

BUILD A GOOD (DOMAIN) NAME.

“Carving out a space for yourself online, somewhere where you can express yourself and share your work, is still one of the best possible investments you can make with your time.”

—Andy Baio

Social networks are great, but they come and go. (Remember Myspace? Friendster? GeoCities?) If you’re really interested in sharing your work and expressing yourself, nothing beats owning your own space online, a place that you control, a place that no one can take away from you, a world headquarters where people can always find you.

More than 10 years ago, I staked my own little Internet claim and bought the domain name austinkleon.com. I was a complete amateur with no skills when I began building my website: It started off bare bones and ugly. Eventually, I figured out how to install a blog, and that changed everything. A blog is the ideal machine for turning flow into stock: One little blog post is nothing on its own, but publish a thousand blog posts over a decade, and it turns into your life’s work. My blog has been my sketchbook, my studio, my gallery, my storefront, and my salon. Absolutely everything good that has hap-

pened in my career can be traced back to my blog. My books, my art shows, my speaking gigs, some of my best friendships—they all exist because I have my own little piece of turf on the Internet.

So, if you get one thing out of this book make it this: Go register a domain name. Buy [www.\[insert your name here\].com](http://www.[insert your name here].com). If your name is common, or you don’t like your name, come up with a pseudonym or an alias, and register that. Then buy some web hosting and build a website. (These things sound technical, but they’re really not—a few Google searches and some books from the library will show you the way.) If you don’t have the time or inclination to build your own site, there’s a small army of web designers ready to help you. Your website doesn’t have to look pretty; it just has to exist.

Don’t think of your website as a self-promotion machine, think of it as a self-invention machine. Online, you can become the person you really want to be. Fill your website with your work and your ideas and the stuff you care about. Over the years, you will be tempted to abandon it for the newest, shiniest social network. Don’t give in. Don’t let it fall into neglect. Think about it in the long term. Stick with it, maintain it, and let it change with you over time.

The beauty of owning your own turf is that you can do whatever you want with it. Your domain name is your domain. You don’t have to make compromises. Build a good domain name, keep it clean, and eventually it will be its own currency. Whether people show up or they don’t, you’re out there, doing your thing, ready whenever they are.

The portfolio

I've already discussed the portfolio in relation to a designer seeking employment in a design studio, but creating a company portfolio to show to potential clients is a different kettle of eels. When a designer shows a portfolio to a prospective employer (usually another designer), they are demonstrating their understanding of the subject of design. When a design studio is showing a portfolio of its work to a prospective client, they are demonstrating their understanding of communication, business and, probably, life itself.

Portfolios are emotive things. Designers are never happy with them. I've known many competent and talented designers who've begun portfolio sessions with an apology: 'I'm just about to redo it,' they say; or, 'Sorry, it's a bit out of date.' It seems to be a designer foible that the portfolio is 'never finished', and never 'representative of current work'. Yet far from being a sign of weakness, this is a good sign: it indicates a restless and necessary desire to improve and develop. When someone tells you their portfolio is great, the only suitable response is to leave the room. The correct relationship between a designer and his or her portfolio is one of constant doubt and questioning.

As designers, objectivity about our work is hard to achieve, and as a consequence, designers are not very good at putting their own portfolios together. I have a rule that I never let designers get involved in the making of a studio portfolio. I am ruthless and dispassionate about what work is included, and how it is presented. I base my decisions on responses and feedback I get from clients, and old-fashioned intuition. This means that many favourite pieces get left out. I show my efforts to the individual designers concerned, but I rarely listen to their views about what is missing.

Now, I have a confession to make: I never once opened up a portfolio in front of a client without feeling a sharp sense of its inadequacy. I suspect most designers – even confident and successful ones – feel this similarly at the moment of testing. You would think that it is a dangerous sensation to experience, as you are about to make an important presentation. It is, yet it is also what carries me through the presentation. It always makes me work harder and forces me to make an adrenalin-charged presentation. Of course, if the presentation goes well, then I look at the portfolio as if it is the finest thing since Leonardo da Vinci's sketchbooks. This warm glow lasts only until the next presentation I'm required to make.

Source: Adrian Shaughnessy dans son livre «How to Be a Graphic Designer Without Losing Your Soul» (2005)