

Day One

Job

Chance

* Get your first job in web design

As the academic year draws to a close, web design students are gearing up to unleash themselves on the job market. Recent graduate **Jack Osborne** has some advice for them

At this time of year, students across the country are putting the finishing touches to their coursework, hitting the books for the exams ahead and preparing to take the first step into 'the real world'. Having recently entered this magical land of gainful employment, I thought I'd share my experiences on how to move from student life into the world of professional web design.

It's a sad but true fact that many of my fellow graduates have still not been able to secure positions as web designers. It's becoming increasingly difficult to leave higher education and gain immediate employment. Many companies are unwilling to take on graduates because they lack 'real world' experience – but how will you ever get that experience if you can't get a job?

I don't claim to have all the answers but maybe if I share some of my ideas, then hopefully this will help give you an edge over the other applicants.

Portfolio

The first thing you need to get right is your portfolio site. This is the main arena in which you'll showcase your work, enabling potential employers to gauge your design capabilities and

get an insight into your thought processes and flows. When considering the layout of the portfolio and which elements to include, it's important that each project contains an image and a description. You may also wish to include a short narrative on the tools you've used, explaining the benefits that made you choose them. If you have a piece of work that's currently live, then offer a link.

I've read countless blog posts that instruct graduates not to include their university/college work in their portfolio as this doesn't relate to 'real industry projects'. It's certainly best to prioritise any commercial work you may have done, but unfortunately many graduates won't have had the chance to do any yet – and you can only work with what you've got!

About Me

The About Me section of your site is another opportunity to sell yourself. Unlike the portfolio, this is obviously tailored to you, the person. By laying out your personal interests and detailing the route you have taken, you're providing the reader with a map of your journey and how you're working to drive your ambitions into reality.

Highlight any awards or achievements. Take pride in what you've achieved and if possible link in a few testimonials so that viewers are able to see what kind of person you are. Adding a picture is also beneficial as it allows the employers and potential clients to put a name to a face. You've just inserted another imaginary bookmark in their head.

+ **Words Jack Osborne** graduated with BA Hons in Multimedia Technology from Glasgow Caledonian University. He is now working as a web designer and developer at Hobo. www.jackosborne.co.uk

+ **Image The Ronin** is Rob Chiu's motion graphics and design studio www.theronin.co.uk





“Show lots of personality”



Jonathan Lovatt-Young, creative director at Fortune Cookie, gives his take on getting your first job

If you have no experience, here's my advice: fake it. Pick

a brand that you love, set yourself a design brief and put the results into your portfolio. Show you understand how to interpret a brand without wrecking its visual identity. We'll be impressed by your enthusiasm. We may even decide to pitch your ideas to the brand and hire you to make it all happen.

Don't inflate a modest folio. Seven amazing ideas with a narrative behind them will have a much greater impact than 50. Art directors don't have a lot of time to spare, so make sure the work you include communicates your strengths and talents. If you get an interview, this is your opportunity to tell us more about your work, so hold something back until then.

Make your enthusiasm shine through. Someone I know sent his CV to an agency in a massive point size. It simply read 'I'll do anything'. They hired him. Develop a presence on the big social networks. We'll check what you're saying to decide whether you're 'our kind of person'. Having lots of personality is great. Giving the impression you're constantly on a bender is bad.

Turn up for your interview on time. Wear a reasonably smart shirt. No scruffy old trainers. Show your enthusiasm and how you'll make a difference to the team. If you get the job, remember that everyone you'll be working with is really busy. Don't feel slighted if it seems that people are ignoring your talent or offering you rubbish tasks. Do a blinder – surprise people, and always grab opportunities to get your work critiqued. You may have left college but you should never stop learning.

Above [Timvandamme.com](#) leads the way in displaying social networking links: a beautiful layout coupled with a clever use of dynamic code

left Elliot Jay Stocks' portfolio site is a perfect example of how to showcase your work

>> Social networks

When moving into 'the real world', it's important to make as many connections as possible. Online communities such as Twitter, LinkedIn and Facebook will help you interact with other designers while sites such as Digg and Design Float can provide you with free marketing and help to get your work 'out there'. Posting links to your social network profiles also helps you make connections with people, who until now will have been nameless and unknown.

When networking, the golden rule is this: don't be shy! Email local firms for advice. You might want to consider asking if you can work for them for a specified period without pay. Web firms are normally quite accommodating and may well be happy to have you in. As Paul Boag recently said: "In many ways the web design community is awesome. There aren't many industries where direct competitors talk to one another so openly and freely" ([boagworld.com/personal/whats_with_the_attitude/](#)). If you know of a local web agency, then why not make the trip and go directly to its office? You're exhibiting both initiative and a determination to succeed: personal traits that every employer looks for in an employee.

A good CV

One important thing you should do when looking for a job is set up a separate, private email address dedicated to work-related business only. In fact, the best thing to do would be to grab your name as a domain and host your email from there, further demonstrating your skillset.

You'll also need a CV. There are thousands of websites detailing what makes a good CV in general, but for a web design job you obviously need to focus on your core web skills – no one's really going to be interested in that summer you spent working behind the meat counter in Tesco. Again, provide links to any live sites and if possible show how your design has increased sales, improved awareness of a subject and so on.

The importance of providing a good cover letter is often underestimated, but it's just as (if not more) important than your CV. Use your cover letter to introduce yourself and outline your career ambitions while highlighting your entire skillset

as concisely as possible. Above all, make sure you understand the components of the job being advertised and that you can demonstrate how and when you've accomplished these.

It may take time, but if you've got the right skills and the right attitude, you'll eventually get your first interview. Remember, interviews are a two-way process, so before going to the interview do some research on the company, review its website, look at the company structure and look at any websites it has. Try to articulate where your skills and ability could have been used – but don't big yourself up too much.

Once you succeed and get your first job, you can go out and celebrate – but this doesn't mean your journey has ended. You'll soon find out that you've only just entered 'the real world'.

“There aren't many industries where direct competitors talk to one another so openly”

Paul Boag

Continue to use the social networking sites that provided you with that useful information. If a new one is taking off, make sure you're the first person in the office signed up to it and that people know it was you who found out about it. Designer, speaker and writer Elliot Jay Stocks recently revealed that he sets aside a portion of his morning to catch up on his RSS feeds, blog articles and Twitter updates: "Don't expect to get any work done in the first hour of your day" he advises.

Also, try to schedule a 30-minute breakout session with the senior personnel, at least once a week. Review what they're doing and ask for hints and tips. Try to create a reference guide of the code you're learning. Many companies use task boards to assign workload: volunteering yourself for things you have little or no experience of can be a quick way to gain knowledge and experience.

The industry can be challenging, but there are fantastic rewards for those who persevere. While fresh graduates in law or finance may be earning more than you, very few of them will have as much job satisfaction. Web design is a mix of art and technology where you can use your skills, ideas and cutting-edge tools to create a solution that was originally just a thought in someone's head.

Remember that web designers don't have to come through college or university. Many are self-taught, and this should inspire you to continue learning new things yourself. A qualification alone will never guarantee you a job in this industry – what's important is passion. Work hard, stay enthusiastic, and you'll never go far wrong. ●

[WWW](#). How did you get your first job? Share your experiences at [forum.netmag.co.uk](#)