

Steve Kovo

LEAD EXPERIENCE DESIGNER

hi@stevekovo.com • linkedin.com/in/kovo • stevekovo.com • Madison, WI

SUMMARY

Design leader with 18 years driving product strategy, design systems, and creative direction across consumer apps, mobile games, and edtech. Builds the standards, tooling, and creative languages that let teams move fast without losing craft, with measurable impact on user growth, engagement, and learning outcomes.

CORE SKILLS

Design Leadership • Design Systems • Product Strategy • Experience Design • Creative Direction • Motion Design • Cross-functional Team Leadership • O-to-1 Product Design • UX Research • Illustration • Rive • Figma • Team Building and Mentorship

EXPERIENCE

Senior Creative Technologist

MAY 2024 – PRESENT

Fetch

I lead creative direction and design systems for Fetch's rewards and loyalty platform, shaping illustration and motion across a product used by 12.5M+ active users. I own the character experience end to end and lead the animation practice behind product, growth, and retention work.

- Restarted a stalled effort to bring Rive into Fetch's product stack, building the standards, relationships, and craft that turned it into the company's real-time animation platform, driving a 4.4% lift in converted referrals
- Design and build experiences directly in Rive alongside product designers, creating motion that responds to live data and user state
- Led creation of Fetch's first illustration system, replacing years of inconsistent assets with a shared visual language now the team's creative standard
- Mentor designers and engineers on animation as a core UX layer
- Directed creative for Fetch's first Super Bowl campaign: 3.2M livestream viewers, 9+ min average watch time, 1.3M new users

Founder & Creative Director

DEC 2015 – MAY 2024

Runner

I founded and led an independent creative studio for eight years as an embedded creative team for every client, owning strategy, hiring, and delivery from concept through launch.

- Led animation for GoNoodle, evolving their Champ characters into an original content library reaching 25.5M children a year, used in 83% of U.S. elementary schools
- Designed and directed a custom animation pipeline for CharacterStrong, producing 90+ minutes of original character-driven curriculum with a small team
- Led animation, web, app, and motion design for national education platforms and regional healthcare, insurance, and legal clients
- Hired and directed multidisciplinary creative teams project to project, owning budget, scope, and client relationships
- Founded and co-hosted Mad Motion, giving Madison's motion design community its first regular gathering

Co-Founder & Product Design Lead

MAY 2014 – DEC 2015

Naut Games

I co-founded a mobile game and app studio, leading product strategy, creative direction, and UX from concept through launch.

- Partnered with GoNoodle to shape product direction and design their first library of interactive classroom games, a category with no existing playbook
- Designed and shipped multiple original mobile games and apps
- Ran UX behavioral research with the University of Minnesota to validate features across the studio's products

UX Technical Artist

SEP 2011 – MAY 2014

Filament Games

I led creative on multiple shipped educational titles, including several for iCivics, owning experience direction from concept through launch.

- Redesigned Immigration Nation's core mechanic from a multiple-choice quiz into a route-planning system that taught through play, not instruction
- Shaped the same play-first approach across Drafting Board, Do I Have a Right?, and Win the White House, now reaching 9M+ students a year with 200M+ plays, tied to a 26% lift in civic knowledge and 62% increase in top-rated student writing
- Partnered with game designers on UX wireframes, journeys, and prototypes, running research to validate design decisions
- Designed the full visual system per project and art directed the illustration team

Freelance Creative

SEP 2008 – SEP 2011

- Led animation on Addiction Incorporated, a feature documentary that became a New York Times Critics' Pick, still used in classrooms today
- Designed, illustrated, and animated original characters for explainer and promotional content, the foundational work that grew into Runner
- Built online course content for KC Distance Learning, converting curriculum into HTML textbook pages integrated into Blackboard