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The rising stars of commercial leasing

The agents set to take the field by storm cut their teeth in the post-recession years and are braced for the fast-paced competition of a bustling market

By [Natalie Hoberman](#) | July 26, 2018 08:00AM



(Illustration by Neil Webb)

In office leasing today, being a successful broker requires nonstop commitment to clients and the ability to thrive amid cutthroat competition. The young guns now rising to the upper echelons of the market seem particularly well equipped for the challenge, given that they first entered the business when the recession was in full swing.

“It was all this calamity and the economy was falling off its foot,” said Scott Unger, a Charles Dunn Co. broker who was laid off from his job in recruiting in 2008. “It was an interesting time to get in. No one was hiring a new broker, so I had to stay persistent.”

Rocky Binswanger, a CBRE broker who started as a public relations manager at Cushman & Wakefield when no broker positions were available, said many people in her age range were weeded out of brokerage during the recession. “If you could make it through that time period, that says something,” Binswanger said. “You had the will to hold on.”

Now, these 10-year veteran brokers are closing some of the biggest commercial office leasing deals in Los Angeles, which in the second quarter of 2018, saw a 9 percent increase in leasing rates year-over-year, and deals inked on a total of 1.1 million square feet of office space, according to a report from CBRE.

Culling from conversations with well-established brokers and other real estate experts, *The Real Deal* compiled a list of up-and-coming commercial leasing stars who are set to compete with the entrenched group leading the pack today.

This hungry group closed a minimum of 100,000 square feet in office deals in 2017 and have spent roughly a decade in the business. The sales information included is mostly self-reported, with additional data coming from supervising managers at brokerages. Brokers are not presented in a ranked order.

Andrew Riley

CBRE

It all started with a borrowed black beach cruiser, equipped with red handlebars and red flames painted on the side of the bike.

Riley, a young University of Colorado Boulder grad had landed an internship at CBRE in 2012, but the only office with a spot available was in Camarillo, about 45 miles away from his home in Westwood. That summer, he booked the nearest Hampton Inn, ate Pollo Loco twice a day and turned to an electric bike as his mode of transportation.



“I looked like a total idiot riding this bike with red flames, wearing a suit and tie to work every day,” he recalled. “But it was a good character-building experience for me. It set the tone for what brokerage is — a consistent hustle and grind.”

A photo of Riley riding that bike ultimately got in the hands of a manager at CBRE, who was impressed by the intern’s dedication. Shortly after, he landed a job as a sales associate at the much closer Century City office.

Since Riley first began at CBRE, he said he’s raked in \$470 million in total transaction volume, propelled recently by a close relationship with biopharmaceutical company Kite Pharma. Riley, alongside veteran broker Jeff Pion, brokered Kite Pharma’s 160,000-square-foot lease at the Colorado Center in Santa Monica in November 2016, in addition to securing other locations for the firm in El Segundo.

“That helped me jump-start my career in a really significant way,” Riley said. “I caught lightning in a bottle at such a young age.”

Jaclyn Ward

JLL

Jaclyn Ward entered the business as the economy was reeling from recession. But it was that slowness in the market that ultimately allowed her to get face time with some of the more experienced brokers at JLL, who sat down with her and taught her negotiation tactics and “walked [her] through the art of dealmaking,” she said.

Since Ward became a full-time broker in 2012, she has closed approximately 3 million square feet of deals on both the landlord and tenant side. That translates to an aggregate transaction value north of \$800 million since she began working, she said.



Sources said that Ward was one of the brokers that represented Spotify in its 110,000-square-foot lease in the Arts District, but she declined to confirm this.

Ward’s other coveted tech clients include Sony, Twitter and Tumblr. On the landlord side, she’s represented Blackstone/EQ, Commonwealth Partners, Ocean West Capital Partners and Westbrook Partners.

To this day, she still relies on one piece of advice a colleague gave her early on: “Success is a sum of small efforts that you just repeat every day.”

Mike Condon Jr. & Kelli Snyder

Cushman & Wakefield

Mike Condon Jr. thought he'd have a career in technology when he graduated from the University of Southern California. He tried his hand at three internet startups, which all ended up being “massive failures.”

So, it was by process of elimination that he ended up as a commercial leasing broker, working alongside his father, Mike Condon Sr., at JLL in 2011. “I was a late bloomer,” said Condon, who reported that he has closed nearly 2 million square feet in his seven-year career.



The younger Condon — now at Cushman & Wakefield — leads a team of six that includes Kelli Snyder, a USC graduate Condon recruited in 2015.

Together, the team has landed the listing for At Mateo, an \$80 million mixed-use development in the Arts District. As the listing agents, Condon's team also helped broker Spotify's 110,000-square-foot at the site, though he won't confirm that.

Snyder said she's noticed teams growing bigger since she joined the industry, especially as companies begin to eye other markets as they search for office space.

“DTLA is starting to see a lot of Westside tenants migrate to DTLA,” Snyder said. That's led to a greater variety within DTLA-based teams, who are increasingly turning to Westside brokers because “they have intel and a different perspective than what we're seeing Downtown.”



Terence Kirk

Colliers International

For Kirk, it's all about “client zero” — that big deal in a young broker's career that can transform any future dealings. At least, that's what he tells his “young guys” in the office.

Kirk's client zero was Brown & Brown Insurance, which tapped him to lead the company's 50-location account nearly 10 years ago. “Financially and resume-wise, that was the first major client I got,” Kirk said.

The Colliers International agent recently brokered London-based Arup Engineering's \$57 million dollar leasing deal at the Wilshire Grand in Downtown, and he is working on 200,000-square-foot-plus leases in New York and Paris.

Kirk started out in 2006 as an intern at CBRE. He's been at Colliers for almost five years, and, over the course of his career, he said he and his team have closed more than 5 million square feet of office space both nationally and internationally.



Jennifer Frisk

Newmark Knight Frank

For Jennifer Frisk, one of the most appealing aspects of commercial real estate is the competition.

“You’re always competing against someone with an existing relationship,” the Newmark Knight Frank broker said. “The market’s busy and everyone is hungry.”

The Downtown-based broker recently closed a deal for JERDE, an architecture firm that relocated its headquarters from Venice to DTLA after 15 years on the Westside. She also has Riveter, a female co-working company, on her client list, as well as MetLife, Pabst Brewing Company and Bank of America.



Frisk entered the business thanks to a guidance counselor who suggested she apply for a scholarship from the USC Lusk Center for Real Estate.

“I loved [real estate] — I thought it was very tangible, and it made sense to me,” Frisk said. She ended up graduating early to work full-time at local REIT Bixby Land Co., joining the brokerage side in 2010. After stints at JLL and LA Realty Partners, Frisk joined Newmark as a managing director in 2015.

Peter Collins

Cushman & Wakefield

Peter Collins was working at one of the largest entertainment agencies in the country, Creative Artists Agency, at its office at 9830 Wilshire Boulevard when he first moved out to L.A. from Massachusetts 13 years ago. Fast-forward 10 years and his team is now responsible for leasing that building.

“The writers’ strike was happening in entertainment, and I thought, ‘Now’s a good time to explore something else,’” Collins said. “I thought if I understood the entertainment industry enough that I could make it work in real estate.”



With a Rolodex of clients from his past gig, Collins started off cold-calling entertainment and law firms throughout Downtown L.A. and West L.A. in the hopes of gaining some business.

Now, along with seven others on his team, Collins is leasing the iconic 460,000-square-foot PacMutual campus in DTLA. As a landlord and tenant rep, he’s closed deals for Thunder Road Pictures, Good Fear Film + Management and advertising company First Media, whose brands include Blossom and BabyFirst.

Combined, his team has brokered more than 2.5 million square feet of office space, he said.

Scott Unger

Charles Dunn Co.

Scott Unger is a commercial leasing broker, but that hasn’t stopped him from delving into the investment sales pool as well.

Unger is now entering his 10th year at Charles Dunn Co., where he works in the Tri-Cities region and represents prominent landlords, such as Onni Group. He said the team he works on has completed more than \$7 billion in transactions with over 8 million square feet leased, sold or underwritten. Individually, he said he’s completed over \$533 million in deals consisting of more than 2.2 million square feet.



Unger was first introduced into the world of commercial real estate while working at a recruiting firm that focused solely on commercial real estate hires.

“I got to see everything from developers, financiers, brokerage — I had to learn how to talk the talk,” Unger said. “Brokerage was appealing to me because it was sales-based and the same business pattern as executive [recruitment].”

Patrick Amos

CBRE

Patrick Amos, named “Rookie of the Year” by CBRE, has been angling for the top since he joined the commercial brokerage world.

“When I started, I asked every senior broker who I knew was making a lot of money, ‘How do I get better at this and learn quicker?’” Amos said. “I kept hearing, ‘Just keep your head down and work hard, there’s no substitute for time,’ but I couldn’t fathom it in my head. I didn’t want to wait.”

According to his company bio, Amos has closed over \$3 billion consisting of more than 8.1 million square feet since 2010. Among some of his more notable deals include representing Hudson Pacific Properties in its 415,000-square-foot lease with Netflix at Sunset Bronson Studios in 2016, and working with the L.A. Rams, Samsung and Universal Music Group.

He chalks up his success to his work ethic and the long hours he puts in; a typical day starts at 5 a.m. and doesn’t end until 9 p.m.

“What I like about this profession is you truly get out what you put in, and there’s something very powerful about that,” Amos said.



Mac Burrige

LA Realty Partners

It was a Double-Double at the In-N-Out in Inglewood that ultimately convinced Mac Burrige, a Chicago native, to venture into commercial leasing in L.A. That, and his mentor, Peter Best, a principal at LA Realty Partners, who agreed to meet with him at the iconic burger spot to discuss the ins and outs of the real estate business.

“Not too many people spend two and a half hours at an In-N-Out, but after a few laughs, a data dump on the L.A. real estate market and a better understanding of my career goals, [Best] asked me to come work with him at LA Realty Partners,” Burrige recalls. “I started my career at an In-N-Out in Inglewood. Go figure.”

In classic L.A. fashion, his first “big break” was finding an office space for television personality Larry King. Burrige ended up securing an 8,000-square-foot lease for King’s production company, Ora TV, in Glendale. Much to his chagrin, Burrige met King’s wife, but he never met the man himself.

Burrige also closed a 10-year, 30,000-square-foot deal for co-working firm CTRL Collective in Manhattan Beach, which is set to open this year. Most recently, he closed a 10,000-square-foot lease in Culver City for New Form Digital, which makes scripted video content.



Rocky Binswanger*CBRE*

In the Binswanger household, it's a rule not to talk shop.

That's because both Rocky Binswanger, a CBRE broker, and her husband, David Binswanger, an executive at development firm Lincoln Property Co., both work in commercial real estate, where they "talk real estate all day."

Binswanger started at Lincoln Property, where she was working for a landlord broker, though that only lasted "a hot second" after she realized the payout for tenant brokers was double. After a brief stint handling public relations for Cushman & Wakefield, she transitioned into brokerage at the firm, then moved to CBRE in 2011.

Some of Binswanger's more notable deals include leasing over 100,000 square feet for the University of Southern California in 2018 alone, and representing private investment firm StoneCalibre in deals spread across five states.

Her piece of advice?

Professionally, "always be the first in and last out," she said. "If you just show up, you are presented with so many opportunities."

