

# Austin

Peter Veash, chief executive and co-founder of digital agency BIO, explains why the capital of Texas is the natural place to expand his company

When Peter Veash set up creative digital agency Big Ideas Online (BIO) in 2006 he knew that one day it would expand into the US. "It was just a natural market for us," he says. And when BIO, whose client list includes Orange, Hotel Chocolat and Hachette, took on a new customer based in Houston, the largest city in Texas, the idea to establish a foothold for the company in Austin began to take shape.

"We'd been looking at the US market for a while and I was back and forth to Houston for the client when they suggested that we should look at Austin," Veash explains. "We'd heard good things before, so on one of those trips I went to Austin to check it out and I was really pleased with what I saw."

Veash found that many interesting businesses were also establishing themselves in the state capital, including Facebook, Google and Apple. "The VCs behind Pinterest are from Austin, Dell are from the city too, so there's a really



Creative hub: Peter Veash says the thriving tech scene in Austin offers a lot of potential for BIO

interesting tech scene going on," he says. Veash quickly realised that the combination of business networks and creativity in Austin offered great potential for BIO. "They've also got an excellent university producing good students who can really help us, so the talent pool is strong."

The fact that Austin was an attractive city sealed the deal. "It has a massive lake in the centre, it's not too big or too small and there's a nice restaurant scene, so it's a good spot," he says.

## GETTING STARTED

Veash, whose UK business now employs 100 people, went to

Austin early last year to prepare for the US launch. "I wanted to make sure that we were represented in the right way by the space that we have – the location for our agency is very important," he says. "In the UK we have a strong brand and you want to be able to carry that over. So I met businesses out there and got some advice from other agency people."

"I must have seen about 20 places, then on the way to the airport I got a call about one and quickly turned the car around, went back to see it and took it up," he says. "Austin has a really hot community at the moment

so there are lots of companies that want to move in there. Many start-ups are looking for the cool, creative spaces so I'd say that is almost the hardest thing – finding the right space. And, of course, when you search for a space in London you've got much longer to look at it – you can go back and forth. But when you're in the US you're over there for a set period, so you've got to find somewhere quickly."

With a base established, Veash then dealt with the legal process, which, he says, was relatively straightforward. "You hire the right lawyers, you have people in your business with the experience and you follow it through step by step. If you've got the right advice around you it's just like setting up a company over here."

The final stage came with Veash dispatching staff to launch the business and, crucially, seed the company philosophy before hiring local people. "We sent over people from BIO UK, got them apartments out there and sorted out their visas," he says,

adding that the amount of British staff willing to move to Texas surprised him. "The people who have moved over there had never even been to Austin before. I think that shows a commitment to us as a company but also to the belief that it's a good place to live." That said, BIO plans to also recruit locally once the company has settled: "We want to make sure that we have the right culture out there first," Veash adds.

## AFFABLE CITY

Veash describes Austin as a lovely city with a great culture. "You have true Texan hospitality, and it's quite a healthy culture, with lots of people cycling and being active," he says.

Fellow businesspeople were also helpful. "People always seem to want to help. They're very keen to recommend other people that they know. They really go out of their way to help you network or find a contact and I think that's one of the bigger differences. They want their colleagues or friends to do

again, everybody over there drives everywhere, so that's a point of difference – it's not like being in a UK city where you can pop to the pub after work and then get the train home."

His advice to others looking to set up a business in Austin is to be pragmatic and not to over-invest. "The advice people give you is that you need a quarter of a million pounds to launch in the US and I don't believe that's true," he says. "Go and see it for yourself and see how you get on with it. If you don't over-invest and it doesn't work out then you can reverse back out of the market. Just take steps that your company can afford."

BIO has been operating in Austin for nine months and Veash says its presence has already led to lucrative new business opportunities. "We've picked up another client who is just four hours away," he says. "I think that there are really interesting opportunities with clients out there which want to speak to English agencies with our expertise."

His next goal is to grow BIO Austin to match the London office. "I think it should be its own independent offering, part of the BIO family with its own managing director, servicing clients and helping us deal with global client issues," he says. "And we see it growing to this level this year, so that's why we're really excited about it."

Behiye Hassan



Work and play: 6th Street, Austin's colourful entertainment district, and, right, BIO's base in the city. "Finding the right space was the hardest thing," says Veash



Feel the power: the State Capitol in Austin houses the Texan government and is a top tourist attraction

## AUSTIN FACT FILE



**Population**  
Around 820,000

**Currency**  
Dollar

**Language**  
English

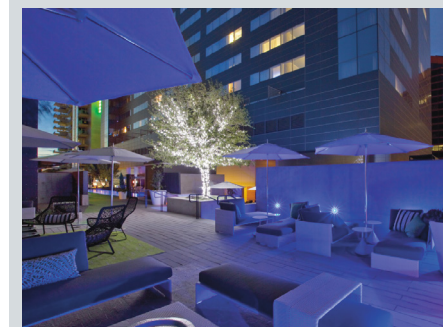
## Sightseeing

"Barton Springs Pool (above) is beautiful and the Texas State Capitol is very popular," says Veash.



**Food**  
"La Condesa serves really good Mexican food and is a cool, buzzy place while Hopdoddy has the best burgers, ever," he adds.

[www.lacondesa.com/austin](http://www.lacondesa.com/austin)  
[www.hopdoddy.com](http://www.hopdoddy.com)



## Where to stay

"The W Hotel (above) is simply amazing," says Veash.  
[www.whotelaustin.com](http://www.whotelaustin.com)

## Getting there

**IOD PLUS** BA and United fly from Heathrow to Houston or Dallas – then connect to Austin. Or book through WEXAS at [www.iod.com/travel](http://www.iod.com/travel) (020 7838 5989).

## Useful contact

Austin's Small Business Development Program  
[www.austinsmallbiz.com](http://www.austinsmallbiz.com)