

Nathan Hornby

Hi, I'm Nate 🎉 A Product Designer with 20 years experience helping businesses to better understand their customers, solve problems, grow teams and produce award-winning, inclusive products.

[Download my CV](#)

An introduction

These case studies hopefully help to demonstrate the variety and scope of the work that I contribute to and how I add value to the design process.

I'm happy to curate a set of case studies that best meet your requirements, so please let me know if you are keen to know more about my experience with specific industries or project types.

Some things people have said about me



“

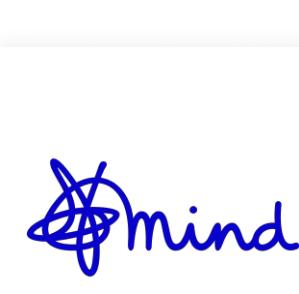
Nathan is a professional that is great at his craft and pleasant to work with. You want your designer to strike a fine balance between supporting your ideas and leading you through good design principles and experience. Nathan manages it well, willing to listen while not letting you waste time on a bad idea.

”

Roi Lustik Cohen, CTO @ Arkk

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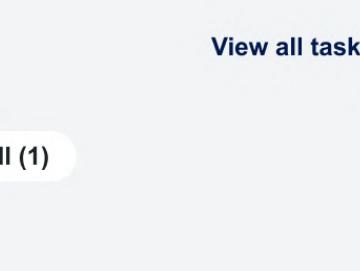
Some of the people I've worked with



Tax Systems

AlphaTax® & AlphaVAT®

Tax Systems make Corporation Tax and VAT preparation software, serving 3 of the 'Big Four' accountancy firms and many of the UK's major corporate customers.



My role on the project

I'm responsible for all of Tax System's products, including AlphaTax, their flagship desktop software of 30 years that I've been helping to transform into a cloud SaaS platform. I've also overseen the design of a new VAT product that was a winner in the Digital Innovation category at the 2022 Taxation Awards.

Whilst leading our team of Product Designers I work closely with the Product Managers, Development Teams and users of our products to help ensure a consistent experience across our whole portfolio, pushing innovative solutions and helping to define strategy and process for all of our workstreams.

The screenshot shows the AlphaTax software interface. On the left, there's a navigation tree with categories like 'Balance sheet analysis', 'Profit and loss accounts analysis', 'Free statement 01', 'Free statement 01.1', 'Free statement 02', 'Free statement 02', 'Transfer pricing', 'Tax accounting', and 'Document manager'. The main area displays a balance sheet with columns for 'Turnover', 'Cost of sales', 'Gross profit', 'Other income', 'Less: expenses', and 'Prior year'. To the right, there's a sidebar titled 'Review notes' with a section for 'Profit and loss account'. It shows two entries from 2019, each with a timestamp, a brief description, and a 'Mark as done' checkbox. There are also icons for search, filter, and other actions.

Consistency and new brand implementation

Following the production of a new identity I worked closely with the brand, marketing and product design teams to define a visual language for all of our products, in addition to a comprehensively documented design system. This involved accommodating various additional stakeholder and business requirements, as well as giving the design team the opportunity to enhance and iterate many aspects of the user experience.

Having been proactive in our approach and recognising the need for this work early in the brands development I ensured that the design needs of the implementation were completed in advance of development availability. Implementation was a complex, multi-phased project with different approaches required for each of our products; success involved close collaboration with our internal development leads.

The screenshot shows a design system documentation page. It includes sections for 'Buttons', 'Types', and 'Sizes'. Under 'Buttons', there are examples of primary and secondary buttons in various states (e.g., small, medium, large, split). Under 'Types', there are examples of dropdowns, text links, and toggles. Under 'Sizes', there are examples of primary and secondary buttons in different sizes. To the right, there are three examples of 'Correct usage': 'Filters', 'Directory Pagination', and 'List'. Each example shows a UI component with accompanying notes and screenshots.

Defining and meeting our non-functional requirements

Several NFR's were created to help us better understand what a successful AlphaTax cloud-transformation looks like; this was in part due to me recognising that several aspects of the project lacked metrics for us to collectively work toward.

I was involved in defining and helping Tax Systems to meet two key NFR's, the first being that our products meet a WCAG AA Accessibility standard - something I'm personally passionate about; and a performance NFR which included a perception component, attempting to address one of the inherent drawbacks of bringing a desktop product into the cloud: it feeling slower. We helped mitigate this with new motion and interaction work that better set expectations for the user as well as employing easing and patterns that allowed for a more fluid, app-like experience.

The screenshot shows a Jira card for '1.3.5 Identify input purpose'. It has a 'Labels' section with 'Motor' (green), 'Cognitive' (purple), 'Visual' (blue), and 'Level: AA' (black). Below it is a 'Notifications' section with a 'Watch' button. The main content area has a 'Description' section with the following text: 'The purpose of each input field collecting information about the user can be programmatically determined when: - The input field serves a purpose identified in the Input Purposes for User Interface Components section; and - The content is implemented using technologies with support for identifying the expected meaning for form input data.' There is also a link to 'Understanding Success Criterion 1.3.5: Identify Input Purpose | WAI | W3C'. At the bottom, there's an 'Activity' section with a comment from 'Nathan Hornby'.

A new design process

One of my self-defined objectives when I took on the Lead role at Tax Systems was to unify our design team, which was small but siloed. With a single designer sitting in each product we had issues with knowledge transfer and consistency, and lacked the benefits afforded by a diverse group of thinkers collaborating on complex solutions.

As part of this unification I defined, iterated and consolidated our shared design process over the course of several months, working with our Head of Product Ops to ensure that it met the needs of the wider project and the teams we work adjacent to.

Like any good design process a key aspect of this is fully understanding the problems we hope to solve. Using workshops, design sprints, user research and our daily specification meetings the senior product team translate various user and business needs into actionable requirements and user stories for the design and development teams.

Timings are especially critical for the AlphaTax project as the bulk of development is catered for by an external partner with 7 dedicated technical teams. Often with only one designer serving that project at any given time we need to ensure that expectations are properly set and that estimates and effort predictions are provided to help with foreseeing and reacting to as many risks to delivery as possible.

The handover process itself can also have additional complications due to the way in which our partners need to scope and cost work, resulting in the need for designers to produce additional documentation.

The screenshot shows a Confluence page for the 'Design Process and Delivery' space. It has a 'Motion in the product' section with a 'Description/Overview' and a 'Macro' section for 'Bar loader'. To the right, there's a '1.3.5 Identify input purpose' card from Jira. At the bottom, there's a diagram titled 'DESIGN WORK COMPLETED' and 'DEVELOPMENT BEGINS' showing a timeline with milestones and sprints.

Committed to a process of continual iteration and improvement derived through user feedback the AlphaTax project is set to succeed in delivering an innovative solution that pushes boundaries whilst retaining the value that its users have grown to love.

Mind

Side by Side

Mind are a UK Charity that offer national and localised services to those that struggle with mental health.

My role on the project

One of the many clients I worked with at Etch was Mind, who came to us to help with the overhaul of their existing Elefriends community. The primary catalyst for the project was a required refactor, which presented an opportunity to address other issues in the platform as well as identify new ways of better serving their community.

Following initial consultation with our London studio, Big Radical, I helped to lead the re-design and re-launch of Elefriends, which became Side by Side, after working closely with the charity, its community managers and the community itself.

Collecting feedback

Historically Mind have been very good at listening to their community but lacked an openly communicated roadmap, leaving people feeling that they weren't being heard. We worked together to produce a series of materials that better set peoples expectations and kept them informed throughout the beta process. We also simplified the feedback capturing mechanism to help reduce barriers, and introduced the ability to capture a screenshot if the user giving feedback was addressing something on-screen.

A small selection of champions were also identified to help with the initial platform testing, which furthered our direct engagement with some of the most active members of the community.

Attachment & rich-media accessibility

Accessibility enhancement was especially important for Mind, and so I spent time working with our development team to create several inclusive initiatives, including a unique approach to image 'Alternative text', using an image recognition API to provide default captioning and default context. Users are far more inclined to correct automated mistakes than they are to provide the initial description, which can sometimes be seen as a chore. The result is WCAG compliant user-generated content, which is a high bar for any platform to reach.

Special attention was shown to how users could manage the flow of information in the Discourse-based platform. Several systems are in place, from the initial onboarding through to account management, that better enable community members to limit what information they see and from whom. These systems are surfaced front-and-centre, affording a safe space for everyone, and approached in a way to help mitigate conflict.

Post-beta Mind remained committed to continual community engagement with special attention being paid to setting expectations around how that feedback would be actioned. We forged a strong collaborative relationship that manifested in the quality of the outcome of the project.

Thanks for your interest!

Hopefully these case studies have been helpful. I look forward to answering any questions you have and discussing your needs in more detail.

[Download my CV](#)

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Some things people have said about me



“

I've worked with Nathan on a freelancer and full-time basis for a number of years now, at all times he's been a hard worker, diligent and professional. I can 100% rely on him.

”

Simon Johnson, Delivery Lead @ Etch

[View all Testimonials](#)

Let's stay in touch

Be sure to connect with me on [LinkedIn](#), [Medium](#) and [GitHub](#). You can also download a copy of [my CV](#).