

# FIRST WHY THEN HOW



One Space delivered results for KPMG

In a wide-ranging conversation, **Hurrairah bin Sohail** speaks with **Greg Pearce** from One Space about how to enable cross-functional collaboration for a design-based approach to create unique experiences that benefit clients.

**E**very completed build-out project is the result of effort put in by multiple parties. Contributions from architects, project managers, consultants, interior designers and technology specialists are required to create the final product. More often than not, due to the nature of how such projects are structured and organised, these contributing parties are given their silos to work in without a great deal of cross-functional collaboration. One Space bills itself as an integrated architecture and technology provider that seeks to break down these silos.

Founded by Greg Pearce and James J. Oliver, One Space aims to change how spaces are designed and delivered for clients. Pearce is an architect, lecturer, writer and furniture designer specialising in integrated design while Oliver is a technology entrepreneur

with a background in computer science who has over 25 years of professional experience in Asia and Europe leading numerous IT build-out projects.

Pearce serves as the managing director for One Space and details the vision that he and Oliver had: “Our idea was to bring together AV, IT, architecture and interior design in a more meaningful way. Having worked in the architecture world for over 15 years at that time, and now for over 30 years, I realised that the AV and IT we integrate into spaces were highly important because they are an integral part of the ‘human experience’. Anybody and everybody I have talked with has had a bad AV experience or a bad videoconferencing experience or has suffered through a bad presentation. This resonates closely with almost everyone we speak to.”

On paper the idea behind One Space is brilliant in its simplicity. Friction between architecture, interior design, IT and AV is a

well-known thing. The number of AV integrators I have talked to who have had gripes about coming on site where an interior designer had forgotten to account for their systems is countless. Why not solve the problem by bringing together all the disciplines from the start?

The model of bringing together all disciplines under one roof is still not widespread. Pearce, however, offers advice on how to tackle friction regardless of organisational structure and capabilities: “The starting point for overcoming friction is finding a common goal and reaching a shared understanding of what you are trying to do together. Know the ‘why’ before you get to the ‘how’. Systems integrators will readily tell you how they are going to do it, but we all need to take a step back and ask why we are doing it. More often than not the answer is that we intend to create an improved experience that brings certain benefits to the client. Then you tease out what

the key characteristics are, why they create a positive experience and what boundaries need to be broken to do so. That is the key to how AV, IT, interior design and architecture can come together and eliminate destructive friction between their roles. Creating seamlessly unified settings and experiences goes well beyond integrating technology systems into the architecture.”

It is interesting to note Pearce’s reference to experiences. The word experience seems to have entered the vernacular of the AV industry and there has been a decided pivot from using terms such as products and systems to solutions and experiences. Building experience is what One Space specialises in. Pearce distils the endeavour: “We want One Space to be known as ‘specialists in behaviour-driven design’. We believe that, at its core, architectural and interior design is a paradigm at the intersection of our shared human perceptions, individual human behaviours, and the built environment in which we live and work with each other.”

He shares an example which serves to highlight how shifting towards creating experiences differs from the traditional approach of an AV integrator:

“Asurion, one of the world’s largest cell phone encryption and insurance companies, has offices in Hong Kong, Shanghai, Guangzhou and Singapore. During our discovery process for the first of those projects, we heard that their development teams like to maintain a fluidity of ideation in their workflow. They wanted to break down hierarchies and allow people to think fluidly, on their feet. During one of our visits to their pre-existing office, we watched three employees walk past each other, stop what they were doing and start an impromptu conversation. We then observed that they just walked over and started to scribble on a wall. In this example, Asurion’s way of ideation was to encourage highly spontaneous, extemporaneous conversations, and they found that writing on nearby walls was the best way to do that. So, we developed our design around this pattern of behaviour, and our interpretation of the brief became that you should literally be able to write on the walls. We then married this idea with digital touch-screen technology, because one of our key findings is that creativity happens best when digital and analogue surfaces are provided side-by-side.”

Pearce’s words lend weight to the claim that a cross-disciplinary design approach to creating holistic experiences benefits the client. But the route is not always easy to take. He says: “It can be tough to reconcile a design-based approach with a market that’s preoccupied with standard office fit-outs, where there is more focus on construction delivery and the cost of products. We are licensed architects and yet we sometimes find ourselves having to compete against contractors. We often need to explain to clients that what we offer is a completely different value proposition, and that what pre-packaged solution contractors offer is not usually geared towards creating an experience tailored to the client’s needs.”

Moving forward, the tech world must learn to adapt itself to the more nebulous concept of what a positive user experience is and how to create it consistently and reliably. Pearce says: “As the world becomes more interconnected and as businesses become less geographically specific, experience will come to the forefront, and increasingly it must. When we talk about why we aim to drive behaviours in our workplace design, the first

priority will always be to increase productivity. And productivity arises from a number of underlying behaviours, such as collaboration, quiet concentration, ideation and more. But ultimately businesses must be productive or the capital expenditure invested in the workplace will appear to have been wasted and surely clients will see that. A state-of-the-art AV installation, for example, can be an expensive proposition; and if it doesn’t perform, then there needs to be a reckoning.”

Pearce finishes off with the following words of advice: “Nurturing interdisciplinary creativity is like playing jazz. Jazz is all about improvisation, and the reason that jazz musicians are able to improvise so elegantly is trust. Because they share the same goal of wanting the music to sound beautiful and coherent, each player knows he has a vital part to play in that success. It isn’t about just your horn or your piano or your bass shining alone, but rather about each playing off the others’ strengths. All the components need to come together seamlessly. In the very same way, excellent design can only emerge from a team where there is trust in each other’s contributions.” 🎷

Know the ‘why’ before you get to the ‘how’. Systems integrators will readily tell you how they are going to do it, but we all need to take a step back and ask why we are doing it.

*Greg Pearce, One Space*

