

James Acklin

Senior product manager & designer

Distributed, self-hosted, and peer-to-peer systems

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Product leader with 17 years across design, engineering, and product. Led a peer-to-peer messenger through a rewrite, a stability turnaround, and a pivot to agents. Previously directed design systems at Nielsen. Hands-on from product strategy and research through design, code, and release.

Experience

- 2021-Present Tlon Messenger · Product Lead
- Own product roadmap and release cadence across iOS, Android, web, and desktop; manage design and user research within a ten-person team and report weekly to leadership.
 - Led a 2025 stability turnaround: paused feature work, built the end-to-end test framework, and investigated root causes. Reached 99% push notification reliability, cut monthly bugs 75%, and moved from daily hotfixes to biweekly releases.
 - Drove a 2026 pivot to agentic messaging through bot-led onboarding, positioning, launch materials, and retention and sync-reliability targets. Agent cohorts doubled 7-day retention, the best result in five years.
 - Ran a reactivation campaign targeting 2,027 dormant users across six cohorts; retained 22% of returning users at week three. Launched an agent waitlist; present product demos to investors.
 - Design in Figma, contribute front-end code, own QA sign-off, deploy to the live network, and coordinate distributed protocol upgrades.
- 2021-2024 Tlon Landscape · Design & Product
- Software launchpad without app stores or centralized servers.
- 2021-2022 Tlon Bridge · Product Direction
- On-chain key management and Ethereum L2 rollout.
- 2019-2021 Nielsen · Design Systems Director
- Built a WCAG-AAA design system and pattern library used by 20+ designers across 18 verticals. Concurrently designed PointLogic decision-support software for planning \$100M+ marketing campaigns.
- 2013-2019 Rhiza · Design & Engineering
- Built geospatial data visualization tools for media and academic researchers. Acquired by Nielsen in 2017.
- 2011-2013 Smith Brothers Agency · Engineering
- Developed web properties for multinational consumer packaged goods brands.
- 2009-2011 Elisco Advertising · Graphic Design
- Produced print campaigns for regional clients.

Selected Projects

- 2026 Alex ebook reader · Independent project
- Self-hosted PDF and EPUB library with browser-based reading and progress tracking; a reverse relay serves the library from the user's own machine. alexreader.app
- 2020-2021 Bloomfield Robotics · Data Visualization
- Built crop-health and yield dashboards from plant-level imaging and ML processing; ran early market validation with trial clients.