



Mick Sharp

Chief Operating Officer, International SOS & Control Risks

Evacuation, security, repatriation, protecting lives – it's all in a day's work for Mick Sharp. *Benjamin Coren* speaks to the COO of International SOS

A BUSINESS park in Chiswick might not seem like the most auspicious location for a company whose business is protecting and saving lives and has a name akin to something out of Thunderbirds, but that's where I meet the Chief Operating Officer of International SOS (ISOS), Mick Sharp.

The affable Australian has a background in counter-terrorism – including long-term assignments in Pakistan and Afghanistan after the September 11 attacks in the US – and talks about his somewhat colourful time at International SOS, where he was pitched into the midst of the Mumbai attacks in 2008, soon after joining the company.

"I was based in India at the time, deploying from Delhi to Mumbai within five hours to lead our Incident Management team, comprised of former Indian military and police officers, some of whom were on hand an hour after the attacks commenced," he says.

"We had 13 people directly affected in the hotels throughout the siege and we were doing a lot of medical and logistical support in the background for people in the country."

International SOS provides security and medical advice to organisations sending business travellers all over the world and, in his capacity, Mick identifies patterns in the sort of threats travellers face today.

"While road safety, crime and health issues are the most frequent risk for business travellers, in terms of

attacks that these groups inspire, as we've recently seen in Orlando," he says.

In the absence of a CEO for the joint venture with Control Risks, Mick has a broad general management remit at the company and reports double digit growth throughout the history of the venture. "It's a reflection of interest in the travel security industry in which we are global leaders," he says.

The tight integration with the medical aspect of International SOS' business is what sets it apart, explains Mick, with the number of medical evacuations and repatriations that it orchestrates reaching around 20,000 a year.

"When I was working out of an embassy in Islamabad one of my colleagues got a bad case of pneumonia and got secondary infections in a less than salubrious hospital in Pakistan," Mick recalls. "At that stage I didn't know the company particularly well, but ISOS did the medevac and got him in very fast and he credits them with saving his life today."

Cybersecurity is becoming much more significant today for business travellers and is something that Control Risks has been working on. The cybersecurity threat extends from basic smartphone and laptop security when entering certain countries to major compromise of a company's database.

Key growth is happening in these areas, says Mick. "We are going down a digital path, and the nature of our business is such that we are very focused on information and assessments, providing preventative solutions for companies. It's about being a trusted advisor in this space."

He continues, "ISO 9001 certification reinforces our security and medical platforms are on the same qualitative level and it's significant for us in terms of external confirmation of the quality of our processes."

Mick believes the future for the company lies in being genuinely international. "Building a team of international people gives different perspectives and creates true objectivity.

"Everyone has a mission focus and camaraderie can be easily built. It's a pleasure to be a manager in this company and the risk management industry, and people love what they do."



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terrorism, one thing is clear. Terror threats in developed countries have become much more significant. It's not a new threat either. We've had September 11 and the London bombings, but what we are seeing now is that it's more dispersed, more frequent and harder to track.

"A large part of it is through Islamic State involvement, but we also see more of the kind of



in brief...

What are some of the main risks business travellers face?

There are many situations that can be avoided by general awareness. People get themselves in a situation that starts to unravel – they take a taxi in the wrong place or they are not aware of a particular threat. The risk for female travellers is amplified around certain threats in particular locations.

Where are some of the higher risk destinations travellers go to?

It largely depends on the nature of where people go and the nature of their operations and work. It's not hard to clarify the extreme end. Our value is not to discourage people from avoiding locations unnecessarily but to help them make informed decisions, understanding and preparing for a given environment and supporting business continuity including in tough environments.

What new threats might business travellers fall foul of?

It's more about the different manifestations of a threat. Terrorists targeting more soft targets in developed countries more frequently, for example. As long as we've been in this industry, it is the criminal elements that fool individuals, and crime is harder to track from a business travel perspective. But we can define hotspots and there are patterns.

Do you make use of International SOS services when you travel?

I'm an international relations junkie and I stay up to date with world events and it's pretty easy when I've got a team covering it. Our app is really convenient – it gives me alerts as soon as I cross borders and it's very clear and objective. I get a sober assessment.

What do you enjoy doing in your down time?

I don't have a lot of spare time, but work is a love as well as work. Spare time is more travel. I like to get out of cities and hiking in the country and spend as much time as I can with my little daughter who is seven.

Where are your favourite destinations?

My passion is South East Asia – Thailand, Vietnam, Cambodia, Burma – and Italy is hard to beat; the history, the food and the people.



PROFILE

MICK SHARP is the Chief Operating Officer at International SOS and Control Risks. With extensive experience and specialised training in risk management and mitigation, he has also worked as a political and security consultant for corporations across the Asia-Pacific region, as well as for the Australian Government with long-term assignments in Pakistan and Afghanistan.