

# BUILD A STRONG ONLINE PRESENCE

An online portfolio is the first and most important impression designers will make on prospective clients. We talk to some of the most creative minds in the business to discover what it takes to stand out from the crowd...

## Research

"Do a bit of research into general web standards such as what the common screen resolution is, how to save images for the web and search engine accessibility issues"  
- Mike Harrison

**3 4**  
**MORTEN NIELSEN**  
[www.greydient.com](http://www.greydient.com)

"I believe the site stands out as if it was a piece of work I did for myself," says Nielsen. "Sometimes designing for oneself can be the hardest job, as the client is uncompromising. I have a passion for what I do and I tried to get that across in my online portfolio designs"

**5 6**  
**ANDREAS WANNERSTEDT**  
[www.andreaswannerstedt.se](http://www.andreaswannerstedt.se)

"In my opinion, the best feature of my website is the simplicity and the composition of the elements," says Wannerstedt. "It doesn't stand out too much so doesn't take any focus from the work"

NAZARIO GRAZIANO | STUDIO

ABOUT PORTFOLIO SHOP



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## Flash is too flashy

"I think some designers go overboard on their portfolios using Flash to create effects and transitions; it can look great, but don't sacrifice the usability in the process"  
- Kevin Lucius

FRESH WORKS



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**1 2**  
**NAZARIO GRAZIANO**  
[www.nazariograziano.com](http://www.nazariograziano.com)

"The 'power' of my portfolio is that it works as an artwork archive. My best advice is to keep things clean and simple," says Graziano



**S**ignposting your services confidently and creatively is crucial for landing those all-important commissions, therefore the use of an online portfolio has become the digital creative's equivalent of a résumé.

One of the first and perhaps most important factors to consider when creating a portfolio website is the design. The design of the site should not only be attractive and inviting, but also something that uniquely represents the artist and their style. "I wanted to create a site that stood out in both look and feel to represent me," says Morten Nielsen ([www.greydient.com](http://www.greydient.com)), a Danish digital art director. "I wanted to move slightly away from the traditional grid-based portfolio and give the user a unique experience in the process. I've always had a thing for organic-looking design, soft curves and heavy use of natural textures and figures, so when it came to doing something personal I felt it was important to display the elements that inspire me."

Ultimately the theme of the website will depend upon the artist's own tastes, brand and ideas, but one thing that the majority of designers agree on is the necessity for simplicity, with a focus on presenting the portfolio in an uncluttered space (as demonstrated in our web portfolio Workshop on page 64). "The type of website that works well are those that are almost plain and do not have lots of distracting elements or details that steal attention," identifies Sweden-based designer Andreas Wannerstedt ([www.andreaswannerstedt.se](http://www.andreaswannerstedt.se)). "I've heard that you only have a couple of seconds to catch the attention of a visitor before they leave the site, so I decided to give a quick preview of my animation skills and enthusiasm for details with the help of a slightly over-ambitious preloader sequence."

Although generating a theme or look for your portfolio will probably be the most exciting part, it can also be the most frustrating and time-consuming so it's worth taking time to perfect. Dedicate a >>>

## Feature / Build a strong online presence

>>> healthy slice of your time to researching what's out there; not to copy but for inspiration and to help you decipher what you do and do not like. It will also help you to isolate weaknesses and strengths in other portfolios that you can avoid or emulate in your own. Keep referring back to your style of art or personalised brand and find ways to brush this into your concept, whether it be a choice of colour, typeface, artwork, music or overall design. Once you've mocked up the appearance, concept and theme of your site you can get your hands dirty with actually creating it.

After sketching a few choice ideas on paper, fire up the computer, bring Photoshop to life and activate that graphics tablet – it's time to get designing. "Everything should be organised when you come to the design stage. In my opinion, this is as important as what the website looks like," Wannerstedt tells us. "Typography is easily overlooked when it comes to web design, but take your time and check the overall structure of your type and how it appears in the context of your design.

"Also you don't want too many subpages," Wannerstedt continues. "Try to have as few clicks between your visitor and your information as possible – and make sure each page has something valuable to offer. However the most important thing in website design is to be straightforward and to keep things simple. Don't try to emulate a billion-dollar company or distract your visitors with an overwhelming animated interface. If you're building a personal portfolio website, make sure to highlight the actual work."

The Swede's portfolio site largely consists of vector elements created in Flash, but he maintains that it is best to start designing the interface in Photoshop. "Only when I was satisfied with the way the design looked did I bring in a merged image to Flash and re-create all the objects that could be built with vectors. I did this because I wanted to keep the file sizes down so, in the end, the only thing that was really saved out as an image from Photoshop was the background gradient. Obviously I could have created this with Flash as well, but to avoid

**7** **NAZARIO GRAZIANO**  
[www.nazariograziano.com](http://www.nazariograziano.com)

**Style:** Nazario Graziano is an Italian freelance illustrator, art director and graphic designer. He describes his portfolio website as "clean, with good macro-areas, simple to use and with a good platform on the backend"

**Keep it light:** "I don't like animations or Flash use in websites. I think they look 'heavy' and boring. People who visit my portfolio just want to see my work, my bio, my client list and maybe my news blog... nothing more"

**Inspiration:** "My style is romantic, ironic and non-conformist. I take my inspiration from old books, illustrations for kids, the weather, my wife, my cats, music, old-school skateboards, Eighties memories, Fifties sci-fi movies and things that happen each day"

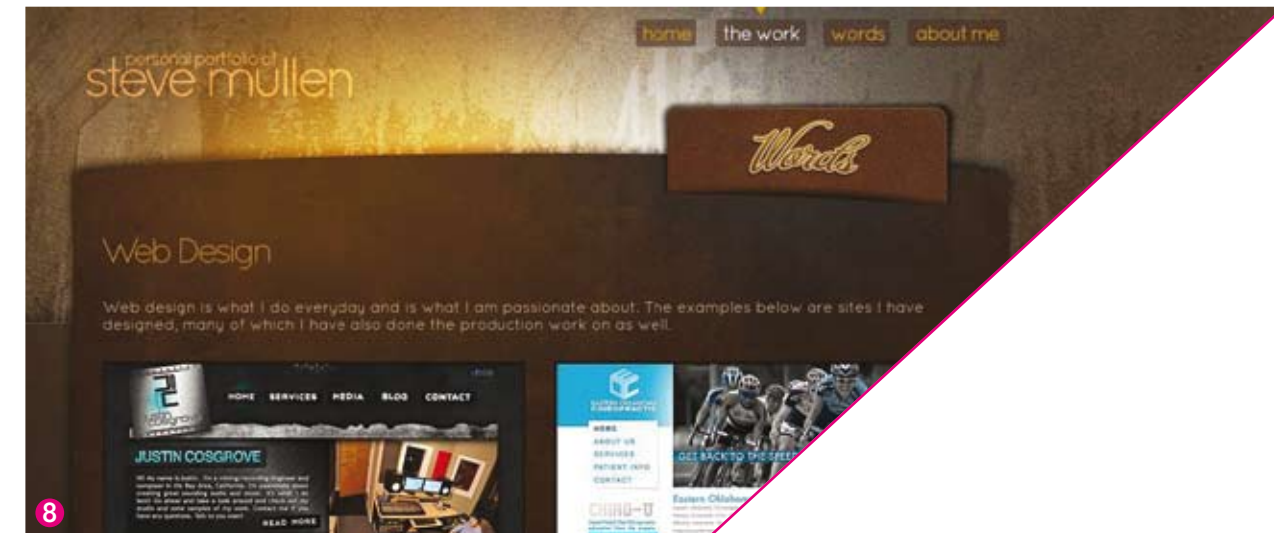
**8** **STEVE MULLEN**  
<http://stevemullencreative.com>

"I love texture and realism in web design. I know that style is not for every client or design, but with a personal portfolio, you have total freedom. That total freedom can be a bit of a curse though. I designed and almost finished three or four complete sites before I finally took this one live. You are your own worst client," explains Mullen

**9 10** **MIKE HARRISON**  
[www.destill.net](http://www.destill.net)

"Previously I'd built all my websites myself, whether they were Flash or HTML, but updating them became a tedious and time-consuming task, and because I'm not a coder I needed a simpler solution. I chose a basic theme and then customised it myself with HTML and CSS, changing colours and layout to keep a clean look," advises Harrison

**Be creative**  
"In two words: be creative. Don't be too smart, don't do too much research and never give up on your aesthetic freedom"  
– Israel Erez



colour-banding issues I chose to create a gradient with some slight noise applied to it in Photoshop and [import] it as a bitmap image."

Although Photoshop is just one of many tools designers use to build a website, most professionals concur that it is their favourite and perhaps the most vital part of an artist's portfolio design. "All my designs went through Photoshop; some were drawn in Illustrator, but eventually it all came together in a PSD file," reveals Morten Nielsen, whose portfolio opens to a bright and colourful collection of assets that visitors navigate using a 360-degree panoramic display. Opting for a more edgy, information-packed portfolio Steve Mullen (<http://stevemullencreative.com>) also sought to use Photoshop throughout his creation process. "Everyone has his or her own way of designing, but I usually just jump right into Photoshop as it's a great place to start experimenting. I begin by playing with colours and textures and eventually I see something I like. What I love about Photoshop is the flexibility to quickly make changes and edits to a design."

With thousands of talented designers, artists and illustrators all chomping at the bit to stand out, it's crucial that your portfolio makes the grade – not only visually but technically. "Make the tech work for the design, not the other way round," advises Nielsen. "I enjoy it when

the designer takes the user on a journey into a personal universe, but this isn't always possible for everyone. A lot of portfolios have become image grids – just click and view – which is still a nice, effective way of showing your work. On my portfolio site I did all the coding myself; I am by no means a programmer and my action script skills are fairly limited, so this meant the design process was a compromise between what I wanted and what I was able to realise."

For artists unwilling or unskilled at coding websites, there are ways around having to do it. "Don't be afraid to seek help," offers Scotland-based designer Steven Bonner ([www.stevenbonner.com](http://www.stevenbonner.com)). "If your technical skills aren't as strong as your design skills, there are plenty of options to get someone to help you implement your design. You can basically get someone for a fair price who you send your PSD files to and they send you back the HTML code." Alternatively for those more tentative about the technical aspects of web design or who are looking for a simpler approach, then there is also a wide variety of off-the-shelf templates one can use. "I personally use the Cargo template, which is an off-the-shelf, pre-built CMS that you can customise and populate yourself through your browser window, so the technical aspects are very easy to adapt to," continues Bonner. "In the past, I have >>>

### INSPIRATIONAL WEBSITES

We look at three of the best website portfolios to help rev your imagination...

**KEVIN LUCIUS**  
[www.kevinlucius.com](http://www.kevinlucius.com)

"The style of my portfolio just came naturally," says graphic designer Lucius from Chicago, USA. "I thought thumbnails would be a good way for users to easily browse my work. They enable people to simply click on a thumbnail if they wish to view the whole piece/project rather than scrolling through a long page of full-size images."



**TUDOR MOLDOVAN**  
[www.zupadupa.ro](http://www.zupadupa.ro)

Moldovan is a web designer, frontend developer and the co-founder of web design agency Zupadupa, whose website was inspired by *The Matrix*. "I came up with the idea of offering visitors the choice between two pills and the entire design was created around that concept. Most of the resources were drawn in Illustrator then imported as Smart Objects into PS."



**ISRAEL EREZ**  
[www.iestudio.co.il](http://www.iestudio.co.il)

Erez is a freelance designer and art director based in Tel Aviv, Israel. In 2007, he set up iEstudio, a design agency that offers a one-stop shop for creative services. "I create my designs for my portfolio website in Photoshop and then modify the work using Flash. PS offers me greater artistic freedom and is very convenient to design in."



# Feature / Build a strong online presence

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MORTEN NIELSEN  
[www.greйдient.com](http://www.greйдient.com)

"I've always had a thing for organic-looking design, soft curves and heavy use of natural textures and figures. So when it came to doing something personal I felt it was important to display the elements that inspire me"



12  
DAVID DELIN  
[www.28162.com](http://www.28162.com)

**Thumbnail teasers:** "I had the idea of circles divided in two. Each half-circle is its own thumbnail that links directly to a new page displaying the illustration in full and a brief explanation of the project"

## Best work

"The most important part of a portfolio should always be the best work you want to highlight. A short preloader animation can also be a nice touch" – Andreas Wannerstedt

**Reflection of personal style:** David Delin, aka 28162, is a freelance graphic designer based in Nantes, France. The self-taught digital artist says his portfolio website reflects his artistic style: "My style is a blend of poetry and urban culture, which builds and improves with each of my accomplishments"

**Simple and sober:** "I wanted my portfolio site to be something simple and sober, without being too busy. However it still had to allow me to present a sufficient number of illustrations. All the thumbnails and the banner were designed in Photoshop"

>>> designed the UI myself and then sub-contracted developers to build my site for me, but I find that this is working very well for me right now. It's based on the Cargo Collective CMS system (<http://cargocollective.com>), which was conceived specifically for those in the creative industries, and is as close to the perfect portfolio site as it's possible to get off the shelf right now. There's a quick and easy backend that allows you to update your site on the fly and a whole host of customisable layouts. There's also a great community that helps with any technical issues you may have, which is great for the less technical among us. I used an independent host before, but now host the site within the Cargo network for a set fee each year. The ability to add work in quickly, and show/hide projects without recoding is fantastic; it really does allow total control over how I'm projecting myself at any time. Also, because the CMS framework is built specifically for portfolios, it's optimised for image viewing, which in this industry is paramount."

Once the portfolio site is designed, created and live, you may be forgiven for thinking the job is done, but it's not. Feedback is vital for continually improving the look and navigation of your online presence. Consider installing a comments page or post a link in one of the many digital art forums or social networks for advice. "The best feedback I received was about the functionality of my portfolio," says Wannerstedt. "When a page has too many thumbnails it becomes very hard to hit the URL links, since the scrolling functionality is so sensitive, so I've adjusted this for better performance. I've also received a lot of nice feedback about the typography in the logotype and my preloader animations."

Danish designer Nielsen urges creatives to be personal, but also to be professional: "I have had mostly positive feedback. Some have been challenged by the way the navigation works, but all eventually learnt to navigate the site and get the information they were looking for. My advice is to avoid using the cheapest provider; often the service level is reflected in the price."

"I've had a lot of great feedback, especially from those viewing [my site] across handheld mediums," Bonner tells us. "In particular, several clients have mentioned they could navigate very quickly to see what they wanted, and that this isn't always the case with other designers' sites." Noting how Apple's mobile devices can't display Flash – a point for all designers constructing an online presence to bear in mind – Bonner adds: "Make it easily accessible – don't use Flash that might not be viewable by everyone and keep it simple and quick to load. Clients don't have time to wait on a hundred elements to load before they can see your work. Make them wait, and they'll go somewhere else. Commissioning editors are busy people, so ensuring fast access to your work and how to contact you is key if you want to be remembered for only the right reasons."

"I believe that a website shouldn't be overly fussy unless there's a good reason for it. In my view, people visit my site to look at the work so I don't want them to be distracted by tacky animations, unsuitable colours or anything else that will take their attention from what I want them to see. For the same reason, I keep my personal branding in black and white as I don't want anything to clash with the artwork."