

The Future Of The Built Environment

An Interview with Justin Tydeman, Chief Executive Officer, Unispace Group

EDITORS' NOTE Justin Tydeman is the Chief Executive Officer of Unispace Group. He has more than 15 years of experience as a Chief Executive Officer having led several private equity-owned firms across international markets and sectors. Tydeman also serves as the Non-Executive Chairman of AIR-serv Europe. He studied at ICAEW and the University of Oxford.



Justin Tydeman

COMPANY BRIEF Unispace's (unispace.com) mission is to be a trusted partner in creating experiential spaces – across both physical and digital environments – that deepen connections, foster a sense of belonging, and propel success. Since being acquired by private equity firm PAG in 2020, Unispace has expanded service offerings to clients into new verticals and markets with intentional organic growth and key acquisitions in recent years of Bulb Interiors – a UK-based workplace and labs fit-out firm; Ireland-based Biopharma Engineering; and global experiential design agency Downstream. These acquisitions evolved the business from a focus on corporate interiors to a broader service offering of Unispace Life Sciences (highly regulated sectors) and Downstream (brand-led experiential environments), optimizing capacity to deliver at scale globally and locally, and across multiple industry verticals.

What interested you in leading Unispace and made you feel it was the right fit?

There was some serendipity. I had recently suffered my own failed space project, delivered by a separate architect, consultants, and a construction contractor. The Unispace proposition was clear to me – you wouldn't hire a chef who can't plan menus, develop new recipes, source quality ingredients, supervise and coordinate cooks, so why are so many built-space projects led by people without integrated strategy, design, and construction expertise? That's what Unispace was built to solve – it just made sense to me.

Conventional design-build projects disperse workplace strategy, design, and construction initiatives across multiple management teams and companies. In a world of compressed timelines, that disjointed approach has become clunky, expensive, and time-consuming. Unispace follows an integrated approach putting strategy, design, and construction at the table at

the same time. This results in process accountability, higher-quality outcomes for clients' budgets, and shortened project timelines. Office footprints are being reevaluated. This provides an opportunity for a flight to quality – high-service workplaces that represent environments where employees want to be. This is Unispace's focus, and I believe there is huge demand for this model. Unispace is proud to realize this opportunity for our clients.

How do you describe Unispace's culture and values?

Our values drive our culture. We care deeply about our people and clients, because we know that trust – be it between colleagues or clients – is built by taking action to foster inclusive spaces. One thing I love about Unispace is that we really operate as one team. As a result, we always bring our best, delivering creativity and excellence in every project.

By keeping these values at the center of our workflow, we've built a culture focused on collaboration, creativity and a strong sense of belonging. We emphasize flexibility, career growth, and inclusivity, offering a dynamic work environment with opportunities to connect globally.

What have been the keys to Unispace's growth, and how do you define the Unispace difference?

It makes a world of difference to have all the core disciplines under one roof. From the first day of a project, well before a design takes shape, we ensure that everyone who will touch the project is engaged in the process and able to work well together. Clients who have experienced this integration understand why it's important, and they appreciate that our team's global footprint and perspective enables us to be nimble and rise to a variety of challenging expectations.

Our clients are some of the world's most forward-thinking blue-chip companies. In fact, our largest single client group can be found in the innovative world of life sciences – Boston Scientific, a company for which we have completed over 40 projects globally. Our primary growth has been through repeat client opportunities, but we have recently made strategic business acquisitions in life sciences, digital, and experience design, and most recently luxury hospitality design. We also have a strong track-record of data-backed research providing the insight needed to create the future of the built environment.

Will you provide an overview of Unispace's global footprint?

Our global presence enables us to locally interpret worldwide trends. Our international team of strategists, designers, project managers, and construction specialists working in 43 studios across 15 countries means we have experts in



Unispace created experiential spaces for Zoom Video Communications in London (above); and Orrick in Los Angeles (opposite page)



each market who are fluent in local rules and regulations. At the same time, our colleagues call on fellow Unispacers around the world to offer solutions to their local challenges. It's immensely powerful. Considering just the central business districts of the cities where we have a studio presence, we access a considerable amount of Class A corporate real estate. Since 2018 we've partnered with over 100 Fortune 500 companies globally.

Will you highlight a few of Unispace's current projects?

Zoom Video Communications, London, U.K.: Needing a space that welcomed both employees and customers and would immerse the user in the world of Zoom solutions, Zoom partnered with Unispace to design and build their London office, and with Unispace's experience design agency Downstream to create its new Experience Centre/EBC. Together we built a space that will shape the future of work and collaboration, placing Zoom's industry-leading technology at its heart for its U.K. employees and visitors.

Genea Fertility Clinic, Melbourne, Australia: In a facility that combines cutting-edge science with heartfelt care for fertility patients, Unispace was tasked with creating a space that would envelop patients in a sense of comfort and care beyond that found in a typical clinical or medical environment. The significance of the move-in date for the doctors necessitated a tightly scheduled program, achieved through our highly efficient integrated strategy, design and construction teams over the holiday season to ensure a timely completion.

DoubleVerify, New York, USA: DoubleVerify is a repeat client who sought to elevate their workplace experience from a very traditional 1:1 tech workplace to a "club house" environment. With a focus on community and a vision to bring staff together and portray a sophisticated company following its IPO, DoubleVerify was also looking to develop their global workplace guidelines. They turned to us for an in-depth strategy engagement to inform their real estate portfolio globally. These design guidelines were used in the HQ design and are scalable to enable a parity of experience within other locations globally.

Orrick, Los Angeles, USA: Starting with strategy, we centered the space around how their staff would function in a truly hybrid environment, with all the technology and spaces to support a 21st century law practice. We also helped them grow their Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging (DEIB) goals, using Unispace's Art for Impact program that they launched in their Los Angeles space which we've since implemented in other locations.

How important is it for Unispace to build a diverse and inclusive workforce?

As Unispace has grown, we have focused heavily on creating an inclusive and equitable workplace for all. That work is never complete, but I am proud of what the team has achieved. Unispace has an interesting perspective on inclusion. Every discipline thinks in such different ways: a designer's mind is wired for success in a completely different way to a construction specialist or strategist, but each brings a different and equally necessary form of magic to a project. Unispace would not be successful without a focus on diversity – be that a diversity of thought, skill, background, or belief.

Beyond standard inclusion metrics, it's important to understand the unique needs and challenges of each team member. At Unispace, we actively focus on listening with one-on-one conversations. It is crucial for us to continually build trust as we work to maintain an inclusive and welcoming work environment. At Unispace, we use an annual survey to measure the effectiveness of our policies and to better understand the makeup of our workforce. The results helped shape content for inclusion training programs and led us to form Employee Resource Groups: Women@Unispace and Parents&Caregivers@Unispace, which foster forums for engagement, learning, and action for all employees.

We also know it is critical that the spaces we bring to life for our clients reflect the diversity of the communities they serve. A great example of this is the Unispace Art for Impact (AFI) program, which connects businesses with community partners and local artists. Through this rewarding program, we have connected Los Angeles law

firm Orrick with muralist Robert Vargas to highlight their work through art with a nonprofit helping formerly incarcerated women reincorporate back into society. We also partnered with a collective of women weavers in Nicaragua to design tapestries made from recycled ocean plastic bags. These sustainable products sit proudly in the offices of clients like Kraft Heinz and Zoom Video Communications.

I think Unispacers deeply appreciate that working in diverse teams makes each of us individually better at what we do. For us, inclusion is our north star, and we try to make it a lens through which we make decisions.

What do you see as Unispace's responsibility to be engaged in the communities it serves and a good corporate citizen?

It's a responsibility we take seriously, and an opportunity that excites us. We create brilliant built spaces – so we recognize that the impact we have on the community is significant – physically, environmentally, and psychologically. But being a good corporate citizen is about more than just repeating canned language. We truly live these values in our work every day.

We approach this in a variety of ways. We've established partnerships with organizations like the National LGBT Chamber of Commerce, the National Minority Supplier Diversity Council, and Disability:In to ensure we are actively supporting our company values and helping our clients meet their supplier diversity goals in a tangible, measurable way. For example, our clients are increasingly interested in workplace neurodiversity, recognizing that design can impact how colleagues experience stress and anxiety in a poorly designed office. Design for neurodiversity by providing a mix of workspace types, including focus rooms and areas of respite. Within these spaces, consider how softer color palettes and tactility have a calming effect, drawing people into spaces and making them comfortable. Designing for neurodiversity means you're designing for everyone's well-being. Every employee can benefit from areas that enable seamless workflow, with mobile furnishing like fidget furniture and adjustable lighting so they can select their desired work environment.

What advice do you offer to young people beginning their careers?

Unispace is a young and dynamic team, and this question has been on my mind during my first months as CEO. Perhaps three thoughts to share: First, stay curious. Be it about colleagues, clients or projects, keep asking yourself how it works, and how it doesn't. Early in your career, your "does that make sense?" sensor will be working well. Use it to learn and find opportunities to drive positive change. Secondly, use your time wisely and master time management early in your career. This combined with productivity are very attractive characteristics which set you up for long-term success. Finally, you'll have more geographic freedom at 25 than 45. Grab it when it's offered because it gives invaluable experience. Unispacers have thrived from hopping between studios, and it has been great for the company too. ●