

KRISTI PAGOULATOS

Creative Director | UX/UI & Digital Strategy Leader

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SUMMARY

Innovative and results-driven creative director with a proven track record of leading cross-functional teams to deliver compelling brand strategies, user-centered digital experiences, and impactful campaigns. Expert at fostering collaboration and empowering creative thinkers to develop solutions grounded in research and human behavior. Adept at driving significant brand growth, consistently exceeding KPIs, and elevating engagement across omni-channel platforms. Passionate about blending creativity with strategic insight to create meaningful connections that resonate with audiences and deliver business impact. Strategically integrates generative AI tools, including ChatGPT and Adobe Firefly, into ideation, rapid prototyping, and presentation development to accelerate creative output without sacrificing quality.

SKILLS

- Digital Strategy & Transformation
- Brand Strategy & Positioning
- Content Strategy & Development
- Concept Ideation & Creation
- Creative Direction
- Strategic Storytelling
- Information Architecture (IA)
- User Experience (UX) Design
- User Interface (UI) Design
- User Research & Usability Testing
- Design Thinking & Human-Centered Design
- Design Systems Development & Governance
- User Journeys & Persona Development
- Art Direction & Visual Communication
- Project & Program Management
- Cross-Functional Team Leadership
- Talent Mentoring & Career Development
- Figma, Mural, Miro Collaboration
- Omni-Channel Marketing Campaigns
- Adobe Creative Suite (INDD, Photoshop, Illustrator, Firefly)
- Generative AI Tools for Creative Ideation (ChatGPT, DALL-E, Claude)

EXPERIENCE

FOUNDER & CREATIVE DIRECTOR, STRATEGIC UX/UI | 10/2024 - Current

Opa Design

- Founded and scaled a boutique design consultancy delivering end-to-end brand, UX/UI, and digital strategy solutions for clients across fintech, healthcare, SaaS, and consumer sectors.
- Led UX and design strategy engagements from discovery through execution, aligning business objectives with user needs to drive adoption, engagement, and conversion.
- Partnered directly with executive stakeholders to guide digital transformation initiatives, brand repositioning, and website redesigns.
- Built long-term client relationships through consistent delivery of measurable outcomes, repeat engagements, and trusted advisory support.
- Maintained hands-on involvement in research, concept development, and execution while overseeing project timelines, budgets, and quality standards.
- Leverage Adobe Firefly and DALL-E to rapidly prototype visual concepts for client presentations, and use generative AI tools daily to build clear, persuasive strategy decks for executive and stakeholder audiences.

DESIGN & STRATEGY LEAD | 01/2023 - Current

Commonwealth Financial Network

- Served as design and strategy lead for Advisor Marketing, supporting independent wealth management firms across North America.
- Developed brand identities, digital platforms, and advisor websites aligned with regulatory requirements and client growth goals.
- Led change management initiatives through internal communications during organizational acquisition efforts.
- Collaborated with cross-functional teams to align design strategy with marketing, compliance, and business development priorities.
- Delivered scalable design frameworks that improved consistency, efficiency, and brand cohesion across advisor-facing assets.
- Used ChatGPT and Calude to help tailor strategic messaging platforms and creative concepts for advisor marketing initiatives, accelerating ideation while maintaining regulatory alignment.

UX STRATEGY CONSULTANT | 12/2022 - Current

REAKT AGENCY

- Led UX strategy, information architecture, and research initiatives for brands including Brightcove, Tamarack Resort, and Noah Water.
- Conducted in-depth user research, usability testing, and journey mapping to uncover actionable insights.
- Translated research findings into intuitive UX solutions that improved navigation, clarity, and engagement.
- Partnered closely with design and development teams to ensure research-driven decisions were executed effectively.
- Elevated overall user experience quality by aligning business goals with validated user needs.
- Used ChatGPT to help tailor strategic platforms and concept directions for Brightcove, accelerating ideation and aligning creative solutions with research insights.

GROUP MANAGER/GROUP CREATIVE DIRECTOR UX/UI | 08/2021 - 09/2022

Avanade - Chicago, IL

- Joined the UX leadership team to embed user-centered design principles across large-scale enterprise engagements, elevating design maturity, consistency, and client confidence across multiple programs.
- Led and developed a fully remote team of 25 UX/UI designers, fostering a high-performance, collaborative culture that improved delivery timelines, clarified scope, and increased overall client satisfaction.
- Directed \$24.5M in client accounts, including a flagship engagement with Humana Insurance that achieved 900% year-over-year growth in partnership with the data and analytics team, supporting platforms managing \$93B+ in assets.
- Acted as career advisor and mentor to five designers, providing structured coaching, performance feedback, and growth plans that resulted in professional development and internal promotions.
- Served in a leadership role within the global Avanade Women's Network, contributing to talent engagement, inclusion initiatives, and leadership visibility across the organization.

CREATIVE DIRECTOR | 04/2019 - 10/2020

SGK - Chicago, IL

- Served as creative lead for the Chicago office, overseeing a multidisciplinary team of 20+ full-time and freelance art directors, writers, and strategists to elevate creative quality, collaboration, and delivery across client engagements.
- Designed and implemented agency-wide programs to strengthen creative process, strategic problem solving, presentation skills, and creative thinking, directly supporting team performance and leadership readiness.
- Built a culture of open communication, trust, and accountability, resulting in multiple team and individual promotions and establishing a strong pipeline of future creative leaders.
- Strengthened and expanded \$12M+ in client partnerships, including Amway and its Nutrilite wellness brand, contributing to client retention, relationship growth, and new business wins through consistently high-quality creative output.
- Partnered closely with account leadership and senior stakeholders to align creative strategy with business objectives, ensuring work was both creatively compelling and commercially effective.

CREATIVE DIRECTOR | 08/2015 - 04/2019

Civilian - Chicago, IL

- Directed full-cycle creative strategy and execution for diverse client projects, leading teams from concept through delivery while ensuring alignment with brand vision and business goals.
- Managed and mentored multidisciplinary creative teams, fostering collaboration, skill development, and strategic thinking that enhanced project quality and team engagement.

- Played a key leadership role on the pitch team, driving creative and strategic collaboration that contributed to winning new business opportunities and expanding client portfolios.
- Built and nurtured strong client relationships focused on elevating user experience, resulting in a 25% increase in website conversion rates and up to 250% growth in user engagement across multiple healthcare industry digital properties, including Cancer Treatment Centers of America, ClearChoice, G4 Dental Implants, and Blue Cross Blue Shield.
- Championed innovative UX and creative approaches that balanced user needs, technical feasibility, and regulatory requirements, enhancing both brand perception and digital performance.

FREELANCE CREATIVE DIRECTOR | 05/2014 - 12/2014

Catapult - Chicago, IL

- Led cross-agency creative teams to strategically develop and launch KitchenAid's new line of appliances, delivering cohesive brand messaging and a fresh market presence.
- Drove a 33% increase in consumer engagement through innovative campaign concepts and integrated creative execution across digital, social, and traditional media channels.
- Collaborated closely with client stakeholders and agency partners to ensure alignment on brand vision, target audience insights, and campaign goals throughout the project lifecycle.
- Managed project timelines, creative budgets, and resource allocation to deliver high-quality work on schedule and within scope during the launch period.
- Provided hands-on creative direction and mentorship to diverse teams, fostering collaboration and encouraging innovative problem-solving to meet client objectives.

ASSOCIATE CREATIVE DIRECTOR | 10/2013 - 04/2014 + 01/2015 – 06/2015

FCB Chicago - Chicago, IL

- Led design and creative direction for multiple integrated pharmaceutical brands in the hemophilia space, guiding campaigns from pre- to post-FDA approval and successful market introduction.
- Collaborated closely with compliance teams to ensure all creative assets and communications met strict regulatory standards while effectively engaging current users and potential patient candidates.
- Developed and launched 70+ omnichannel campaigns for high-profile clients including Cox Communications, Milkbone, and Valspar Paint, driving brand awareness and customer engagement across digital, print, and broadcast platforms.
- Partnered with cross-functional teams to align creative strategy with client marketing objectives, ensuring cohesive messaging and impactful storytelling across diverse channels.
- Managed multiple projects simultaneously under tight deadlines, maintaining high creative standards and fostering collaborative relationships with clients, agencies, and internal teams.

FREELANCE ASSOCIATE CREATIVE DIRECTOR | 01/2013 - 09/2013

Ogilvy & Mather - Chicago, IL

- Delivered compelling conceptual art direction and video direction across a diverse portfolio of brands, enhancing creative storytelling and visual impact in integrated marketing campaigns.
- Collaborated with creative teams and clients to develop innovative campaign concepts that aligned with brand strategy and resonated with target audiences.
- Directed video productions from pre- to post-production, ensuring alignment with creative vision, quality standards, and campaign objectives.
- Provided hands-on leadership and mentorship to junior creatives, fostering a collaborative environment that encouraged fresh ideas and creative excellence.
- Managed multiple projects simultaneously, meeting tight deadlines and adapting quickly to evolving client needs and market trends.

ASSOCIATE CREATIVE DIRECTOR | 01/2012 - 11/2012

Commonground - Chicago, IL

- Led creative teams in developing strategic, results-driven campaigns for existing clients and new business pitches, consistently delivering innovative concepts that supported brand growth and client retention.
- Partnered closely with clients to understand their business objectives and translate them into compelling creative strategies that enhanced brand positioning and market impact.
- Established an agency-wide art direction standard, improving consistency, visual quality, and brand coherence across multiple accounts and creative projects.
- Mentored and guided creative team members, fostering professional development and elevating the overall creative output of the agency.

- Contributed to successful new business wins by driving collaborative pitch processes, integrating strategic insights with creative innovation to win client confidence.

SENIOR ART DIRECTOR | 02/2009 - 11/2011

Vladimir Jones - Denver, CO

- Spearheaded strategic, conceptual art direction and video direction across a diverse portfolio of brands, elevating creative storytelling and visual impact in integrated marketing campaigns.

SENIOR ART DIRECTOR | 01/2008 - 01/2009

Adworks - Washington, DC

ART DIRECTOR | 09/2002 - 12/2007

Publicis Group - Dallas, TX

- Helped establish a corporate brand foundation for GlaxoSmithKline grounded in research and development, shaping strategy and creative direction across the portfolio.
- Provided art direction for consumer health brands including Beano, Goody's, and BC Powder, translating brand strategy into effective creative execution.

EDUCATION AND TRAINING

The Creative Circus - Atlanta, GA | Design & Art Direction Program

09/2000 - 09/2002

- Portfolio program specializing in creative strategy and execution as well as typography and color theory. Teaching assistant for the typography classes during the second year in the program, mentoring the incoming students to master kerning and type designs.

University of New Mexico - Albuquerque, NM | BA Mass Communication And Journalism

08/1995 -12/1999

- Worked through the communication program with a mix of fine arts and psychology. Interned with local agencies while bartending and waiting tables. (who only wants to do one thing at a time?!!)

LEADERSHIP & BOARD SERVICE

Awaken Chicago | Board of Directors

- Term: July 2023 – July 2026
- Secretary: June 2024 – July 2026

AWARDS & PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS

- Angel Awards – Best in Public Service Advertising
- Women's Image Network – Best Art Direction (Television)
- Cannes Lions – Shortlisted
- One Show – Merit Award
- Featured in Lürzer's Archive
- Art Directors Club – Global Member
- International Society of Female Professionals

CERTIFICATIONS

Luma Design Thinking Practitioner Certification

Microsoft Catalyst Certification