*Coming from the world of sound and video, a concept such as UMA can be hard to fully grasp. We sat down with UMA Founder and CEO, **Stephen Milner**, to try and get a better understanding of what UMA is, what UMA does and everything in between.*

So Stephen, what exactly is UMA?

UMA was founded in response to the need for workplaces to digitally transform to improve user experiences, collaboration, reduce real estate costs and drive operational efficiency using technology and enhanced business intelligence. In short, it is a a workplace technology SaaS platform.

And what is SaaS?

Software-as-a-Service (SaaS) is a software licencing and delivery model in which software is licenses on a subscription basis and centrally hosted. SaaS is also known as on-demand software and web-based software. SaaS is considered to be part of cloud computing and UMA Software is hosted in the Cloud on Amazon Web Services (AWS).

So UMA is software?

UMA is a software platform that includes a web application with a dashboard showing you a digital floormap, analytics and connects your workplace resources and technology into a single pane of glass. UMA also provides IOS and Android Mobile applications and chatbots to help with your resource scheduling like booking hot-desks, meeting rooms, parking spaces or lockers. UMA also provides display panel software, clearly showing meeting room bookings, room occupancy and environment data.

What does UMA integrate with?

UMA provides the option to connect to your existing enterprise calendar software such as Microsoft Office365. UMA seamless integrates to your O365 allowing your employee, resource and calendar data is connected. Any resource can be assigned to UMA on the digital floormap to make them easy to book and manage.

Can you connect hardware to UMA?

UMA is an open platform that allows you to manage your existing workplace technology including audio visual equipment and Internet-of-Things (IoT) sensors. UMA allows you to connect to and manage devices such as audio-visual and video collaboration hardware. Empowering IT and Facilities with the ability to monitor and remotely diagnose and fix workplace technology has a huge impact of employee experience and workplace productivity.

UMA also connect privacy-first occupancy and environmental sensors to improve the employee experience by monitoring space capacity and air quality within the environment. UMA can pull rich real-time data-points such as presence and occupancy allow businesses to identify patterns and trends in how the office is being used and it can also enable automation such as auto-booking of spaces and room release in the event of a no-show to a meeting room or desk booking.
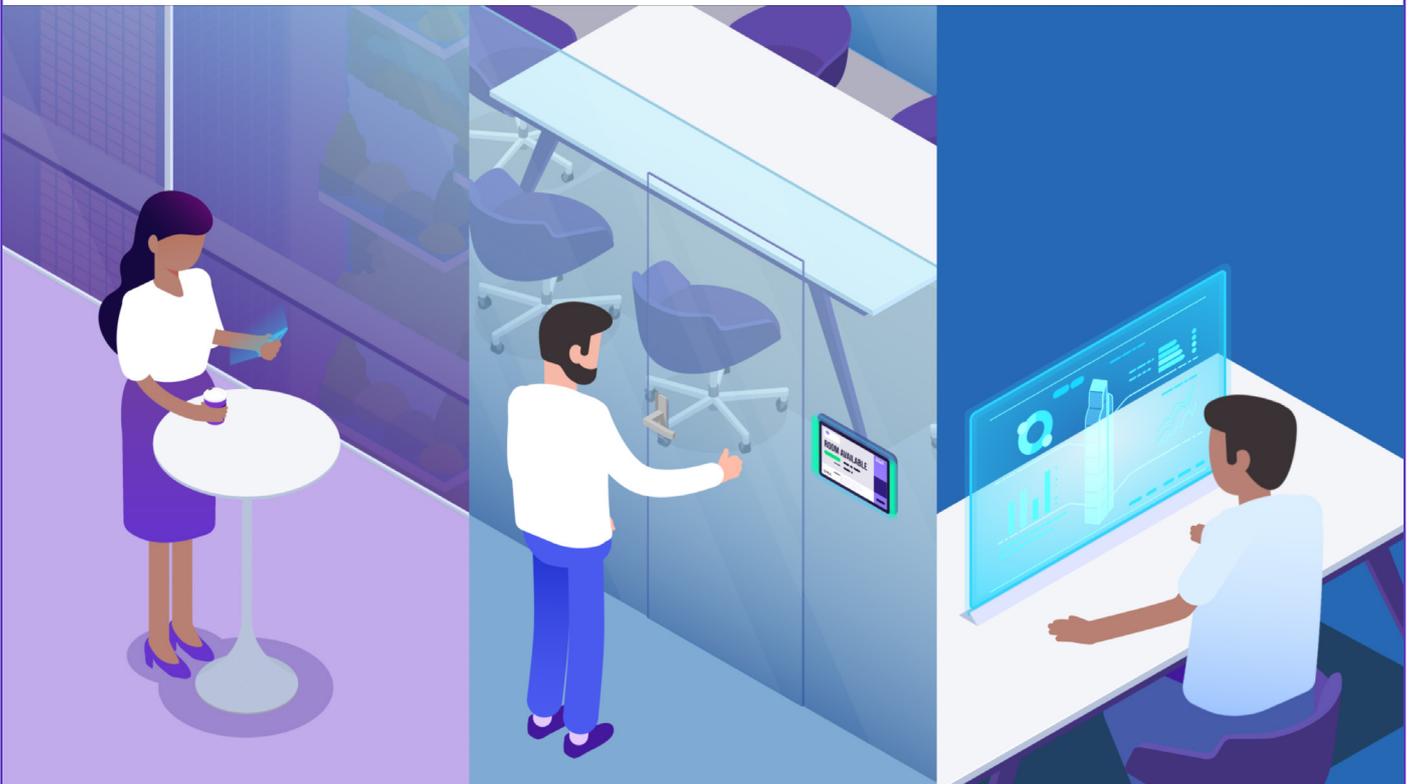
So it monitors and tracks human behaviour and the working environment?

UMA software enables people to book and manage their resource scheduling much easier and for administrator users such as Facilities & Estates Teams and AV & IT Teams the analytical tools to enable data driven reporting and insight on resource utilisation, helping businesses to adapt to the changing needs of the workforce. Insight into the workplace is more important than ever before due to the prevalence of hybrid and flexible working. Many organisations have moved to a hotdesking policy and the booking of desks is complex without intelligent software to manage bookings. Understanding how the workplace is being used is essential to adapt to changes in the workforce and to reconfigure the space needed to support day-to-day operations.

What about privacy, data security and all that stuff?

UMA prides itself on being a privacy-first solution. Our sensors are GDPR compliant not using camera technology and our digital voice assistant used for resource scheduling on mobile

phones requires users to press the microphone button before UMA listens for instructions. The UMA platform is enterprise grade and secured by our partners in the Amazon Web Services Cloud. Our integration with Office365 requires users to use their Microsoft credentials to log-in before they can access an of the workplace information in the platform.

How does it integrate with existing display panels such as AMX and Crestron?

UMA is an open platform, with the ability to connect to any of your workplace technology that has an IP address. UMA's web application for display panels is hardware agnostic and can run on panels with a web-browser including Android and iPadOS devices, Cisco Navigators and UMA's display panel software will soon be available on Crestron display panels. UMA can even control the LED light-bars found on display panel hardware to show clearly from a distance if a meeting space is occupied or not. UMA's display panel application and dashboard can also be customised to reflect company logos and branding.
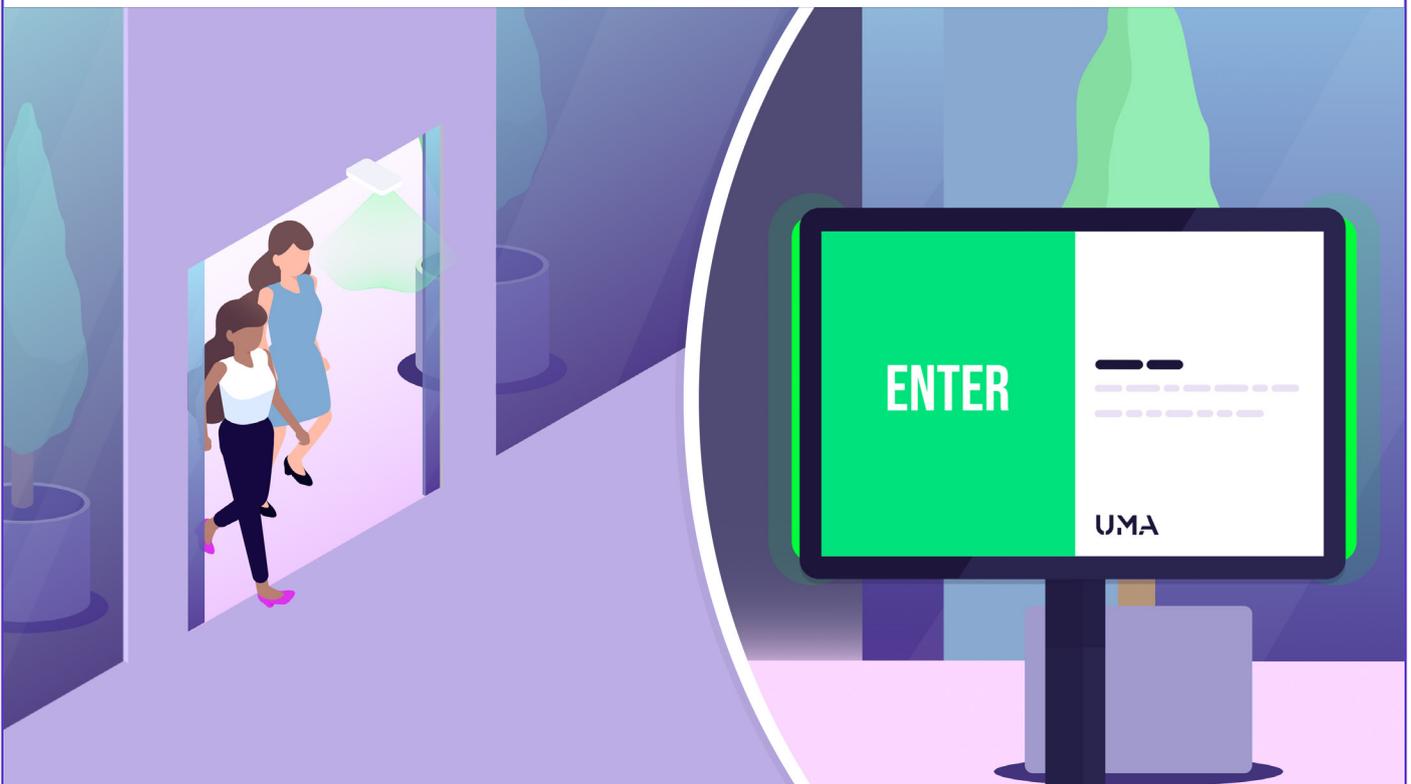
How is it priced? Is there a licence fee per user? Per room? Per year?

UMA have a simple pricing model with annual license fee, per room or per desk with clearly defined features to help select the right license. Hardware such as display panels, occupancy or environmental sensors are also available from UMA through our partners at Septon.

OK, so I am an employee at a medium-sized company on a normal Tuesday. How does UMA influence my work day?

From the very beginning of your day UMA makes your working day easier. From the UMA web and mobile apps employees can clearly see the meetings scheduled for that day. If they are planning on going into the office they can use the digital floorplan to check availability of a desk and understand where their team members are in the office. Planning a last minute meeting

becomes easy as resource availability is clear on a time and date slider and the right space can be selected based on requirements and technology available in the room. You can even virtually

walk around the workplace in 3D to help select your meeting space.

Even on your commute, UMA makes it easier as you can simply use your voice to make a booking using our natural language chatbot. The risk of desk or meeting rooms not being available is reduced with UMA's data-driven room or desk release, so if someone doesn't turn up then that resource becomes available again in O365.

How many times has productivity been lost due to equipment issues in a meeting room. UMA's device monitoring ensures issues can be identified before the cause issues and can even be diagnosed and fixed remotely so you are not waiting for your Facilities Team to attend in person to resolve a ticket. UMA understand that some meeting attendees might not be in the office so we have integrated collaboration tools including Webex, Zoom or Microsoft Teams so that details can be added to meeting invites easily, ensuring your colleagues that are attending remotely are supported.
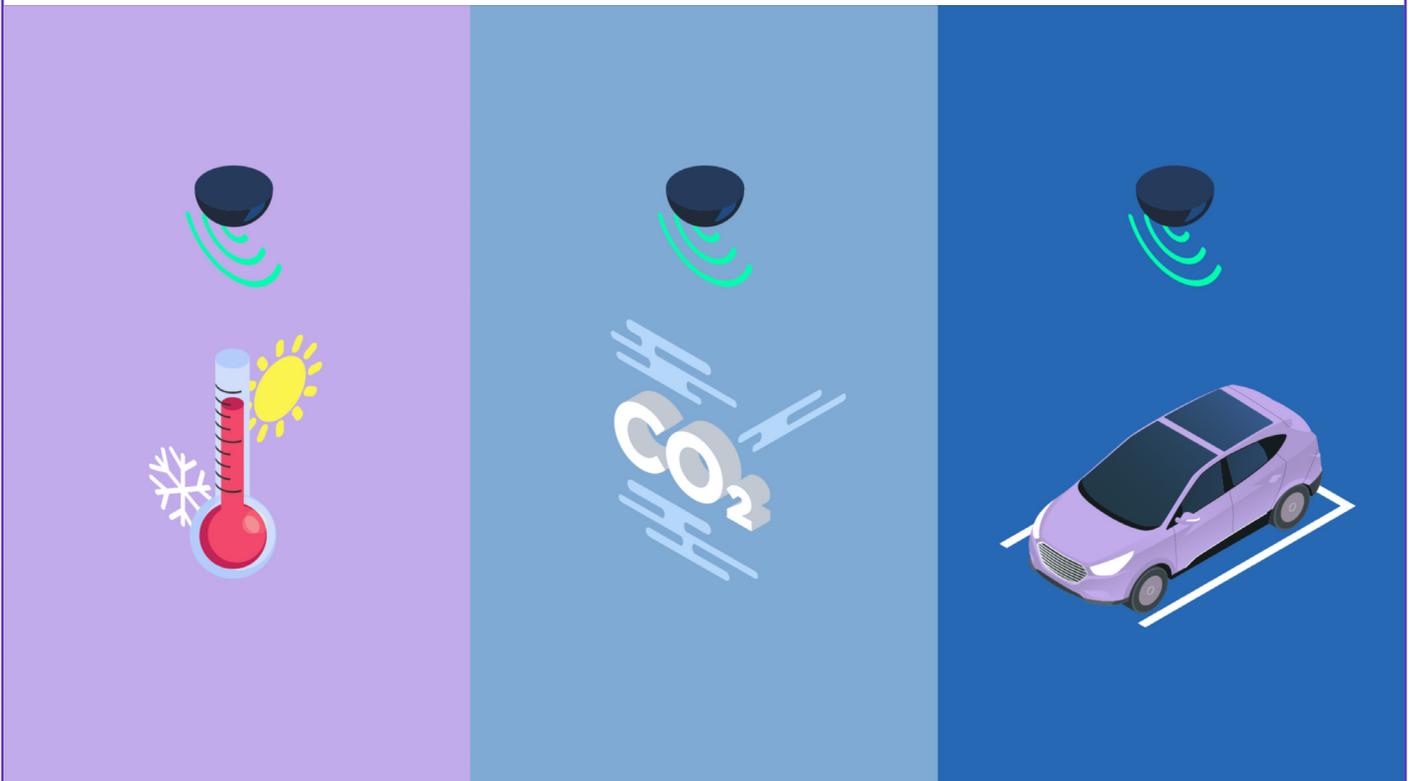
OK, now I am the MD of the same company, and we have had a complete UMA ecosystem running for the past year. What are my benefits?

Right now most organisations have little or no visibility or understanding of how their workplace is used by their employees. This became even more evident during the pandemic when businesses were required to be cautious about return-to-work, controlling capacity and limiting access to resources. The time, cost and effort involved became apparent and UMA flexed our solution to accommodate these needs. UMA gives senior leadership teams peace of mind as social distancing limitations can be applied to the digital floorplan and adjusted according to requirements.

In the event of an employee testing positive for covid UMA provides tools such as a Contact

Trace Report that shows who that employee was sat next to and who was in the same meeting room space in the preceding days.

Beyond the day-to-day controls that UMA brings to improve business continuity the analytical tools can help provide the data-driven insight required to manage any flexible or hybrid workplace strategy. Senior leadership teams can utilise UMA as a tool to help their teams to collaborate.

Occupancy reporting can show trend analysis, to help understand the demand for desks and meeting spaces and to evidence clear business cases for the change in the workspace, removing a 20 seat conference room that is rarely uses to reconfigure and create additional collaboration spaces that meet the demands of the workforce.

If your organisation has adopted flexible working and there is no longer an expectation that your employees come in to the office every day then you may have moved to a hot-desking policy, removing fixed desks, provide an opportunity to reduce real-estate footprints but requiring a software tool to manage the booking of these new 'shared' resources. This process could prove chaotic to operations if undertaken without a software tool such as UMA.

UMA's dashboard provides historical reporting to allow patterns to be seen on how your workspace is being used but importantly this can lead to opportunities for operational cost savings, through a reduction in real estate or energy costs. UMA have also added environmental data points to ensure a heathier workplace. Indoor Air Quality along with Noise Pollution within the office is known to impact employee wellness. By connecting sensors to UMA you can take corrective actions based on the data obtained and ensure that the workplace is as healthy and productive as possible.

Is UMA for everyone? Or does a company have to be of a certain size for it to make sense?

UMA is helping organisations as large as the National Health Service (NHS) in the UK where space is at a premium. Our customer base is diverse and includes Premier League Football teams, Accountants, Multi-national Financial Service firms and small Charities. The transformational change in the workplace is happening to small and medium sized organisations as well as large enterprise and the benefits that UMA brings with its data-driven insight can help make all workplaces smarter.

UMA's competitive price point and ability to connect to equipment that is already in the workplace means that it is not cost-prohibitive and we have seen that a return on investment can be obtained regardless of the industry vertical or the size of company.

How do you see this developing over the next decade?

The concept of the office originated from the factory during industrialisation and hasn't not radically changed in hundreds of years. The transformation of the workplace has been accelerated by the recent pandemic and the opportunity that this brings for the way we work is exciting. Combined with the advances in internet speeds and collaboration tools it is clear remote and hybrid working is here to stay.

The office is being reshaped and is finding new purposes. Every organisation is different and want to try different ways to perhaps reduce or repurpose their estate but the common goal is to have a workplace that truly meets the needs of their employees and the only way to truly do this is to ensure that they data is available to adapt to the changes to get a deeper understanding of the impact of the decisions being made.

At UMA we expect that the benefits of data to make buildings smarter will grow exponentially and the way we have designed our open platform allows us to integrate and connect new sensors and technology. We also see the benefit driving the benefit of the additional datasets back to the employees with automation and better user experiences. Enabling personalisation and wellness benefits that help people to become more productive in their jobs every day when they are working at home, remotely or in a virtual office platform like UMA accessed in a web application or located in the metaverse.

Thank you Stephen, this was really helpful!

Thank you for having me! We are really looking forward to working with Septon and Lydrommet. The Scandinavian countries have always been good at adopting new technology, so UMA should definitely be a great fit.