

Aligned with Clients

An Interview with Arthur J. Mirante II,
Principal and Tri-State President, Avison Young

EDITORS' NOTE Arthur Mirante joined Avison Young in 2012 as a Principal and Tri-State President, based in the firm's New York City office. Mirante serves as a member of the company's Executive Operating Committee. Prior to joining Avison Young, he worked at Cushman & Wakefield for more than 40 years, where he most recently served as President of Global Client Development for seven years. Prior to this, he served as the firm's CEO for 20 years. Throughout his career, Mirante has participated in some of the New York market's largest and most complex transactions, including the sale of the World Trade Center. He graduated from College of the Holy Cross with a B.S. in Sociology and from St. John's University Law School with a J.D., and received a Doctor of Human Letters honorary degree from St. John's University.



Arthur J. Mirante II

COMPANY BRIEF Headquartered in Toronto, Ontario and founded in 1978, Avison Young (avisonyoung.com) is Canada's largest independently owned commercial real estate services company. Avison Young is also the largest Canadian-owned, principal-managed commercial real estate brokerage firm in North America. Comprised of more than 1,500 real estate professionals in 58 offices across Canada and the U.S., the full-service commercial real estate company provides value-added, client-centric investment sales, leasing, advisory, valuation, management, financing, and mortgage placement services to owners and occupiers of office, retail, industrial, and multi-residential properties.

What excited you about the opportunity to join Avison Young?

I had been at the same company for 40 years and I used to preach that a CEO shouldn't stay at one company for more than 10 years because you get stale.

I woke up in my 10th year at Cushman & Wakefield saying, it's time for me to leave. Yet, at that point, we were just at that point of embarking on growth as an international company, so I stayed to build an international company for the next 10 years.

At the 20th year as CEO, I stepped down and spent the next seven years working directly with the firm's clients. But the firm was changing and I was not comfortable watching many things that happened around me.

When I was approached by Avison Young and offered a clean slate in the Tri-State area, it was too good an opportunity to pass.

The opportunity to build a real-estate services business from scratch was exciting for me. I also had tremendous respect for the leadership at Avison Young and their vision for the company.

How were you able to stay true to the company culture when you came onboard?

I did my research on the Canadian Avison Young, and learned of their strong heritage, very strong local business enterprises, highly ethical business practices, and very competent people who had integrated seven different partnerships into one and had a 35-year-old strong reputation in Canada.

We were going to build a different kind of commercial real estate company with a structure unlike the big global firms. The AY structure is designed to be aligned with our clients. We are a partnership like the management consulting, law, and accounting firms, because only then can you have the principal partners, the owners of the firm, take responsibility to deliver services for clients. These professional service firms are not public for a reason.

I had helped to build a great company at Cushman & Wakefield, and created departments and silos to drive professional excellence in the different specialties. This was my belief then, but times have changed. The Avison Young culture is driven by collaboration. Silos inhibit collaboration and are road blocks to bringing the best resources to clients. So we have no silos at Avison Young and no profit centers – it's just one partnership, which has been reinvigorating for me.

How challenging was it to attract the talent you needed?

When we started to build Avison Young in New York, we began by building a core, an infrastructure of research analysis and marketing. We evaluated talent through a strainer of our culture. For example, hoarding information in our industry on the theory that information is power has been a legacy. Today, with electronic communication, you have to collaborate to make information power, because the information only stays secret for about three hours. If you don't quickly figure out how to use that information to your advantage, it's not worth anything.

Our growth strategy is our culture and, with our infrastructure in place, we began to attract experienced brokerage talent from other firms.

Before we knew it, we were getting calls and making presentations to some of the large financial institutions about our model and what makes us different, acknowledging always that we were just starting and this was who we were.

Within six to nine months, we had surrounded ourselves with top leasing professionals, and soon we were saying that, although our company is new, we're not new – we are bringing the best of what we have learned from other companies to our new company.

We also pointed out that we couldn't afford to fail. We had to work harder than the competition because we were new, and we couldn't let our clients down.

For the client who wants more attention and focus, and who wants senior people working on what other firms may consider a small assignment, we are the firm of choice.

What are your areas of expertise?

We have multiple service lines: project management through acquisition, office and retail leasing, investment sales, valuation, investment banking, debt and equity, and soon, property management. We have something to offer professionals: equity. In the old days, the big firms had that. They don't have it anymore – it's public stock. They are owned by the public or major investors. We have partnership equity to offer senior people so they can build wealth, not just make commissions on one-off transactions.

Is full recovery happening in the real estate market?

This City and our real estate market has never been this healthy in our history. The amount of investment taking place in this City in the infrastructure, in our cultural institutions, and in our educational institutions is incredible.

Today, we are not only a safe haven but we are where the action is. There is also a global trend of people wanting to live and work in major cities and New York is the poster-child for this trend.

What does it take to be a successful broker today?

Very little has to do with personality. I always look for integrity so I don't have to manage that person. The real estate business is about earning people's trust because these decisions involve millions of dollars, and involve risk avoidance and mitigation.

Today, brokers must add value and have talents that are superior to those of their clients; otherwise, why are they needed? ●