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Apps for Offices: Q&A with Charm City's Tina Urquhart

BY CHRISTINA STURDIVANT-SANI JUNE 12, 2019 3:56 PM

REPRINTS



TINA URQUHART PHOTO: CHARM CITY CONCIERGE



When Tina Urquhart worked as an insurance broker for a Baltimore-based insurance company 25 years ago, there was no emphasis on workplace experience. “It was a sea of cubicles back then and people definitely were not talking about employee engagement,” Urquhart told Commercial Observer in a recent interview.

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Urquhart left corporate America and founded Charm City Concierge in 1993 to help employees boost their work life balance and assist landlords in better serving their tenants. The Herndon, Va.-based firm currently employees 75 people and services more than 300 buildings owned by firms such as Brookfield, Boston Properties and WashREIT. Nearly 70 percent of the properties are located in the Washington, D.C. region.

In response to an increasingly tech-centric tenant base, the firm is rolling out a new app called Simpli. The tool allows tenants to access everything from wellness programs and



Urquhart, a married mother of three who lives in Queenstown, Md., told CO how Charm City has evolved over the past two decades and what the app means for the company's growth.

Commercial Observer: How did Charm City go from being a concierge-based firm to now offering a tech platform?

Tina Urquhart: We've evolved as the workplace has evolved. We provided concierge services for 20 some years and as landlords and owners started spending all of this money creating and developing amenity spaces, they started asking us to activate the spaces. That evolved into creating another platform of our business called experience management. Landlords were having us brand and run programs for them.

Now people come to work and they want to have all of their goals met that they do at home. They want to get their to-do lists taken care of at work, they want to socialize and connect with people with similar interests at work... all the things they do in their personal lives. So we brought together all that we learned and married the technology to tie all of our offerings together.

How does Simpli differ from apps run by similar companies?

We have an expertise in workplace experience and we created a technology around our businesses, versus a lot of companies that are starting out as tech and trying to learn the workplace experience.

So we are a big piece of the human experience in the buildings; it's the building of those relationships and authentic interactions. We find what our clients like and bring people together based upon common interests. We're building the calendar based on what they're telling us and we'll bring it full circle back to them.

In running the company for 25 years, what have been some of your most challenging hurdles?

Dealing with the generational shift in the workplace, which I feel like a lot of companies have experienced. A lot of what we do is helping companies recruit and retain talent. We have that same challenge and have really focused on it ourselves. So we have an in-house director of culture and engagement and we put together our own employee engagement programs. I guess the best way to describe it is: We try to do for our employees what we have our employees do for our clients.

...and a minimal viable product and we're going to be constantly improving upon that.

Can you tell me your budget for the app?

I'd rather not. I didn't get any kind of funding for it. We fully funded it ourselves.

Where do you see Charm City or Simpli going from here?

A trend now in these experience management programs is real estate companies branding their programs which is leading them to white label apps. I can see where we can take our app and link it to another tech platform and have it all in one.

We also want to do something in the employee engagement arena. We have such close relationships with the tenants and companies that we work with in all levels of the buildings so we're looking at tying a technology concept into the employee engagement area. I don't want to say too much about it because it's not totally framed out. Stay tuned.

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KEYWORDS: [Charm City Concierge](#), [Tina Urquhart](#)



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