

# insight

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## *Corporate Social Responsibility in Practice*



In a series of 10 interviews with Business Leaders in the Czech Republic, Mark Hamill (pictured), Global Managing Director for SpenglerFox, an Irish Executive Search organization and external partner with UNICEF across the CEE markets discusses social, professional and corporate social responsibility challenges facing business leaders in these demanding times.

**Mark Harris is Business Development Director EEU Region of International SOS.** International SOS is the world's leading provider of medical assistance, international healthcare, security services and outsourced customer care. Sitting down to lunch recently, Mark told me a little more about SOS.

International SOS focuses on offering corporations a complete solution to their business needs. It has created a new industry in international healthcare and integrated medical and security assistance since it was established 20 years ago. With over 6,000 professionals operating in 70 countries, they help organizations manage the health and safety risks facing their travelers, global workforce and customers.

The Czech Republic is their regional headquarters for Central Europe, the Balkans and the Baltic States, covering the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Macedonia, Slovenia, Albania, Kosovo, Montenegro, Serbia, Bosnia Herzegovina, Estonia, Lithuania and Latvia. Their presence in this region dates back to 1992.

Their Prague office operates a multi-language 24/7 alarm center servicing clients in English, Czech, Slovak, Hungarian and Polish with other local languages present as well. A quick snapshot of their clients include corporations, governments, NGOs, oil and gas companies, insurance companies and banks and financial institutions.

Mark graduated from the University of York, UK, with a Bachelor of Arts in Economic History and spent his formative years growing on the coast of south west England in Devon. In fact when asked what he misses most about life in Prague, it relates directly to growing up on the coast, and missing the sound and smell of the sea and walks on the beaches of his native Devon.

Mark relocated to Prague two years ago with his Czech partner, whom he met in the UK. Her family is from Sumperk, and they really enjoy weekends spent in the mountains, with the fantastic Czech family hospitality, food and entertainment.

When friends and family come over to Prague to visit, Mark says they are generally very pleasantly surprised by the high level of English spoken by Czechs in Prague and also find that eating and drinking is much more reasonable than in the UK.

On a personal note Mark hopes the authorities speed up the metro link to the airport, as the bus ride does not create such a wonderful impression of the city! With two years under his belt in Prague, Mark sees himself settling here medium term. Longer term, it's impossible to say, but he would be open to another international assignment although the Czech Republic will always remain close to him for family reasons. Mark travels for 2-3 days per week, although currently slightly less, and finds Prague to be ideally situated for travel with a great airport giving him access to most of the destinations he needs.

Growing up Mark knew he wanted to get involved in business, although he did consider pursuing a professional rugby career in his younger years! Nowadays, he really enjoys life in Prague, going out to restaurants, walking through the center and playing touch rugby with other expats up in Letna.

When asked about International SOS's approach to CSR, Mark replied "We care about people. Due to our worldwide client base and the fact that we operate over 400 remote site medical projects for our clients, in many countries we will be running CSR activities with our clients."

Mark went on to further explain their active involvement with UNICEF in many markets already, including Hanoi, Maputo, Kinsasha, Gabon where local contracts are already in place between International SOS and UNICEF. Later on Mark counted examples in more than 15 countries.

In Czech Republic there has not been much connection so far, Mark plans to make the local connection with the UNICEF team in Prague. Mark has also asked that I put him in touch with UNICEF in Romania, through our SpenglerFox connection there, as he sees potential co-operation there given the growth in the Oil and Gas sector, with Romanian companies sending specialists abroad to high risk areas.

Mark was very enthusiastic to get International SOS and UNICEF connected locally and would like to help them in fundraising activities, either through their participation in the Prague Marathon or upcoming Football Tournaments, and would like to nominate UNICEF as their charity of choice. Mark has seen the impact charities can have on local communities both growing up in the UK and having been involved as a student in raising donations for the local children's hospital. Another illustration of International SOS touching the local communities is ensuring all staff worldwide go through CPR training, therefore having the skills to save lives.

Before finishing coffee I asked Mark what was his advice to anyone who currently finds themselves out of work. "Don't panic" he replied, "it looks like 2009 will be the bottom of the cycle and from here the only way is up!"

Having studied Economic History and entered the work force in the middle of a recession in 1989, and witnessed the dot com boom and bust in the early 2000's Mark feels it part of the natural

economic cycle, and to use the time to learn new things, stay focused and things will pick up, ending our conversation on a positive note.