

E.portfolios

by Stewart Cooke (Manager, Skills Formation), July 2010

The need to project an image seems to have been never more important than in the current digital and electronic age.

The use of Facebook, Twitter, personal web pages and blogs are but a few examples of how we display ourselves in the public domain. While much of what we do online is personal, there are also many career tools to help us record our training and work history.

One example of an existing paper based tool that has been modernized is the humble portfolio. Historically portfolios have been used for personal and professional purposes: to help job seekers find work, students catalogue their work and businesses showcase the extent or quality of their professional undertakings. In the early 1990's the use of the term e.portfolio started to enter common usage as the use of electronic content and storage changed the way traditional paper based portfolios were used.

The Skills Alliance is currently examining the benefits and application of e.portfolios for workforce development in sport, fitness and recreation.

Wikipedia defines e.portfolios as '.... a collection of electronic evidence assembled and managed by a user, usually on the Web. Such electronic evidence may include inputted text, electronic files, images, multimedia, blog entries, and hyperlinks'.

E.portfolio's come in a range of guises and for a range of purposes. For industry bodies and regulation purposes, or for learners recording their skills acquisition, the e.portfolio is an invaluable record. Learning institutions offer e.portfolio facilities to students and some industry bodies do the same for their industry workforces. In the VET environment, e.portfolios are used by learners, teachers and institutions in a multitude of ways and with a wide spread of functionality and effectiveness.

The use of e.portfolios is still growing and research is ongoing. The Queensland University of Technology, University of Melbourne, University of New England and the University of Wollongong are currently involved in the Australian e.portfolio Project (AeP). This aims to 'investigate e.portfolio practice in the higher education sector in Australia, in order to provide strategic and practical guidance about the use of e.portfolios in academic institutions.'

The UK body Skills Active, the 'Sector Skills Council for the Active Leisure, Learning and Well-being Sector' (Sport, Fitness, Playwork, the Outdoors, Caravans) supports the use of

the Skills Profile. This 'allows you to easily build and maintain a verified record of your skills, qualifications and achievements. The Skills profile is endorsed by leading employers, independently verified, is view-controlled by the individual, and helps individuals achieve their career goals'.

E.portfolios/Skills Passports come with a range of functionality and it is necessary to consider a range of issues with regard to the type of product you would want to use. One overriding issue is whether the product is to focus on product or process. That is, should the e.portfolio be a record repository for evidence of activity, skills, qualifications etc, or should it instead/in addition provide assessment functionality, and if so, with what levels of access?

Part of the answer comes in defining exactly what and who wants to use the e.portfolio. It could simply be used by an individual to record their work history, upload some relevant documents and maybe video evidence to show to potential employers. Alternatively, it could also be used by registration bodies to record and assess individuals for their registration, by training organisations to assess and record competency, or by employers to sign off on work experience by volunteers or students doing practical placement.

In reality, the uses are limited only by the technology and our own imagination.

At this stage the Skills Alliance has no real data on the use of e.portfolios in our industry. No doubt individuals and training organisations are promoting them, but maybe there's a place for an industry wide/endorsed product?

We'll be looking more closely at e.portfolios of various types over coming months and letting you know what we find. We'd welcome any feedback on the issue as well, so if you'd like to give us your views or ideas please contact Stewart Cooke at stewart@skillsformation.com.au

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