

# Aaron Neeley

## Design + Product

⚠️ *\*If you're looking for portfolio work, there is a good chance that what is available online is out of date. Please reach out if you would like to see more.\** ⚠️

Since 2004, I have been helping teams develop meaningful products and foster cross-disciplinary collaborative environments.

While focusing on solving user problems has been a significant part of my journey, I have also built and led medium-sized teams, mentored and grown designers, and worked with other leaders to establish operational practices. As a former founder myself, I strive to bring unique approaches to the table to help R&D and SLT teams unlock their potential.

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### Employment History

#### Head of Design - Dooly

*Aug 2021 - Mar 2023*

Dooly is a sales enablement platform that leverages AI to collect information and insights essential to close sales deals.

#### Design Strategy

- Created high level models to guide how we thought about our problem space and users
- Provided design direction, feedback, and guidance to the team, promoting their professional growth and development.
- Developed design strategy for team to encourage innovation, get designers 'unstuck,' and foster a 360deg mastery of the business and user problems.
- Established the guidelines for how we approached scalable design operations including our Design System, Brand, Voice and Tone.

#### Team & People Development

- Led and mentored a team of product + marketing designers, fostering a collaborative and creative culture of excellence.
- Created a high-energy design culture, built on empathy, growth-mindsets, and curiosity
- Defined the day-to-day operations for a team of 7 designers (Product + Marketing), providing coaching, mentorship, and guidance to foster professional growth and development.
- Identified and implemented the necessary tools, rituals, and systems to help streamline decision-making processes and enhance collaboration amongst the team.

#### Hiring Strategy & Team Growth

- Developed a comprehensive hiring and development strategy for a multi-disciplinary design team, ensuring the team was staffed with the right mix of skills and expertise.
- Created growth development rubrics to guide expectations.

#### Cross-Team Collaboration

- Worked closely with R&D leaders to foster relationships and drive optimal behaviors that promoted autonomy, innovation, and efficient teamwork across the organization.

### **Quality Bar**

- Worked to establish and maintain Dooly's "Quality Bar" including the guiding principles, quality standards and best practices.
- Conducted regular check-ins, critiques and retros

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## **Founder - theCOOP**

*Nov 2020 - Feb 2022*

theCOOPs mission is to help career changers and recent graduates accelerate their transition in to the Engineering and Design fields by simulating real world work environments. Couple that with structured industry mentorship and a safe space to break things we were able to 'crack the code' of helping candidates separate themselves in interview process.

### **Vision**

- Crafted a vision and compelling story that motivated teams to get excited about building a high impact service.

### **Product Success**

- Successfully helped over 25 designers and engineers break into the tech field by providing them with a simulation R&D environment where they could collaborate on large-scale projects, work with cross-disciplinary teams, and gain hands-on experience with real product requirements.

### **Fundraising & Financial Management**

- Led successful VC and fundraising efforts for Seed and Angel funding, securing the necessary resources to grow and expand the company.

### **Business Model & Product-Market Fit**

- Developed a solid business model and achieved product-market fit by leveraging Lean Canvas methodology and the Build, Measure, Learn framework to continuously refine our offering.

### **Strategic Problem Solving & Prioritization**

- Made informed decisions on which service problems to tackle based on user needs and business outcomes, while also identifying 'what not to do'.

### **Partnerships & Collaboration**

- Established strategic partnerships with staffing agencies, companies, mentors, and bootcamps to create a robust network of support and resources for our aspiring tech professionals.

### **Agile Execution & Learning**

- Embraced a proactive, "make s#@t happen" attitude by trying new ideas, learning from failures, and continuously iterating to improve our programs and services.
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## **Product Design Consultant**

Clients: The **LEGO** Group, **General Assembly**, **Spring**.

*Feb 2018- 21*

I spent a couple of years being a digital Nomad. Along the way I leveraged my design talents to remotely help clients from both the EU and the US in different capacities from hands on design and prototyping to product strategy.

## UX Designer

*Cassandra Report — Jan 2017 - Oct 2017*

I had the pleasure of working with the Cassandra team on transforming their digital library of “generational marketing trend insights” into a next-gen information hub. We redesigned the product from the ground up, transforming Cassandra from being a static database to an interactive experience based around user’s core objectives.

- Created and maintained necessary design assets including user flows, journey maps, prototypes and wireframes
  - Implemented a product design process to help foster collaboration across stakeholders, that included Design sprints, kickoffs, and daily check-ins.
  - Led all check-in and status meetings with the ground team as well as C-level stakeholders
  - Mentored Cassandra’s young visual design team, sharing experiences, and providing feedback on both hard and soft skills
  - Devised an analytics strategy for gathering real-time and historical data as well as measuring success post launch.
  - Conducted group white-boarding exercises to help define the desired flows and architecture for potential solutions.
  - Worked with team to align design decisions to specific business objectives. This included interviewing internal team members to help establish a baseline direction for what we hoped to accomplish.
  - Conducted generative and evaluative user research - interviewed existing users, conducted usability testing, site audit, and mind mapping exercises with users such as card sorting and empathy mapping to identify existing pain points.
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## UX Design Instructor - General Assembly

*July 2014 - March 2017*

My goal was to help students gain not only a firm grasp of the tools and concepts pertaining to UX Design but also a real life perspective on how to apply those concepts to different product development environments. I’ve had the privilege to continue to mentor many of my students through their design careers well after our time together.

- Served as Lead Instructor for classes ranging from 25-50 students
- Created Lesson plans, exercises, and workshops utilizing teaching best practices (I do/ We Do/ You Do)
- Reviewed and provided regular feedback on projects and assignments

- Mentored existing professionals on transitioning into UX and Product Design Fields

### ***Full-Time Immersive Instructor (UXDI)***

Served as a full-time instructor of 10-week immersive courses teaching students the necessary skills to transition into careers in UX and Product Design. I used Design Thinking as a framework to apply UX tools, research methodologies and soft skills to help solve problems in an increasingly complex digital landscape.

### ***Part-Time Immersive Instructor (US)***

In addition, I lead part time courses and workshops that exposed students to the basics of the entire UX and Product Design process. The goal was to introduce students to the same ideas as an immersive course on a more compact schedule in hopes of broadening their existing skill sets.

### **Global Curriculum Creator**

Collaborated with another instructor on creating the baseline UXD global curriculum, including the framework, lesson plans, and activities for part-time instructors.

Tools, Concepts and Methodology covered included:

- Design Thinking
- Lean and MVP approaches
- User centered designed
- Collaboration
- The Product Triad
- User research (Generative and Evaluative)
- Designing with Intent
- Design Systems and modular design
- Iterative design processes
- Sketching and white boarding techniques,
- Balancing business vs user goals,
- Wireframes
- Paper and Interactive prototyping

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## **Manager of Design and User experience - Knewton**

***Oct 2014 - Oct 2015***

I was fortunate to play a major role in Knewton's attempt to put their advanced adaptive learning technology directly into the hands of teachers and students. We were able to go from a concept with 18 months of work without a major release, into a realization, with 3 major releases over a 8 month period. Along the way I was able to build a design team, integrate them with Product and Engineering teams, and help them grow both hard and soft skills along the way.

Duties included....

- Scaling, managing, and mentoring our design team.

- Created an integrated code based design system to help speed and standardize development
  - Managed communication with C-Level stakeholders including CEO, CTO, and Head of Product in regards to progress and direction of product design.
  - Providing feedback for designers through regular checkins and performance reviews.
  - Implemented lean processes for working with Engineering and Product
  - Established design team processes to help maximize success, while maintaining autonomy for team members
  - Integrated design team with engineering and product teams
  - Defined day to day schedule for design team including stand-ups and check-ins
  - Collaborated on Product Strategy
  - Advised on technical recommendations (React library, Integrated CSS HTML Pattern Library) with the purpose of enhancing the overall user experience.
  - Translated product requirements into features and functionality
  - Defined the initial flow, product architecture, and language for the consumer facing product
  - Implemented a user testing strategy
  - Lead user research program with local schools (Ambassadors program) from a design perspective.
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## **Team Lead/ Sr Product Designer - Outbrain**

*June 2013 – October 2014*

Built and Lead a Product Design team focused on all of Outbrain's client facing systems. Outbrain's software is both historical and real time data driven, focusing on solutions for the online publishing industry. This includes the world's leading publishers who need robust reporting analytics and management features to maximize their campaigns.

- Grew, managed, mentored a small design team including the interviewing and sourcing of candidates
  - Worked with the Product and Engineering triad teams to understand their needs and develop processes to help teams work collaboratively and efficiently
  - Advocated for designers needs within the organization, focusing on areas to maximize their growth including establishing success criteria and the development of hard and soft skills
  - Developed a physical scrum process for design to help stay focused, provide more accurate timelines to stakeholders, and provide transparency in regards to design team velocity.
  - Established a code based design pattern library to help engineers work more quickly while allowing the designers to centrally control the visual and interaction design aspects.
  - Oversaw our R&D design process, developing next-gen publishing and predictive analytics solutions.
  - In addition to managing and mentoring the design team I was involved in the day to day to design when possible, including user research and personas, ideation, prototyping, and writing html/css.
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## **Interaction design lead - Vibrant media**

### ***June 2012 - June 2013***

At Vibrant I was the Interaction Design Lead on our Product Team in charge of UX and UI design. I collaborated with engineers, product managers, campaign management teams, and publishing partners to build tools that made our data reporting process more user-friendly. I work across several agile tech teams interpreting feedback, user testing, creating wireframes, rapid-prototyping, creating visual designs, and producing high-fidelity working HTML prototypes.

In addition I helped the product team with other needs such as building prototypes for our core products and helping the In-Image advertising teams with custom creatives.

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## **Senior Designer - Boungiorno (NTT DOCOMO)**

***October 2009 - June 2012***

Spearheaded the design process for Buongiorno N. America's family of web and mobile products. Responsible for UX and visual as well as asset delivery to development teams. Products included native mobile (iPhone and Android), mobile HTML5 apps, and desktop web based projects. Ranging from online music services (think Spotify) to subscription based games and entertainment applications.

- Brainstorming, flows, wire framing, UI design.
- Worked hand in hand with marketing, business development and engineering teams on product strategy and final user interaction,
- Proofed final code to assure that it met design specs (HTML, CSS, and Javascript).
- Was responsible for staying up to date with current best practices within the industry as it pertains to responsive design for devices as well as trends in user expectations, and visual appeal.
- Assisted marketing and product managers to develop strategies for user acquisitions and retention.
- Responsible for day to day projects that arise such as WAP and BREW mobile projects, style guides, landing pages, and banner ad campaigns.

## **Freelance Designer - TAG Worldwide, McGarry Bowen**

***2009***

## **Design Manager - Irwin Slater Organization**

***2008-2009***

## **Designer - Media First International**

***2004-2007***

## **Creative Director - Metonym Studio**

***2002-2004***

## **EDUCATION AND TRAINING**

**UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON** Seattle, WA — *Masters of Fine Arts, 2002*

Gonzalez Scholarship Recruitment Award

Presidents Graduate Scholar Award

Teaching Assistantship- Unaided Teaching Position

**JAMES MADISON UNIVERSITY** Harrisonburg, VA— *Bachelor of Fine Arts, 1999*

The Virginia Museum of Fine Arts Fellowship

**AGILE PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT TRAINING** — *Jeff Patton, 2012*

**BIGBLUE GUMBALL MANAGEMENT TRAINING** - *Todd Cherches, 2015*

## **VOLUNTEERING**

### **Ambassador to The UA Maker Academy**

NYC Department of Education - Jan 2016 – Apr 2017

I've had the privilege to volunteer as an ambassador for the UA Maker Academy in Manhattan on several occasions. This has included participating in volunteer workshop and design sprint competitions for high school level students. It's an opportunity for outside professionals to help student apply design thinking approaches to real world scenarios.