

Daniel E. O'Connell, PhD

London, United Kingdom · +447539928558 · daniel@cleverpilgrim.com · linkedin.com/in/oconnelldaniel · Eligible to work in UK, EU & US without sponsorship

SUMMARY

AI Product Manager / Founding PM who turns ambiguous problems into shipped, trustworthy product. Spent the last year and a half as a solo, non-technical founder conceiving, designing, and building Clever Pilgrim, a travel planning platform, directing AI-assisted development (Lovable, ChatGPT) while owning every product decision: requirements, UX, architectural trade-offs, and iteration based on testing. Background spans corporate law, international business teaching, and academic publishing. Consistent throughline is learning a complex domain fast, simplifying it without losing the substance, and building something people can actually use.

CORE SKILLS

Product Strategy · Artificial Intelligence (AI) · Conversational AI · Prompt Engineering · Trust & Guardrail Design · No-Code Development · Go-to-Market Strategy · Competitive Analysis · User Experience (UX) · API Integration (Google Places/Routes, Mapbox, Stripe, Perplexity)

EXPERIENCE

Founder & Product Lead — Clever Pilgrim

December 2024 – Present · United Kingdom

- Conceived, designed, and solo-built a travel planning app end to end, without writing code myself, directing AI-assisted implementation (Lovable, ChatGPT) across requirements, UX, and architecture.
- Designed the coordination system governing every conversational turn. The system decided what the AI assistant was allowed to do before it acted, so a single message could safely trigger multiple actions (checking real venues, factoring trip geography, applying personalization) at once, while structurally guaranteeing the assistant could never claim to have saved a change unless it actually had.
- Designed the system to detect when missing data would prevent an accurate or complete travel-time picture for a day, and surface that explicitly with an “Incomplete” tag rather than show a silently wrong estimate.
- Designed a deterministic ranking layer for venue suggestions using real candidates from Google Places filtered by weighted scoring with a deterministic tiebreak, so no venue is ever AI-generated or AI-selected, and designed real-time route computation between itinerary stops, using Google Routes API, with correct incremental recomputation on edit.
- Ran product discovery and QA across nearly 3,000 AI-assisted development iterations, repeatedly cross-checking the AI tooling's self-reported state of the codebase against observed app behavior and catching multiple cases where the tool's own audit was materially incorrect.
- Conducted competitive analysis, product positioning, and go-to-market strategy; formed the company (Ltd Co.) and handled tax compliance, regulatory research, and privacy/ToS documentation.

Career Break — Caregiving

September 2018 – November 2024 · United Kingdom

- Secured Croatian citizenship by descent for the family (passed the citizenship exam in Croatian) and served as ad hoc citizenship consultant for eight family members, researching requirements and coordinating multi-country document sourcing, consulate visits, apostille certification, and translation.
- Served as primary at-home parent through the pandemic while coordinating household logistics around a spouse's hospital shifts and nursing studies; guided son through a competitive dual-country (UK/US) university application process.

PhD Candidate & Teaching Assistant — Henley Business School

October 2012 – August 2018 · Reading, United Kingdom

- Doctoral research: “Essays on Regional Strategy, Subsidiary Knowledge Capabilities and Performance.” Designed and conducted a panel-data study integrating multi-source data across countries, parent companies, and subsidiaries, applying econometric techniques to model regional and firm-level effects on subsidiary performance.
- Taught bi-weekly tutorials for undergraduate students in Markets, Marketing & Strategy (2013-2017) and graduate students in International Strategic Management (2013–2014), consistently earning high approval ratings in student assessments.

EARLIER CAREER

Editorial Coordinator / Program Coordinator / Research Associate — Saint Louis University

Saint Louis, Missouri · 2009 – 2014
Managed the editorial and publication process for an academic journal (Multinational Business Review), assisted with its sale and transition to Emerald Publishing Ltd., and coordinated undergraduate and Executive Masters international business programs for the Boeing Institute of International Business.

Lecturer — China Agricultural University

Beijing, China · 2005 – 2009
Full-time lecturer in International Business, Business Strategy, and Business Law for a UK university-partnership degree program (International College at Beijing); awarded Excellent Teacher of the Year twice. Concurrent business/executive English training for corporate clients. Previously taught English in Beijing (2004 – 2005) before moving into the lecturer role.

Attorney — Polsinelli, Shalton & Welte, P.C. / Legal Consultant — ILS Consulting

United States & Spain · 1999 – 2003
Corporate attorney advising small and mid-size businesses and banking institutions on acquisitions, contracts, regulatory compliance, IP, and capital-raising transactions; later advised a publicly traded Barcelona media company on corporate and regulatory matters.

EDUCATION

PhD, Management (International Business & Strategy) — Henley Business School 2012 – 2018

JD — University of Denver, Sturm College of Law 1994 – 1997

BA, Government and International Studies — University of Notre Dame 1989 – 1993