

Reimagining future workspaces

Aura is a brand born in the pandemic with a value proposition focused on next-generation workspaces. As COVID-19 has accelerated the workspace-of-the-future discussion, CEO Alpesh Unalkat explains why the company is very well positioned both as a thought leader and solutions provider



Alpesh Unalkat

Michelle Ryder (MR): Although technically Aura is marking its first year in business, your vision was formed early in 2019, long before COVID-19. What has it been like trading during a global pandemic and did it drive any changes to your strategy?

Alpesh Unalkat (AU): Aura was formed in March 2020 – the same month the first lockdown was announced – through the acquisition of Karlson and Intevi in a deal led by a management team that previously ran the workplace technology business within Capita Plc.

Our vision focuses on 'reimagining future workspaces' through connected solutions that integrate workforce and customer experiences at home, in retail outlets, in shared collaboration spaces and in offices.

Whilst the pandemic has naturally affected our clients' print usage, as it will have done for many print-focused resellers, it has also brought us opportunity in the form of accelerated customer-led dialogue around wider workspace technologies.

Our strategy hasn't changed but the short-term approach has. Like many businesses, we have pivoted our focus to capitalise on new demand that simply wasn't there pre-pandemic.

Before COVID, as we formed the Aura thesis, we expected to be spending time working with customers and explaining the benefits of reimagining their approach to workspace technology. Instead, what has happened is the conversation around workspaces has catapulted itself to being a top priority on board agendas – there is less need to convince a customer to focus on the benefits of a subject that they already see themselves.

For that reason, we've had to change gear and accelerate our go-to-market approach to facilitate increasing customer demand. Whilst the early focus

from clients was on non-print aspects of workspace technology including workspace transformation, we expect to see a return to work as being a catalyst for print strategies to be revised and updated too. Furthermore, our strategy to support clients with more automation of processes and workflows remains a focal point.

MR: Have you changed the way you support customers?

AU: Our strategy remains to organically and acquisitively grow Aura to offer our clients more solution services. We expect customers to focus less on standalone products as the need for a holistic, integrated solution set with supporting analytics becomes more important.

We have enhanced the way we look after our customers, but this wasn't driven by the pandemic; this is something we always planned to do, creating a business capable of supporting a wide range of workspace technologies.

During the pandemic, we have had to adapt the way we delivered great onsite customer service, in the backdrop of changing government guidelines and restrictions.

In addition, both businesses that form the founding platform for Aura were well known and highly regarded for great quality service/support delivery. We've enhanced that further through a range of solutions that add value to our customers including things such as integrated dashboards and real-time analytics across our varying products and services. Providing best-in-class service levels is something we pride ourselves on

MR: Aura was formed with what you define as 'alternative technologies to print' at its heart. Was that a key advantage in terms of generating revenue in the wake of enforced home working?

AU: Our revenue is derived equally from print and non-print technologies so



we have embraced the latter from the word go. That said, during the course of the past 12 months, we have taken on several new technologies and added them to our portfolio from leading software and manufacturer partners such as Sky. We have also doubled our hardware/software development teams in the UK and Poland, as we continue to develop new and innovative technologies around our intelligent television and visual communications platforms.

Our plans involve deploying our teams to create Aura-unique solutions for the print market too, the roadmap development is underway so watch this space!

MR: Congratulations on winning the Dealer of The Year (turnover in excess of £5m) in the PrintIT Awards 2020. On a final note, how confident are you that the print market will recover from COVID-19?

AU: Our view about the print market is less about recovery and more about evolution. COVID-19 isn't about to disappear nor necessarily will its impact on end-user behaviour. The pandemic itself will (hopefully) reduce in its intensity, but the effects will be felt for some considerable time and therefore the configuration of offices and where people work will take some time to settle. That said, we are all seeing signs of increased demand for real estate in City locations and, of course, a number of financial services businesses have recently come forward to confirm their ongoing need for office locations.

All of this will affect how/where print is required, our view is whatever that looks like, print certainly isn't about to disappear and we believe it is still a growth market with considerable opportunity. www.aurafutures.com

