

Albert Chou:

This is IT Visionaries, your number one source for actionable insights and exclusive interviews with CIOs, CTOs, and CISOs, and many more. I'm your host, Albert Chou, a former CIO, former sales VP, and now, podcast host.

Welcome, everyone, to another episode of IT Visionaries. And today, we have a special guest. He is the executive managing director of a company called JLL, James Quinn. To give you a little brief rundown on James, he has over 25 years of experience in corporate real estate technology services. He's the author of Tech Trends 24/7: And the Impact of COVID-19 and that book made the CIO Insights' Recommended Books for CIO's list. James, welcome to the show.

James Quinn:

Albert, it's great to be here. Really happy to be on the podcast today and looking forward to our discussion.

Albert Chou:

Absolutely. But before we get too far, let's start with the company, JLL. We did a little homework, we see that it's in the Fortune 500, but it's one of those companies where maybe a lot of people haven't heard of it. Unless they've dealt directly with you, they might not know too much about it. So if you could, for our audience, what is JLL and what does it do?

James Quinn:

Sure. JLL is a global commercial real estate company. We have offices throughout the world. We're a Fortune 200 company. It's a place where we help major corporations, technology companies, startups with really a huge suite of services in terms of offices, technologies. And our specialty is that we help them with their technology portfolios globally.

Albert Chou:

And when you say technology portfolio, I'm assuming it has to be a physical footprint portfolio because we checked out your LinkedIn and stuff like that and you definitely seem knowledgeable in data center, colocation, hybrid workspaces. Anything physical property, is that what you're advising on?

James Quinn:

Yes, absolutely, that's the list. But then we are starting to help clients out with cloud spend, looking at the metrics there. Network spend is another area which is key today. So I think that you covered all the areas. Making my life easy here, Albert. Thank you.

Albert Chou:

Hey, listen, we do our homework, but we always got to confirm just in case. But one of the things about having you on as a guest right now is we are in an interesting timeframe right now. We're not going to beat around the bush. We know that the market is quite uncertain right now. There's companies currently announcing layoffs. We know that the move to hybrid is here, so things are changing super fast. What are your customers' businesses? What are they asking of you right now? Because they just went through a huge seismic shift. A lot of companies went at minimum to hybrid, right?

James Quinn:

Yes, correct.

Albert Chou:

And now there's another seismic shift that seems to be coming right now, which is they might not need this space much at all. Things are happening. What are customers asking of you and JLL?

James Quinn:

Yeah, it's a great question and there are multiple answers. In terms of if you look at the future of office, I think that COVID was a great accelerator of technology. And from the standpoint of when people were going to the office five days a week or four days a week, and now a lot of companies are really focused on hybrid work and then making the office now an experience to go to and a very collaborative place.

They're really trying to figure out, still today, as COVID is hopefully in the rear-view mirror, what is their organization going to look like and how are they going to use their space as really recruiting for the war of talent? So we've been advising them in terms of optionality, like, "What are you looking at in terms of your physical footprint and then really how do you make it an experience where it really conveys collaboration and really people want to be engaged in the workplace?"

Albert Chou:

So what does that look like for the future? Because we saw this cool article on Connected Real Estate Magazine, it talked about JLL working on hybrid flex spaces, which had more focus on its connectivity, its AV equipment, its ability to book rooms. Give us an idea what investments you're making, your customers are making, and how does this look? And I guess it's already here, the next two, three, maybe four years, what's it look like?

James Quinn:

Yeah. No, our office is at 330 Madison Avenue and we recently refreshed our space and it was after incorporated what we're seeing and talking to our clients. And every conference room got a complete technology upgrade all in terms of video conferencing. And we actually have a studio, the screen is more or less the whole room, so in terms of making interactive presentations. So it's very collaborative, it's very bespoke from the standpoint there are multiple seating areas so you can really experience different parts of the office. It's not like you're locked into your desk. And really, the theme of it is encouraging collaboration.

Plus, it's just not us, but other organizations are hiring, it's a new kind of position. And experience managers, their focus is really what they can do when you come into the office that makes it a great experience. And that is if all of a sudden you have a yoga, so somebody comes in yoga for the day or the best coffee that you can have and really looking at making it a very engaging place. When the people want to be here, they're excited to be here and want to really participate in the fabric of the organization.

Albert Chou:

So what does it look like from a technology perspective? What does it take to do this kind of stuff? You mentioned that immersive screen experience. In the article we read, it talked about tier-one fiber broadband throughout the whole thing, client portals to actually not only book rooms digitally but physically there. You're talking about interconnection. Give us an idea of what it takes to do this, and I'd

love to hear if there's any feedback already on what this looks like and if this is really our office space of the future.

James Quinn:

I think that as it relates to the technology in terms of being able to book your conference room via an app, when you think about it, some of the space historically has been pretty straightforward. You have your windowed offices and you have your cubicles. Going forward, it's really different seating areas, as I mentioned before, really great technology. So in terms of WiFi and interconnectivity, it's really to the highest level just because everybody wants optionality, they want mobility when they come to work.

Albert Chou:

Have these new immersive, optional workplaces, are they currently being deployed? Are you seeing them deployed? Does it encourage more productivity? Does it encourage people to come back? Because I know, for example, they will see in the news, some companies want their employees back. Some companies are fine with remote, but there's definitely a bunch that are saying, "Hey, you got to come here." Elon just announced on Twitter, "Hey, you got to come back." You know what I mean? I'm not here to debate whether the benefits or merits of remote versus hybrid or whatever, but I am curious if companies are seeing increased productivity because of these new setups.

James Quinn:

I think that they are. And I think that every company really has a different vision. It's interesting, American Express came out, there was an article on the Wall Street Journal where you had optionality. If you wanted to be at the office four or five days a week, right. If you wanted to be hybrid two or three days, fine. If you wanted to be remote, that's great. So it really was what people wanted to do. But then a lot of financial institutions and like you mentioned, Elon Musk saying, "Look, we want our employees back." People are doing that.

And our office has been very vibrant. New York City during the pandemic was actually a very quiet place, but now it's back, it's thriving. It's not to where the pre-pandemic was, but there is buzz, there's buzz in the office. In terms of the amenities that we have here, it's like when you're working hard, you want to be here. It just has a good vibe to the space and the technology really helps that.

Albert Chou:

So when you think about your big customers at JLL, they're coming to you and saying, "Hey, we need some help, we need some support. We need to understand what to do with our footprint. How are we going to build and how are we going to optimize our physical spaces?" What does that look like? Because for a lot of us, when I sit down here, then it's like, "I don't really understand it." You would think it's simple, "Hey, I have this many employees, I need this many seats." It sounds simple to me, but I know it's more complicated than that. What is JLL advising on and how does that, I guess, help the customers make these decisions?

James Quinn:

So we have a workplace strategy group that they have a separate department that they'll come to us to meetings and understand, look at the client's particular space and really understand in terms of the physical layout, the age of it. There's a whole assessment. What kind of technology do they have? What are their goals and objectives going forward? And they take all that information and then they come

back to say, "Based upon what you told us, based upon your footprint, based upon your current configuration of space, these are some ideas that we have and what we're seeing some of your peers doing as well as other corporations." And give them real-time case studies what other organizations are doing. And they really feel very good about that because it really gives them a great sense of intelligence of what groups are doing and what they can do, especially when we see what their layouts are, what their corporate culture goals are, and what they want to do going forward.

Albert Chou:

Can you give us an example of how that looks? Because as you say these things, it sounds simple, but for someone who's not as involved in this space, I'm just sitting here thinking, "Well, how much difference and unique things can actually be done with physical space?" I don't even know. It sounds more like architecture, but I know it's not architecture because you guys do technology advisory on real estate. So that's where I'd love for our audience to learn even more about because I have a feeling we definitely have some companies and CEOs and CIOs and CTOs that are listening to our show right now that aren't quite there yet, but they might be.

James Quinn:

Yeah. Well, no, I think that, again, it's really a discovery. And the more we can understand an organization in terms of what they're pain points are, looking at also what are the commuting patterns of their workforce, that's another key area. The other trend that we're seeing is that there's been a migration to the top-flight buildings there are in the respective cities, but also, people want to be in terms of transportation hubs. It's kind of the hub and spoke whereby if my office is at 330 Madison and I'm directly across the street from Grand Central and then I have a satellite office in Stamford, Connecticut, that's, for example, at 1 Metro, you walk off the train and then you walk right into your Stamford office. So connectivity from a physical presence is a big objective as well as really to being in buildings that have the greatest technology as well as address sustainability and really knock it out of the park for sustainability as well as amenities.

Albert Chou:

You mentioned sustainability now a handful of times. We've had guests in the past talk about that's one of the biggest priorities for a lot of companies. We had the Diligent CEO, she was on our show and they do government advisory and insurance. She said it was one of the biggest priorities across their customers about, "Hey, they want to be part of a sustainable future." What does that mean for a company like JLL? Because, obviously, a lot of us recognize sustainability from possibly food, transportation, and so on. How does a building help in sustainability?

James Quinn:

Yeah, sure. And the other great thing is I feel like I'm in the commercial real estate candy store because we have a sustainability group that we work with. And similar to the workplace strategy group, they really understand what the client's sustainability objectives are and then how are they going to get there. What's their current state and then where do they want to go from a carbon footprint standpoint? And then they'll work with them on a roadmap in terms of how to get there.

Albert Chou:

And what are you seeing are some of the big first steps to take?

James Quinn:

I think, again, it's an audit of your space and also the buildings. What's the lead certification as the building that you're going in, or what is the current status of the building's lead certificate? Where does the building that they're in stand? And landlords and tenants are working together really to get the standards to the highest from a lead standpoint. And then it all comes down to what kind of materials are they buying with the theme of how they can improve in sustainability with every facet of their operations. Our sustainability group goes in there to give them suggestions based upon what others are doing and just on their experience in terms of what they've seen and what the hurdles are.

For example, if you want to reduce your carbon footprint and you're buying in terms of credits for that, there's a whole strategy as it relates to that as well. We're going to talk about data centers too, and technology. Obviously, data centers really draw a big carbon footprint. And New York City actually just overlaid new sustainability laws where each building as well as data centers have to reduce your carbon footprint and you need programs to get there by a certain date. It's spurred a whole new industry in terms of how do you solve for that?

Albert Chou:

I guess who bears the burden in that responsibility? It seems like the landlords or the owners of the physical properties?

James Quinn:

It's both.

Albert Chou:

Okay. But it's splitting into the tenants as well?

James Quinn:

Yeah. Well, because it's the tenant space. You want to be accountable for your space. So I think it's another big area that's a big focus. The future of the office is going to really simultaneously be very sustainable in its practice, which is great.

Albert Chou:

One of the things that's pretty cool is, of course you have that book, Tech Trends 24/7: And the Impact of COVID-19. I'm curious for yourself, what other things because your book is beyond just commercial real estate, we got a chance to check out a couple of anecdotes from it, but for anyone who's not familiar, it talks about digital transformation from smart cities to digital twins to office corporate technology, which we've discussed, also advances in home music, sports technology. Let's start there. What was your inspiration for writing this?

James Quinn:

That's a great question. So I've just been in real estate for all my career and I just was lucky where I found one or two corporations that wanted to really switch locations all across the country because they were building out the internet at the time and they needed not office space, but they needed data center switches. So we probably did 50 markets. It was like 5 million square feet of data centers. And I was like, "Wow, look at the impact this is having to real estate." So I was always interested in really the crossroads of real estate and technology. And then our major focus of our practice is that we help firms

not only with their traditional real estate portfolios, but their technology portfolios. And their technology portfolios, every year are getting more important.

Just in terms of getting familiar with your podcast, I listened to a couple of episodes and I thought really one that really hit a nerve with me was when you talked with Isaac on Digital Trailblazer because he was talking about the whole digital transformation process. And that's as a result of really where technology innovation is going. And everyone likes to talk about digital transformation, but what we sell for is really, in these economic clouds that we're in right now, what's the cost basis for each thing that you're considering doing? As well as, how do you address your entire portfolio? Because you're not going to transform digitally in two hours, right?

You have legacy assets that you have to deal with and you need really good advice in terms of really getting optics around, "Okay, this is the current state, where do you want to go? How can we give you strategies that you're going to save money on your colocation sites, on your cloud spend, on your data centers that you own and your operating expenses are very high, what's the game plan there? And then what's the market value of those own sites? Because, eventually, you're probably going to want to do a hybrid cloud strategy where you're going into colos and the cloud."

Albert Chou:

Yeah. It's interesting you mentioned that because we've also seen a desire as cloud costs have risen, and I'm sure you've seen this across your customers as well, there is now a desire for some people like, "Wait, we should probably run some of this ourselves." Because I guess it's now crept past a little bit of the benefit that it originally promised, especially as the cost of real estate has continued to rise, data centers have to, of course, account for that. Their loans, their debt service gets bigger and bigger.

James Quinn:

Exactly. I'll give you a good example of that. So I just hired a new team member. We recruited her out of Oracle. All she did was during the day she talked with CIOs and CFOs, just really what's their journey, how's it going? And the biggest point to what you mentioned is that everybody did the transformation and now they're looking at, "Okay, what's the cost?" And they're like, "You know what? Maybe we do take some on-prem back because maybe long-term, we don't have to do this model."

So it's really an interesting time because a lot of people had pressure in terms to do the transformation. A lot of people did it great, some people maybe didn't do it so well, but now you're almost taking a half step back like, "Okay, what components do we want to analyze?" And in this economic time that we're in, how can we do it because our advice is totally agnostic? Whatever technology solution that you think is the best for you, we put numbers on and we want to make sure that it makes sense.

Albert Chou:

Yeah, I'm sure a lot of companies are now reinvestigating that now that we're in a time where, let's say, cost-cutting measures and austerity is coming, right? Or it's here, you can just say it's here. People are going to be evaluating every dollar that they have, whether it's in physical real estate as you suggested, investments in the future, cloud spend today. They're going to make some bets. They're going to make some bets and say, "Hey, I want to bring this on-prem. Hey, this can stay in cloud." And like you said, "I'm going to sunset certain buildings and I might open different ones, different facilities, like these new hybrid experiential places." Because many companies are talking about, "Hey, we're going to go and make even more investments but we want people to come back together." Definitely, when we see in the tech industry, if I were to look at Twitter or look at LinkedIn again, and of the CTOs we've talked to, I

would say this about recessions, people tend to want to innovate faster, but they want to do it with less, meaning, less cost. And that's going to happen.

James Quinn:

Absolutely. To give you an example, we met with a major firm and it was kind of around the holiday season. So always that time of year, people are really stressed for time and it was the first meeting so they were like, "Look, we'll give you 10 minutes," right? I'm exaggerating, but it was like 15, right? So we walked through what our playbook is and what we do and then we left an hour and a half later and they said, "You know what? Nobody's really come to talk to us about this and we'd liked to sign an NDA. We'll give you the information if you guys could come and give us suggestions."

So we went through, we did the whole analysis on the portfolio, we came back with our findings, and we found one or two really high-profile suggestions and strategies where they could really save money, at the same time, upgrade their technology. So it was great and they were very happy just because we do the initial assessment just to get to know the firm. And they've been a client now for the last five years.

Albert Chou:

What's interesting about the industry you play with the real estate and physical space is, when we talk about 10X engineering, a lot of times here at the show, we talk about cost savings, but when it comes to real estate, man, for those of you listening, for a lot of companies, real estate costs are, let's say, the second most expensive thing to carry on their P&L right behind payroll. So if you're talking about even a few percentage points in any direction, it adds up big. It adds up huge. And if you're helping people, it is, that's just the fact of it. It just is.

James Quinn:

Al, but that's why we're so busy. It's a good space to be in because we're really trying to drive value. Like you said, it's a big cost.

Albert Chou:

Yeah, exactly. So a lot of CIOs and CTOs we talked to, they're trying to save 10 times their costs or whatever, cut efficiency by big numbers. It's like, "Man, in real estate, you can cut it 2%." It's like, "Yo, you've just saved quite a number." And I know that your clients are pushing you in many directions. One of the things we were in our homework about you is we saw that you're also really involved in a pretty interesting nonprofit, Beacon of Hope, that merges technology with humanitarian help. Tell our audience, what is Beacon of Hope 365?

James Quinn:

Yeah, no, thanks for the question because writing a book is a difficult thing. And to be completely honest, when I first started, I thought it was the worst idea because I had tremendous writer's block. I was like, "I really need to come up with. If I'm going to put my name on something, it has to be pretty good." But just like with anything, you keep at it. But during the research, Albert, when I was looking and researching for the book, I was amazed in terms of how technology was helping people in need. And it hit a nerve with me and I was like, "Boy, you know what? If you can get behind this and start a new charity to really focus on this and you could help people," I was really inspired.

So when I was doing my research for the book, I came across a company called Open Bionics. They're based out of the UK and they have produced the first 3D-printed bionic hand and arm. They call it the

Hero Arm. So we basically have been working with them. They have people that reach out to them and say they're limb challenged. There was a great person, we've helped numerous people, but the column that he was in the UK. He had a campaign whereby he was just born without one of his hands. He tells a story that his dad was a salesman and every couple of years he moved to another school. It wasn't the easiest thing because kids are curious, they come up and ask you. So when we helped him get a Hero Arm, the transformation went from people asking questions to say, "Oh my God, you look like Iron Man. That is the coolest thing I've ever seen."

And it's a bionic hand that he can throw a Frisbee and help him in terms of every day and it's transformed his life. So when we started doing those projects, we keep on doing more. There are always things that are positive about technology and also negative, but we really wanted to focus on the positive here. And we're very driven to keep it going.

Albert Chou:

Listen, I think that is extremely noble. Being born without an arm or a limb is going to be a challenge. And then the medical costs of getting a comparable or a quality prosthetic is quite high. And that's just the way it is. And some people are born into situations where they can afford a prosthetic, others can't. Any way to help, especially kids like you just said, helping a kid throw a Frisbee, that's pretty darn cool. You know what I mean? That's something that's pretty darn cool. I can get behind that every day.

James Quinn:

I appreciate you saying that. You mentioned children, children grow. So the Hero Arm that they have when they're seven or six-

Albert Chou:

Yeah, won't fit.

James Quinn:

... is it going to be the same one that they have at 15, right? So, that's an expensive journey. And the more that we can help people, we're inspired to do it.

Albert Chou:

Well, that's awesome. Well, James, it was awesome having you on the show. Thanks for sharing a lot about JLL. It's just an industry we just don't know too much about. I think it's easy for someone who's not as familiar with commercial real estate to just say, "Oh, what's the difference? You're just buying square footage, you just need internet, and just throw some people in there."

But it's not how people are thinking about it anymore. So I thought it was awesome hearing some of that. But before you go, it is time for the Lightning Round. The Lightning Round is a way for our audience to get to know you a little bit better. The Lightning Round's brought to us by Salesforce platform, the number one cloud platform for digital transformation of every experience. James, this is where we ask you questions outside the world of work so our audience can get to know you a little bit better. Are you ready?

James Quinn:

Ready to go?



Albert Chou:

How did you first fall in love with technology? What was the gadget, gizmo, or thing that you experienced where you're like, "Wow, this is interesting"?

James Quinn:

I've always been a fan of Apple and the innovation. So anything that Apple innovated that I was a consumer of. And then 2007 is a long time ago, but if you watch Steve Jobs's presentation of the iPhone, I just think that's technology. So any Apple-related thing, I usually have. My kids tease me because I always get the latest upgrade.

Albert Chou:

So I was 27 when that presentation came out and I remember thinking to myself, "What is the big deal? I like buttons." I was one of those people that was like, "This is never going to work, man. I like typing on my buttons. What if I mistouch it? This is a terrible idea." And that's why he's Steve Jobs and I'm just some guy.

James Quinn:

That's right. And also with the Blackberry too, like you said, you like the way to feel typing, but he knew better than us.

Albert Chou:

He did. There was a little bit of resistance in the beginning, but that obviously faded away quite quickly. When you were younger, were you interested in technology as a kid or did it not really switch on until you were an adult?

James Quinn:

No, I was always interested in the space program. Really, when you think you blast off in a rocket and you're going into space, that's a pretty cool thing. So I was always interested in NASA and what they were doing as well.

Albert Chou:

So if you're interested in NASA, then how did you land in commercial real estate, man?

James Quinn:

Well, it's a good question. So my father was a shopping center developer and he would always want me to go to the grand openings, which he worked six months in terms of get the construction and all the tenants in and the mayor comes down to the town and we have a big ribbon cutting. And real estate, there's something interesting about it. You meet so many different people from different parts of the world and different parts of the country. So it resonated on me. So my love for real estate really was generated from my father.

Albert Chou:

There you go. What was the hardest part about writing your book? You mentioned you got writer's block a lot. How did you get over it?

James Quinn:

Just like with anything, I just kept at it. I would write a little each day. And at the beginning, I didn't like what I was writing, which made it harder. But it was a good process to go through because the more and more I worked at it, the more I had a framework of, "Okay, now I know what I'm going to say and how I'm going to do it." And then it got a lot easier.

Albert Chou:

All right. If someone was thinking about writing a book, what tip would you tell them?

James Quinn:

I think that you should take your time with it. A lot of people are like, "Oh, I have to get it done." So be methodical about it, get some advice along the way. I got some really good advice because it's something you want to do, you want to talk to somebody like, "Hey, what was the journey like?" So you understand what you're getting yourselves into. So that would be my two nuggets.

Albert Chou:

I like that. I just wrote a book also, it was more of a how-to book, so I didn't have to be literary prose. It's not out yet, but I got a piece of advice similar to yours, but it's a little bit different. The person said, "Hey, listen, don't worry about making it good, just get it done because making it sound good comes in the editing phase. You got to get your ideas on paper." So like you were saying, don't beat yourself up too much. I'm like, "Yeah, that's the way he told me. Don't beat yourself up, just get your ideas on paper and then you'll edit and massage it into something glorious."

James Quinn:

That's good advice. What's the name of the book?

Albert Chou:

Well, it's a guide to how to operate section 8 properties. So I'm not in the big commercial, more like town homes and condos, but it was a fun experience, for sure.

James Quinn:

Oh, that sounds great. That sounds really good.

Albert Chou:

Yeah. Well, James, it was awesome having you on the show. It was fun talking to you and hearing of all the things that JLL does. It's not often we hear about a company or get a guest on our show that works at a company, and for those of you're not familiar, JLL is already publicly traded, you can go check out their stock price at JLL. It has over 10,000 employees of which there's 76,000 people on LinkedIn that claim they work at JLL. This is a massive company. If your curious about it, go check them out. James, I want to say thank you for joining us today on IT Visionaries.

James Quinn:

Albert, it was a great discussion. Thank you for having me. You have a great podcast and I really appreciate the exchange today.

This transcript was exported on Dec 01, 2022 - view latest version [here](#).