

Russell Flench

Human-Centered Design Leader

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Summary

- Human-centered designer (HCD) with over 15 years experience leading teams and consulting in healthcare, gov-tech, manufacturing, and automotive.
- Successfully grew HCD capabilities in various organizations, including Cleveland Clinic, Bixal (federal consultancy), and Saint-Gobain / CertainTeed.
- Facility for team building and mentoring junior and senior colleagues about improving the human experience within the broader context of organizational goals.
- Has led many cross-functional teams on complex user research and customer insights projects, particularly those focusing on health and social good.
- Skilled at design research, service design, design operations, strategy, patient and employee experience, workshop facilitation, team leadership, business development.

Professional Experience

Bixal (Fairfax, VA) 2020-present

Director of Human Experience (HCD team), April 2025 - present

- Leading a team of UX / UI designers, researchers, CX, and accessibility specialists on federal contracts in tech and social good, with a focus on practice area development, team engagement, cross-disciplinary collaboration, and business growth.

Director of Design Operations, Jan. 2023 - March 2025

- Established and led the Design Operations practice, scaling a multidisciplinary team of 50 designers, researchers, and accessibility specialists while managing hiring, onboarding, and project allocation.
- Developed and implemented processes for onboarding, design methods, professional development, and collaboration, including creating a resource hub that consolidated seven outdated knowledge management platforms.

Director of Service Design, Jan. 2021 - Jan. 2023

- Grew a service design practice from one to four practitioners, documented team methods and templates, ensured contracts were staffed appropriately, hired and managed team members, and contributed to business development.

Service Designer, 2020-present

- Applied service design, HCD, and trauma-informed design methods to enhance federal agencies' customer-employee-operational experiences, including research with disaster survivors, policy analysts, and members of the general public.
- Clients included: the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), Social Security Administration (SSA).

Cleveland Clinic, Strategy Office (Cleveland, OH) Nov. 2016 - March 2020

Service Designer (Associate Strategy Partner III)

- Expanded HCD capabilities at Cleveland Clinic by addressing enterprise service line challenges in colorectal cancer, pediatric asthma, and weight management, while collaborating with the Office of Patient Experience and its Patient Advisory Committee.
- Championed a patient-centric strategic approach by partnering with executive leadership, founding an HCD community of practice, developing a playbook, mentoring talent, and creating a dedicated 900-sq.-ft. design collaboration space.
- Elevated industry engagement by designing and facilitating interactive presentations at the Patient Experience Summit for ~1,500 healthcare professionals and co-authoring a whitepaper in the Southern Medical Journal.
- Advanced creative problem-solving through the launch of "Sketch Class" workshops for MBAs and healthcare administrators.

Saint-Gobain / CertainTeed (Malvern, PA) Jan. 2016 - Nov. 2016

Sr. Design Researcher and Strategist

- Co-led a flagship research project to expand CertainTeed's customer base to DIY homeowners, built the "Insights and Innovation" team to enhance HCD capabilities in R&D and Marketing, and advocated for HCD integration through company-wide presentations while mentoring design research interns.

Point Forward (Redwood City, CA) July 2013 - Dec. 2015

Sr. Design Researcher

- Led and contributed to various ethnographic and strategic design research projects for clients including Kaiser Permanente, Stellantis, Astellas Pharma, and Chick-fil-A, uncovering customer insights and delivering strategic recommendations.
- Consulted on Kaiser Permanente's *Vision 2025* strategy; managed global research studies across the US, Europe, and East Asia; and facilitated client engagements to drive innovation.

Conifer Research (Chicago, IL) May - July 2013

Design researcher (contract)

- Led a three-month data-mining project analyzing five years of research for a CPG manufacturer, facilitating a cross-departmental workshop to identify opportunities and delivering a strategic report with recommendations across three product lines.

Steelcase, Workspace Futures (Grand Rapids, MI) May 2012 - May 2013

Design Research Intern

- Co-led a global research study across North America, Europe, and East Asia using web-based and field methods to support the development of a next-generation task chair, including creating a new framework for observation and analysis. Presented key insights and opportunities to senior leadership, focusing on office workers' relationship with task chairs and workplace culture.

PlayLab, Inc. (Brooklyn, NY) Sept. 2009 - Nov. 2009

Design Intern

- Conducted research for developing a community music space with programming and musician residencies for underserved communities in Greensboro, Alabama.

Education

Master of Design (MDes), Design Research/Strategy, IIT Institute of Design, Chicago, IL, 2013

BFA, Photography, Cleveland Institute of Art, Cleveland, OH, 1997

Presentations & Publications

2024, **Impact First Digital Development Summit** (Lisbon, Portugal), presenter

2024, **Design For Dignity** (Boston, Massachusetts), presenter

2021, **Southern Medical Journal**, *Patients Desire Personalized, Specific, and Continuous Advice on Weight Management*, co-author

2017-2019, **Patient Experience Summit** (Cleveland, Ohio), workshop facilitator (multiple)

2014, **core77**, *Designing Here/Now*, case study

Certifications & Awards

IDEO U, Communicating with Impact certification, 2021

Design Management Institute, Innovation Tools and Process certification, 2016

core77 Design Awards, Top Prize, Service Design (student), 2013

Tools:

AI (ChatGPT, Copilot)
Adobe Creative Suite (Photoshop, InDesign, Illustrator, Premiere Pro)
Confluence
Dovetail
G-suite
Jira
Miro
MS Office
Mural
Optimal Workshop
Sketching (analog and digital)
Survey tools

Skills:

Design research and strategy
Data analysis and synthesis
Service blueprinting
Journey mapping
Patient experience, employee experience
Storytelling
Workshop facilitation
Design operations
Writing
Presentations
Process mapping
Persona building
Digital and experiential prototyping
Video production
Design management and mentoring
Agile project management