. After creating the website, Sarah updated her resume and LinkedIn profile, adding the URL so prospective employers could view her online portfolio. She also began including the URL in her customized cover letters and adding a "teaser" page that showed the best eight items she'd created. Then Sarah printed out a selection of the projects (in full color) and put them into clear protective covers that she clipped into a three-ring binder to take with her to job interviews.

In preparation for interviews, I helped Sarah practice explaining examples by briefly sharing the customers' needs and how the solutions she created benefitted them. This gave Sarah the boost of confidence she needed, and she never lost the attention of a hiring manager again. She actually ended up receiving three different job offers – a nice problem to have!

To benefit from a portfolio, you don't need to work in a job that is typically considered "creative" like Sarah's. You could pull together a portfolio with accomplishments and accolades to help you stand out from other job candidates. Include certifications earned, awards won, and positive letters from customers/clients or previous managers. Put all of these into individual, clear protective covers, clip them into a three-ring binder and bring it with you to job interviews.

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