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How can we provide free online e-portfolios for our students? (Part 1 of 3)

Can Web 2.0 tools provide graduates with a way to create an online portfolio of work, at no cost, and help to position them for job search success?

I believe that all students who graduate with degrees in Digital Media or related disciplines should have an online representational electronic portfolio when they complete their studies. This type of tool, accessible to any potential employer, can play a critical role in the job search process. An online portfolio can also be a powerful resource for students in many other academic disciplines.

While there are many tools available in today's marketplace that can provide this sort of functionality, some students are very pressed financially (*who isn't these days?*). It would be great to be able to direct students to a free site for creating and hosting such a portfolio, that they could keep and maintain after they complete their studies.

Unfortunately, many free Web 2.0 tools are advertisement-supported, and this lends an unprofessional appearance to a portfolio of work. My goal for the next few weeks here on EmergingEdTech.com is to look into some of the ways in which today's students can create an online portfolio of artwork and other creative expressions, at no cost, and select at least one that I think provides professional results and will support their career aspirations.

Is Google Sites the answer?

While searching the web for information about such resources, and reading many blog posts and web sites, I came across the presentation below, from a professor Helen Barrett, who is apparently quite active in pursuing the functionality I seek. Ms. Barrett's presentation provides a

thorough overview of e-portfolios, and recommends the use of Google Sites as a very good tool for creating them.



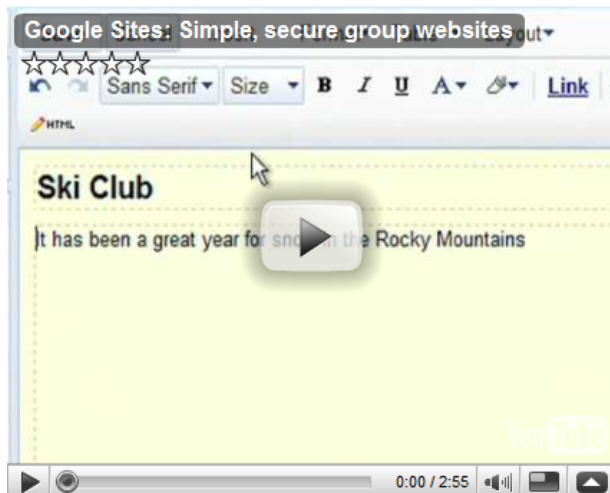
Web address for this SlideShare presentation:

<http://www.slideshare.net/eportfolios/classroom20>

I am going to leverage the excellent work that this educator has done, and try this out as a solution.

Setting up your own Google Site

My next step is to see what it takes to set up a Google Site, and how easy it is to use to create an e-portfolio.



I quickly found [this information page](http://www.google.com/sites/help/intl/en/overview.html) about Google Sites (web address: <http://www.google.com/sites/help/intl/en/overview.html>).

(This web page includes the overview video pictured here.)

The functionality here appears to be kind of similar to that provided by various free wiki applications, but the end result isn't burdened by advertisements. I know some Wiki sites provide advertisement-free sites to educational institutions, but Google Sites does that for everyone, and has less menu clutter, providing students more control over the presentation of their work. I should also clarify that I am suggesting the personal tools set from Google, as opposed to their Education Apps, specifically because this provides the user complete control over their work after they move on from their alma mater.

It looks like Google Sites may be a pretty good solution. Over the course of the coming week I will set up a site and see how well it lends itself to the creation and hosting of an e-portfolio. I will also seek input from faculty and administration at my own institution, to see if they agree that this may be a good option for many of our students.

I look forward to sharing my findings here, and even more so to providing students with a solution that can help to position them for career-building success.

Using Google Sites to create e-portfolios for students

(Part 2 of 3)

Is Google's "Sites" application the solution we're looking for?

Following up on last week's initial look into free tools for students to create and host an electronic portfolio of representational work, this week I am trying out Google Sites as a possible solution. Google Sites provides a free application for creating your own web site. Let's see how effective it is for hosting an e-portfolio.



The basic process I followed to create my Google Site

So, what did it take to create an example portfolio site with Google's tool? It starts with a Google Account, which is quick and easy to create (and provides access to a wide range of tools beyond Google Sites). Click here (<https://www.google.com/accounts/NewAccount>) to access the page for creating a Google Account.

Next, choose the Google Sites option (under the "more" menu from the main Google page, or just go to sites.google.com). When you get there, click the big "Create Site" button. This takes you to a page where you name your site, choose who can see it, and select a theme.

Unfortunately, you can't control the URL, beyond the suffix (your site will be located at "sites.google.com/site/*the_name_you_give_it*").

As you get started with the actual design of your portfolio site, you can choose to remove the Header and the Sidebar navigation menu and just use HTML to create the navigation structure, to get a site that lays out almost entirely based upon your coding, or you can leverage the built in menu tool to facilitate navigation. In any case, it was pretty easy to figure out how to create your own pages and relate them to each other.

I spent a little over an hour creating an example e-portfolio site, which can be viewed at <http://sites.google.com/site/kwportfoliosite>. I was easily able to imbed videos, upload and display images, and provide links to external work. The result may not be very pretty, but I don't pretend

to be a design expert – I am sure others more talented than I could create a more attractive site (*an example of a more professional looking site created with the application can be viewed at: <http://sites.google.com/a/googleclassrooms.org/mrs-richau/Home>*).

One important limitation I noted with Google Sites was that Java scripting was not allowed, so it is clearly limited in terms of its use for hosting a portfolio of web design examples. On the other hand, it is well suited towards structuring and laying out a site focused on displaying examples of a wide variety of work – pictorial, video, text, music, and more. The results are unencumbered by ads and other clutter.

Conclusion

Google Sites seems like a great tool for students to create electronic portfolios of their work. I need to run this solution by some faculty members and our Career Services team to see if they agree, but I am confident they will.

The main limitation that the application presented was that it doesn't look like it will work for web programmers who wish to display sites with any level of complexity (such as Java code or other more involved coding). There are many relatively inexpensive hosting sites on the Internet, where web design students can host their own URL and display web design techniques. Next week I'll take a look at various options for those types of students.

5 top-rated low cost web hosting sites (for web programmer e-portfolios) (Part 3 of 3)

The final post in a series that examines tools for students to create and host e-portfolios for little or no cost.

Over the last two weeks, I researched free options for creating and hosting e-portfolios for college students, to help with job search efforts. I settled on Google Sites as a great option for laying out a site to display text, images, video, web links, etc., but it won't support Java scripting or other functionality that may be required by students who wish to display web programming savvy. With that in mind, this week I am looking into inexpensive web hosting sites.

I combed the Internet for reviews of inexpensive web hosting services, and found a good number of sites that are rated well and offer services for \$50 to \$60 per year or so, based on multi-year agreements.

The following 5 providers all cost about \$5 or \$6 per month for annual agreements, and less for longer term deals, and were all rated very good (*ratings of 90% or better, or 4.5 out of 5*) on the various rating sites where I came across them. All of these sites offer free domain names and unlimited disk space.

Host	Current Monthly (Multi-year) Price
Justhost.com	\$3.45
HostClear.com	\$3.95
Fatcow.com	\$5.25 (\$3.67 special available)
SuperGreenHosting.com	\$3.95
WebHostingPad.com	\$1.99

To learn more, you can visit these sites and check out their offers, but it can also be useful to read reviews and look at comparative information. Following are a few web sites that provide ratings and compare features and functions for these and other web hosting sites:

- [TheTop10BestWebHosting.com](#)
- [WebHostingSummary.com/cheapdeals.html](#)
- [WebHostingGeeks.com](#)

This concludes my series on e-portfolios for students. As always, I welcome comments and questions. If any readers have experience with e-portfolios for students and wish to provide insights, share ideas, or offer any other feedback, please do so. Thanks!

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