Adam Ponders

Leading Teams to Align, Brand, & Create.
Brand Strategy · Creative Alignment · Story Theory | RecLet Founder, Creative Director

Chicago, IL · relocating to Los Angeles (No assistance required) · remote anywhere in the US, or hybrid in or near LA
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SUMMARY

Creative leader who owns the brand and builds the system a team ships it through. Managed eighteen people across two teams, junior to senior. Co-led a ten-person design group through a national news network's launch, rebrand and relaunch, then ran it alone; three of the ten moved into supervisory roles. Then seven digital producers, each carrying 20 to 40 client brands, inside a thirty-person digital production department. Twelve years in design, motion, and production at WGN-TV, NewsNation, and Epsilon, leading teams the last six years. In 2026 founded RecLet, owning the brand, the pricing, and every word of copy, and directing AI coding agents as the production team. I work from story theory: a brand's promise, the line of copy that earns the click, even the palette, because a product built to calm someone cannot be red.

EXPERIENCE

Founder / Creative Director / Story Theorist — RecLet (Mautonce LLC), remote March 2026 – Present
Founded the company and own every function in it: brand, positioning, product and UX, every word of copy, pricing and tier architecture, store readiness, and direction of the engineering. RecLet is a local-first writing and audio studio for iOS, Android, and web, exporting to open formats (ODT, PDF, EPUB, MP3, M4B, FLAC), with no account, no cloud, and no AI in the product. reclet.now

- Took RecLet from concept to store-ready in six months across 80+ versioned releases. Set the tier architecture, and ran a pricing audit and a dark-pattern review of the paywall before launch.
- Directed AI coding agents (Cursor AI, Claude Code, GitHub Copilot) as a production team, writing the briefs, acceptance criteria, and review gates behind ~170K lines of TypeScript/React and a Rust→WASM document kernel: 520 merged pull requests, 4,100+ unit tests, 85 end-to-end tests, CI-gated releases.
- Authored the standards the agents work from and the record they update: a library of 67 agents, 75 skills and 84 rules covering QA, security review, accessibility, store compliance and brand voice, plus a 42,000-word product Blueprint. The onboarding-and-standards discipline I built for human teams, applied to AI.
- Built CLARK (Cyber Librarian Activating Relative Knowledge), the studio's private AI knowledge base: local models and retrieval running entirely offline across 117,000 files and 23 role-scoped workspaces, with written rules for what is indexed, what is never indexed, and how a change is approved, signed and logged. CLARK also runs RecLet's maintenance and updates, the only standing work the product requires.
- Built the brand from zero: name, identity, tagline system, the brand script, and competitive positioning against the cloud audio suites and the manuscript-writing apps. Owned the copy for the marketing site, onboarding, a 43-entry help FAQ, the paywall and billing, and the store listing.

Manager, Digital Production — Epsilon, Chicago April 2023 – March 2026
Led seven digital producers inside a thirty-person digital production department at a company of thousands, with partner teams in the US, UK, and India. Each producer carried 20 to 40 client brands, on programs with budgets from a few thousand dollars to several million, for clients including OLIPOP, the NFL, McDonald's, Walgreens, Marriott, and Anheuser-Busch.

- Designed the workflow from intake to delivery, so work stopped stalling between teams and clients could be given dates that held.
- Wrote the onboarding and the compliance checks, so a new producer and a new engineer started from the same expectations instead of learning them by accident.
- Built the production system for Spaceback, which turns social posts into paid ads, end to end: account manager's request through Digital Production to build and client revisions. Rolled it out with the US and India teams, then stood the process up with Epsilon's LATAM teams, determined the cost basis so the service could be priced for clients, and wrote the pitch material that sold it.
- Interviewed producers and contributed to hiring. Translated program requirements into planning frameworks for internal partners and clients and facilitated the sessions around them; ran weekly one-on-ones and coached producers into bigger roles, including owning client relationships and working alongside AI tools.

Storyboard Artist (contract) — Encyclopædia Britannica, Chicago, remote Feb 2022 – Jan 2023

- Storyboarded the topic-introduction videos for Expedition: Learn, Britannica's science and social-studies platform for grades 3–8, launched October 2023. Turned scripts and subject-matter-expert notes into shot-by-shot storyboards in Adobe XD with sourced stock footage, which production then animated to spec.

Manager, Graphic Design / Art Director → Manager, Creative Innovation & Production — Sept 2020 – May 2023
NewsNation (Nexstar Media Group), Chicago
Promoted October 2021

Joined on the launch team of a national news network (September 1, 2020). Co-led the design group — eight graphic artists and two motion artists — through year one with a fellow manager, then ran it alone from 2021 when my co-manager left and was not replaced, building the creative infrastructure that carried a three-hour newscast toward 24-hour national news.

- Designed the network's first live-event packages within 60 days of launch: the 2020 presidential and vice-presidential debates and election night.
- Spearheaded rebranding strategy from WGN America to NewsNation (March 2021), establishing a cohesive brand identity and creative strategy after the network set aside an outside agency's branding and marketing proposal and brought the work in-house.
- Branded eight new shows as the schedule grew from three hours a night to five, each with key art, an open, and a template family.
- Institutionalized the brand so people outside the design team could produce in it: a template system that grew the graphics library 30% (31 new Ross Xpression templates), and training for producers, writers, and editors across the network's locations.
- Developed the group: interviewed artists and contributed to hiring, and three of the ten moved into supervisory roles. Replaced ad-hoc requests with task assignment and deadline accountability that cut errors and sped delivery, and chose Blender as the 3D pipeline, standing it up and training the team on it.
- Built the election-night graphics system for the 2022 midterms, which drew 93K households in primetime, and the template library and training behind the move to 24-hour weekday programming in April 2023.
- Network context over the same period (Nielsen, via Adweek and Variety): primetime audience more than doubled from the 2021 rebrand year to 2023, a 46K to 101K average, and NewsNation took its first primetime 25–54 wins over Fox News and MSNBC over the 2022 Christmas weekend.

Graphic Artist / Media Manager — WGN-TV (Tribune Media, then Nexstar), Chicago Jan 2014 – Sept 2020

- Graphics for WGN Morning News, Chicago's #1 morning newscast for ten straight years (Adults 25–54, 6–9 a.m.): six hours of live television every weekday, through the 2014 WGN America split and the 2019 Nexstar transition; the streak's widest lead, +70%, came in 2020.
- Lead designer for Man of the People with Pat Tomasulo (2018–2019): about 80 graphics and animations a week, 4,000+ in all; season one averaged a 1.4 rating (45,518 households), ranked #2 in Adults 25–54 among regularly scheduled Saturday late-night shows, and was renewed.
- Built an After Effects + Excel automation system that generated 900+ trivia lower-third animations a quarter for Tribune's national multicast networks (Antenna TV, This TV), replacing hand-built graphics.
- Built the anchor-intro open system for the 2015 WGN News redesign: one template family with replaceable media slots and retouched anchor portraits, used for every newscast, and the live Ross Xpression package for Chicago Football Weekly's September 2020 launch.
- Animated the 2018 WGN Sports package from the art director's design: transitions, interstitials, and per-player and stats animations for the Cubs and White Sox, the last package WGN Sports aired before its 72-year Cubs run ended in 2019.

SKILLS

Creative leadership: brand identity, art direction, motion and animation, key-art and template systems, broadcast graphics (Ross Xpression), Adobe Creative Cloud, After Effects, Blender, Figma, Adobe XD

Creative operations: workflow architecture, program management, production automation, digital asset management, documentation and training, onboarding systems, change management, cross-functional planning, hybrid and remote team leadership (US, UK, India)

Product and brand strategy: product marketing, positioning, brand messaging, design systems, pricing and tier design, App Store and Google Play launch readiness, accessibility (WCAG, VoiceOver)

Directing AI agents: Cursor AI, Claude Code, Microsoft Copilot, GitHub Copilot; agent/skill/rule authoring

EDUCATION, TRAINING, CERTIFICATIONS & AWARDS

B.A., Communication, Media and Theatre; Minor in Media Studies — Northeastern Illinois University, 2022

Second City Training Center, Chicago — Improvisation Program, all five levels, April 2016; Voiceover

Professional certificates, 2026 (LinkedIn Learning, except where noted): Succeeding as a Senior Manager · Impacting the Business as a Senior Manager or Leader · Change Management · Essential Business Communication Skills · Sales Management Foundations · Human Skills in the Age of AI (Microsoft and LinkedIn)

2015 Silver Dome Award, Best TV Use of Graphic Design — Illinois Broadcasters Association