

J. Cornelius

Digital Product Strategy & Design Leader · Author of Loops · 30 Years in Human-Centered Design

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SUMMARY

Built products from napkin sketch to 50 million users. Sold companies. Wrote the book on it, literally. *Loops: Building Products with Clarity & Confidence* (Lioncrest, 2019) distills 30 years of human-centered design into a framework product teams actually use.

Most product leaders come from one lane: engineering, design, or business. Few have run the restaurants, bars, and hospitality businesses they're building software for. Fewer still have spent three decades watching what works and what doesn't across Fortune 100s, VC-backed startups, and their own ventures.

Selected clients across three decades: Delta Air Lines, InterContinental Hotels Group, Fiserv, UPS, Circle K / Couche-Tard, American Express, Experian, Budget Car Rentals

EXPERIENCE

Founder, Empty Nest Holdings

Atlanta Metro · October 2019 – Present

- Bootstrapped restaurant management platforms born from operating Lucky Hare and Night Train Pizza. Serving independent operators who need real tools without enterprise pricing.
- AI-native architecture: multi-agent prospecting (Agency) on local OpenClaw, Square-API ordering with kitchen-capacity and throughput modeling, modular pricing across three product modules. Tech Stack: Claude API, Supabase / PostgreSQL, Node.js, Ruby on Rails, Stripe, SendGrid, Tailwind, Swift. Server-side and local-first by design.

Fractional Product Strategy Advisory

jcornelius.com · Independent · Atlanta Metro · October 2025 – Present

- Partnering with founders, CEOs, and product leaders on strategy, positioning, and product development.
- Focus areas: restaurant & hospitality tech, SMB SaaS, and consumer digital products.
- Author of *Loops: Building Products with Clarity & Confidence* (Lioncrest, 2019).

Owner & Operator

Lucky Hare · Marble Hill, GA · January 2024 – Present

- Multi-concept restaurant: chef-driven kitchen, thoughtful wine program, and Night Train Pizza. Inspired the founding of Donna.

- Designed and ran a structured guest-research program. Translated findings into a 90-day operational action plan addressing throughput, consistency, and value perception.
- Built brand identity, marketing systems, wine program, and POS-integrated reporting from scratch. Lead all positioning, copywriting, and creative direction.

Founder & President

Nine Labs · Atlanta Metro · May 2012 – September 2025 (13 yrs 5 mos)

- Founded and led a product strategy and design consultancy serving Fortune 500s, VC-backed startups, and growth-stage companies.
- Built a 20-person team across offices in the US, Spain, Russia, and India.
- Shipped 40+ products, including a proprietary CRM and reporting platform.
- **Selected engagements:**
 - simplified back-office applications used by global banks; prototyped touchless ATM workflows for a top-tier financial services firm; rethought multi-platform hotel booking for a global hospitality brand; mobile concepts streamlining convenience-store operations; design systems powering apps used daily by millions.
 - Codified the firm's product methodology into the published *Loops* framework, used internally on engagements and taught publicly.
 - Wound down operations in 2025 after the travel industry, the firm's primary vertical, contracted sharply post-COVID. Chose an orderly close over a pivot to verticals the team didn't know well.

President

CoffeeCup Software & Bluedomino Web Hosting · Atlanta, GA · February 1998 – 2012 (14 yrs)

- Led operations for a consumer software company (website builders, HTML editors, design tools) from back of a coffee shop to over 50 million users globally.
- Managed product development, QA, and customer success across a distributed team.
- Grew product portfolio and shipped hundreds of major releases across 14 years of platform evolution: desktop, web, mobile.
- Grew Bluedomino Web Hosting from concept to 20,000+ customers globally in under a year.
- Led the company through successful acquisition by Endurance International Group (EIG) in 2005.

ADVISORY, BOARDS & COMMUNITY

- InVision, Design Leadership Forum Member, July 2018 – January 2024.
- Founder Institute, Mentor, July 2015 – January 2024. Brand strategy, product strategy and design, user experience for early- and growth-stage companies.

- Shadow Ventures, Strategic Advisor / Board Member, December 2017 – December 2019. Innovation in the AEC industry.
- Atlanta Web Design Group, President, October 2008 – November 2018 (10 yrs 2 mos). Led the leading professional organization of web professionals in greater Atlanta, 3,300+ members.
- Georgia Tech ATDC, Branding and User Experience Mentor, June 2011 – 2014. Worked with member companies on branding and UX projects. Co-taught Customer Discovery workshops.

PUBLISHING & SPEAKING

- Author, *Loops: Building Products with Clarity & Confidence* (Lioncrest Publishing, 2019). Amazon best seller. A 250-page playbook organized as a five-step process across three phases (*Should we do it, How do we do it, Let's do it*) covering human-centered business design, research, prototyping, testing, branding & positioning, and building at speed.
- Author, *Redesign Your Design Thinking*. – Talks on human-centered product design, product strategy, mobile commerce, and brand fundamentals. Featured at Chicago Camps and other industry events.
- Instructor, ATDC. Product and UX curriculum.
- Instructor, Iron Yard. Product and UX curriculum.
- Instructor, General Assembly. Product and UX curriculum.

SKILLS

- **Product Strategy** — Opportunity framing, problem-space discovery, hypothesis design, validation loops, roadmap synthesis, product-market fit assessment, methodology development. Innovation & AI — Claude API, multi-agent systems, OpenRouter, AI-native product architecture, server-side and local-first patterns, applied prototyping with foundation models. Design & Research — UX research, information architecture, interaction design, prototyping, brand & positioning, copywriting, design systems.
- **Enterprise Consulting** — Fortune 500 and growth-stage delivery, multi-disciplinary team leadership, distributed-team management across four countries.
- **Operations** — P&L ownership, BOH/FOH operations, vendor management, food and beverage program design, wine list curation, POS-integrated analytics.
- **Frameworks** — Loops (own methodology), 30x500, The Mom Test, Design Sprint, Win Without Pitching.

EDUCATION

The Wharton School.

Business Administration, Management and Operations,
2016 – 2018.