

JAMES STEPHANS

Creative Director | Branding Expert | Marketing Strategy Leader
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PROFESSIONAL SUMMARY

Creative Director, brand strategist and AI advocate with 13+ years industry experience, 6 of those building high-performance teams and driving growth for startups, agencies, and SaaS enterprises. Track record of owning end-to-end brand strategy from positioning and campaign messaging through team structure and budget management. Strong alignment to sales, pipeline metrics, and growth goals. Proven ability to lead organizations through change, including M&A integration and rapid scaling.

EXPERIENCE

Creative Marketing Director, Ncontracts (2023 - Present | Remote)

SaaS risk and compliance platform; grew from ~150 to 400+ employees and increased customer base by 25%.

- Owned brand integration across two large acquisitions, aligning creative strategy, visual identity, and messaging for a unified market presence, contributing to a 146% ARR increase during tenure.
- Nurtured a growing creative team managing 50–100 projects per month, implementing structured sprint workflows and check-in cadences that improved on-time delivery and project capacity.
- Drove an 83% reduction in paid media cost-per-click (from \$12 to \$2) by conceiving and producing an animated digital ad series, significantly improving pipeline efficiency.
- Spearheaded AI adoption by developing an AI usage framework for the creative team, introduced generative tools into production workflows, and created the company's first AI-assisted video for the annual sales convention.
- Refreshed brand visual system to strengthen competitive positioning at in-person events and support the company's overall narrative.
- Managed an extended vendor network including external agencies, freelance designers, and printers. Oversaw scoping, quality control, and delivery across concurrent projects.

Creative Operations Director, Exclusive Marketing Agency (2021 - 2022 | Remote)

High-growth digital marketing agency with clients in mortgage, finance, and real estate sectors.

- Scaled creative operations infrastructure to support 100% month-over-month client growth, without sacrificing output quality or increasing error rates.
- Coached and co-led a project management team of 15–30 employees, establishing roles, workflows, and accountability systems from the ground up.
- Reduced asset delivery turnaround time by 50% through a full creative department reorganization, including process redesign, tooling standardization, and capacity planning.

Creative Director, Mile High Spirits (2019 - 2021 | Denver, CO)

Colorado-based craft spirits brand with national retail distribution.

- Drove a 30% increase in sales through a top-to-bottom brand overhaul encompassing product packaging, copy, logo design and digital presence; repositioned the brand for retail shelf competitiveness.
- Introduced brand stunt PR campaigns — including a high-profile product launch that placed a barrel of whiskey in space — generating national media coverage and amplifying brand awareness.

Sr. Graphic Designer, Agape North (2017 - 2018 | Memphis, TN)

Non-profit apparel design and production firm serving enterprise clients.

- Directed apparel design and production for major accounts including FedEx and St. Jude Children's Research Hospital, managing brand compliance and client relationships.
- Oversaw a full website redesign that increased client engagement and established a cohesive brand presentation across digital platforms.

Graphic Designer, Hemline Brand Strategy (2016 | Memphis, TN)

Brand strategy and marketing agency.

- Produced marketing collateral within strict brand guidelines for enterprise clients including Church Health and Hilton Hotels.
- Contributed to client-facing brand presentations and creative reviews, gaining early exposure to the full agency workflow from brief to delivery.

Brand & Creative Consultant, Independent (2012 - 2023 | Remote)

- Launched dozens of brands and executed multi-channel campaigns across retail, hospitality, finance, nonprofit, and professional services sectors.
- Managed full project lifecycles from discovery and strategy through production and vendor handoff, consistently delivering on time and on budget.

CORE COMPETENCIES

Leadership & Strategy

Brand Strategy & Positioning • Team Building & Development • Budget & Resource Management • Cross-functional Leadership • M&A Brand Integration • KPI Tracking • Workflow Design • Process Optimization • AI Adoption • Creative Operations

Creative & Technical

Brand Identity • Marketing Campaigns • Digital Advertising • Paid Media Optimization • Web Design • Package Design • Illustration • Photography & Video Production

Tools & Platforms

Adobe Creative Suite • Figma • Wrike • Microsoft Teams • Generative AI (Claude, ChatGPT, Midjourney, Gemini) • Slack

EDUCATION

B.A. Media Communications, Union University (2016 | Cum Laude)