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The Man In The Shadows...

CBI Interview with Russell Grey, Managing Director, Security Services International.

In professional circles, Russell Grey is regarded as the consummate bodyguard: the “go-to guy” for UHNW clients with security needs or concerns. His services are so sought after that recently he was jokingly referred to as the UHNWI’s “most wanted” after representatives of three family offices failed to recruit him for their own UHNW clients.

His response was simple; “It’s not just about the money. At the time of these enquiries, I was already with my team on assignment with a client family in Europe. And despite some very attractive offers, I couldn’t walk away from a client just because a better offer came along.

It’s a matter of professional standards and personal integrity. It’s a code of honour that I choose to work to”.

1. Tell our readers about your work with UHNWIs.

I have been providing specialist Executive Protection services to UHNWI’s for more than 20 years. These clients have ranged from hugely successful entrepreneurs to highly respected families. Various clients have requested I be by their side in more than 50 countries. The modern protective role requires me to blend in and not look or feel out of place in any environment, be it business or social.

The priority for me will always be to shield a client and his or her family from physical harm, and you’ll regularly see me and / or my team working alongside a client’s close advisers and staff to help facilitate business and social engagements, arrange transport logistics and the like.

My aim is for clients and staff to quickly recognise my services as an additional asset to their daily lives. The more involved I am the more informed I am, which leads to a more efficient and effective service. All this, while remaining discreet and unobtrusive.

“Being referred to as the HNWIs Most Wanted was a flattering comment, but I didn’t take it too seriously”

2. Tell us about your label as the UHNWIs “most wanted”?

This was a light-hearted remark made when I was approached while already taking care of another client. I had three or four separate offers in as many days! And although I do sometimes turn client offers down, in this instance I was genuinely unavailable. It is not often that I am unable to accommodate a request, but on that occasion my company was at full capacity, so I could not extract myself and two of the clients had asked for me specifically. It was a flattering comment, but I didn’t take it too seriously.

3. What made you decide to form your company?

Several years ago I began to see what I felt was a fall in the standard of service being offered to many UHNW clients. I believed that was disrespectful to clients who deserved better, and were paying good money. It was at that point that I decided to form a team of my own Operatives; made up entirely of individuals whose standards I knew to be of the highest levels.

I only wanted to work with men and women whose approach mirrored my own, and could be relied upon to provide a top quality service to top quality clients. Hence, Security Services International was formed.

Being determined to maintain the highest standards, we only provide our services to a select, small, but significant group of clients, generally only dealing with UHNWI’s and families. Rarely do we accept clients that do not fall into this UHNW category. By limiting the number of clients we take on, we are able to consistently provide some of the best operatives in the business. And by channelling our focus on the clients’ needs rather than on unbridled growth, we can ensure that our service levels remain in line with clients expectations.

By the same token, we are particular about only engaging the highest quality clients, clients who recognise and value a truly professional service. Of course, these select clients can also be quite demanding. So receiving a phone call today, and being on a flight to the other side of the world tomorrow is considered - “just another day at the office”. Life is rarely straightforward.

4. Apart from these spur of the moment demands, what incidents have you had to deal with that may wet the readers appetites?

In the interests of drama, I can reveal that I’ve been shot at in Nigeria, avoided an apparent kidnap attempt in Tbilisi, Republic of Georgia, and disarmed a knife wielding attacker in Miami. But in 20 years of

service, that’s not a bad ratio. My job is to prevent and avoid these problems before they occur. If I had to deal with similar incidents more regularly it would be a sign that I am not doing my job properly.

“Needed to disarm a knife wielding attacker in Miami”

5. Who seeks out your services, and why?

The services we provide are generally sought by UHNWIs who recognise that their wealth and status alone can single them out for targeting by those with criminal intent.

In today’s world of readily available information, and the sometimes irresponsible use of social media and the like, many wealthy individuals and public figures realise that they may be the subject of unwanted attention, so will look to engage companies such as ours to mitigate these risks.

If someone appears on a prestigious list such as Forbes or Spears, they must also accept that they could find themselves on a list created by someone wishing to cause them harm.

6. What threats do UHNWIs face?

With greater wealth comes greater risk. The UHNWI’s will always be vulnerable to a greater risk of: kidnap, robbery, extortion, blackmail, exploitation, cyber-attack, damage to image, damage to or invasion of property, and invasion of privacy. In extreme cases there is even the threat of assassination and targeted assault.

Our responsibility as a protection team runs far and wide, hence why being fully informed is essential to aid a successful outcome.

“With greater wealth, so too comes greater risk”

7. What final message would you like to pass on to potential clients reading this article?

We ask clients or their representatives to please reach out to us, even if only to have a no obligation

review, of the current security coverage, or to discuss alternate measures to enhance this service. Be proactive, and do not wait for an incident to occur. Allow us to show that in addition to the peace of mind that a professional security package can provide, we also bring a complete bespoke service that can become a real asset to your daily lives, without being an invasion of your privacy. We have found that many VIPs can be dissuaded from engaging such services due to a perception that it has to be obtrusive or intrusive. This does not have to be the case, and we would like the opportunity to prove that when performed discretely and professionally, such a service has the potential to even enhance a client’s image. We seek to protect, not invade their privacy.

Finally, I’d like to say that over recent years I believe the level of service being provided to many UHNWIs, particularly those from the Arab world, has fallen well below the standard it should be. I see this as disrespectful, and formed a company to address this situation.

When a client invests their trust in us, we immediately look upon it as our moral obligation to repay that investment by continually demonstrating a commitment to provide a professional service that’s second to none, and reflects the respect we have for them. When a client engages our services it goes beyond a business arrangement, it creates a personal bond. Our aim is to never let them down and to make them feel that they are being looked after to an unequalled standard, enabling them to continue with their daily lives, confident that their security is taken care of.

So to return to the question, the message I’d like to pass on to potential clients and their representatives is this: The current unpredictability of the world, and someone’s status or personal wealth alone, can mean that a serious problem can appear at any time. This can impact upon you and your family directly or indirectly and without warning. If you feel it is better to be prepared in advance of such a situation, please consider reaching out to us now. And put your security, and that of your loved ones, in experienced hands. ■

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