

Don't cry for the Old Bag

By [Carmen Schaefer](#) and [Dr Carla Enslin](#)

10 Dec 2012

She's dead, and we are not sad. For far too long the ever-present portfolio bag has been stultifying creative endeavour and boring prospective employers with its flat, black, uniform format - even extending its death grip to digital platforms.



(Image: JorgenCarlberg, via Wikimedia Commons)

What is supposed to be a collection of best practice and an expression of the person is routinely lost in presentation. This is why Vega School of Brand Leadership, an educational brand of the Independent Institute of Education wants to re-invigorate the concept of the ubiquitous black portfolio bag. We need it new, fresh, innovative and daring - mirroring the students and work-seekers that must use the tool to delight and impress potential employers.

The dictionary defines a portfolio as a "large, thin, flat case for loose sheets of paper such as drawings or maps" or "a set of pieces of creative work collected by someone to display their skills, esp. to a potential employer." In the digital age, a collection of portfolio work often resides on the Internet. Work is also collected on Behance, on a personal website, or sent as a PDF file. Then we have friends in advertising who take their laptops to interviews and scroll through a PDF (the modern black bag) with a creative director watching over their shoulder.

Taking a more holistic view of the candidate

More than ever before, the employment focus of successful companies and their human resource divisions is closely directed to consider the fit, or synergy of the person with the organisation, the brand philosophy and the team. Similarly, the modern advertising and communication agency now looks for all the factors of the whole person that may support the agency objectives; his or her unique qualities, their potential to grow, to collaborate and to experiment.

Being immediately human is a core Vega value. A company's success depends on its culture of innovation, unique personal identities and to stimulating different ways of thinking. A creative portfolio is a powerful vehicle to express uniqueness. During portfolio execution time Vega students are challenged to develop an engaging creative concept to express who they are.

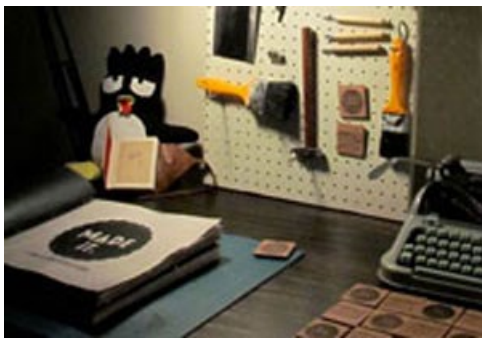
Much soul-searching is done to identify the qualities that distinguish them from their classmates and define uniqueness. Students are expected to execute this concept as a container to express their portfolios. The project is approached as a design project in publication. For example, students must pay particular attention to suitable sizes and formats, and to binding techniques or paper stock. In doing this, they create an enticing leave-behind, including reference to their on-line portfolios. Vega portfolios function as exhibition formats or 'handles' to guide and assist industry representatives in deciding where to position the person and his/her body of work.

Mind the pitfalls

Naturally, there are pitfalls to avoid. The unique student or portfolio identity cannot overwhelm the good work inside the portfolio, or perhaps even worse, obscure the bad work! Nor can the portfolio be a constructed gimmick. Students are instructed to identify and avoid image traps and aim to be genuinely original and meaningful in their concept and execution.



Copywriting student Tom Courly built a set of drawers with a bonsai tree planted on the top. Each drawer contains a booklet showing off a project. Tom says: "The idea behind my portfolio revolved around the subject of balance, and achieving the perfect balance. I was looking for a way to represent that idea visually, and the bonsai became my manifestation of that. It is the ultimate exercise of control over a 'chaotic' nature, but the outcome of that experience is a strong sense of balance."



Bella Evans (copywriting) made the paper for her portfolio herself by recycling the pages of all her previous 'bad ideas' in her sketchbook. The idea is that all her bad ideas become the vehicle for her good ideas. Her portfolio is called 'Made it'.



Natalie Kirkwood worked with the idea 'Design from all angles' She explains: "I look at design in a 3D tangible manner and design through experimentation with prototypes. I want to design from every angle. I would love to be able to design brand identities and then extend identity into interior spaces." Her portfolio book folds out into an impressive origami-like paper sculpture, but is also very easy to page through on a desk surface.



Design student Xoliswa Mayapi's portfolio concept is "culturally informed design." The outer cover consists of perforated postcards representing the array of cultural artefacts and memories that have influenced her creativity.



Bahle Bonga recreated her own version of *Drum* magazine. Her idea centred on timeless design. She added her own quirky comments on old Drum layouts. The rest of the magazine shows her work. Bahle says, "My love for music, fashion, literature and standing up for myself is rooted in Sophiatown, a little place of big people."

Each and every portfolio celebrates the person and his or her creative potential. In this fashion, each and every student

hopes to find that special synergy - a personal alignment with the right agency, creative team and creative director. The communication industry is a rich source of ideas, filled with uniqueness. It is no overstatement to say this is an industry that seeks and celebrates individuality because it is the source of creativity.



Carmen Schaefer.

Carmen Schaefer has guided many talented young creatives towards their ultimate portfolio in her role as a Visual Communication (design and art direction) Navigator at Vega School of Brand Leadership. Her published research focuses on young peoples social behaviours in the digital era. She has a private design practice, where she focuses on sustainable design solutions for her clients.



Dr Carla Enslin.

Dr Carla Enslin is one of the founding members of Vega School of Brand Leadership and heads Vega's national team of Navigators (lecturers) across four campuses. She is visiting lecturer at the University of Cape Town's Graduate School of Business and publishes, presents and consults on brand identity design, concept development and contact strategy.

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