

# A Trusted Advisor

## An Interview with David Lipson, President, Savills North America

**EDITORS' NOTE** *David Lipson assumed his current role in March 2021. His responsibilities include oversight of Savills' consultancy practices, Mid-Atlantic, Southeast, and Southwest brokerage regions, platform development, strategic expansion of industrial and capital markets teams, as well as mergers and acquisitions and strategic business development pursuits. He co-managed the Mid-Atlantic region for almost 15 years and served on the firm's board and executive committee since 2004 and 2014, respectively. Formerly one of the most successful brokerage professionals in the Washington, DC region, Lipson and his team completed real estate transactions totaling more than 92 million square feet. He currently serves as chairman of the board for the British Schools and Universities Foundation. He is a member of the Board of Benefactors at Christ Church, Oxford University and the Parents Committee at Dartmouth College. Lipson earned a BA magna cum laude in economics from Harvard College and a BA in politics, philosophy and economics from Christ Church, Oxford University.*



David Lipson

**You assumed your current role in March 2021 during the pandemic. What was it like to take on this role at such an uncertain time?**

I was honored to take on this role but must admit that I could have had better timing – running a real estate company during a pandemic is challenging. In North America, we have about 900 people who are part of a 39,000-person company that has almost no debt and is very cash positive, which is unique in our industry.

When things shut down in March 2020, our company had the financial strength to keep our workforce fully intact and we have actually added people during the pandemic. We grew our headcount almost 10 percent in North America from March 2020 to the end of last year.

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Our clients needed us to be there for them during this unprecedented time and our people were there to help mitigate exposure, minimize real estate expenses where they could, and join our clients for this challenging journey. It was uncharted territory, but that is what we do best. Savills has dealt with many unforeseen events over the years and our strength is figuring out how to help our clients during these challenging times.

**What are your views on the future of work and the use of office space going forward?**

The transformation in the way that companies look at using office space did not start with

the pandemic – it began in the wake of the financial crisis. In 2009, companies were forced to cut their office space significantly to save money, and they realized that while cutting this space, they still performed well. They realized they simply had too much real estate. As the economy grew and businesses strengthened, reduced footprints allowed employers to focus on increased quality and amenities to upgrade the employee experience.

The pandemic definitely accelerated this trend, but I think in the chase for talent and the need to attract and retain the best people, companies know that employees want and companies need collaboration and peer interaction. People are coming back to cities and while there is clearly more flexibility around where and how employees are able to do their work, being a part of a team and living a company culture works best in an office environment.

**How important is it that Savills builds a diverse and inclusive workforce to mirror the diversity of its clients and the communities it serves?**

We work hard at this and know that in order to attract the best talent, you need to look at the entire workforce as the talent pool. We should never limit ourselves to anything less just because a portion of it is not easily seen. The easiest person to hire is not necessarily the best person to hire. Savills is a company built on human capital – all of our value walks out the door at the end of the day, and for us not to take advantage of all of the human capital that is available just makes no sense. We are doing everything we can to reach diverse talent and to reach out to different schools and organizations to explain our business to people and to tell our story. We need to educate, even at the high school level, about what this business is and the opportunities it offers.

**What do you see as Savills' responsibility to being engaged in the communities it serves?**

It starts on an individual level and we encourage our people to get involved in their communities. It is our role to support them in those efforts, whether that is financially or with flexibility. This is a ground up effort and we have a lot of this happening across the country.

As an organization, we need to think creatively and band together with other successful companies of our size to make the most impact. We need to find a way to have successful, mid-sized companies come together to make a difference in our communities. ●

**FIRM BRIEF** *Established in 1855, Savills (savills.us) is one of the leading real estate advisors in the world. Savills helps organizations find the right real estate solutions that ensure employee success. With services in tenant representation, workforce and incentives strategy, workplace strategy and occupant experience, project management, and capital markets, Savills has elevated the potential of workplaces around the corner, and around the world, for more than 165 years and counting.*

**What have been the keys to Savills' strength and leadership in the industry?**

People think of real estate as a transaction business, but Savills is an advisory business. Our success is based on the long-term relationships we have built with our clients. Our business is about being a trusted advisor and the transactions happen along the way.

We also have long and close relationships internally. Savills has grown significantly over the years, but still has a family feel and culture. People here know that they are valued and play a role in the success of the business.