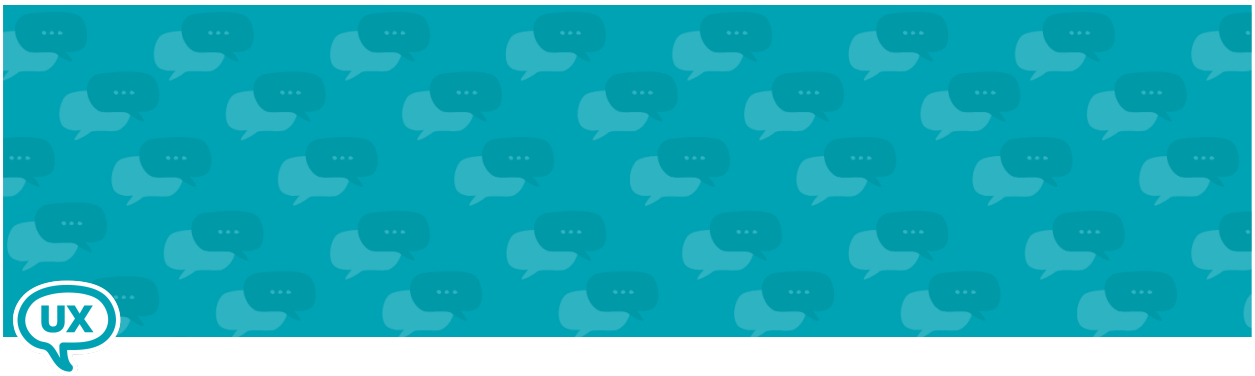

2025-01-27 - UX Job Search: What Goes Into An Ideal UX Portfolio

Monday, January 27 - Led by Jared Spool

Portfolios weren't designed for UX professionals. They were created to show the finished deliverables of individual graphic designers, industrial designers, and architects. In those fields, hiring managers flip through the designer's "book of work" to see their creativity.

In UX, the work often isn't about polished, creative deliverables. It's about the work processes that deliver great experiences for users and customers.

Similarly, UX work isn't individual work. It's always a group process. In their original form, portfolios are awful at showing a team's work process and how the job candidate might've contributed to that teamwork.

The new normal is for hiring managers to require a portfolio from job applicants. Now, the question becomes," *What should go into the book?"* The portfolio becomes challenging when your UX experience isn't visual. Instead, it's leading teams, conducting research, facilitating workshops, and changing cultures.

- How do you best express your vast experience and capabilities in an easy-to-understand portfolio?
- What common traps do UXers fall into when assembling their portfolios?

- How do you represent all your past projects' work when there aren't "visual" deliverables?

Join me as I explore how UX professionals are repurposing their portfolios to communicate the depth and breadth of their extensive experience. Discover how you'll tell your story to hiring managers who want to "see" what you could do for them.

Before the talk gets started:

- **How this discussion will go:**
  - We'll start with a short presentation on today's topic.
  - We'll spend the remainder of the time discussing your questions.
    - Please put your questions in the chat.
    - Please change your Zoom name to your actual name.
    - A'Nia will collect the questions and pick the ones we'll answer today.

- **Things to keep in mind with Zoom:**
  - Feel free to open the chat window if the little Chat pop-ups get distracting.
  - Please put your microphone on mute.
    - If A'Nia chooses your question, you can unmute to talk about it with me.
  - Zoom's *Speaker View* will let you keep me visible, and you'll see what I am presenting on the screen.
  - This session is closed captioned.

We will post the recording for this session within a day.

UPCOMING TOPICS

Upcoming Talk UX Strategy topics

Always free. Subscribe to our automatically updated calendar.

A Big Shift in Choosing Our UX Metrics and Goals

Monday, February 3 at noon ET (17.00 GMT)

How "Brains over Hands" Makes UXers Layoff Resilient

Monday, February 10 at noon ET (17.00 GMT)

Your User Stories Could Be Harming Your UX Efforts

Monday, February 24 at noon ET (17.00 GMT)

Upcoming Center Centre courses and programs

Outcome-Driven UX Metrics

Cohorts starting: ***February 18*** *and* ***March 13***

https://ux-metrics.centercentre.com

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Cohorts starting: ***Tomorrow (January 28)*** *and* ***March 18***

https://ux-research.centercentre.com/

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Join anytime. *Group meets every Friday at 3pm ET (20.00 GMT)*

https://standoutcommunity.cc

How to Win Stakeholders & Influence Decisions

New cohorts start on ***February 10*** and ***March 10***

https://winstakeholders.com

Today's Notes

UX Job Search: What Goes Into An Ideal UX Portfolio

Nothing puts fear into the hearts of UX professionals more than the thought of needing a portfolio.

> Nobody wants a portfolio.
>
> Nobody likes the idea that they'll be judged based on their portfolio.
>
> It's a horrible artifact.

Partially, this is because portfolios are misunderstood.

> People think they are something bigger than they need to be.
>
> We fetishize what a great portfolio looks like.

Tip #1: Stop looking at other people's portfolios

> There's no value in it.

People are also scared of portfolios because they're being judged.

Nobody likes to be judged.

Everything you've become in your career, everything you've accomplished, everything you are.

It's right there in these big mythical portfolios you need to build.

The more you get into your career, the more you have to describe.

And if you do it wrong, you'll be judged for it.

It could cost you your next job.

Of course, we're scared of portfolios.

Let's reframe them.

Let's say that people aren't judging you by your portfolio.

Instead, let's say they will judge your portfolio to see how well it represents you.

You can incrementally improve your portfolio to represent you better.

The more you take those incremental steps, the better the hiring team will see who you are and what you can do for them.

Disambiguating "Portfolio."

A *portfolio* is a fancy word for *folder*.

A folder is a collection of related artifacts.

There are four types of UX portfolios:

- The total body of work from your entire time at an organization.
- The body of projects you've been (or currently are) responsible for at a particular job.

- The visual artifacts you bring to interviews to support your story.
- The collection of stories you submit to a job application to explain why you're an ideal fit for the position.

Today, we are focusing on the last one.

This portfolio contains the stories you want the hiring team to see.

How hiring managers will experience your portfolio.

A portfolio is a designed artifact that must fit into a designed process.

For most organizations, it's a screening tool.

It will determine if you move to the next phase of the hiring process.

Hiring managers don't care about your past work.

They only care about the evidence that you'll perform well when they give you this job.

You'll accomplish the assignments.

You won't need too much support to do that.

You'll represent their efforts well.

The portfolio is your first interview with the hiring manager.

"Convince me that you're the right person for this job."

Hiring managers don't need another puzzle in their job.

They don't want hints and clues that suggest you might be the right person.

They want the portfolio to come right out and say, "I would be great at doing this work."

It needs to be blatant about this.

Hiring managers have three piles: **No**, **Maybe**, and **Yes.**

You want your application to end up in the **Yes** pile.

Don’t make them work to figure that out.

Make it crystal clear.

Your portfolio is not a museum. It’s a sales brochure.

That’s a quote from Mitchell Clements.

Your portfolio must tell a story about how you are an excellent fit for this job.

Every image and every sentence must build the case that you’re their next new hire.

Break up the work by what the hiring manager wants to know.

Too many UXers organize their portfolios by “most recent big project.”

That makes it hard for hiring teams to decipher what’s relevant in the portfolio for their open position.

The portfolio is an answer to the job ad.

Everything in your portfolio needs to be directly responding to the job ad.

Anything in your portfolio that isn’t asked for in the job ad is superfluous.

Start with the bullets and text in the ad.

Put them into a spreadsheet, one line per bullet.

For each line, add a column that rates how great your stories are at explaining you can do this thing.

Add another column that rates how much you want to do that more.

Start your portfolio with cases for the highest-rated lines.

What goes into an ideal portfolio

Tell your stories with a narrative.

Narratives have a start, middle, and end.

> They provide just enough context to make it clear why this has happened and the story's goals.

You need visuals. (Screenshots are optional.)

The visuals shouldn't just be deliverables.

> They should be storytelling tools that help the reader understand where they are in your story.

When they are deliverables, they should be custom-made for the portfolio.

> Reusing artifacts that you created for other purposes is confusing to the reader.

Your portfolio should be well-designed.

You work in UX, and you're expected to know the basics of good design.

You're showing "artwork to framers."

> If the trained designers on the hiring team see defects in your design, they'll judge you for it.
>
> > Basic design mistakes are a distraction from why you're there.
> >
> > Have a colleague give you tips.
> >
> > Learn the basics of good visual design, information design, and information architecture.

Our Programs

Hunting for a UX job is more challenging than ever. It's a mess out there. There's never been so many UX professionals looking for their next job at one time.

That's why **we've created a working community to ease the struggles of navigating this chaotic job market**.

Each week, join a group of professionals facing the similar obstacle of finding their next ideal UX job and uncover how you'll:

- Present your vast experience most effectively in your résumé, portfolios, and cover letters.
- Stand out in the application screening process to get an early interview quickly.
- Make the most of your networking efforts to access unpublished opportunities.

- Pitch yourself as a strategic UX leader who will bring great value to the organization.

Together, we'll encourage and bolster you through the difficult task of putting your career under a microscope as you try to prove you're the person your next job is seeking. You'll come away from each interaction inspired to take everything to the next level.

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We're offering a discount for the next few weeks to help you make your next career move as an emerging UX Leader. Discuss your UX leadership challenges with Jared in a free 30-minute Mentoring call.

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UX Strategy Four Week Live Online Courses

Establish your team's 2025 UX metrics and goals by investing 4 hours weekly in our Outcome-Driven UX Metrics course.

Discover our radical approach to measuring and reporting UX metrics with your org. Learn to directly measure how every new release of your products and services improves your customers' and users' lives.

Cohort starting: Tuesday, February 18

Tuesdays and Thursdays at 10am + noon ET.

Investing only four hours weekly for four weeks will lead your organization to become the foremost expert in your users' and customers' needs.

Connect your organization's long-term direction and strategy directly to your customers' and users' deepest needs with the power of Strategic UX Research.

Cohort starting: Tuesday, January 28

Tuesdays and Thursdays at 2pm + 4pm ET.

Cohort starting: Tuesday, March 3
Mondays and Wednesdays at 2pm + 4pm ET.

Cohort starting: Tuesday, March 18
Tuesdays and Fridays at 11am + 1:30pm ET.

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Leaders of Awesomeness | Contact Us | Free 30-Minute Mentoring Call with Jared Spool

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