

Can an Executive Portfolio Differentiate You?

BY MARJI MCCLURE, EXECUNET CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

In today's ultra-competitive job market, executives are constantly wondering what they can do to separate themselves from the competition and become a hiring organization's top choice.

For years, individuals seeking jobs in creative fields toted a portfolio of their work, from artwork to newspaper clippings, to showcase their skills for potential employers. These days, the idea of creating and presenting a portfolio of prior accomplishments and current capabilities is gaining traction in non-creative fields. "Bringing in a portfolio makes it immediate and real for the person making the

ANATOMY OF A PORTFOLIO

Depending on an executive's career experience and accomplishments, the exact contents of a portfolio can differ. However, most executives should have the following list of materials prepared, says Jan Melnik, president of Absolute Advantage, a career management and résumé writing firm:

- Precision-focused challenge/action/result-rich two-page résumé
- Project or leadership addendum (two pages in length, maximum)
- In-depth briefs created for significant success stories
- Networking cover letter
- Recruiter letter of introduction
- One sheet of annotated references
- Full-page bio
- Very brief bio
- One page executive résumé (that provides succinct glimpse of qualifications)
- Separate mini profile (of publications, presentations, speeches, etc.)
- A 90- or 180-day business plan (for presentation after the first or second interview)

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EXECUNET

295 Westport Avenue

Norwalk, CT 06851

(800) 637-3126 or (203) 750-1030

info@execunet.com

www.execunet.com

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hiring decision,” says Paula Weiner, president of New York-based executive search firm Weiner & Associates Inc.

WHAT'S IN A PORTFOLIO?

Essentially, a portfolio is an extension of the traditional résumé, which experts agree is still a necessary component of job search materials. The materials typically included in a portfolio range from the résumé, press releases and letters of recommendation to PowerPoint presentations, copies of speeches and video presentations.

Through the portfolio, executives communicate the results they generated for previous employers (in terms of revenue, profit and size of the business) and how their performance compares to other competitors in the industry, says Weiner. “I’ve seen people who have a one-page résumé that provides the names of companies, titles, dates of employment and then they’ll have additional pages that include vignettes of achievements,” Weiner explains.

“Regardless of what the portfolio contains, everything should clearly show in dollars and cents or in some other production measurement (key management indices) what the results were,” says Brendan Cunningham, president of New York-based Excelleron Business Consulting LLC.

Brian Walker, president of New York-based Excelleron Business Consulting LLC, notes that a PowerPoint presentation isn’t a valuable addition to a portfolio unless it conveys something of interest to a potential employer. “Show me a presentation on how you plan to carry out the job in the next 30, 60 and 90 days, and to me, it is worthwhile,” says Walker, president and managing director of executive search firm The Wise Group. Video is likely going to become an increasingly valuable addition to executive portfolios going forward, notes Weiner, as streaming capabilities online continue to improve and companies post videos of executive presentations on their websites. If an executive is a strong public speaker, could provide yet another compelling reason for an employer to consider hiring him or her. “I wouldn’t say it is necessary, but it does give the employer a sense of your image,” says Walker.

Creating their own personal websites on which they display the contents of their portfolios is also becoming a strong option for executives. These sites, which can include résumé, articles and related materials are also referred to as “webfolios.” Fifteen percent of ExecuNet surveyed executives said they maintain such a site.

Just as résumés must be tailored to fit a particular industry, company and position, the portfolio must be created in the same way. “You can show that you’ve done research and know what a company is going through,” says Weiner. “You can put together a one- or two-page document of how your skills can help. The more specific you can be about demonstrating your skills and how they apply to [an organization’s] opportunities and challenges, the more powerful the meeting.”

“If you are pursuing several potential, but divergent employers — different products or industries — tailor your presentation,” says Walker. “One size does not fit all. Put their company name and logo on it. Address it to the person you want to address. You’re selling here, and any personality you can filter into the presentation will not be lost.”

Cunningham cautions against being redundant when highlighting your accomplishments across the slate of materials contained in an executive portfolio. The impact of your achievements may be diminished if they are mentioned too often throughout the portfolio, he notes. “The purpose is to create a believable impact,” says Cunningham. “You need to develop a point of differentiation so blatantly obvious between yourself and the competition so that the decision-maker is forced to say, ‘Wow, this candidate is a moneymaker, and I can’t afford not to hire this person.’”

Weiner adds that when preparing the contents of the portfolio, do not include proprietary information owned by their current or previous employer. “Never betray a confidence as you’re putting these documents together. If the industry custom is not to discuss details, don’t do it,” says Weiner. “The long-term damage isn’t worth it.”

WHEN TO OPEN YOUR PORTFOLIO

The last thing an executive should do is inundate a potential employer with too much information from his or her portfolio. Jan Melnik, president of Absolute Advantage, a career management and résumé writing firm, suggests sharing the majority of the contents with a recruiter at the beginning of the relationship. She also recommends a more conservative approach when communicating with hiring managers. “The executive should carefully select those components that will bring the most value at the most opportune time, but be cautious of ‘overkill,’” she says. ■

This article is an excerpt from the extended ExecuNet article “Can an Executive Portfolio Differentiate You?” If you’d like to access the full article, [Upgrade Your Membership Now](#).