

Derek Darby

Principal Product Designer · Complex Workflows · AI-Integrated Practice

Enterprise SaaS · Product-Minded Design Leader · Cross-Functional Leadership

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PROFESSIONAL SUMMARY

Product designer with 20 years of experience across enterprise SaaS, FinTech, ecommerce, and education technology, including nearly four years in Director-level roles managing design teams of up to eight. Has worked as a founding designer at startups, Director of Product Design at both an EdTech enterprise and a multi-client agency, and lead IC on products used by millions. Builds design systems and combines systems thinking with hands-on interaction design and UI craft, including typography, visual hierarchy, spacing, responsive layout, and reusable patterns. Shapes product direction through cross-functional discovery with Product and Engineering, using problem framing, ideation, story mapping, research, and data to clarify problems, priorities, and what to build. Brings a front-end development background with production HTML, CSS, and JavaScript experience, plus later UI implementation and pull-request work within a React codebase. Directs AI agents connected directly to design and development tools, including Figma, to accelerate concept exploration and production work, and holds an MBA and an NN/g UX Management certification.

CORE COMPETENCIES

Product Design Leadership · UX Leadership & Strategy · Design Engineering · Interaction Design
UX Research & Synthesis · Design Systems & DesignOps · Engineering Collaboration · Data-Informed Design
Cross-Functional Leadership · Team Building & Mentorship · A/B Testing & Experimentation · Accessibility (WCAG)
Journey Mapping & Service Design · UI Design & Visual Craft · Information Architecture · Product Discovery & Facilitation

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Director of Product Design & UX – Digital Product Systems & Operations Nov 2023 – Dec 2025

Grey Dog Media, *West Des Moines, IA*

- Managed and developed a UX team of 4 to 8 across a multi-client agency environment, delivering UX across desktop and mobile web for major clients including Hy-Vee, while owning sprint planning, standups, retrospectives, and other Agile ceremonies with Product and Engineering.
- Reduced rework and review cycles by establishing component standards, reusable patterns, and foundational design system elements that improved cross-team consistency and enabled scalable production without added headcount.
- Identified responsive-design issues rooted in how components were built and coached designers toward alternative UI approaches that worked within engineering's real constraints, using front-end knowledge to keep design and engineering aligned.
- Managed monthly Hy-Vee analytics reporting in GA4 and LogRocket, translating UX and technical findings into content and optimization recommendations, and later supervising a direct report to scale analytics delivery.
- Led design and development of internal and client-facing web products in Webflow, including the GDM site, Life:Beautiful Magazine with Shopify ecommerce and subscription integration, and Fresh Thyme digital magazines, while building AI-assisted content operations using Python-based scraping and AI-driven SEO analysis to audit and optimize magazine content at scale.
- Authored and delivered Hy-Vee governance proposals covering DAM tagging, alt text, and new event-tracking instrumentation.
- Ran regular 1:1s and performance reviews for the team, pairing structured feedback with hands-on coaching and training to develop designers' skills and support their career growth.

Senior Product Designer & Researcher – FinTech SaaS Startup May 2022 – Oct 2023

Innovation Refunds, *West Des Moines, IA*

- Joined as the founding product designer at a rapidly scaling FinTech startup, designing HubSpot marketing automation workflows to repair broken lead and funnel experiences before pivoting to research-led product strategy in partnership with the CMO and CPO, shaping product direction and defining priorities amid ambiguity.

- Conceived and led an internal sales enablement platform built on Contentful from research through delivery, serving as lead designer and de facto product lead in the absence of a PM, owning problem framing and prioritization. Built a knowledge system organized around nine customer archetypes that improved sales speed and messaging consistency.
- Conducted mixed-methods research including moderated customer interviews and large-scale surveys with 300+ participants to evaluate financial product concepts and sales workflow gaps, shaping product and platform decisions directly from field findings while using AI to support survey design and synthesis.

Senior Product Designer – Ecommerce & Consumer Platform Jan 2020 – May 2022

Hy-Vee, Inc., *Des Moines Metro, IA*

- Reframed a PDP redesign as a broken product-variation model by auditing 100+ real catalog scenarios, then authored the variation, grouping, and precedence rules used by Product, Engineering, and ProdX (Hy-Vee's product-data vendor), leading to ProdX extending its API with attributes the model required.
- Delivered measurable month-over-month ecommerce growth from the resulting PDP redesign across desktop, mobile, and app: +84,000 related add-to-carts, +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?' pre-checkout upsell experience, improving average order value by surfacing relevant add-on recommendations before checkout.
- Redesigned the full cart, checkout, and payment experience across web, mobile, and app, including payment method selection, order confirmation, error states, tipping flows for DoorDash deliveries, special order workflows, and gift card experiences, with in-store usability testing at Hy-Vee dining locations to validate key payment moments.
- Drove product direction before design work began by introducing and owning a Design/Product/Engineering discovery practice, then partnered with the same leads on A/B experiments using GA4 and Quantum Metric data to guide iterative releases.

Product Design Lead – Enterprise 3D Collaboration SaaS Apr 2018 – Oct 2019

Vertex Software, *Ames, IA*

- Served as founding and sole designer at a stealth B2B startup building a complex enterprise 3D collaboration platform, defining the full interaction model, information architecture, and early design system under high ambiguity and tight constraints.
- Designed a novel Stories interaction model enabling distributed engineering teams to curate, annotate, and discuss 3D model states asynchronously, anchoring feedback to specific geometry and reducing reliance on file exports and disconnected review tools for enterprise accounts including Rockwell Collins, John Deere, Vermeer, and Caterpillar.
- Designed role-aware permissions and secure sharing workflows enabling external suppliers and non-CAD stakeholders to participate in model reviews without exposing full IP, working within strict enterprise security constraints to keep collaboration viable.
- Implemented UI styling directly in the platform's production React codebase, translating design specs into working CSS and submitting pull requests into the front-end environment.

Director of Product Design & UX – Enterprise Nonprofit EdTech SaaS Jun 2016 – Mar 2018

ACT, Inc., *Iowa City, IA*

- Reduced student registration time from approximately 30 minutes to under 7 minutes by redesigning a complex, data-heavy workflow using research-driven problem framing and iterative usability testing.
- Built a multi-source VOC dashboard integrating customer service data, usability findings, and web analytics; delivered quarterly design strategy insights to senior leadership that shaped product roadmap prioritization.
- Led cross-functional ecosystem discovery and experience strategy across 37+ ACT systems and 5+ product lines, reframing a fragmented portfolio into a single, unified platform vision for the learner journey. The work shaped product roadmap prioritization and aligned product, architecture, and research leadership around continuity across planning, testing, and postsecondary decisions.
- Built and managed a team of 5, including hiring 3 designers (recruiting remotely beyond the local market) and developing a research coordinator into a stronger research contributor; owned labor and non-labor budget planning and negotiated master service agreements with multiple research, visual design, and UX vendors.

Lead Product Designer – Enterprise Nonprofit EdTech SaaS Dec 2013 – Jun 2016

ACT, Inc., *Iowa City, IA*

- Led research and design for core EdTech products used by students, educators, and institutions nationwide, conducting user interviews, usability studies, and workflow redesigns while partnering with engineering and product leadership to align on cross-portfolio dependencies and deliver scalable solutions across a matrixed enterprise.
- Informally mentored and grew a then-junior UX designer's HCD methodology, IA principles, and structured critique skills at his manager's direction; that designer later formally reported to him as Director and went on to help lead creation of ACT's full enterprise UX style guide with brand integration.

Interaction Designer & Front-End Developer – Enterprise EdTech SaaS Jun 2006 – Dec 2013

Pearson, *Iowa City, IA*

- Progressed from front-end development into interaction design, building production UI in HTML, CSS, and JavaScript before moving into research, information architecture, and prototyping for EdTech products.
- Hand selected by the Core Engineering director to move from Pearson's UX team into Core Engineering for the ground-up redesign of PearsonAccess Next, then led field research across 10 districts in Texas and Virginia spanning systems from 129 to 204,000+ students and developed a six-role coordinator persona framework that grounded all navigation and interaction design decisions in validated real-world workflows.
- Redesigned PearsonAccess navigation architecture from data-object organization to task-organized structure targeting a 25% user satisfaction increase and 30% revenue growth, with prototype feedback from district coordinators describing the result as intuitive, elegant, and significantly better than the existing system.
- Built interactive prototypes and collaborated closely with engineering to reduce implementation ambiguity.
- Conducted a full Section 508 and WCAG accessibility audit of PearsonAccess Next during the platform redesign, testing with screen readers and text-only browsing environments. Delivered code-level correction recommendations directly to the engineering team so accessibility was addressed as part of the redesign itself.

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

Design & Prototyping: Figma (interaction, motion, and responsive prototyping) · FigJam · Miro

Front-End Implementation: HTML · CSS · JavaScript · React (production UI styling)

Research & Analytics: GA4 · LogRocket · Quantum Metric · UserTesting · Optimal Workshop · PostHog

Product & Collaboration: Jira · Confluence · Aha! · Notion

CMS, CRM & Commerce: Sanity · Contentful · Webflow · Brandfolder · HubSpot · Shopify

AI Tools: ChatGPT · Claude · Claude Design · v0 · MCP-based agent orchestration (Figma, Webflow) · AI-assisted concept exploration, rapid prototyping, and research synthesis