

Episode - DU016 - Portfolios

Hosts - Chris Mears and Carla Lindarte

00:17 Chris: Hello and welcome to Design Untangled with me, Chris Mears and Carla Lindarte.

00:22 Carla: Hello. Finally we made it work again.

00:26 Chris: Yup. Dialing in from Google HQ.

00:29 Carla: Yeah. Secretly hiding in the corner and recording this. So it was great.

00:35 Chris: Yeah, that is a good use of company time. So what are we talking about?

00:42 Carla: We're talking about portfolios I think is one of the favorites of topics in the slack channel, isn't it?

00:49 Chris: Yeah, it is an absolutely classic topic and we've touched on it about 50 times in different episodes, so I think it is time it got its own one. We can put it to bed and never mention it again.

01:01 Carla: Oh, maybe this is just going to open more questions for people so do not worry, you can keep asking questions. Do not be mean Chris.

01:08 Chris: All right. I think it is worth caveating this whole episode with there is no guaranteed portfolio format or way of presenting your work that is going to guarantee you at job. Seems like an obvious thing to say. But there are people peddling that kind of advice and we can give you tips based on our own experience as both people hiring for UX people and being hired as well. That is obviously no guarantee that what we use in our approaches always going to be applicable. But we'll do our best to pass down our top tips and hopefully it will help you get your UX portfolio in shape.

01:53 Carla: That is absolutely right. I mean also got like related to that comment, I think that it also depends on the kind of UX or the kind of person or professional you are. You couldn't just have one form or another works for everyone because you could be, for example, a more UX, UI person who kind of like is just one person, the spot of, one team at one person's team delivering something. Or you could be a UX specialists in a team, or you could be more specialized in research, or you could be a hybrid, which, I used to be more like a hybrid, with different types of skill sets. So there is no one formula, that works for every for everyone. Isn't that so?

02:41 Chris: Absolutely. And everyone's going to have different levels of experience as well, which is something that can affect it. Let us get into it. So the first question I think to ask is do you even need a UX portfolio? And the answer is yes, yes, in my opinion. There is two reasons for that. The first is because in order to get a job, you have to apply for a job. And in order to apply for a job, you usually have to go through a recruiter and they are going to be using your portfolio along with your CV/Resume.

If you are in the States to filter out candidates and as a kind of first pass for their client, they are working for. So it is very important that your portfolio demonstrate in a nutshell what you are about and clearly shows some examples of work and projects and stuff that you've been doing on so that you get past that first or gatekeeper phase of the recruiter and in front of the actual end client that you are going for the job for.

03:45 Carla: Exactly. I mean not being a part of the, the team who used to select lots of UX designers, even as a contractor or permanent, I will find it very suspicious when UX designer or a designer of a role, does not have a portfolio. I just, first of all, maybe that means that they haven't been thorough enough to actually start capturing the key projects and key deliverables or key winnings, across their career or maybe even they do not have the experience, they haven't like made the effort to actually create a portfolio which, it is possible as well to do it with that experience. So I have always found it really suspicious when, I wouldn't even consider, someone applying for a job if they didn't have portfolio.

04:32 Chris: Yeah, I would agree. You are just not even going to look at him because you've got, the job application processes, floor does, it maybe does involve you kind of putting some sort of show of your work and yourself in front of someone before you speak to them face to face. Usually it is how you get that initial impression of a person and then your portfolio is a key way of showing that to your potential employer. So if you do not have one you should get on with making one and maybe it is worth leading into how you do that is one of the questions we had on the Slack. Which is how you do that, if you haven't got any UX experience currently.

05:15 Carla: Well it is a tricky one but it is not impossible to do it. I think like any other piece of communication that you do, whether it is a portfolio or CV or a deck or whatever. You need to think about your audience and you need to think about the key messages that you want to convey in that piece of communication. So for someone who does not have the experience or at least a long experience doing UX, well you need to do is to pull out any education or any practical, projects or some projects that you've done. If you did a course or something that highlight your skill sets or at least the things that you want to communicate about yourself and just put them in the portfolio. Even if you have previous experience as related field that you think are ways to convey your skill sets that could have played a couple to UX, you can also do that.

06:15 Carla: I remember that met this guy was who used to be, I think it was a chef or something. And then he actually talked about his creativity and his portfolio and he talked about how he is, he used to design, his dishes and stuff like that and, then trying to highlight his previous experience and how these skills could be transferred to UX. So there is always a way to link that. What do you need to do is to sit down before you actually start putting anything together. Just trying to, go back to your past, even if just educational or if you have previous experience and try to look at what are the key skill sets that people are looking for, for the role that you applying for and see if there is anything relevant that you can highlighting for portfolio.

07:04 Chris: Yeah, definitely in stuff like team-working as well as obviously a big plus. So if you can highlight anything like that, that is always a good thing. But yeah, I think it is just about showing that you can work in a way where you solve problems, that might not be design problems depending on what you are doing, but it is critically thinking about stuff you are doing, coming up with solutions, demonstrating how you arrived at those solutions, if that was free collaboration or experimentation, and validating those solutions and you can find power levels for not so a process in any industry or profession or course really. I think,

07:47 Carla: Yeah, I have also think, I think I mentioned this before, but you can actually, say, okay, maybe take a couple of brands or couple of products or apps, or something, and say how you would, we would have approached to redesigned certain elements of it. I think now more and more you kind of go for an interview for, the likes of Facebook or Google, they would like you to do a lot of like app critic or website critique. So maybe that is a very good way of showing even, even though you haven't had experience before, you've gone and they basically looked at Citymapper for example, and identified, from a UX perspective, what are the key pain points that you see and you can actually show the process that you follow to actually, redesign or at least improve that particular product. And that is a good way of showing how you think about things and, showing, that you actually understand UX. and obviously visual design as well, if you applied for visual design job.

08:54 Chris: Yeah. And if the client has an Apple website themselves, obviously that is a good opportunity to kind of show how you might approach thinking about the products as well. Use that as an actual case study. Obviously that is going to get a bit time expensive. If you are applying to millions of jobs, you can do that for everything. If you are targeting one or two places, it can be valuable to actually do that exercise on their own things. So you can go into the interview saying, I know this is your product, these, a few of the things I think may be issues and this is how I would go about tackling them.

09:33 Carla: Yeah, exactly. You could also interview, run a survey for example, with some people inside, gather some research and people, this is people's perceptions about your website or rap and so you can show that, the user centricity of how you approach, design from a user perspective, et cetera. So you could apply the whole, like city process to either a generic critique of an app, or website, or doing with that is relevant for the person, for their company you are applying for.

10:09 Chris: Now how about portfolio format? We had some questions around that. So pdf versus website. Yeah, those are the two that I can think of actually. I guess for me it depends probably, your skillset. Again, what kind of job you are going for. If you've got the skills to do it in a website format, that is fine. If you do not pdf works equally as well to be honest in most situations. And it gives you something to talk to in the interview. I guess the main thing to mention is if you are doing it as a public facing website, then be careful about what you are actually putting on there. You know, everywhere has got NDAs and stuff you shouldn't be showing. Not to say that you should be picking those in PDFs that you are showing to people either. But just be wary in general, I guess about what you are paying on your portfolio and whether you are actually allowed to do it.

11:03 Carla: Exactly. That is a good point. I mean in my mind it all comes back to how much experience you have got and, and the type of, designer that you, are selling yourself at. If you go for a more UX, UX, UI role, which you need to demonstrate more your visual design. If you do that. Your visual design expertise. I will go with a website and obviously with animations and motion and if that is where you experience (a) so that is where you want to go. If you go more for our UX strategy or research, I would actually just make it, more around the process that you follow. So some pictures about like workshops that you've facilitated or pictures of user testing sessions. I tried to, to life your experience and as I said before, I know the podcasts to be very clear of your role.

12:00 Carla: I actually would, in an ideal world, and I do not know if you agree with this, Chris, I think you should have both. I think you should, you should have a website that basically is kind of a brochure of who you are, very simply, very high level and you could actually perhaps, and I have found that on my website, the brands that you work with, this shows a little bit of your experience but no, it does not go too deep into why you've actually done and then a pdf could contain or , I have actually had people who have presented a PowerPoint or Keynote with more details about one or two projects that they want to highlight at the back of the actual website. So, I guess having to be ideal, but, as I said before, it all depends of the type of designer you are, the amount of experience you've got and the type of role that you are applying for.

12:58 Chris: Yeah, I think that is a good shout on the website, particularly because if you do get past that initial screening and get to the point where your portfolio is being put in front of the client, it is highly likely they are going to be doing a bit of Googling and LinkedIn stalking or whatever. So if you've got a web presence that allows them to, get a better idea of who you are and what you've been up to in a hopefully digestible format, that is only going to add to your allure as a candidate. And obviously wearing lots of scarves and lots of pictures in your face is a big plus. Definitely wear scarves on your portfolio website. It is a guaranteed success.

13:42 Carla: Yeah. You'd be very, you'd be very successful. I think there was someone who asks about what happens where, you worked on a project for a very, very long time or a couple of projects and a lot of your deliverables, either they either never go live because the client is slow or whatever. Or are there more like a process you actually worked on, say as a member of the team and facilitated a lot of the design thinking sessions or design thinking workshops? And so I think even though you are not showing a more tangible output as a website, or an app, or this is experience I prototyped, I think there is value in showing the process. And as I mentioned before, you could have a website that talks about and very high level your skill sets and where you are good at and then you could have a pdf that shows the process that you follow.

14:45 Carla: So just make it more real and specify your role in that particular project. I think it is a lot of people, I include myself, I have worked in practice for ages and never deliver anything tangible. Especially when you talk about UX design and service design, you show why you sell to clients. It is more the process rather than the actual output. So do not be afraid of showing that process. And even if you

have to anonymize the client, you can always talk about the process that you follow and your role within that.

15:26 Chris: Yeah, I mean to be honest, deliverable is a bloody boring to look on a portfolio, because you've got no idea the process that the person went through to get to that end deliverable sites. Okay, you can do wire frame, but why is that? Why frame like it is, why did you put that there? et cetera. I mean it makes the portfolio look a bit UXC if you've got a wire frame or do you use a journey in there or something. But it is a lot more interesting, at least when I have been hiring people is just how they arrived at that end deliverable. So it is fine type. There is a thing to talk around, but it is the process that leads to that ends deliverable. That is the interesting bit.

16:10 Carla: Exactly. It is more like the problem statement and you know the process that you follow for that and how you solve the problem. More interesting than showing a massive service design fruit brain. So, I use a journey that is really hard to read anyway, I think is more more about the process that you follow and the role that you play within that.

16:29 Chris: To be honest, I do not think I have got any deliverables at my portfolio at all. Mainly just because I do not do anything like that. It is just pictures of workshops and few post it notes here and **[inaudible 00:16:43]** classic, long songs they actually relate to something. Yeah, so just about what was the problem is trying to solve, what process did I go through to get to it, who did I collaborate with to get to that end result? And if there is an end result then great. If not, does not really matter too much as long as you went for a kind of rigorous process and it is worth identifying what your constraints were. Maybe not in the portfolio but in the discussion with the client when you are presenting the portfolio. Because understanding how people work around constraints, which there always are and projects. That is very interesting to show how flexible you are as a UX designer as well.

17:27 Carla: Yeah, exactly. So like even though I just said you do not have an outcome, tangible output, do you always, and I'm sure that everyone's going through this when they were working on a project that they've made some impact, right? That impact could be, the way the organisation change in the way they are tackling design challenges or they were new to design thinking and you managed to introduce the concept into the business. Or they didn't know about how, the value of prototyping and I showed the value prototyping. So even if it is not a tangible output, there is always an impact that you can highlight in any case that you have. What else? I mean, I see questions like how many pages do we recommend the portfolio you should have?

18:18 Carla: Look, I think it is not by the number of pages I think is more whether or not any ideally if you are going to have a pdf or a website you should count. If you have a experience that you had to pick out, the more end to end projects you can find in your experience so far. What I mean with end to end is like I started then defining the problem and then I proposed this solution, then we went through the process and then this is an outcome. I mean ideally pick out those ones over anything else because that is what it is going to show your end to end thinking, and that is a way for you to prioritize where you put in your portfolio. Then if you have a number of them that you've got lots of experience.

19:12 Carla: I have done that many times, highlight in my mind that more like interesting ones or the best brands you work with as well, like the more known brands. And so just tried to use different criteria as you prioritize what you have. But I wouldn't put lots of things in it because they would just get bored and people just normally look at your life and I can see it on the data on my website when I was looking for jobs. Majority of the people go to your home screen, then they click on my work and then just have a look at that and that saves. Then if you build a massive website with lots of sections and lots of content, no one is going to look at it. So just tried to prioritize and just find different criteria to prioritize your projects.

19:58 Chris: I guess another tip I would have as well is to write the case study while you are doing the project as well because it is very easy to forget what you've done. If you've done two years on this project, you are now looking for a new job, you are not going to remember everything you did for the last two years. So actually write the case study as you are going along. And then just keep those in a back cloak and swap them in and out is something I do as well. So if I'm going for like an econ role, I will potentially bring in a couple of the eCom case studies that I have done. Just have like a big backlog of them that you can slot in and out. I usually do like two main ones and then like a third one which never really gets talked about or looked at in the portfolio, but it is there you want to bring out a specific thing that is maybe not shown in the other two. There is no ideal number of pages or anything. One thing to bear in mind is file size probably I guess would be the only impact on that if you are sending stuff over email. But it is really about telling a good story concisely, which is essentially the whole job anyway.

21:11 Carla: Exactly. No, ideal. number of pages. Just make it simple and make it easy to digest. Not so much copy. I have seen portfolios that are extremely long and a little bit boring. Just make it succinct. I mean it does take time and if that is something that people need to realize, I have a good portfolio. You have to invest your time in it. And as you said, it is his idea that you stopped by and when you actually on the project, take pictures, pictures off what you are doing, pictures of you in action, which I know it sounds a bit, salesy, but you should sell yourself. You wrote a product and you have to think about yourself as a product. So if you are running a workshops, get your colleagues, take pictures of you actually running the workshops and stuff like that so you can have ways of demonstrating your role. Then if you work in your portfolio is something that never stops in my opinion. If you want to and return, you could actually spend a little time doing it and if you want a good one, you should invest on it. It is not just like copying and pasting all your deliverables into one pdf and show it to kind. You have to really think about it as a piece of collateral that is selling your skill sets and your capabilities. Are you shooting [inaudible 00:22:34]?

22:34 Chris: And it should be operate as a standalone document. So it shouldn't necessarily need you there to explain everything in there. Someone should just be able to get it cold and understand what's going on. I think it is worth thinking about the ways different audiences will use it as well. So the initial worker, like recruiter person, they are going to be spending 30 seconds flicking through it, checking that you've got the kind of rights skills or you've used the right software or whatever just to get you free that first pass. And then the client, if you are lucky, may spend a few more minutes looking at it a bit more in

depth reading for it. Um, so bear in mind you've got those two tiers of information you need to cater for.

23:20 Carla: What else did we have? Videos gave this as videos when in front of product interaction. As I said before, I mean if you are selling yourselves the interaction designer and a visual designer with UX skill sets. So that is why it is worth sitting down and writing down specifically what kind of designer want to be and what kind of experience I have to show. Then you can perhaps out of those little animations and things like that into your portfolio. I think that is key. Showcase whatever you are proud of and also is going to get you the job, you are applying for. That is do not show everything or anything. Just be very, very strategic about the content that you put in it.

24:10 Chris: Client logos as a useful one to have. Yeah. Just as a one pager. It just shows that it gives you quite a good visual overview and sense of what kind of projects you've probably worked on just from the client logo itself. So if you've got loads of e-comm logos, you are going to get an idea of what that UX designer is about generally. Whereas if you've got lots of government ones and that gives you a certain other impression.

24:36 Carla: Yeah. I think, I think that is it for now. We've covered majority of the questions. I do not know unless you want to add something else.

24:49 Chris: No, I do not think so. It is quite light to never talk with them again, to be honest. It is one of the most common questions we get on the UX Mentor Me Slack Channel. So that is not meant to discourage anyone asking about. And of course you can, as I said at the beginning, there is tips we can give you based on our own experience. There is no one size fits all. Essentially it is as being able to communicate what you are about, what you've done and how you've applied design thinking to whatever that is. Um, and it needs to meet the needs of the various different target audiences it is going to be going to. So it is very similar to designing a website or an app or anything else. The only difference is that you are the product that you are designing.

25:37 Carla: Yeah. So that is exactly, right, Chris. I think you have to think about yourself as a product or service as you would do as if you are a UX designer and you have to think about your audience. So your customers who are going, who are the people who are going to buy your product and you need to prioritize, what are the key messages that you want to communicate about this product? And make it as simple as possible and use, principles of UX, that progressive disclosure. Just show what's important first. And then as user actually drill down into more information, if they require more information and you have to be ready for that. Make it simple and just apply the same principles of UX design to whatever you do it.

26:20 Chris: Yep. Okay. Cool. Is it plug time?

26:23 Carla: Yeah, you do it because I can't be bothered to do it.

26:28 Chris: Yeah. I'm not really feeling the energy, but I will do it nonetheless. So if you are wondering what the Slack channel we keep talking about is, then it is at UXMentor.Me, which is our kind of UX Slack. We've got over 600 people there now, as of last check. And, we tried to answer questions you may have about UX. We got people organizing meetups, we have each other on there and stuff. So if you are new to the field or not new to the field, then head over there and join. You can tweet us @designuntangled or on the web www.designuntangled.co.uk. Individually on Twitter, @Chris_Mears_UX and @CarlaLindarte. And the only other thing I will say as a teaser is we've got a very exciting partnership to announce within the next week or two, which will be done via the UX Mentor Me Slack. So if you want to hear about that and ways that you can potentially get some experience for your UX portfolio, then join up and you'll find out.

27:42 Carla: Oh, that sounds exciting. So just please give us some feedback and please give us some love. Talk to other people about these books. If you find it interesting and you think is really bad, also let us know cause we want to learn.

27:59 Chris: And on that note, I'm going to play the out tray music

28:01 Carla: Okay. Bye. Bye.