

Barbara Gordon



The Selling Portfolio

It's not just pretty pictures

Every freelancer knows that it isn't the same old marketplace it was years ago. Aside from the less robust economy freelancers must also compete with a greatly expanded group of freelancers all going after the same pie, as well as an increased use of stock art and photography that has eaten into that pie. Gone are the days when an art director could "take a chance" on a new talent and had the budget to do some experimental pieces for an ad or book cover. With the emphasis in business on doing it fast and keeping the prices down, there is no longer room or time to pay a freelancer to do an experimental piece.

Conversely it is no longer possible to just put together a port-

folio of pieces one has available or "likes." And with the demise of the personal interview, where freelancers could get feedback on their portfolios from knowledgeable creatives, today's freelancers have to take a different approach to setting up the content for a selling portfolio. This involves becoming more aware of how clients are skewing and targeting their buying audiences. You have to determine how your work

applies to these buying audiences and set up an appropriate portfolio.

Do not try to be all things to all clients, it doesn't work.

Let me give a few examples. Anyone who reads a newspaper or the trade press, watches TV, listens to the radio or goes online, knows about the frequent criticism of the TV commercials that

were shown during the Super Bowl and the repeated use of "bathroom or potty humor" employed in many of these ads. That was no accident. The marketers were trying to reach the overwhelmingly young male audience that watches the Super Bowl. Research tells them what themes appeal to each particular audience.

The same techniques apply to every audience. Surveys done both privately and independently about young women auto buyers have shown that the female auto buyer is looking for different features in her automobile purchase than her male counterpart. Young women are more interested in safety features and factors that protect the environment. So advertisers take different creative approaches in trying to reach these individual audiences.

Then there's the ethnic buying audience. One of the fastest growing audiences in the country today is the Hispanic audience and, if predictions are correct, it will be one of the dominant buying audiences in the very near future. Surveys, market research and focus groups have determined the Hispanic audience has its unique buying preferences as well.

To be a successful freelancer, you have to become aware of the audiences clients are trying to reach and how *you* can help



VISIT US AT WWW.ARTRES.COM
FOR THE WORLD'S GREATEST ART

Representing the world's leading museums,
with millions of images available for license.
Call 212-505-8700 or visit www.artres.com



Benozzo Gozzoli, Lorenzo de Medici the Magnificent. Palazzo Medici Riccardi, Florence.
©Erich Lessing / Art Resource, NY (left)
Piero di Cosimo, Portrait of Simonetta Vespucci, Musée Condé, Chantilly. ©RMN / Art Resource, NY (right)

Freelance

them by structuring your portfolio to reach those audiences. How to do this? Start by educating yourself about the clients markets. Read the trade press, the publications of your professional organizations. Check sites and newsletters, online. Listen and watch business talk shows. Read the advertising and marketing sections of your local newspaper, attend educational seminars. Slowly you'll accumulate an understanding and knowledge of the audiences clients are trying to reach.

As you research, take a look at your own work and talent. Don't try to be all things to all people or try to get every and all assignments—that doesn't work in the long run. Concentrate on compiling an inventory of your *best* work. You can then determine what pieces to target for the selling portfolio—using your newfound knowledge.

Have some conversations with yourself, e.g., “I know that I illustrate or photograph people well and that the Hispanic buying audience is becoming one of the biggest. Is there a way I can incorporate my vision of people to communicate this to clients going after the Hispanic market?”

“I do landscapes and nature scenes well and I know the obvious markets for these themes, but is there a way I can get clients trying to sell automobiles to young ecologically-minded

young women to consider me for assignments?”

You get the idea. Let me reiterate. To construct an effective selling portfolio—only show your *best* work. Do not try to be all things to all clients, it doesn't work. Always keep evaluating, changing and updating your portfolio. Keep immersed in knowledge of the field and your potential clients' marketing goals. Get feedback on your work wherever you can, from fellow freelancers, clients, reps, consultants, surveys. Keep engineering that portfolio so clients can envision you as the freelancer who can deliver the right visual messages to their buying audiences.

I know that I write frequently on marketing and selling, but the old adage “Nothing happens until the sale is made” is more true today than ever. In today's competitive marketplace, a freelancer cannot just randomly show work. One has to structure and target the selling portfolio continually because we are dealing with an ever-changing world of technology, demographics, social mores, politics, trends, societal goals and beliefs. Today's selling portfolio has to incorporate and reflect these changes to be effective in the freelance marketplace. ☐



Portfolio Center

The School for Design & Art Direction
Media Architecture, Writing
Advertising Art Direction
Photography & Illustration.
125 Bennett Street, Atlanta, GA 30309
Call 1.800.255.3169 ext. 19
www.portfoliocenter.com

Ph: Fernando Decillis
www.decillisphoto.com