

Derek Niedringhaus

Design Systems & UX Platform Leader

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PROFESSIONAL SUMMARY

Design systems and UX platform leader with more than 20 years in UX, including 15 in enterprise SaaS. I make the system underneath the interface explicit: shared primitives, platform patterns, governance, and the working agreements that keep teams from drifting. I have led large teams, managed managers, and stayed close to implementation. I now run Aquex.ai, where I build and use tools that help people and agents work from the same understanding.

CORE CAPABILITIES

Design Systems Strategy & Governance | UX Platform Leadership | DesignOps & Team Development | Design-to-Code Partnership | Object-Oriented UX | AI-Assisted Workflows | Accessibility (WCAG 2.1 AA) | Platform & Data Product Design

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Aquex.ai | Founder & Principal, Design Systems & UX Platform | Jan 2024 - Present | Chicago, IL / Remote

- Founded an implementation partner and product studio for AI-native teams, focused on design systems, semantic layers, and agent workflows.
- Built and maintain OODS Foundry, CMOS, TraceLab, agent-vitals, and Stage1. Each tool addresses a recurring problem in design-system or agent-enabled product work, and the stack runs in my own work.
- Lead consulting work for complex enterprise products, including admin and back-office UX strategy for a B2B travel platform and client portal modernization with policy gates, evidence capture, and delivery guardrails for a global financial institution.
- Publish writing on object-native architecture, design-system meaning, and how to measure AI systems without losing context.

System Systems UX Consultancy | Director, Design Systems (Consulting) | Sep 2022 - Dec 2023

- Independent design systems and platform UX consulting for enterprise software, focused on system architecture, governance, and design-to-code execution.
- Carried the practice, client work, and public R&D into Aquex.ai in 2024.

Paylocity | Senior UX Manager | Nov 2019 - Sep 2022 | Chicago, IL

- Led a 22-person UX team within Paylocity's broader UX organization, including managing managers, across more than 15 enterprise SaaS products.
- Set UX direction for shared platform capabilities, including design systems, chat, video, calendars, notifications, and engagement tools.
- Contributed to Citrus alongside the Citrus team and partner engineers, evolving shared patterns, components, and contribution models.
- Co-authored the UX career framework, established roles and progression paths, created structured onboarding, and served as hiring manager during rapid team growth.
- Led mobile-first UX across responsive web and native apps. [View the Paylocity Citrus case study.](#)

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE, CONTINUED

Uptake | Director, UX Design | Jun 2016 - Sep 2019 | Chicago, IL

- Built and led a 12-person multidisciplinary UX team for data platform products, including machine-learning tools, developer platforms, and ingestion pipelines.
- Set interaction standards for data-heavy workflows across responsive web and native apps.
- Made analytics easier to understand and more accessible through reusable platform patterns and data-visualization standards.
- Drove roadmap decisions with research, prototyping, and partner alignment.

Morningstar | Senior Lead UX Designer | Nov 2015 - Jun 2016 | Chicago, IL

- Led UX for flagship advisor platforms, managed four designers across agile teams, standardized platform patterns, and modernized legacy financial tools.

Orbitz Worldwide | Senior UX Architect | Oct 2014 - Nov 2015 | Chicago, IL

- Led UX for global B2C and B2B travel experiences, improved booking and itinerary workflows, and advanced reusable mobile-first patterns across surfaces.

DePaul University | Assistant Director, UX & Information Architecture | Feb 2010 - Oct 2014 | Chicago, IL

- Led cross-functional teams delivering university-wide web and mobile experiences; built information architecture, content frameworks, and accessible platforms; managed large-scale migrations.
- Built a responsive design system between 2010 and 2012, establishing mobile-first foundations for campus-wide properties.

SELECTED PUBLIC WORK

Systems: OODS Foundry, CMOS, TraceLab, and related tools at derekkn.com/systems

Writing: Essays on object-native architecture, design-system meaning, UX leadership, and AI measurement at derekkn.com/writing

Case studies: Design systems, data platforms, and enterprise UX work at derekkn.com/work

TECHNICAL SKILLS & METHODS

Design & systems: Figma, Tokens Studio, Storybook, design tokens, component libraries, design-system governance

Engineering & standards: HTML, CSS architecture, React, TypeScript, OpenAPI, REST, GraphQL, accessibility (WCAG)

Strategy & operations: DesignOps, service blueprints, Jobs-to-be-Done, OKRs, information architecture

EDUCATION

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign | BFA, Painting & Printmaking

ADDITIONAL WORK

Denied Art | Founder & Owner | 2022 - Present | Contemporary art studio and gallery