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Title: HOW TO ADVANCE YOUR CAREER AS A WEB DESIGNER.

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As an entry level web designer you will be given tasks the runt of the litter tasks, and you will get paid very little for it. My first job out of school had the title of “web designer,” but that gave the position to much credit. We frequently joked that our job was to “make it pretty.” We took large 75+ page powerpoint presentations that were mostly text heavy, and make them more professional for presentations. We did this from within the shackles of not being able to simplify data, or shorten presentation. I don’t blame the company or coworkers at all, they were hiring kids strait out of school with no IA/IX experience. To compound the issue we worked extremely long hours to clean up and add graphics to these massive slide decks. It was a rough situation for any designer, but being a young designer out of school I was happy to have the opportunity to sling pixels, even if it was in powerpoint. I did all this for about 1/2 of what I am currently making. As I look back I gained SUCH valuable experience at that job. Some of the lessons I learned I am sure could have been gained with out working 100 hours in a week, but I don’t know if they would be seared in as firmly.

As you advance your career as a web developer you will most likely start with some type of production level work where you are paid little, and have even less responsibility or control. As you prove your abilities you have the choice to advance or stick with your current work type. Notice I said “prove your abilities” not “grow your abilities.” A lot of advancing your career is about selling your self, and work you have done.

How to better yourself!

1. **Grow your portfolio**— First sign of an ultra amateur portfolio is limited pieces, that are not used in real life. These pieces are great for grabbing that first job, but won’t get you into a position where you can help users. You will be doing tech/production work under the direction (micromanagement) of someone else. This isn’t always a bad thing, but if this person is instilling bad habits or isn’t encouraging your career in the way you would like it to grow, you need to be respectful, but be pushing yourself. Volunteer and donate your time if possible, there are plenty of non-profits that would love design work.
2. **Prune your portfolio** — After your portfolio is filled with more pieces then someone can consume in a quick paging you are at the great position to start removing pieces you are least proud of. Start with the ones you put in “just to have more” once those are weeded out move onto work that you aren’t proud of. If you still have more then 5–10 pieces start pruning out pieces that don’t fit the career you want to have. If you love user experience, show and talk to pieces where you did that!
3. **Take on responsibility when ever you can.** Rarely in your career will you get the easy opportunity to do something new. When that opportunity comes around, say yes! Once you have the reputation for being scrappy, and making things work, people will feel more comfortable letting you take on new things. This is how the snowball rolls!
4. **Make connections**— Once you have a strong portfolio, and a wide variety of responsibility. Its time to start meeting people. It doesn’t have to be a networking event with strangers, it can simply be eating lunch with a new person at the office. If people know you, they will be more likely to help you out. During your connection making to be on the lookout for people who can teach you things, or mentors. Your goal is, like always learning.
5. **Become A Leader**— Write, speak, contribute, do whatever you can to get your work in to the communal space. It will be slow at first, you won’t go straight to talking at south by southwest, but there are always meet-ups looking for speakers to fill a Thursday night slot. Use blogs as a test ground for your ideas, if it gets traction in a blog, chances are it will make an okay talk.

If you hate your job the ability to move is completely in your hands. Don’t blame others for the situation you are in, people may not be helping you, but you hold the ability to move. You can always work harder/smarter, improve, and advance.