DEREK DARBY

UX & Product Design Leader | Strategy, Research & System Design | Business & Engineering Fluent

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PROFESSIONAL SUMMARY

UX leader with 20 years of experience driving product clarity, simplifying complex workflows, and improving decision quality across enterprise SaaS, fintech, ecommerce, and education technology. Combines front-end development foundations with an MBA and MIS background to bridge design, engineering, and business priorities with credibility. Experienced in building and growing UX teams, maturing practices, and implementing scalable systems that accelerate product delivery. Known for bringing calm structure to ambiguity while staying hands-on to deliver measurable improvements in workflow efficiency, decision quality, and product clarity.

CORE COMPETENCIES

UX Leadership • Interaction Design • UX Research • UX Strategy • Complex Workflow Design • Product Alignment • Engineering Collaboration • Design Operations (DesignOps) • Enterprise SaaS • Cross-Functional Stakeholder Alignment • Data-Informed Design • GA4 & Experimentation (A/B Testing) • Journey Mapping & Customer Understanding

Director of User Experience - Digital Publishing & Content Operations
Grey Dog Media, West Des Moines, IA | Nov 2023 – Dec 2025

- Managed and developed a UX team of 4–8 within a multi-client, agency environment, introducing modern processes and operational structures that improved speed, quality, and consistency of output.
- Cut production mistakes significantly, reducing rework and review cycles through component standards, reusable patterns, and aligned workflows.
- Improved operational efficiency by streamlining cross-functional processes, enabling scalable digital production without proportional staffing increases.
- Delivered analytics-backed insights for major clients, identifying UX gaps, conversion-impacting issues, and optimization opportunities.
- Introduced foundational design system elements that improved consistency and accelerated recurring workflows.

Senior UX Designer & Researcher - FinTech Startup SaaS
Innovation Refunds, West Des Moines, IA | May 2022 – Oct 2023

- Researched, authored, and structured 100+ knowledge base articles, reducing internal ambiguity and improving communication accuracy in a high-growth startup environment.
- Designed and led the knowledge base product from discovery through launch, including IA, content standards, and cross-team collaboration.

- Conducted mixed-methods research, including interviews and large-scale surveys (300+ participants), to evaluate desirability, feasibility, and market fit for new fintech concepts and reduce investment risk.
- Partnered with sales teams to identify workflow gaps and delivered recommendations that increased clarity and process consistency.
- Aligned research insights with business needs to strengthen product understanding and decision-making across departments.

Senior UX Designer - Ecommerce SaaS
Hy-Vee, Inc., Des Moines Metro, IA | Jan 2020 – May 2022

- Delivered a data-driven PDP redesign resulting in +84,000 add-to-carts (related items), +4,000 direct add-to-carts, +31,000 variation interactions, +31 seconds time on page, and –5% bounce rate.
- Designed the 'Did You Forget Anything?' upsell flow, increasing order value by capturing pre-checkout add-on opportunities.
- Partnered with engineering and product owners to define experiments, validate hypotheses, and guide iterative releases.
- Improved cross-team alignment and delivery cadence through active participation in the UX/Product/Engineering triad model.

User Experience Lead - 3D Collaboration SaaS
Vertex Software, Ames, IA | Apr 2018 – Oct 2019

- Served as the sole UX designer at a stealth startup building a complex engineering collaboration platform with high-security IP requirements.
- Designed segmented model-sharing workflows enabling secure data exchange with annotations and contextual metadata.
- Built foundational navigation structures, interaction patterns, and early design system components.
- Supported engineering velocity through iterative prototyping, usability validation, and close collaboration with technical leadership.

Director of User Experience - EdTech SaaS
ACT, Iowa City, IA | Jun 2016 – Mar 2018

- Reduced student registration time from ~45 minutes to under 10 minutes by redesigning workflows using research-driven insights.
- Built a multi-source VOC dashboard integrating customer service, usability findings, and web feedback; delivered insights quarterly.
- Managed UX budgets, vendors, and a multi-disciplinary team responsible for personas, journey maps, and design sprints.
- Established scalable UX processes and engagement models that improved product quality and delivery consistency.

Lead UX Designer - EdTech SaaS
ACT, Iowa City, IA | Dec 2013 – Jun 2016

- Led research and design initiatives for core EdTech products, conducting interviews, usability tests, and workflow redesigns.
- Collaborated with engineering and product leadership to define requirements, prioritize roadmap needs, and deliver scalable solutions.

Interaction Designer - EdTech SaaS
Pearson, Iowa City, IA | Mar 2008 – Dec 2013

- Conducted on-site usability studies with administrators, IT coordinators, district leaders, and state officials across Texas and Virginia.
- Created personas, scenarios, and workflow models informing redesigns that improved efficiency for large-scale testing operations.
- Enhanced clarity and task success through iterative prototyping and collaboration with engineering teams.

Front-End Developer & Prototype Creator - EdTech SaaS
Pearson, Iowa City, IA | Jun 2006 – Mar 2008

- Built interactive prototypes and UI components that supported early product exploration and accelerated alignment.

EDUCATION

MBA, Management & Organizations - University of Iowa, Tippie College of Business

B.A., Management Information Systems (Computer Science Emphasis) - University of Northern Iowa

CERTIFICATIONS

UX Certificate (UX Management Specialty) - Nielsen Norman Group

Certified User Experience Analyst (CXA) - Human Factors International

Certified Usability Analyst (CUA) - Human Factors International

TOOLS & PLATFORMS

Figma • FigJam • Miro • GA4 • Jira • Confluence • Aha! • LogRocket • UserTesting • Optimal Workshop • Webflow • HTML/CSS (prototyping) • AI-Assisted Design & Research Tools