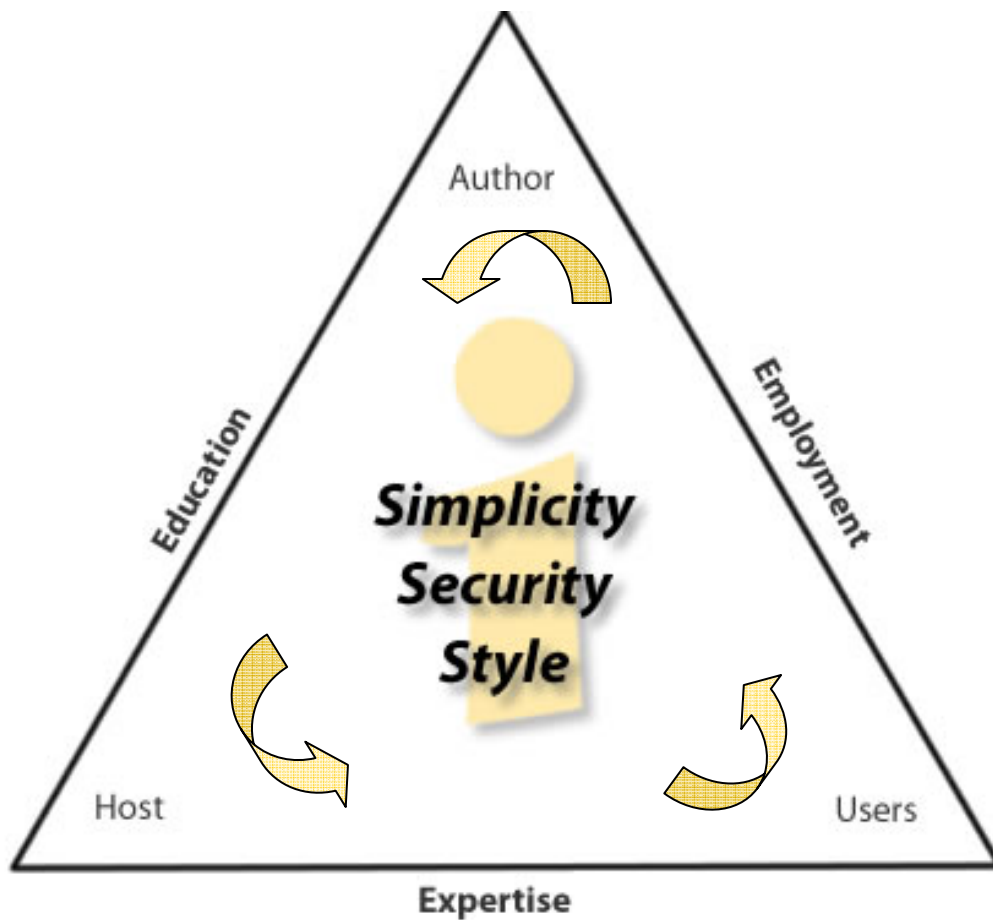


Designs, Dilemmas, Dreams: State-wide ePortfolio™ initiatives in Iowa

Submitted by Rebecca Anthony & Will Coghill-Behrends ©2007

The use of ePortfolios in education, business, and other settings has been a steadily increasing phenomenon as technology, both hardware and bandwidth, become increasingly affordable and accessible. State-wide ePortfolio™ initiatives, like the one currently being considered in the State of Iowa, offer the promise of new enterprise and connections made possible with technology to millions of potential users. Therein lies the concern. A project of this scope (multiple parties with multiple goals), size (thousands of simultaneous users), and product offerings (complex interface design with diverse functionality) has the potential to become an insurmountable task when one considers the rate at which our technology is expanding and the ways in which our interactions with that technology change as a result of that growth.

As we contemplated the goals of a state-wide ePortfolio™ project in Iowa, we designed the following model in an effort to create a discourse about the vision for this project.



The Iowa e³ Model: Audience, Approach and Applications for ePortfolios

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The model helps to visualize the multiplicities and complexities inherent in a multifaceted product. As a group Iowans are independent, educated and proud. They are independent of mind, but with a commitment to the success of the community. Iowans are educated, regularly ranking among the top

performers in the world. Lastly, Iowans are proud of their accomplishments, communities, and state. Iowans, as evidenced by the caucus system, firmly believe in grassroots initiatives. With this in mind, the most successful Iowa ePortfolio™ initiatives will be homegrown. A product presented to Iowans that doesn't feel like Iowa – simple, secure – may be perceived as suspect, ingenuine, and bureaucratic.

The Iowa e³ Model©, is based on the three fundamental dimensions of an ePortfolio: Education, Employment and the sharing of Expertise. The 3 pillars of the ePortfolio's architecture can be seen as a tool to support authors in these lifelong stages.

In this model there are three distinct participants in the ePortfolio™ process.

Host	Supplier of the infrastructure and system that provides the framework and platform to design and deliver ePortfolios.
Author	The author acts as the designer. They create, manage and market themselves through the Iowa templates. They personalize their "spaces" consistent with the goals of their ePortfolio™.
User	Those who use the ePortfolio™ system to make decisions and encourage commerce. These are employers, educators, and others who view an author's ePortfolio™ to make some important decision – grade, employment offer, promotion, recognition.

At the heart of this model you'll find the three over-arching needs of all who interact with the system: **Simplicity, Security, and Style**. Though the way the individuals participate in the process may vary, their needs converge. With a design in mind that stays true to these principles, Iowans, and others will find the product and process meaningful, productive, and worthwhile.

Simplicity	Refers to the design of the interface, its capabilities, and its façade. It is always possible to add complexity or advanced features to a sound foundation. Overly complicated design is difficult to comprehend and navigate and causes a loss in effectiveness. The initial goals should also be simple – to improve communication, commerce and communities.
Security	All parties must feel their information is protected when they view, upload and manage large quantities of digital material. Filters must be in place to keep unwanted threats to the system and its users at bay. Iowans generally trust their localities. A product should have a similar feel. Secure modes of access and usage encourage communication, commerce and communities.
Style	Careful consideration, contemplation and implementation based on standards of excellence in design, promotion, access, and support will promote communication, commerce and communities.

An ePortfolio™ is an academic achievement tool that can be used throughout a lifetime – beginning in the Kindergarten classroom to senior citizen seminars. The architecture lends itself to ever-changing goals and needs. Multiple constituents – employers, educators, government officials, and private industry – here in Iowa, indeed around the world, can benefit from an ePortfolio™ that is carefully designed and delivered. In our own experience the uses of an ePortfolio™ are just as multifaceted as the information that can be included. They really are a digital toolbox, a passport into the next age, and an

effective way to document where you are and where you're going – as an individual, business, community, and state. ePortfolios can **improve, encourage and promote** *communication, commerce and communities* in the great State of Iowa.

Considerations

The following list represents our thoughts on the design, delivery and vision for Iowa ePortfolios. This list is based on our experiences with designing, implementing and assessing ePortfolio products and systems for the last decade.

- Any proprietary model will be bound by the market and thus driven by a desire to make money. Because the goals of a state-wide ePortfolio™ project are to increase commerce across the board for all Iowans, there arises a potential conflict of interest in soliciting a private enterprise to manage the system. This is not the same thing as increasing commerce across the State. Any attempt to increase commerce has to be homegrown, that is to say, its goals must be consistent with and aligned with the realities of those who are to benefit from its implementation. In this regard, Iowa's vision must be one of long-term growth and a continued, and perhaps, renewed commitment and investment in education, training, and outreach – particularly to rural Iowa.
- The “Digital Divide” (which once referred to the discrepancy between the amount of readily available technology to underprivileged and minority groups as compared to their white middle class counterparts) is shifting nowadays to include those who have high speed broadband access, and those who do not. This divide is ever present in rural Iowa.
- A drive through rural Iowa reveals a landscape rich in beauty, but often devoid of opportunities. With the shift in the economy – to knowledge based, knowledge driven – a comprehensive training and rural refitting plan could create a large workforce ready to win back jobs and opportunities. *Why outsource to India what we could outsource to Ida Grove?*
- It seems lately as if Iowa's economy, business, and very identity are up for grabs to the highest bidder. We must balance sustainable agricultural practice with new industry. We must recognize the needs of all communities in Iowa and locate, provide, and support multiple modes of learning, working, and living.
- An infrastructure to support the delivery of an Iowa ePortfolio™ is already in place – the Iowa Workforce Development Office, the Iowa Communications Network, the Area Education Agencies, the Iowa Rural Development Council, and the USDA Rural Development Office.

Vision

An Iowa ePortfolio™ needs to be more than a personal website. An Iowa ePortfolio™ should be a systematically designed and thoughtfully constructed presentation that has a communicative purpose. To that end, the context of *all* Iowans – from the urban to rural landscape – should be carefully considered so that *all* Iowans will have access to a system that supports our shared goals of education, employment and the sharing of expertise to position our state for success and prosperity for future generations.

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