



Tom Coates

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Profile

Product and design leader with 20+ years experience in new product development and strategy - particular expertise in decentralized social platforms, media, location, and IOT.

I've led large cross-functional teams and incubators at the BBC and Yahoo!, developed products for Nokia, Eero, and Jawbone, and founded two venture-backed startups—Thington (acquired by Eero) and Planetary. Most recently co-founded the Social Web Foundation and worked on UI for end-to-end encryption on the ActivityPub ecosystem, funded by a grant from the Ethereum Foundation.

Consulting & Advisory

Between full-time roles, I've worked with various clients on product strategy, product design, UX etc. Some examples include:

- *Wired*: Partnered with Editor-in-Chief to develop future-of-media strategic pitch (2021)
- *Scenery.video*: Delivered UX for collaborative video-editing platform
- *Jawbone*: Delivered caffeine-tracker CoffeeUp - 500k downloads in month one
- *Nokia*: Multiple projects, including ML-driven city guides and location-sharing tools
- *Massive Health*: UX for The Eatery, an early health-tracking app
- *BBC*: Created internal idea management / social tools for culture change program

Relevant Experience

SOCIAL WEB FOUNDATION - CO-FOUNDER (NOW ADVISOR) - JAN 2024-PRESENT

Co-founded a nonprofit advancing decentralized social media with ActivityPub co-author Evan Prodromou, developing strategy and securing funding from 13 organizations including Meta, Ford Foundation, Flipboard, and Fastly. Co-ran project on end-to-end encryption over ActivityPub (Ethereum foundation-funded). Now serve as an advisor.

VERSE COMMS (TRADING AS PLANETARY/NOS) - CO-FOUNDER & VP PRODUCT/DESIGN – 2018-2020

Co-founded the company with Evan Henshaw-Plath to build an open, decentralized and humane alternative to Facebook built on Secure Scuttlebutt. Secured \$1.2m in pre-seed funding from Bloomberg Beta, Upside.vc and others.

- Co-developed vision, positioning, and business model, leading it from concept through funding, development, and large-scale beta launch
- Ran the product roadmap, co-managed engineering, and led audience research, branding, naming, and trademark efforts

- Designed the application and website's information architecture and visual design
- Wrote user rules, privacy, moderation and abuse policies tailored for decentralization

EERO – SENIOR PRODUCT MANAGER - 2017-2018

Joined Eero via acquisition to lead software strategy for Hive, a whole-home safety and security system. Defined the software experience in close collaboration with Heads of Product, Design, and Hardware.

THINGTON - CO-FOUNDER & VP PRODUCT/DESIGN – 2014-2017

Co-founded Thington, a smart home concierge app for iPhone and web. Led product and design from inception through acquisition by Eero in 2017, overseeing product strategy, UX/UI, and information architecture. Directed business development, fundraising, and partner relations. Managed legal operations, including company formation, contracts, and patent filings. Oversaw PR and brand direction; product featured in the Financial Times, Daily Mail, BuzzFeed, and more.

PRODUCT CLUB – CO-FOUNDER & VP PRODUCT/DESIGN 2012-2014

Co-founded consultancy with clients such as Nokia & Jawbone (see Consultancy above) that evolved into the Thington venture-funded start-up.

YAHOO! – VARIOUS ROLES - 2005-2010

Led product development and innovation across three roles at Yahoo, spanning social platforms, location-sharing, and internal incubation

- *Head of Product, Yahoo Brickhouse*: Directed product strategy for Fire Eagle, a pioneering location-sharing platform, from concept to public launch. Helped define product ideation processes and advised on acquisitions.
- *User Location Strategy Lead*: Owned Yahoo's cross-platform location strategy, including PM responsibilities for LocDrop (global location datastore) and the Universal Location Widget, working with global engineering teams.
- *Social/Media Technologist*: Ran a rapid prototyping team focused on social web and media products, including early decentralized and data-sharing experiments. Co-organized Yahoo/BBC Hack Day and contributed to patent-awarded projects.

BBC RADIO & MUSIC INTERACTIVE – SENIOR DEVELOPMENT PRODUCER R&D - 2003-2005

Led a small R&D and strategy team at BBC Radio & Music Interactive:

- Defined product strategy for a 120-person department and co-led a 20+ person cross-divisional team to develop what became BBC /programmes/, the enduring metadata backbone for all BBC broadcast content
- Spearheaded R&D initiatives exploring mobile song recognition, social experiences around media, and experimental broadcasting technologies such as Java over DAB
- Represented the BBC's digital innovation efforts externally at industry conferences and within the wider organization

UPMYSTREET.COM – PRODUCER: COMMUNITIES & FORUMS 2002-2003

Led design and development of UpMyStreet Conversations, an early geo-coded community platform. Oversaw product from concept to launch, including social features, UI/UX, and moderation systems. Managed the initial community, trained staff, and collaborated with commercial teams on business use cases.

TIME OUT – ASSISTANT EDITOR & PRODUCTION EDITOR - 1999-2001

- Designed and built web templates for city guides, travel, tickets, and shopping; managed production schedules, house ads, and search strategy.
- Edited and maintained site content and handled content syndication.

Education

- London College of Printing, Postgraduate Certificate in Periodical Journalism (1998)
- University of Bristol, PhD Classics - incomplete (1994-1997)
- University of Bristol, BA Hons Classics, 1st Class Hons (1991-1994)

Public Speaking, Events & Communications

- Spoken at dozens of major conferences—including keynoting Mind the Product and presenting at O'Reilly ETech, Future of Web Apps, XTech, dConstruct, PICNIC, Webstock, O'Reilly Solid, Where 2.0, and An Event Apart. Served on program committees for O'Reilly ETech and multiple Microsoft Social Computing Symposiums.
- Co-organised the landmark BBC/Yahoo! Hack Day at Alexandra Palace, bringing together 500 developers for one of the first large-scale hack events in the UK.
- Trained journalist with published credits in *CNBC*, *Icon*, *Screen International*, *Time Out* and *The Guardian* etc. Work featured in *The Guardian*, *New York Times*, *Wired*, *Forbes*, *BBC*, *MIT Technology Review*, *BuzzFeed*, *Icon*, *Financial Times* and others.
- Media trained with experience on TV, radio and podcasts.
- Founded and maintained plasticbag.org (est. 1999), an influential blog on technology and culture; established and ran barbelith.com, a pioneering online community.

Skills

Product strategy and roadmapping, UX/UI design, rapid prototyping, branding, naming, user research, moderation policy, decentralized protocols (particularly SSB & ActivityPub), E2EE, location services, IOT protocols, iOS/web app design, Figma, Illustrator, Photoshop, Sketch, HTML/CSS, engineering management.

Patents

Three patents: Wearable devices and interfaces for managing activities responsive to physiological effects of consumables (US20150238139A1), Methods and systems for exploring a corpus of content (US8117256B2), Centralized location broker (US20080299989A1)