

Employment Screening in Asia

By Dave Mattinson,

Whilst the ongoing credit crunch in the West continues to impact global financial systems and areas of the broader economy, growth in Asia, whilst somewhat dampened, continues apace. As more and more businesses move into the region or expand existing operations, Asia Pacific's increasing economic importance directly affects the demand for, and demands upon, Control Risks Screening's regional employment screening services. Whilst many of the challenges of screening are universal, no one region, even one country, is the same as the next.

There are some unique challenges, misconceptions and undoubted opportunities that exist in the Asia marketplace specifically. The disparate nature of the region and the multiple legislations create a compliance minefield not easily negotiated without in-depth local knowledge; China alone consists of 22 Provinces, 5 autonomous regions, 4 self governing municipalities and 2 special administrative zones (Hong Kong and Macau). The difficulties are compounded by the fact that concepts of data access and data provision are, in many instances, less sophisticated than in more developed screening environments.

Whilst access to information is undoubtedly improving as a whole in Asia, screening policies that may be applicable and deliverable in the US, may not be easily transferable to the Asia Pacific arena; criminal record checks are not universally available and are often first on the list of employment checks that new comers to Asia wish to conduct. This level of knowledge and expertise is obviously one of the great benefits of outsourcing employee screening to dedicated global employment screening providers. Scott Smith, EVP of Global Sales & Marketing for Control Risks Screening says, "Being able to provide subject matter expertise in complex and evolving legislative environments is essential to supporting compliant screening."

Continuously endeavoring to bridge the gaps between best practice in one jurisdiction and what is actually available and fit for purpose in another must be a key objective of providers. It entails, in some circumstances, the need to employ 'feet on the ground' resources, where remote access models are simply not viable. The widespread lack of digitization in countries such as Indonesia, Thailand, Vietnam and Pakistan, not to mention the regional language requirements, all work against the effective commoditization of employment screening.

Cultural sensitivities also present a challenge both in the uptake of employment screening programs and the elicitation of information. Business cultures that operate on a system of networks and contacts – 'guan xi' in China – and historical mindsets that are more familiar with the concealment of information as opposed to its disclosure can make screening a hard sell to local companies.

Increasing awareness, globalization of national and regional players, and the ability to demonstrate the intrinsic benefits and bottom line value of robust screening programs all work in the industry's favor in changing perceptions and attitudes towards employment screening. The very economic dynamism of the region can in itself be a source of problems for employers, and an opportunity for screeners. As recently reported in *Mint*, an India commercial publication, companies are setting up to provide fake employer, education and reference documentation – complete with support services such as contact telephone numbers, fictional referees, and payslips – for unscrupulous individuals trying to secure high paying positions with reputable MNC's. Local screening companies have identified approximately 250 such businesses in India alone.

A further challenge for businesses looking to put a screening program in place is the lack of regulation placed on screening providers in the region. The barrier to entry is relatively low and enables fly-by-night operators to tout low cost by offering, not surprisingly, inferior products in the market.

Investigative enquiries in poorly regulated jurisdictions can source a lot of information inappropriate for use by internationally answerable firms as a basis for hiring and firing decisions. Compliance should be the cornerstone element of any reputable screening company's ethos.

NAPBS's efforts to implement an international accreditation / standards* program are especially welcome in setting standards / guidelines* for background screening providers, as is the recent creation of the affiliated India Association of Professional Background Screeners. Accountability levels for screening providers in Asia are perhaps lower than in more mature markets and it is in the industry's own best interests to increasingly raise standards and levels of integrity, to protect the industry's reputation and professionalism, regionally and internationally. This is an area where room for improvement remains in Asia Pacific, though thankfully, the trends are headed in the right direction.

About Control Risks Screening

Dave Mattinson is the Regional Managing Director, Control Risks Screening – APAC. Control Risks Screening is a Screening International LLC company. Screening International LLC is a joint venture between Intersections Inc. (NASDAQ: INTX), based in the USA and Control Risks Group Limited, and also incorporates AmericanBackground Information Services Inc. in the USA.

Visit us at www.controlrisks-screening.com or contact us on APAC@controlrisks-screening.com or call +65 6227 2038.