

vero centre – realising suncorp's cut-through vision

Financial services corporate Suncorp New Zealand – best known locally for its Asteron Life and Vero Insurance brands – has been a mainstay tenant at Kiwi Property's Vero Centre since it first opened in 2000. A major shift in business strategy meant an equally major rethink on how it housed its New Zealand head office, leading to a spectacular upgrade of its Vero Centre premises.



Paul Smeaton (CWO) and Catherine Dixon (Executive General Manager, People Experience), Suncorp and Chris Guelgeen, Chief Executive, Kiwi Property

Catherine Dixon, Suncorp's Executive General Manager, People Experience, remembers clearly the hurdles faced by Suncorp New Zealand in bringing its life and general insurance businesses together.

"At the beginning, we still very clearly had a life business and a general insurance business, our Asteron Life business was 'blue' and our general insurance business, being Vero Insurance, was 'red'," she recalled.

"The sense of belonging to one brand had not really come to fruition. We had pulled everyone together but we didn't have a single identity. With our teams still sitting in areas defined by our market brands, we weren't using our space efficiently, so used our lease renewal as an opportunity to really look at the way we work."

That's when Suncorp approached Kiwi Property with a bold vision to bring their united organisation to life, at the same time seeking to change the way many of the Suncorp teams worked to produce higher collaboration, productivity and connectivity.

Suncorp's Vero Centre head office houses around 800 employees, from senior management to those in insurance assessment, support and customer service. In the company's previous environment, teams were assigned spaces within floors, but Suncorp wanted even greater workplace flexibility.

"We wanted to be much more fluid in the way we worked. We recognised that we needed to work differently to create greater collaboration... and one of the ways we could achieve that was by having consecutive office floors connected by an internal staircase," said Ms Dixon.

"The way our people work really does depend on their role. We have those who are in our contact centre where they need a really clear, ergonomic work station that is well set up with good technology, those who are a little more fluid, who move around from time to time, such as team leaders, and those people who work far more flexibly."

"We also recognised that not everyone is going to be in the building at the same time. We have assessors and sales teams out on the road and a large number of people who need or want to work

flexibly and need to be well connected by technology from home."

Out of this recognition grew a new workplace mandate, improved technology, agile working environments, inter-floor connectivity, and a mix of formal and informal spaces for people to meet and collaborate.

"Kiwi Property's support in achieving this was absolutely critical. They've been a truly fantastic partner to work with, not just providing us with decant space so we could undertake the refurbishment and cut through the floors while still operating, but in trusting and helping to realise our vision, the centrepiece of which is a very beautiful staircase, which allows our people to easily connect and collaborate," she said.

The staircase, in itself, an engineering spectacle: over 140 tonnes of concrete were removed from four floors, replaced by 40 tonnes of steel.

"Technology was another huge enabler of our workplace vision. With over 800 people working in this building, 300 in different parts of New Zealand and colleagues in Australia, India and the Philippines, technology was key to ensuring a high level of connectivity."

Through this redevelopment we have been able to take away the 'red' and the 'blue' and unite under a single Suncorp brand, our 'go to market' brands are there, but you would be hard placed to tell now who in our office works under which brand. That's exactly what we wanted to achieve," said Ms Dixon.

The final floor was occupied in April 2018. While Suncorp is still getting used to its new environment, Ms Dixon said the immediate feedback was overwhelmingly positive.

"There are a lot more conversations going on within the business, and you see more people naturally congregating in small groups to catch up and to deal with issues, rather than setting up formal meetings," said Ms Dixon.

"Kiwi Property's upgrade to the lobby has also facilitated our shift to more mobile working. Our people use it a lot. You would never go to the lobby without seeing Suncorp people having a meeting with internal and external people," said Ms Dixon.

"And our people love all the new facilities, especially those who cycle to work or go to the gym."

How are the staff adapting to an agile working environment?

"We knew that this was going to be a big shift for our people, so we had a change strategy in place to help everyone settle into our new workplace. We also ran development programmes for leaders on how to lead teams who are dispersed or working in new ways. It's a new way of thinking for some," said Ms Dixon.

"It's fair to say that some took to it like ducks to water and others are working their way through it."

What's next for Suncorp?

"There is always a danger that, once things are in place, everyone relaxes and nothing happens after that. We have to be proactive and check how it is going. We have a team of people – our floor champions – plus our real estate and HR people, who are continuing to work with teams to ensure they feel supported in their environment and empowered to continuously improve our workspace culture."

Suncorp have also installed a new system, Serraview, to help employers locate both people and available workstations. It will also allow them to monitor utilisation, and improve the effectiveness of the workspace over time.

Paul Smeaton,
Suncorp New Zealand CEO

As founding tenants, Suncorp New Zealand has enjoyed a long and proud association with Kiwi Property and the Vero Centre.

Two years ago, Suncorp New Zealand embarked on a journey to create an inspiring new workplace so our people could thrive.

Our new home is a transformative space that provides our people with different options, depending on how they choose to work. I was thrilled to share our official opening of it last month with Ngāti Whātua Ōrākei, the mana whenua of Tāmaki Makaurau, who brought to life for us their rich history and connection with the area.

I look forward to the next stage of our journey in the Vero Centre.