

# DESIGN PORTFOLIO HANDBOOK



FLUX

# OUTLINE

1

**THE GOAL OF YOUR PORTFOLIO & HOW TO ACHIEVE IT**

2

**THE STRUCTURE OF A GOOD PORTFOLIO**

3

**HOW TO PRESENT CASE STUDIES**

4

**BEST PORTFOLIO TOOLS**

5

**COMMON QUESTIONS:**

A I have no works to show,  
What should I put? (NDA)

B What language should I use?

C Should I brand myself as a freelancer or  
an agency?

6

**THE PORTFOLIO CHECKLIST**

7

**CONCLUSION**

# ABOUT THE AUTHOR



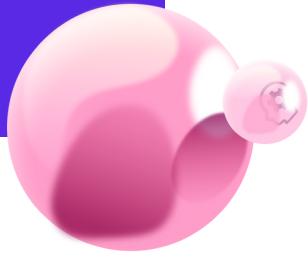
Ran Segall has been working as a designer for the past 20 years, working in advertising & branding agencies, in tech startups, and running an independent freelance business.

After scaling his freelance business to 6-figures he founded Flux Academy in 2019 to create a better alternative to design education online and help as many people as possible to become professional designers and make a living doing what they love.

“

**IF PEOPLE LIKE  
YOU, THEY'LL  
LISTEN TO YOU,  
BUT IF PEOPLE  
TRUST YOU,  
THEY'LL DO  
BUSINESS WITH  
YOU.**

ZIG ZIGLAR.



# INTRODUCTION

Our own portfolio is one of the most touchy projects we ever get to work on.

It's quite understandable why - we typically associate how the portfolio looks with how we are perceived and compared to others, and that immediately evoked the natural feeling of inadequacy.

This is why so many designers either neglect touching the topic, or are forever in cycles of working on the portfolio as "it's not ready yet".

But that leaves them with nothing visible online as their "business card" or something really old which doesn't represent them anymore, and that's just bad for business.

My goal with this handbook is to "kick you in the ass", with a basic framework for how to create or improve your portfolio so that you **just do it**.

A portfolio is always a work in progress and my goal is not for you to have the "perfect" portfolio, but rather to push you towards your next iteration of a better portfolio.



# THE GOAL OF YOUR PORTFOLIO & HOW TO ACHIEVE IT

You cannot design any website without a clear strategy, and your portfolio website is no different.

Typically most design portfolios have the following goal:

Build trust & preference so clients/companies want to hire you.

Assuming that's your goal, we are now faced with the question: "what do we need to do to build trust & preferences so clients pick us?".

The answer to this question is your Strategy.

Let's break down the techniques designers use to create trust & preference on the web:

## GOOD GRAPHIC DESIGN

Choice of color, type & layout must be both functional and in line with the story you're trying to tell to create preference. The quality of images you use or mockups will also contribute to trust: a professionally taken photo can immediately present you as a trusted professional.

A very common mistake for junior designers is to make bad graphic design decisions, which hinders trust.

If you're just starting out, perhaps using a template or classic type/color combination with help avoid those mistakes.

## GOOD UX DESIGN

We have to make sure the website makes it easy for prospects to find what they are looking for:

- Who is this designer?
- Can I see their work?
- How do I contact them?

A lot of designers try to demonstrate creativity with the design and structure of their portfolio making it hard for potential clients to answer these core questions.

Of course, making sure the website is fully functional on mobile is a must-have these days.

## SOCIAL PROOF

As humans, we tend to trust something if others have trusted it before.

Social proof is anything that shows that there's a reason to believe you're trustworthy:

- Testimonials
- Awards
- Numbers (years of experience, projects done...)
- Logos (clients, publications...)

If you're just starting out, it might be challenging to find lots of "proof" as to why to trust you, but I encourage you to be creative and find an answer to this critical question.

## CLEAR VALUE PROPOSITION

Answering the questions "is this for me?" and "how is this better than X?" are critical for creating preference.

Most designers find it hard to answer the question "why should I pick you? How are you better than the other freelancers?".

I completely understand this sentiment which stems both from insecurity (again) and also from the fact that the design community is very friendly and that makes it difficult to see my friends as competitors that I must "win".

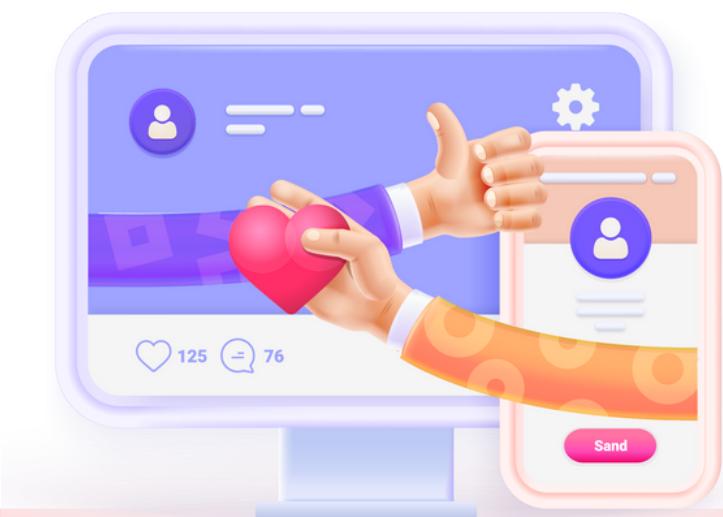
That being said, you must consider this question. Everyone today has so many choices about who to buy from, and our clients are no different.

On the surface - the most obvious thing that makes you different is YOU. Only you are YOU. If you're clear about who you are, and what makes you different as a person and service provider and find the people who prefer those traits over others, you have your "product-market-fit"

Of course, there might be other things that set you apart such as your skills, location, abilities, and more.

The more specific you can speak to a target client type, the more chances you'll have to establish trust with them: lawyers and musicians find different language, traits, and visuals "trustworthy".

Make sure you clearly communicate your unique value proposition as soon as possible - usually in the headline of the top section of your portfolio (the "hero" section)



# THE STRUCTURE OF A GOOD PORTFOLIO

**Let's list down the sections of a portfolio home page, and then dive into each one of them:**

- Hero Section
- Trust building section
- Why work with you
- Show me the work
- About you
- Call to Action

**Let's dive deeper:**



## HERO SECTION

A “hero” section is the topmost section of a website, fully visible before the visitor has to scroll.

The first job of the hero section is to make sure the following questions are answered within the first 15 seconds (data shows most visitors will leave a website if they cannot find the answers in that timeframe):

- “Who’s website is this?” – This question is typically answered by having a logo or your name at the top left corner of the website.
- “What do they do” – This needs to be answered by “I’m a designer!”, which can be either stated in the heading text or implied by the image (for example someone working on a computer in a studio setting)
- “Why should I care?” – this is where you should plant your value proposition which we covered earlier, in clear writing.

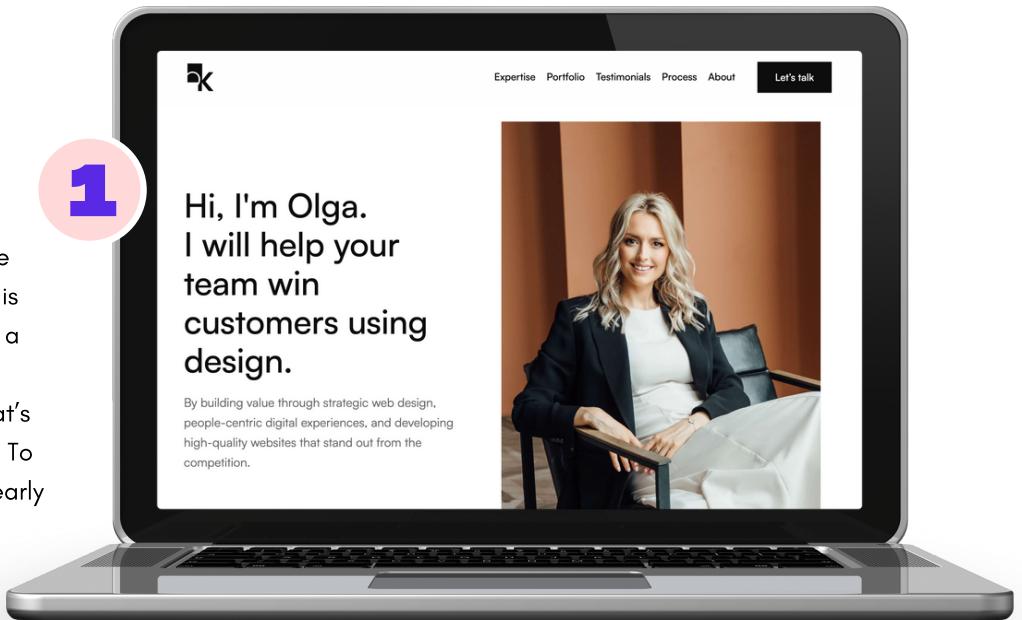
One more typical goal for a hero section is to drive people to your “call to action” – the action you want your users to take. This might be contacting you, or submitting an inquiry.

Remember, some people may have already got to your portfolio convinced they want to work with you, or are here a second time just to “close the deal”, so you’d want to make it easy for them to find the CONTACT button.

**Here are some examples of good hero sections:**

1

Olga introduces herself, how she can help, and who. Her photo is professionally taken, showing a friendly professional. The navigation makes it clear what's on this website, and the "Call To Action" button - Let's Talk, clearly grabs attention.



<https://www.olgak.design>

2

<https://www.danbeeshin.com/>

Ilya's website logo is plainly his name, while his position as a "creative director" is simply presented on a friendly professional image. There is no clear call to action here, as Ilya might not be actively looking to generate work off this website but rather build credibility, which his "site of the day" badge on the right hand side helps to achieve.

3

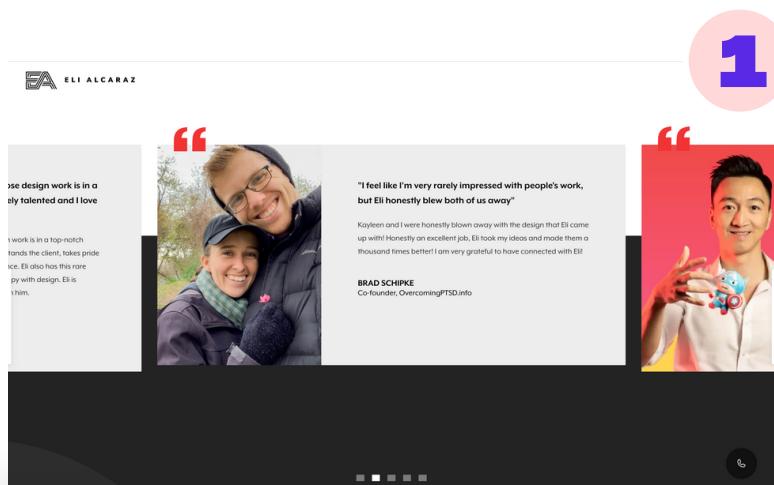
<https://kulbachny.com>

## TRUST BUILDING SECTION

Some of the people hiring you might not have a real clue how to tell good design from bad design, and so before getting into the actual work, it's great to build credibility immediately by showing some social proof.

As stated earlier when discussing **social proof** - if you're just starting out and don't have fancy logos, testimonials, or awards to share, consider what can help prove you're trustworthy?

- A quote from a previous boss (even if non-design related) about your personality?
- A logo for a company you worked at?
- the institution you learned at?



Eli's portfolio has a carousel of testimonials, each of them includes a photo to a past client (which helps see them as real people) and also includes their titles in their respective companies.



Creative Nights has a section where they list of their awards and include an image of a trophy.

Note that they even bother listing "0 Webby Awards", which may look silly, but when you glance over this section does help it look more impressive.



creative nights

RECOGNITION CREATING AWARD-WINNING EXPERIENCES SINCE 2014.

9♦Awwwards, Site of the Day♦  
14♦CSS Design Awards, Site of the Day♦  
4♦FWA, Site of the Day♦  
0♦Webby Awards

CREATIVE ACADEMY JOIN US FOR TRAINING AND NETWORKING

<https://creative-nights.com>

## WHY WORK WITH YOU

In this section, we're trying to explain to our prospects what kind of problems we solve, and how we're different or better than alternatives.

**Content that goes in this section may include:**

- Description of services
- Description of your process
- Agitating the problems the prospect is currently facing



EA ELI ALCARAZ

2

## You don't need a website, you need a high-performing website.

These two extra words make all the difference between a *visit* and a *sale*.

When I say high-performing website, I don't just mean a beautiful looking website; although that is most definitely a part of it.

What I mean by a high-performing website is:

- LOOKING GOOD
- PLUS Getting discovered by your clients
- PLUS closing them

Your High-performing website will achieve this through the use of intentional design and on-the-pulse marketing tactics.

A good, intentional design will position you as the expert and authority that you know you are, conveying trust among your visitors.

An on-the-pulse marketing strategy will help your clients discover you, and then funnel them into buying from you.

If you want to discover how you stand out from the rest and be represented by a high-performing, 24/7 lead-generating website, then connect with me by booking your free, 30-minute call below.

<https://www.elialcaraz.com>

Eli dedicates a whole section to explaining why his unique focus on "high performance" makes all the difference and the reason for you to hire him.

Jomor comes out with a pretty radical reason to work with him "making all your dreams come true\*" (\*as long as your dreams revolve around something like; being the proud owner of a spectacular website.), this both shows his amusing personality and gives you a reason to work with him.



## SHOW ME THE WORK

This is where we get to the heart of your portfolio – showing your work.

It's common for designers to think they need to show every piece of work they ever worked on, but the right approach is quite contrary – you need to curate your work to your best 4-6 pieces you're most proud of, and ideally would like to do more of.

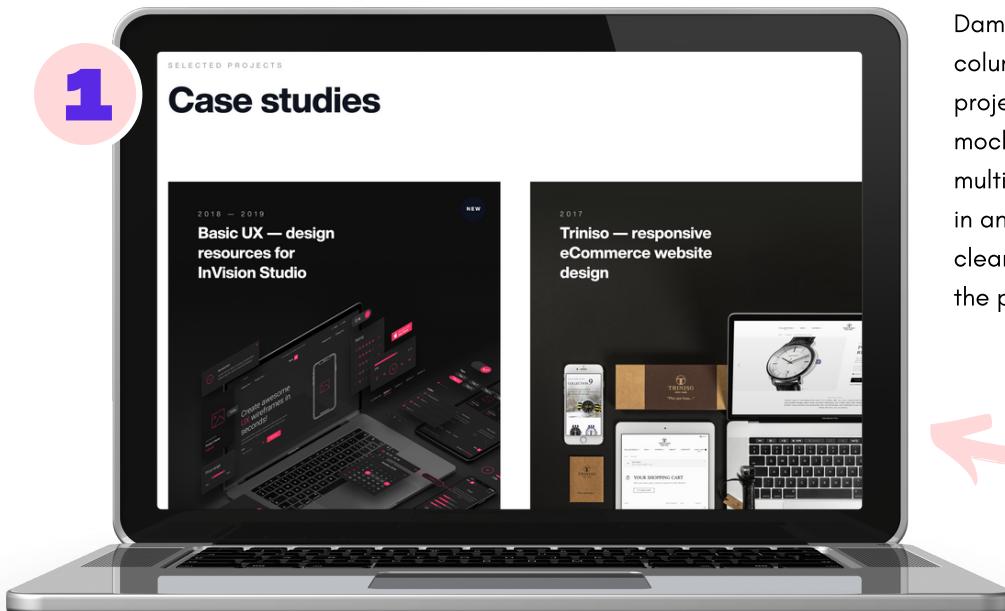
### If you're just starting out, even 2-4 projects are enough.

Quality is so much more important than quantity, and even more important than if the projects are "real" client work. If the only client work you have is work you're not happy with, it's better to show self-initiated projects or "side projects" if they better represent your abilities.

On the homepage, we typically just show thumbnails of the projects, clickable to full case studies (which we'll cover in more detail in the next chapter).

You want to be very mindful in designing these thumbnails: do not just paste screenshots or exports from your design software. Make sure you take the time to full design them while considering:

- **Context:** if it's an app – show it on a phone. Use high quality mockups.
- **Focus:** make sure the image is not too busy and the text on the image does not compete with other texts on the page
- **Art Direction:** does the color / layout / crop of the image work with the rest of the website? Does it work well next to the other portfolio pieces?



Damian shows a curated 2 column grid of his projects, each project has a custom made mockup that allows seeing multiple elements of the project in an aesthetic form while leaving clear space on the image to add the project name



Million Frames present their work in with a consistent background color and minimalistic mockups to give context to the platform they were designing for



2

millionframes

Work Products Blog About Academy

Shaping world class websites, designs and experiences

I can help you successfully take your business online while assisting you throughout the building process.

**JustWatch Mobile App**  
Enhanced the user experience of a TV show tracking app and content hunting app downloaded over 5M+ users.  
[View On Appstore](#)

**NFT Mobile App Design**  
Worked on designing interface for the NFT based mobile app

**JustWatch TV App**  
Designed the interface of a TV show tracking app and content hunting app downloaded by 100K users.  
[Read Article](#)

<https://www.millionframes.com/work>

DON'T BE  
SCARED TO  
PRESENT THE  
REAL YOU TO  
THE WORLD,  
AUTHENTICITY  
IS AT THE HEART  
OF SUCCESS.

## ABOUT YOU

At the end of the day, the “product” your portfolio is selling is – YOU.

In this section, you’ll introduce yourself – who you are & what are you like, so prospects can imagine what’s it like working with you.

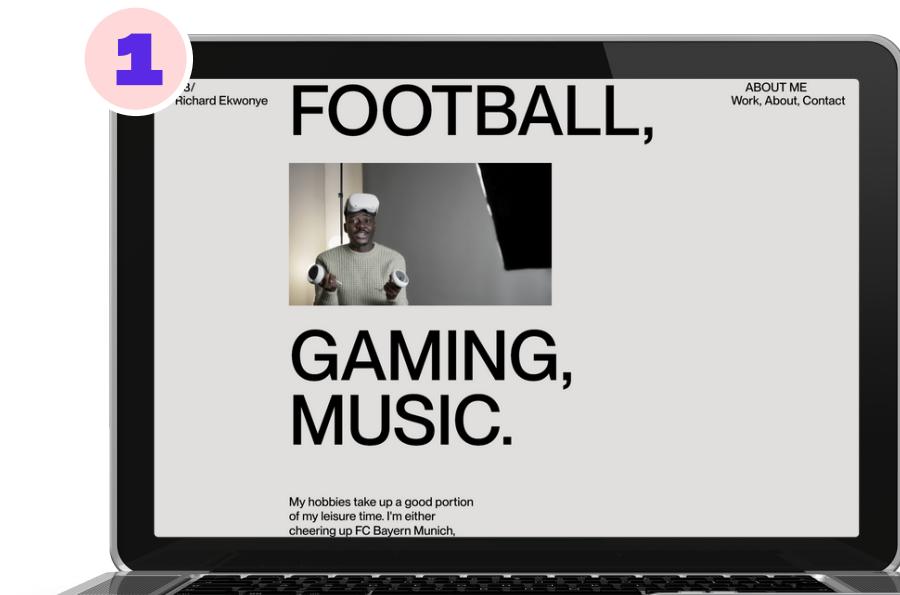
I’m all for using images of yourself as they tend to immediately communicate a lot about you:

**how you dress, where you work, are you friendly / serious, and much more.**

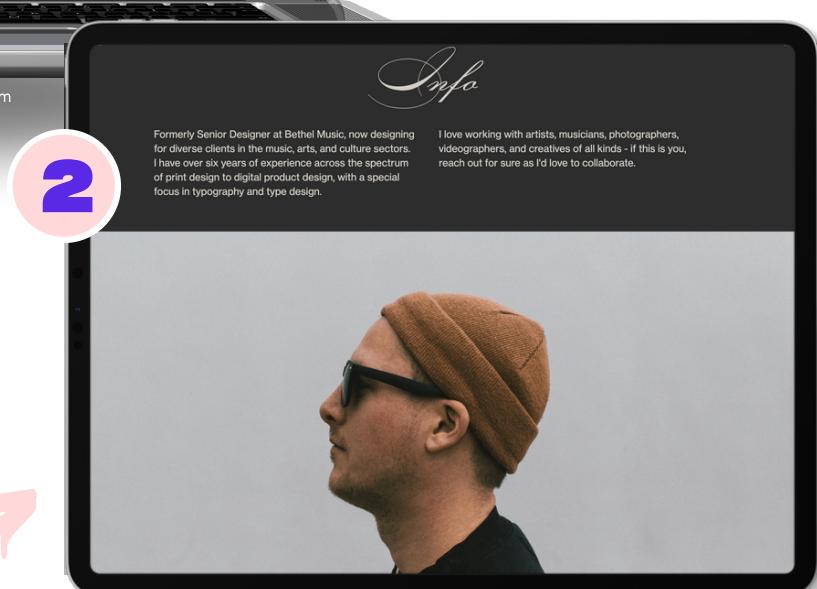
People hire people, and seeing who you’re about to hire is very helpful.

I realize that a lot of people are worried about putting their face on their website, and bias is a real thing. That being said – my perspective is that you’re going to end up working with the client anyway, so they’re going to learn about you, so better put “reality” out there in the first place.

I also think that a professionally taken photo immediately builds trust and suggests quality in your work: If you invest in yourself, you’ll invest in the client’s work as well.



Richard uses his about section to tell you about his hobbies and even his favorite sports team. Remember people like to hire people that are similar to them in their likes and world-views so it helps to share your personality.



Josh uses his about page to share some of his work experience and his passion for music. If you’re trying to aim for a specific client type, it’s worth mentioning that you have a personal interest in their work.

## **CALL TO ACTION**

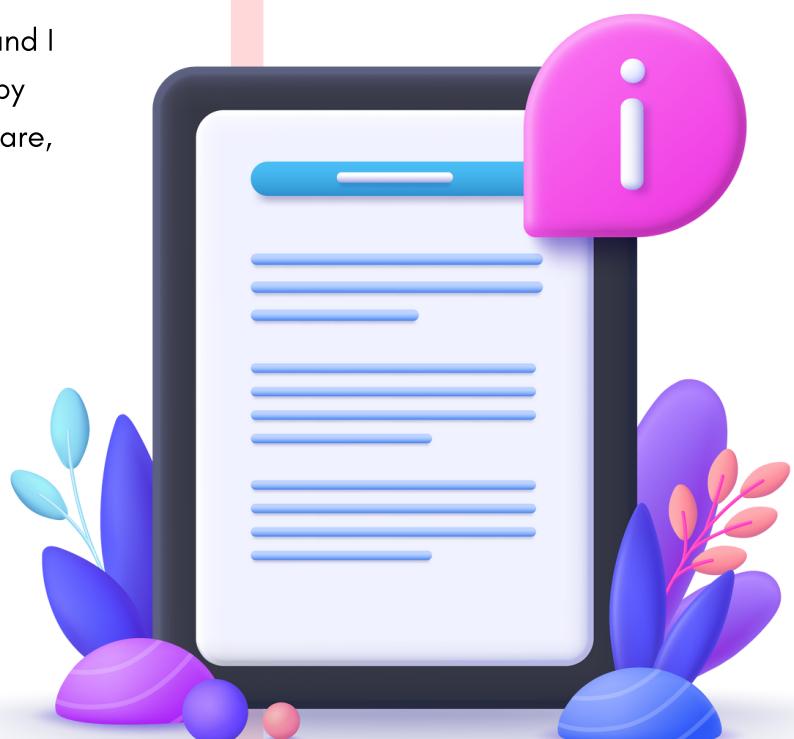
If your clients scroll to the end of your portfolio and you're not telling them what to do next - they'll just close the tab and get back to scrolling another page.

It's a good best practice to always close your portfolio with a call to action - usually to "get in touch".

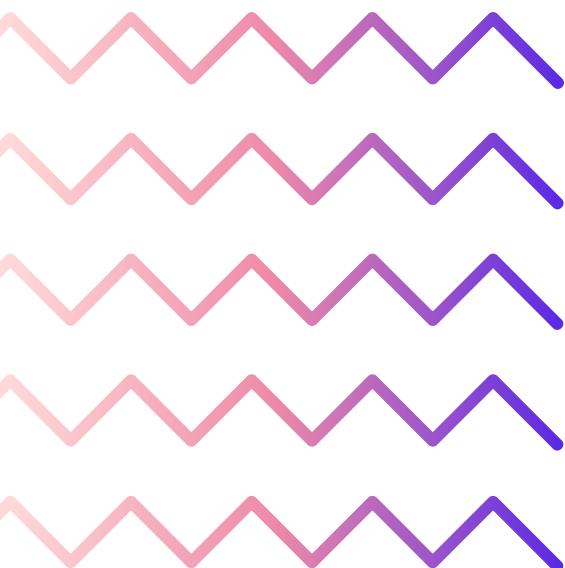
Some designers offer inquiry forms, others allow for booking a consultation call on the page and other photo numbers.

Your ideal client might have different preferences on how they'd like to communicate with you, and those differ by culture, location and personality - so instead of copying what others are doing, pick that one that's ideal for your client (and if you don't know what's ideal for them, do what's ideal for you).

My personal preference is email, and I love websites that allow me to copy the email into my own email software, but as I said - to each his own.



# HOW TO PRESENT CASE STUDIES



The case study is where we give more context to the work we did beyond the initial thumbnail on the homepage, typically on a separate page on our website.

Depending on the work you do, this might be as simple as just showing more images from the project (in case you're a photographer, illustrator, or 3D artist), or as elaborate as describing the full process & challenges of the project (for web designers, or product designers)

Because web designers & product designers are not hired just to "make things pretty", but to actually solve business problems, it's very hard to judge if a design is good or not by just looking at images, which is why describing the challenges and process is a key.

If you're a UX designer who's not taking care of the visual part at all - of course for you the "final results" might not be visually appealing and you might want to put most of the focus on the process.

When you're writing the copy for your case study, remember – this is the internet, which means people mostly don't read, they skim.

To make your case study skimmable, make sure you always use titles for sections and not writing more than 1-2 paragraphs on each section

## DESCRIBING THE PROJECT

In these initial paragraphs, you want to give context on what is the client's business and who are the customers, and what business challenge you were hired to solve.

If you have worked within a team, it's important to describe what was your role and if you've had any collaborators on the project.

# BEST PORTFOLIO TOOL

As with most things in life “best” is really relative and depends on who you are and what you need.

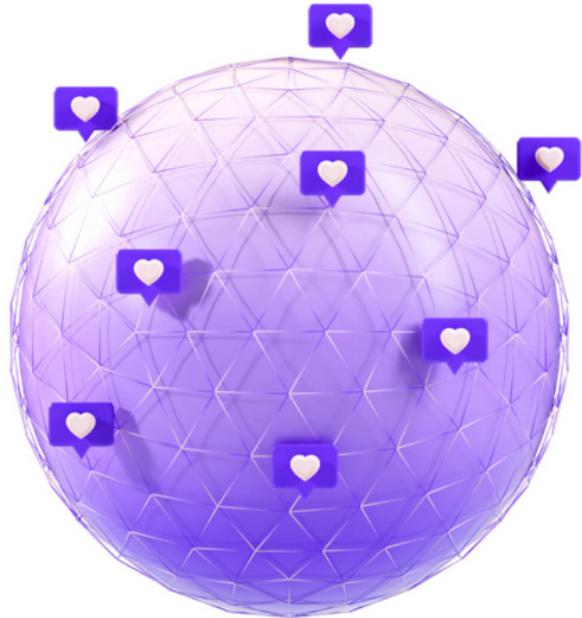
I tried to break down the tools based on typical design personas in hopes you can find yourself in one of them.

## THE NON-TECHY DESIGNER

If building websites is not your day to day jam, you feel clueless and you just need to put your work out there as fast as possible - your best choice is probably - [Carbonmade](#)

Carbonmade allows you to pick a well-designed template, specifically designed for your type of work, which you can easily customize and connect to a domain.

Very little learning curve here.



## THE WORDPRESS DESIGNER

If WP is your thing, of course, there are lots of free portfolio templates, but if you want to go with something a bit more robust, premium and dedicated for portfolios you should check out [Semplice](#)

## THE CUSTOM WEB DESIGNER

If building custom websites for clients is your jam, is just natural that you'll develop a custom portfolio for yourself as well using [Webflow](#).

Webflow also offers free & premium templates if you want to shortcut your way into a fully developed portfolio you can customize.

## DESCRIBING THE PROCESS

Showing some of your processes is important as it helps prospects understand how you arrive at your final designs.

The key here is to make sure we keep the process description skimmable and remember people are not here to read a full-on article but rather quickly understand how you work and get to your final result.



## STRUCTURING THE CASE

### STUDY PAGE

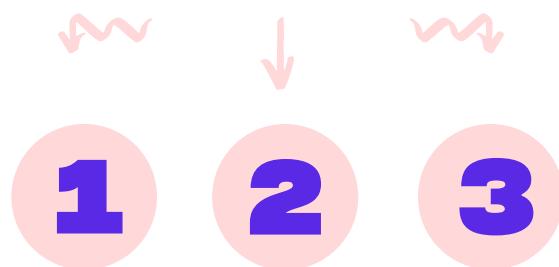
Always make sure you start with “the bottom line” – people want to very quickly see the end result, before diving into the full process and reading. They want to know if it’s worth investing time in this case study.

**A good structure to the page can be:**

- Hero section that includes the final design
- Description of the project
- Process images
- Final outcomes

**Here are a few examples that do great work following these guidelines:**

### SEE EXAMPLES HERE



# COMMON QUESTIONS

## I HAVE NO WORKS TO SHOW, WHAT SHOULD I PUT?

In some cases, you might not have any work you can show in your portfolio, either because you haven't done any client work yet, or because you've been working with agencies or clients who do not allow you to share work you did for them.

If this happens, worry not, you should still have a website and should proceed with one of the following approaches:

- Self Initiated work: These can be projects you do for fun as a practice working on side projects or imaginary client briefs ([find briefs here](#)). This is also good to show what kind of work you're passionate about doing and will help attract the right people.
- A website without work examples: While this basically means this is not a "portfolio" per se, it can still be very successful, if the website itself is well designed, and can show your abilities as a designer the website itself, and also demonstrate an understanding of your potential client's problems.  
Sumith's website is a great example.

## WHAT LANGUAGE SHOULD I USE?

If you're living in a country where English is not the native language, you might be asking yourself - if I build my portfolio in my native language it may limit me to working only with local clients, but if I build it in English, it might be weird to local clients.

So which is better?

The answer is - it depends.

If you mainly work with local clients, your no. 1 priority is to build a website that's easy for them to use and follow their expectations. If they wouldn't like reading English, you should not use English.

Personally, I was working with local clients here in Israel (where our native language is Hebrew), and yet because I was working in the tech niche, which communicated in English even in Israel, I chose to build my website in English to demonstrate that I am able to communicate in English as well.

## **SHOULD I BRAND MYSELF AS A FREELANCER OR AN AGENCY?**

I hate to be that guy again, but – that also depends.

Certain clients want to hire freelancers over agencies – they perceive them as being more affordable, easier to communicate with, and being able to deliver faster results. For them, it would be ideal to see the person they are about to hire to see if they are the right fit for them.

Other clients want to hire agencies over freelancers – they feel like that's a safer choice, as a team is perceived as more robust, experienced & trustworthy.

For them, it would be ideal to see a studio/agency brand in the front vs a single person.

So there is no “better” solution here, it only depends on what kind of clients you want to work with, and what their preferences are.

My advice – ask them! And also – see what they tend to do by looking at who designed projects for similar clients.



# THE PORTFOLIO CHECKLIST



Do you have a logo that clearly spells your name in the top navigation? (so people know who's website is this)



Do you have a clear value proposition title on your top section (what you do + who you do it for)?



Is it easy to find how to contact you (clear button)?



Can visitors see who they're going to hire (you!)? \*This is not a must, but helpful as people hire people



Is there any social proof? Why would people trust you?



Did you curate your best work (~4 projects), so that it's clear what services you offer?



Is the portfolio responsive and shows up well on mobile devices?



Can I scan the homepage and see who you are and some of your works without clicking to another page?



Have you used professional-looking mockups to show your work?



Do you have your website on your own domain?



# CONCLUSION

Whether you need a completely new portfolio or just a facelift to the current one you have, I suggest making a decision right now on what is your budget ("how many hours am I going to dedicate to this project"), and then proceeding to putting those hours on your calendar right now so that you don't just postpone this project to "someday".

I hope you've found this handbook helpful, please tag us on social media (@flux.academy) when you update your portfolio so we can give you a shoutout.

Until next time, happy designing!

**Ran Segall &  
The Flux Academy Team**

## WANT TO LEARN MORE?

Check out our full courses including a community and expert support:

**SEE COURSES**

