

FRACTIONAL **STRATEGIC** DESIGNER

Matteo Balocco

Senior Consultant · Remote

I work as a senior individual contributor: embedded in the team, without layers of management. Comfortable in rooms with engineers, stakeholders, and users.

TRACK RECORD

20+

Years designing digital products

+€1.5M

ARR growth at DatoCMS

5

parallel supplier teams, at Zanichelli
(as Fifth Beat consultant)

+45%

Allocated budget YoY growth, at Sorgenia
(as Fifth Beat consultant)

UX RESEARCH & DISCOVERY

Understanding users before building

Research without a plan to act on it is expensive documentation. I run structured discovery — interviews, usability testing, surveys, tree testing — with the explicit goal of informing decisions, not producing reports.

Best for teams about to redesign a key flow, validate assumptions before development, or enter a market they don't fully understand yet.

WHAT YOU GET

Research report with prioritised insights, actionable recommendations, and documentation ready for the product team.

TYPICAL DURATION

2–4 weeks · Fixed-scope or single-day workshop.

IA & INTERACTION DESIGN

Structure and coherence for growing products

Fast-growing products accumulate inconsistencies. I work on the parts that are hardest to fix later: information architecture, interaction patterns, design systems. The goal is a product that scales without losing coherence.

Best for teams that have outgrown their original structure, or that are building something new and want to do it right from the start.

WHAT YOU GET

IA audit, new navigation architecture, tested wireframes and prototypes, design system contribution with documentation.

TYPICAL DURATION

4–10 weeks · Fixed-scope or monthly retainer.

DESIGN LEADERSHIP & ADVISORY

A senior design partner, without the overhead

Some teams need a design lead but not a full-time hire. I work as an embedded IC — present in the room with engineers and stakeholders, without management layers. I help teams make faster decisions, raise the quality bar, and develop more autonomy over time.

Best for product teams without internal design leadership, or that need external perspective on complex decisions.

WHAT YOU GET

Defined design process, more autonomous team, faster decisions. Regular or on-demand presence depending on your needs.

TYPICAL DURATION

Ongoing retainer or single-day advisory

CASE STUDIES

SELECTED WORK

CASE STUDY

Fifth Beat for Sorgenia

DESIGN ROADMAP AND BUDGET GROWTH FOR AN ITALIAN CONSUMER APP

Product Management

Agile

Mobile App

The problem

mySorgenia — Sorgenia's consumer app across Web, Android, and iOS — needed to raise its design quality while managing a fundamental transition: from Waterfall to Agile, and from output-focused to user-centred thinking. Multiple suppliers were working in parallel. No one was holding the design thread.

My role

UX Tech Lead within the Fifth Beat team, embedded alongside 14 designers, researchers, and developers. I operated at the intersection of design quality and stakeholder management — including D-level relationships with Sorgenia leadership and coordination across EY and Accenture supplier streams.

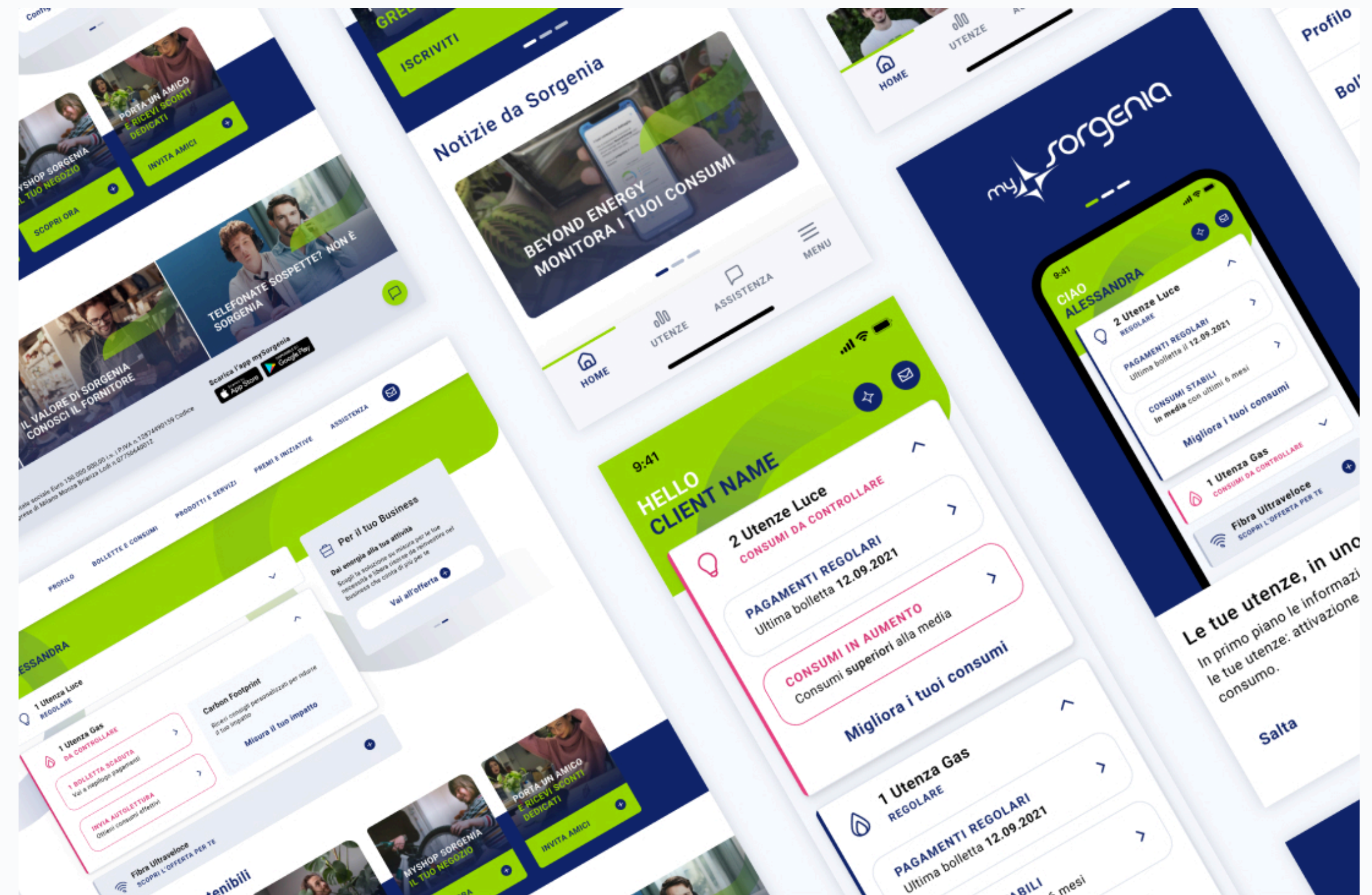
What I did

I co-managed the product design roadmap end-to-end: facilitating alignment across Design, Development, and Marketing, keeping coherence across supplier teams, and maintaining the quality bar through the organisational transition.

The work wasn't glamorous. It was governance, facilitation, and consistent delivery — the kind that builds trust over time.

Impact

The annual project budget grew from €275K to €400K — a 45% increase year-on-year. In client relationships, budget growth is a direct proxy for confidence in output quality.



+45%

Budget growth YoY

€400K

Annual budget reached

CASE STUDY

Fifth Beat for Zanichelli

GOVERNANCE AND ROADMAP FOR ALBE, ZANICHELLI'S DESIGN SYSTEM

Research Design System Agile Method Governance

The problem

Zanichelli was scaling its digital products division fast — five supplier teams working in parallel, no shared component library, no governance model. Each team was making independent decisions. The system was accumulating inconsistencies faster than anyone could resolve them.

My role

UX Tech Lead within the Fifth Beat team, responsible for design system governance across a €300K/year programme. My counterparts were designers and developers distributed across multiple agencies.

What I did

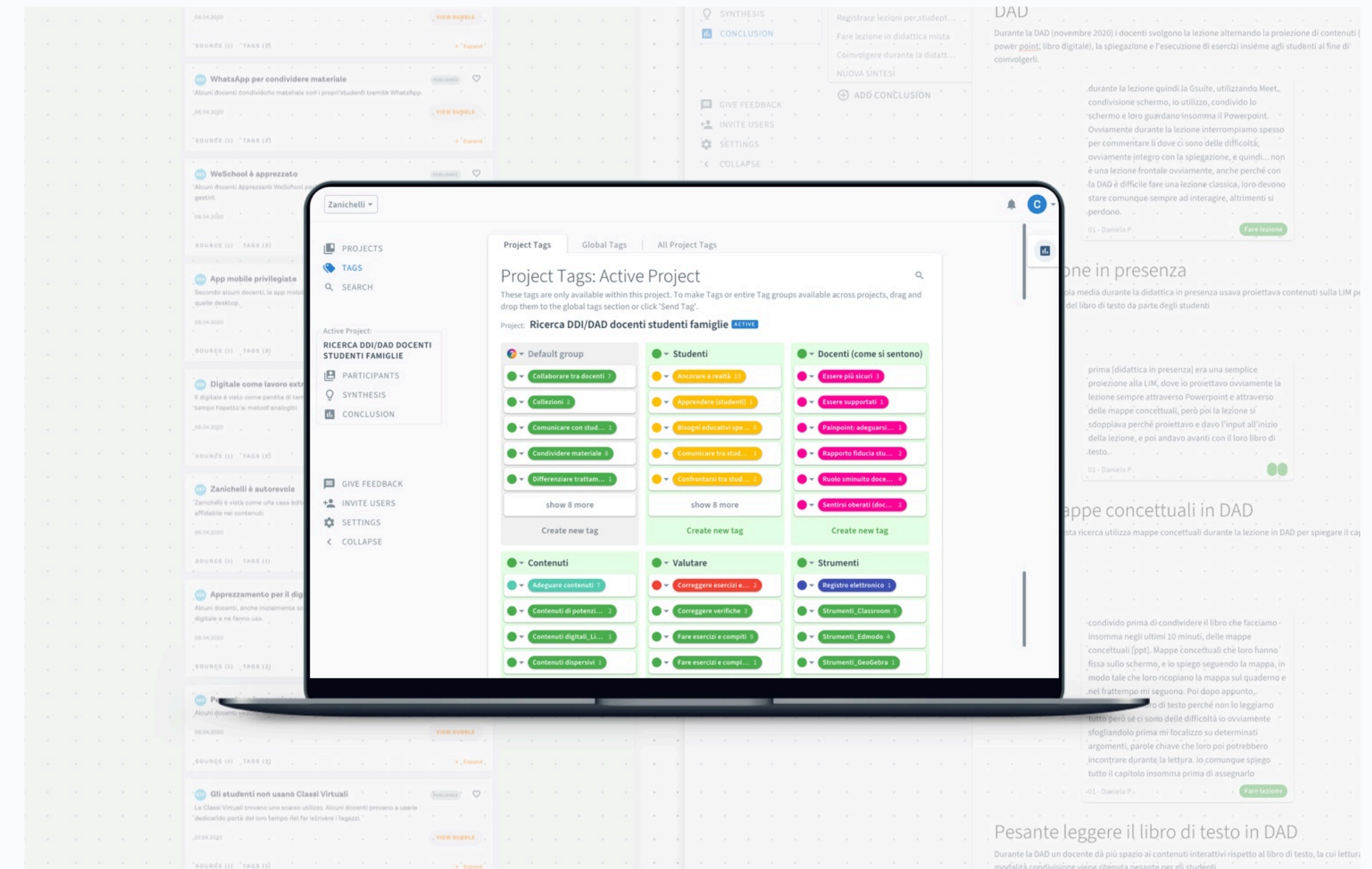
I redefined the governance model and versioning strategy for Albe, Zanichelli's design system — giving the five teams a shared language and clear rules for contribution, ownership, and conflict resolution. I managed the roadmap and kept the system coherent as the product surface grew.

The goal wasn't to build components. It was to make parallel work possible without chaos.

Impact

Five supplier teams collaborating in parallel, without conflicts.

The system is still in production and actively maintained — the most honest signal that the governance model held.



5

Parallel supplier teams

€300K

Annual project budget

USER RESEARCH, IA AND STRATEGIC DESIGN FOR A GLOBAL SAAS

IA Design System Dark Mode UX Research

The problem

DatoCMS had grown into a global SaaS with clients worldwide — but without a dedicated design function. By 2023, the cracks were visible: navigation had three competing “Settings” entries, the colour system failed WCAG accessibility standards, and the plugin marketplace lived entirely outside the product, invisible to most users. No one had been responsible for the whole. It showed.

My role

I joined as Design Lead, part-time and embedded — no management layers, direct collaboration with engineering and product. We work in 6-week Shape Up cycles: fixed time, variable scope, every cycle ships to production.

What I did, and why it mattered

Each year addressed a different layer of the product’s structural debt.

In 2023, I redesigned the global navigation — removing lexical ambiguities, introducing a two-tier hierarchy (project → environments), and giving users a coherent mental model of the product for the first time. That navigation has been in production since, unchanged.

In 2024, I brought the plugin marketplace inside the CMS. Discoverability went from near-zero to a first-class surface within the product.

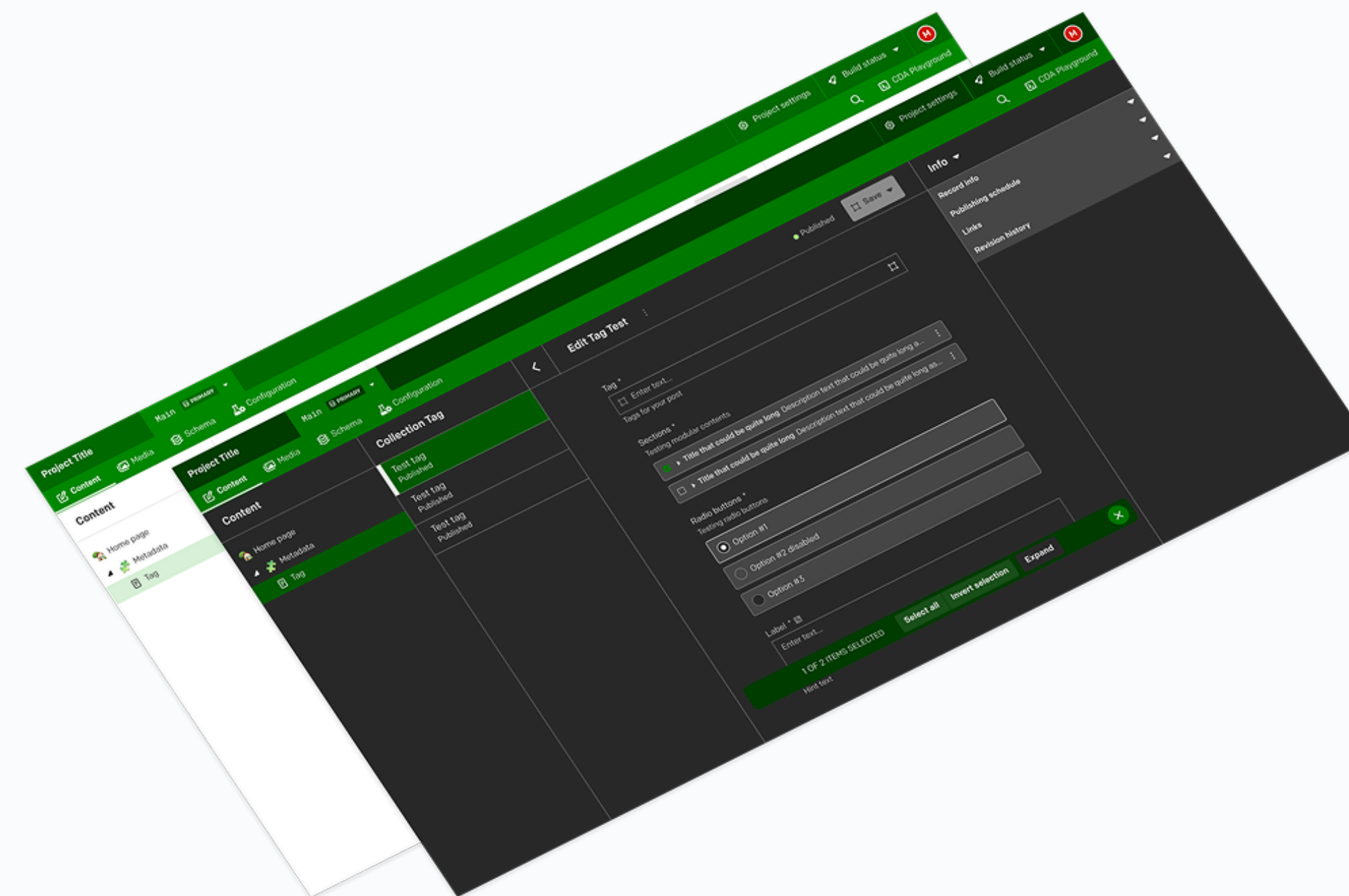
In 2025, I directed AI integration work — grounded in research rather than assumption.

In 2026, I defined the colour theory substrate — HLS and OKLCH — behind the automatic palette generation that powers light/dark mode.

Impact

ARR grew from €5M to €6.5M. The team grew from 9 to 13 people. EBIT margin reached 65% — top 5% globally among SaaS companies. Monthly API calls: 3.5 billion.

The product is more coherent, more accessible, and structurally sounder than when I joined. The work compounds.



+€1.5M
ARR Growth

65%
EBIT Margin

SIMPLE TO START. FOCUSED ON IMPACT.

01

EMBEDDED, NOT EXTERNAL

I work inside the team, in the same rooms as engineers, stakeholders, and users. Not as a vendor who delivers decks, but as a collaborator who shares context.

02

CYCLES, NOT PROJECTS

I work in cycles: fixed time, variable scope, every cycle ships to production. I'm comfortable with structured ambiguity: defining scope is part of the work.

03

RESEARCH BEFORE ASSUMPTIONS

I don't validate ideas I've already decided on. Discovery comes first, and it shapes what gets built, not the other way around.



READY TO START?

30 minutes is enough to understand whether we're a good fit.
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HAVE A PROBLEM WORTH SOLVING?

I work with teams that are serious about design — not as decoration,
but as a structural lever.

If that's the context, let's talk.

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MATTEO BALOCCO