Yan Walton



VP Design · Design Director · Head of Product Design

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I build the operating models that let product, design and engineering ship as one. I started out designing products; for the last decade I've designed the structures around them: the teams, systems, decision-making and conditions that keep three disciplines pulling in the same direction as a company scales. At XING and Elastic I built the design orgs and the operating systems those companies still run on, and partnered at VP and C-level to make design part of how the business decides. Calm, curious and collaborative, I lead close to the work; structure is how I take pressure off people, so they can do their best work.

Core competencies

Leadership:	Manager of Managers · AI-native teams · Hiring/Coaching · Budget & Capacity · Design Ops
Strategy:	Design & Vision · Product Strategy · OKR Goal Setting · Stakeholder Alignment · B2C & SaaS
Craft:	Design Systems · Systems thinking · Prototyping in code · UX Research · Cross-platform
Process:	Agile / Lean UX · Team Typologies · Community Contribution Models · Design Governance
Tools:	Claude Code · Figma · Jira · Confluence · Miro · Storybook · GitHub
Languages:	English (Native) · German (Good proficiency)

Professional experience

Elasticsearch · Remote / Hamburg (Dec 2023 – Present)

B2B, remote-first, globally distributed SaaS enterprise search, observability, security and AI-driven applications.

Product Design Director — Platform

- Scaled the team from 5 to ~15 designers; established four cross-functional squads aligned to platform domains: Application Experience, Global Experience, Admin Experience, and Billing & Onboarding
- Led design for Dashboard (data visualisation) and Discover (log exploration), as well as platform-wide enablement via Elastic UI (EUI). Contributed to Elastic's AI Assistant and brought natural language into the new ES|QL query editor
- Directed the evolution from Amsterdam to Borealis UI theme, a redesign of global navigation and platform chrome, and a papercut / component-sweep initiative to improve interface quality at scale
- Launched the OneFeedback system for in-product customer sentiment, enabling CSAT to be a tracked metric at quarterly leadership reviews
- Launched an AI-Native Design Program — embedding AI workflows (rapid prototyping, large-scale research synthesis, automated delivery) across the team to lift velocity and ambition. Within three months, designers shipping their own PRs went from a handful to about half the team.
- Established a continuous user research programme, & initiated an org-wide training programme with Jared Spool for UX Outcome driven metrics and Strategic UX Research

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New Work SE / XING · Hamburg, Germany (Jan 2013 – Jul 2023, 10 years)

Europe's leading network for German-speaking markets — 17M users, competing with LinkedIn in DACH.

Director of UX — Network Product Area (Oct 2021 – Jul 2023)

Led UX strategy across 14 product teams (Profile, Messenger, Notifications, Contacts, Growth, Platforms, Design System) with accountability for a 30+ person design organisation; UX Leadership Team reporting to VP Product

- Managed 6 direct reports — 3 Team Leads and 3 Principal UX Designers — driving OKR adoption and cross-team alignment through all design workstreams
- Pitched and led a company-wide cross-disciplinary Vision sprint defining 3-year product strategy, aligning C-suite, product and engineering around a shared north-star direction

Director of UX — Design System & Design Language (Oct 2018 – Sep 2021)

- Owned the XING Design Language and Design System across a ~30-person UX/UI team; delivered a cross-platform system (iOS, Android, Web) adopted by 35+ product teams
- Pitched and delivered the most significant visual identity rebrand since XING's launch — rolled out across all product surfaces and corporate digital touchpoints

Team Lead UX — Web & Brand (Jun 2013 – Sep 2018)

- Built and led a team of ~10 UX/UI designers across 20 product teams; delivered XING's first design toolkit. Co-led creation of a React-based component library — scaled to 30+ frontend teams — that became the foundation for all subsequent design system investment
- Supported the first adopter of the design system, our flagship Messenger project — chat based, real-time responses
- Privacy made by XING initiative: redesigned the global Settings area plus the public-facing website
- Initiated and managed a corporate identity update with Saffron brand consultancy

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London Agency & Early Career, UK (Sep 2001 – Dec 2012)

Progression from Designer to UX & Creative Director across digital agencies and in-house roles.

UX & Creative Director — Pancentric Digital (May 2010 – Dec 2012)

- Led a UX team of nine. Clients: The X Factor, Disney, Bluewater, CBBC Newsround, BBC Radio 2, DC Leisure, Burger King, Zurich Insurance

Art Director — Cimex Media Ltd (NMA Top 50) (Oct 2005 – Dec 2008)

- Clients included: 2012 London Olympics brand, BBC JAM (interactive sport, motion-capture 3D)
- Project: Houses of History for the UK Parliament — Design Week Awards 2011 shortlist

Education

BA (Hons) Graphic Design — 2:1 · University of the West of England (UWE), Bristol

Foundation Art and Design · Kingston University, London

Leadership references & peer feedback

"Calm leader that strikes the balance between listening and directing — delegating with the right level of freedom. Absolute team player with a strong people focus."
Manager Annual Review, Dec 2022

"Great moderator, great on stage, great communication and presentation skills — more of it!"
Manager Annual Review, Dec 2021

"I trust Yan enough so that I can always have an open dialog with him about things going wrong and thinking about how to improve the situation."
Team Member Feedback, Dec 2022

"You have been driving the topic forward wholeheartedly and actively managing and re-calibrating expectations — towards the core team, stakeholders, peers and management."
Manager Annual Review, Dec 2022

If you got this far, let's talk — yanwalton@gmail.com