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# **Avison Young completes GVA buy and unveils leadership team**

Companies combine under Avison Young name and brand



The GVA HQ at 65 Gresham Street

Canada's Avison Young confirmed it has closed the acquisition of GVA, the leading UK agent, in a move that sees the two companies combine under the Avison Young brand.

Avison Young said in a statement that it “establishes [the group] as the only privately held, Principal-led, global, full-service commercial real estate services firm” and establishes Avison Young among the top five commercial real estate advisory businesses in the UK.

[CoStar News revealed the acquisition first here.](#)

Avison Young also unveiled the post-acquisition leadership team: Avison Young Principal and U.K Managing Director Jason Sibthorpe becomes Principal and President, UK; GVA CEO Gerry Hughes becomes Principal and Managing Director, UK and Managing Director, Global Consultancy; and GVA Chair Andy Mottram becomes Principal and Managing Director, Europe.

As a result of the transaction, Avison Young now has approximately 5,000 real estate professionals in 120 offices in 20 countries.

Avison Young CEO Mark Rose said: “This acquisition represents another milestone in our global expansion strategy, and the combination will better position Avison Young to serve our clients across the world. Furthermore, the acquisition establishes Avison Young as the global, disruptive challenger brand. We are now 5,000 strong, having nearly doubled our size and ability to provide clients with whatever they need, wherever in the world they need it. In GVA, Avison Young has added a like-minded UK real estate leader – a company that brings a partnership culture formed during more than 200 years in business.

“The acquisition increases our scale and presence, expands our global talent pool and reach, and enhances the breadth and balance of our services. Most importantly, the combination increases the resources that we can invest in innovation to keep our clients ahead of the curve.”

Terms of the acquisition were not disclosed. As a result of the merger, Avison Young increases its revenue to 25 times its 2008 level to approximately C\$1bn, it said.

The acquisition includes GVA Worldwide Ltd. – an international organisation of licensed affiliate commercial real estate advisory companies with offices in 20 countries. GVA has 1,500 employees in 15 offices in the UK, Ireland and Poland and is a founding member and majority shareholder of GVA Worldwide.

GVA’s Hughes said in the statement: “Overnight, the ambitious growth strategy that I set out for our business three years ago has been achieved, and we can now serve our clients as a global full-service business, with an enviably strong consultancy and transactional offer.

“The opportunities for our combined platform are vast, and I see one of the biggest growth areas stemming from the increasing trend for clients to seek strategic multi-consultancy real estate advice, which demands market intelligence, expertise and connections. The ability to provide such advice on a global scale is extraordinary and I look forward to helping to deliver that potential.”

He added: “Our merger with Avison Young is the perfect outcome for our business and our clients, and is the biggest opportunity that we have had since Grimley & Son and JR Eve merged in 1988.”

In the UK, Avison Young will have 18 offices and 1,600 employees working with clients on the transaction and consultancy sides of the business. This includes the addition of 96 staff working across GVA’s Scottish offices in Edinburgh and Glasgow.

Alison Taylor, Principal and Managing Director, Glasgow, Avison Young, said: “Becoming part of the Avison Young family gives our Scottish clients access to an expanded global network. Their commitment to providing the highest level of service matches with the work of our teams and existing clients can be assured that our work continues as usual.

“The approach that has seen Avison Young grow so successfully will be rolled out, providing an enhanced market-leading real-estate service.”

Stuart Agnew, Principal and Managing Director, Edinburgh, Avison Young, said: “There is a lot to be positive about in the current Scottish real-estate market with strong occupational and investor demand. GVA joining forces with Avison Young provides an opportunity to build on this by creating a forward-looking company that meets the needs of clients across the country and beyond.”

Headquartered in Toronto, Canada, Avison Young is a collaborative, global firm owned and operated by its Principals. Founded in 1978, the company comprises approximately 5,000 real estate professionals in 120 offices in 20 countries.

Jason Sibthorpe said: “Since Avison Young entered the UK in 2014, we have had the intent and ambition to build a market-leading real estate advisory business by leveraging our unique Principal-owned business model.”

“We have made significant progress and now, through this transaction, our two complementary businesses have combined to become a leading player in the UK market whilst also significantly strengthening the international capability and coverage. The exciting thing is that this is still the start of our journey with our new Principals and colleagues from GVA. Our ambition to build further and add market-leading talent that marries with our clients’ strategies and expectations is absolute.”

In connection with the transaction, Avison Young said it has optimised its capital structure through a recapitalisation. The acquisition and the refinancing have been funded through a combination of cash on hand, committed financing from Credit Suisse, CIBC and BofA Merrill Lynch, and additional common equity, including participation by Caisse de dépôt et placement du Québec (CDPQ). Avison Young has ample capital to invest further in its global growth strategy.

Also in conjunction with the transaction, GVA senior directors who will become Avison Young principals, and certain other GVA employees, will receive Avison Young shares.

Today's announcement follows Avison Young's announcement on July 16, 2018 that CDPQ, one of Canada's leading institutional fund managers, had made a C\$250m preferred equity investment to accelerate Avison Young's strategic growth plan. Avison Young made its first investment under its strategic partnership with CDPQ by acquiring retail warehouse specialist Wilkinson Williams and opening a new office in London's West End on August 1, 2018. On October 10, 2018, Avison Young opened its first office in Asia, in Seoul, South Korea, with 63 members joining from Mate Plus Advisors Co. Ltd.

Credit Suisse and KPMG LLP acted as Avison Young's financial advisors in the acquisition of GVA; and Gowling WLG (UK), DLA Piper LLP (US and UK) and Stikeman Elliott LLP (Canada) served as Avison Young's legal advisors.

Rose added: "This is a very exciting and memorable day in the history of Avison Young. As a result of the acquisition, our combination fortifies the pillars of our culture – honesty and integrity, investment in people, a Principal-owned model, a lack of service-line silos, and best-in-class internal and external resources to provide exemplary service to clients. We look forward to working with our new clients, colleagues and partners around the world."

Over the past 10 years, Avison Young has grown from 300 real estate professionals in 11 offices in Canada to approximately 5,000 real estate professionals in 120 offices in 20 countries.

The acquisition of GVA sees Avison Young add offices in: the United Kingdom (London, Belfast, Birmingham, Brighton, Bristol, Cardiff, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Leeds, Liverpool, Maidenhead, Manchester, Newcastle); Austria (Vienna); Bulgaria (Sofia); China (Beijing, Guangzhou, Hong Kong, Shanghai); Croatia (Zagreb); France (Bordeaux, Lyon, Marseille, Paris); Greece (Athens, Thessaloniki); Italy (Milan, Rome); Norway (Oslo); Poland (Warsaw); Republic of Ireland (Dublin); Romania (Bucharest, Cluj-Napoca, Timisoara); Russia (Moscow); Spain (Madrid); and United Arab Emirates (Dubai).