

Alakananda Thurlapati

Senior Product Designer - AI & Human-Centered Design

alakananda.figma.site · linkedin.com/in/alakananda-thurlapati · (510) 361-1705 · alka.uxui@gmail.com

PROFILE

Senior Product Designer with 7+ years of end-to-end ownership across AI-powered SaaS, government-scale enterprise systems, and high-growth startups. Proven in the hardest parts of the job: designing for extreme user diversity (rural collectors with limited literacy to C-suite administrators), making AI explainable and trustworthy to non-technical users, and translating ambiguous problem spaces into scalable systems with measurable outcomes. Have led design as the sole designer on a 14-month government digitization program, as the strategic voice at a VC-backed pre-seed marketplace, and as the founding designer of a consumer app from zero to growth. Equally strong in field research, stakeholder alignment, and production-ready systems design, and holds a Stanford certification in UI/UX Design for AI Products.

EXPERIENCE

Sapphire Software Solutions

Senior UX Designer

Remote

Aug 2024 – Present

Led product design for a zero-to-one AI-powered restaurant management SaaS - sole designer owning strategy, information architecture, and execution across 9 interconnected modules, including real-time operations, predictive analytics, menu intelligence, and a conversational AI interface.

- **Information architecture & navigation** - Designed a role-aware routing system that eliminated the need for separate operator and staff portals, reducing design surface complexity by ~40% and accelerating engineering implementation.
- **Conversational AI module** - Designed an embedded AI chat module grounded in live operational data, cutting manager query resolution time by 62% across inventory, scheduling, and guest service - validated through moderated sessions with 12 hospitality professionals (85% task success, 8.6/10 satisfaction).
- **Menu Intelligence** - Owned end-to-end: mapped the full decision flow from supplier cost fluctuations → AI-generated pricing recommendations → operator override, consolidating a workflow previously requiring 3 disconnected tools, with transparency patterns surfacing AI confidence levels.
- **AI integration strategy** - Determined which workflows should be automated vs. human-in-the-loop across all 9 modules, establishing override patterns and explainability conventions that reduced algorithm aversion among non-technical restaurant operators.
- **Staffing Simulator** - Designed an interactive scenario-modeling tool enabling managers to forecast labor costs before committing to schedules; tested configurations showed 20% reduction in simulated overstaffing.
- **Design system** - Built a token-based system spanning all 9 modules - Dashboard, Inventory, Menu Intelligence, Staffing, Suppliers, Reports, AI Chat, Notifications, Settings - standardizing data visualization patterns across high-density operational screens.
- **Ethics & Society Review (ESR)** - Authored governance documentation on labor transparency, algorithmic scheduling fairness, and data privacy, embedding responsible AI practice before shipping.

TradeUp Exchange Corp.

UX UI Designer

Beverly Hills, CA

Aug 2023 – Aug 2024

Embedded designer at a VC-backed (Plug and Play, Hatcher+, Berkeley SkyDeck) pre-seed collectibles marketplace competing with eBay, StockX, and Grailed - designing core user journeys for a fee-free, escrow-protected trading platform targeting the \$462B collectibles market.

- **Funnel diagnosis & navigation redesign** - Identified via Mixpanel, Tableau, and Google Analytics that navigation complexity was driving significant pre-listing abandonment; led an IA and navigation redesign that reduced drop-off by 10%.
- **Loyalty program** - Designed from research through execution, grounded in collector motivation analysis and competitive benchmarking; shifted the retention model from transactional to community-driven, delivering a 20% improvement in user retention.

- **Escrow onboarding** - Designed and iterated on a uniquely complex trust-establishment flow for a cash-free trading model most users had never experienced; A/B testing and journey analysis reduced friction and improved time-to-first-trade.
- **Category IA** - Rebuilt browse and search architecture for collectible categories (trading cards, Pokémon, video games, fashion, electronics) through card sorting and user interviews; directly supported TradeUp's expansion into AI-powered item matching.
- **Design leadership** - Operated as the primary design voice in a fast-moving pre-seed team, aligning decisions with roadmap priorities and presenting research findings to founders and investors.

K R mroads Pvt. Ltd.

UI/UX Designer

India

Sept 2020 – July 2021

Sole UX lead across two high-complexity enterprise engagements - a government digital transformation initiative spanning 3 platforms and 8 languages, and an AI-powered personality assessment tool for corporate talent management.

Multi-Platform Supply Chain Management System - State Government

- **Research & strategy** - Led UX strategy for a 14-month digitization program as sole designer on a team of 12, conducting field research across 12 rural collection points and 45 stakeholder interviews across 4 user groups.
- **Strategic platform decision** - Rejected a single universal UI in favor of context-appropriate complexity: minimal touch-optimized forms for low-literacy rural collectors (Android), operational dashboards for field officers (web), and auto-rotating transparency displays for public TV kiosks - all sharing one unified data model.
- **Accessibility-first design** - Created progressive disclosure patterns, photo-based verification, and icon-driven navigation for users with limited digital literacy; advocated successfully against policy stakeholder resistance by tying the approach to measurable adoption risk.
- **Design system** - Built a 47-component multi-platform system supporting 8 regional languages with RTL layout handling and culturally appropriate iconography, delivered with full developer documentation.
- **Outcomes** - 100% paper elimination · 72% faster processing · 94% collector adoption within 3 months · 89% data accuracy improvement · 60% reduction in payment delays · 4.6/5 mobile satisfaction score · architecture adopted by 3 additional state departments.

Panna Personality Assessment - AI-Powered Recruitment Platform

- **UX strategy** - Identified through discovery that the core trust problem was opaque AI scoring neither candidates nor recruiters could interpret; redesigned the results flow to surface trait reasoning pathways, confidence levels, and growth areas - shifting the product from a judgment tool into a collaborative decision partner.
- **Explainability design** - Designed confidence indicators and layered visibility patterns (summary-first, deeper insights expandable), increasing recruiter trust in AI outputs by 2.4x and lifting report interpretation accuracy from 61% to 92% among new recruiters.
- **Candidate experience** - Progress indicators and empathy-first UX addressed mid-assessment drop-off, driving a 45% increase in candidate satisfaction scores.
- **Operational impact** - Role-bifurcated recruiter dashboards and structured AI output presentation reduced manual HR time per candidate by 60%.
- **Delivery** - Produced investor-facing pitch decks, POCs, and a style guide supporting client delivery and the product's expansion roadmap.

Younify Applications Pvt. Ltd.

Founding Designer

India

May 2017 – Aug 2020

Founding and sole designer for a campus audio-social startup - owned the full product lifecycle from zero to growth across 3+ years: user research, product strategy, end-to-end UX/UI, design system creation, and interim product management.

- **Engagement diagnosis** - Identified through user interviews and competitive analysis (Spotify, Apple Podcasts, iHeart Radio, Google Podcasts) that the radio-only model lacked content variety and offline access; set the strategic direction to pivot toward user-generated podcast creation as the platform's core growth lever.
- **Zero-to-one podcasting feature** - Architected and designed the full feature: creator flows (trailer upload, episode management, cover art, tagging, categories) through listener discovery (browsing, keyword search, personalized feed, watchlist) - filling a gap no competitor addressed: UGC campus content in a single native app.

- **Podcast trailers** - Introduced as a pre-launch audience-building mechanic grounded in competitive gap analysis, enabling creators to generate buzz and gather early feedback before publishing full episodes.
- **Offline-first experience** - Designed download management, sync state indicators, and graceful degradation patterns for students in low-bandwidth campus environments.
- **Empty & error state system** - Built 15+ scenario coverage (no internet, campus not found, first post, upload complete, no notifications) treating friction moments as brand touchpoints with personality-driven copy and clear recovery paths.
- **Design system & retention** - Established the startup's first component library and documentation; combined feature additions drove a 25% retention improvement and positioned the platform for Series A conversations.
- **Cross-functional leadership** - Acted as interim product manager - writing user stories, running sprint planning, coordinating engineering delivery - while mentoring 2 designers and building the team's first research and documentation processes.

EDUCATION

California State University, East Bay

Master of Arts - Interaction Design & Interactive Media

Hayward, CA

2022 – 2024

Gandhi Institute of Technology and Management

Bachelor of Arts - Sociology

Vishakhapatnam, India

2013 – 2017

SKILLS

- **AI & Human-AI Design** Conversational UI & Chatbot UX · Agentic Workflow Design · Decision-Support Interfaces · Explainability & Transparency Patterns · Algorithm Aversion Mitigation · Human-in-the-Loop Design · AI Trust & Ethics · Multimodal Interfaces · Prompt Engineering for UX · Generative AI Tools
- **UX & Product Design** End-to-End Product Design · Zero-to-One Product Thinking · Information Architecture · Interaction Design · Wireframing & Prototyping · Mobile-First & Responsive Design · Multi-Platform Design (Mobile, Web, TV/Kiosk) · Data Visualization UX · Accessibility (WCAG 2.1)
- **Research & Strategy** Mixed-Methods Research · Field Studies & Contextual Inquiry · Stakeholder Interviews · Usability Testing (Moderated & Unmoderated) · A/B Testing · Card Sorting · Journey Mapping · Competitive Analysis · Product Discovery & Problem Framing
- **Design Systems** Atomic Design · Component Library Creation & Documentation · Design Token Architecture · Multi-Platform Systems · RTL & Localization Support · Figma Variables & Auto Layout
- **Tools** Figma (advanced) · Figma Make · Sketch · Adobe Photoshop · Zeplin · UXpin · Miro · FigJam · Midjourney · Loveable · Microsoft Copilot · Claude Code · Basic HTML/CSS · Vibecoding
- **Analytics & Testing** Mixpanel · Google Analytics · Tableau · Maze · Typeform · Dovetail · Funnel Analysis · Conversion Optimization
- **Leadership** Cross-Functional Leadership · Stakeholder Alignment · Design Storytelling · Roadmap Influence · Agile UX · Junior Designer Mentorship · Investor & Client Communication

LICENSES & CERTIFICATIONS

- UI/UX Design for AI Products - Stanford Online · Aug 2025
- AI for Designers - Interaction Design Foundation · Feb 2025
- Understanding Your Customer's Journey - SAP · Jun 2021
- Enterprise Design Thinking Practitioner - IBM · May 2020
- User Research: Methods and Best Practices - Interaction Design Foundation · Dec 2019
- Human-Computer Interaction (HCI) - Interaction Design Foundation · Jul 2019
- User Experience - Interaction Design Foundation · May 2019