



karen chisholm

creative director | brand strategist | storyteller | entrepreneur

Karen Chisholm

Creative Director | Branding Strategist | Project Manager | Program Analyst | Entrepreneur

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Professional Summary

Creative leader with decades of experience working directly with CEOs, retailers, marketing agencies, celebrities, real estate developers, media firms, consumer goods manufacturers, and high-ranking military leadership. Proven track record leading branding, rebranding, storytelling, customer journey strategy, packaging, and cross-platform marketing across diverse industries. Owner of Pixie Grit Studios, known for award-winning design, digital media, and client relationships spanning decades. Recognized for leading complex, multidisciplinary initiatives from concept through execution with lasting business impact.

Core Skills

Brand Strategy • Creative Direction • UX/UI Design • Graphic Design • Program Analyst • Project Management • Product Development • Communications • Presentations • Data-Driven Storytelling • Adobe Creative Suite • DoDAF Graphics • Product Packaging • Tradeshow Development • Active Secret Clearance

Professional Experience

Senior Graphic Communications Specialist & Program Analyst

U.S. Army Futures Command (AFC) via COLSA and SAIC | Austin, TX | 2020 – Present

- Lead visual designer and branding strategist for classified and unclassified briefings. Hired under two consecutive defense contracts through COLSA then rehired with SAIC.
- Assigned to the Project Convergence Operational Planning Team, which includes members of Five Eyes intelligence alliance (US, UK, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand).
- Received an honorary Army Challenge Coin for excellence under pressure in recognition of my ability to translate complex data and concepts into visual narratives that supported time-sensitive, high-level defense decisions.
- Designed high-level briefings to 3- and 4-star generals and senior leadership for closed door high-stakes meetings, as well as large industry-leadership events.
- Designed branded marketing materials and swag for large public-facing events like SXSW and industry conventions to engage and attract top talent and industry leaders.
- Created logos and seals for divisions, capabilities, products, Communications Departments, and Army Cross-Functional Teams (CFTs), building cohesive visual identity systems aligned with Army branding priorities.
- Analyzed complex data and created strategic visual narratives, infographics and reports to support decision-making.
- Spearheaded creation and management of a secure 11,000+ asset graphics and document library, serving the 29K+ person Army Futures Command enterprise and other DoD agencies.

- Designed DoDAF architecture products, presentations and white papers collaborating with system engineers, data scientists, analysts, researchers, and program leads to ensure visual communications aligned with evolving technical requirements.
- Coordinated disbursement of the major Army-wide rebrand products across AFC HQ, directorates, and supporting commands including DEVCOM, Futures and Concepts Center (FCC), research laboratories, innovation hubs, and Cross-Functional Teams (CFTs).

Owner / Creative Director

Pixie Grit Studios | Austin, TX | 2004 – 2020

- Managed long-term client retainers across diverse industries: consumer goods, real estate, entertainment, tech, software, marketing agencies, defense, and retail.
- Produced over 200K digital and print assets under deadline-sensitive conditions.
- Led end-to-end design for brands, packaging, websites, campaigns, tradeshow, advertising, print, websites, social media, apps and multimedia experiences.
- Delivered measurable results including client profit growth of 100–400% following brand system rollouts.
- Most clients engaged on multi-year retainers or project contracts for creative leadership and execution. Due to NDAs and classified agreements, portfolios for some projects are only available upon request.

Selected Long-Term Pixie Grit Studios Client Projects (2004–2024)

- **U.S. Army Futures Command:** Trusted by 4-star generals for nearly five years to create 11K+ assets supporting global modernization and ensuring visual consistency across a 29K+ enterprise.
- **Billy F. Gibbons / ZZ Top:** Retained for over 10 years to lead personal brand, merchandising, album artwork, books, and live-event visuals.
- **Holoma Product Development:** Trusted for 6+ years, including current special projects. Designed retail products and packaging across categories—automotive, fashion, food, and home décor—sold at Walmart, Target, AutoZone, Hobby Lobby, and more.
- **Industry Fintech:** Six-month private equity contract leading a full company rebrand, website development, UX design for a client portal, and investor materials. Also produced pitch decks and brand systems for clients, contributing to \$4M+ in funding across multiple ventures.
- **Audio Fusion Systems:** Managed a high-visibility NAMM trade show debut for a disruptive, industry-changing music software platform. Directed photo and video shoots, hired talent, and designed marketing strategy, website, and tradeshow materials for product launch.
- **SmartDog Services:** Consulted daily with the CEO to spearhead a company-wide rebrand and service model innovation. Introduced a now-standard time-based consulting model that grew revenue by 400% in the first year. Designed and executed a trendsetting Facebook-driven trade show campaign that won “Best of Show” at the largest Oracle industry event. Retained for 10 years. Company acquired by App Associates.

- **Gamer World News:** Created branding and media assets for the first-ever gaming-dedicated news outlet. Supported investor funding during pre-launch and was offered a full-time role based on performance.
- **Zero Wait-State:** Under monthly retainer for 4+ years. Led rebranding and product/service development that helped secure Google as a client. Delivered UX overhauls and design systems prior to executive leadership turnover.
- **Thomas Steinbeck, Author:** Retained for nine years for branding, marketing, websites, and book design and related copyright advocacy work for the late author.
- **The Touch Agency:** Served as creative lead for two years, managing product packaging, advertising, pitch decks, and social media marketing for a natural grocery-focused marketing firm.

Education

- Bachelor of Science in Advertising — University of Texas at Austin (Honors)
- UX/UI Design — Austin Community College

Side Ventures

- KC Industrial Art & Design – Abstract art commissions for art collectors, galleries and interior designers.
- Karen Chisholm Underwater – Underwater photography and video, ocean conservation and marine life awareness.
- Pixie Grit Studios & Stock Photography – Design agency and stock photography collection of interior design mockups, art mockups, and nature-based photo and video social media assets.
- Karen Chisholm Music– Independent musician, producer, and multimedia showrunner; national tours and video production (mostly inactive).

Software & Tools

Adobe Creative Suite • Microsoft Office • Sketch • WordPress • Shopify • Etsy • HTML/CSS • Final Cut Pro • Google Suite • Figma • Canva • Firefly • AI Applications

Volunteer Work

Founder, The Faces of Bravery (Hurricane Harvey Relief)

- Led on-the-ground rescue efforts, distributed supplies, raised funds, and coordinated community communications for three months during the 2017 hurricane crisis.

References

Available upon request