Portfolio and Interview Tips for Starting a Career in Game Art

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Setting Yourself Up for Success (Before You Even Get Close to an Interview)
- Never, ever, stop pushing and challenging yourself artistically. Enter contests, set personal goals, do a show, take a class, do art as a volunteer, find on-line tutorials, try something you've never done before. Do not stay in your comfort zone!
- Play games and look at on-line gaming art. Stay current on what is out now and what is hot. Remember that you're not competing with your classmates, you're competing with people who have been doing this for years. If you aren't as good as they are, get there.
- Do not be overly concerned with learning software. We can teach you software in a couple of weeks, we don't have time to teach you to make great art. You don't need to know all the packages out there, get to know one well enough to show what you can do with it. Know your tools, but focus on your skills.
- Meet people in the industry however you can. Take an unpaid internship, join the IGDA, attend conferences (such as GDC and Firaxicon!) .
- Be careful what you put on social media. We are going to look you up on Facebook, etc.
- Practice consistently undivided attention to work. Do not watch TV, check email, check facebook, text, tweet, skype, chat, or whatever while you're working. Remove those distractions whenever you work, but especially if you're actually on the job.
- Approach everything with equal measures of confidence and humility, especially in the first few years of your career. It is going to take time for you to get your dream job, it is not going to happen right out the gate. You're going to have to do work that is boring sometimes. Attack it like it is the best thing that you've ever worked on. If you give the impression that any part of getting the job done is beneath you, you're in trouble.

Portfolio Do's
- Create a website that is easy to use, loads fast, and requires as few clicks as possible to get around (no deep menus). Keep the site simple, limited to professional art, personal art, resume, and contact info (which should be on every page and image). Make sure it works on different browsers as well (IE, Firefox, Chrome, Safari, etc).
- Include your best work up front with a strong focus on the specific position for which you are applying. Include only your best work! Quality over quantity every time! 5 great images are better than 10 images out of which only 5 are great. Remove anything that isn't great because that is what we'll remember.
- Pay attention to presentation (well staged and lit renders, spelling, grammar, etc). This tells us a lot about the care you put into your work.
- Annotate everything with what you did (even if you did everything) and anyone else who contributed (and how they contributed).
- Utilize appropriate music for your site or demo reel. Overpowering or offensive music can detract from the experience.

Portfolio Don'ts

- Don't send anything physical beyond a printed cover letter and resume (no physical portfolios, DVDs, etc). We don't have anywhere to store them and they get lost easily.
- Don't complicate your website with unusual file compression, video codecs, sluggish flash menus, annoying music, excessively large images, etc.
- Don't password protect the site unless you have confidential imagery and then separate that off and only protect that imagery.
- Don't use poor quality images. If you're bringing traditional media to the interview use a good scanner.
- Don't show mediocre work in other disciplines. If you're a great modeler, show great models, not great models and mediocre animation (though in your resume you can note that you do have animation ability and offer to show samples).
- Don't show in progress work unless you must and then carefully explain where you are in the process and where you intend to go with it.

Resume and Interview Tips

- Don't list yourself as an expert in numerous software packages and/or skills. It takes about 5 years working full time with one thing to really qualify as an expert on it. List your skills noting which you consider your strongest. The word expert is dangerous, especially if you're looking for your first job.
- Tailor your resume and portfolio for both the position and company (don't tell us about winning first place in a basket weaving contest). Show work in the style they use. If you don't have any, make some! Caution! Do not redesign something that the company created (such as a character). You may inadvertently annoy the person who created it or come off as thinking you knew better than the company did. Create something new in their style (this is more impressive anyway).
- Play the companies games before you interview! At least play a free demo if available (and always check to see if there is).
- Bring supplemental materials to the interview; sketches, storyboards, work in progress, abandoned ideas, etc. In the interview you can discuss them and give them the context that your website cannot (even if you put it there we probably won't read it).
- Be honest about everything, especially your limitations. Nothing is worse than getting caught trying to make yourself look better than you are or outright lying.
- Dress casually, but appropriately (no suits and ties, but no offensive t-shirts either).
- Be careful what you say about non-work related subjects (particularly controversial or illegal subjects, such as race, religion, politics, drug use, etc.)
- Don't bad mouth or rant about previous employers, teachers, or experiences. You never know who is friends with that person and we'll be worried that you'll talk that way about us later on.

Don't lose faith in yourself if getting a job is hard. It is hard. Just keep applying and growing and you'll get there. Thanks and Good Luck!
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