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Mississauga travel management firm sees spike after Boston bombings



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A mobile app designed by e-Travel Technologies

When bombs exploded at the Boston Marathon last week, **Vision 2000** had three runners in the race.

The independent Canadian travel management company's critical incident team sprang into action to locate its employees and make sure they were safe.

"We found out pretty quickly that they were all OK," said Vision 2000 chief operating officer **Brian Robertson**, whose

company has an office on Skymark Ave. in the Airport Corporate Centre. "We know immediately, within a matter of minutes, if we've got anybody who's an employee or traveler of our company in an effected area."

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Jeff Verman wasn't watching CNN when the bombings occurred, but he knew about them instantly.

The chief executive of Mississauga-based **Uniglobe Plus Travel Group** received an email alert on his cellphone advising him of the emergency that helped the travel management company assist clients in re-routing employees away from Boston.

"I don't watch television much, but I monitor my emails all the time," said Verman, who runs the Canadian operations for the Uniglobe Travel franchise that has offices in more than 60 countries across six continents.

Both companies were first notified by an alert system developed by **e-Travel Technologies**, a small Mississauga software company that specializes in risk management solutions for travel companies.

E-Travel was founded by Don Churchill 25 years ago, but saw its technology take off after the 9/11 attacks when companies had no idea if their employees or clients were directly impacted.

"We had clients in hotels right across the street from the World Trade Centre," said Verman, who fortunately had nobody die on that day. "9/11 caused a sea change in our thinking in terms of how to best service clients. Now we wouldn't even consider going without some kind of service like this."

Churchill said governments introduced "duty of care" legislation after 9/11 that made companies liable if their employees are hurt or affected while traveling internationally. In this way the legislation operates as an extension of workplace safety policies, said Churchill.

The Travel Industry Council of Ontario now requires travel companies to have some sort of advisory system in place and e-Travel's software has been incorporated into the services offered by most of the top Canadian travel management firms.

"We basically have taken what Don had and integrated it into a whole process and as part of our value add to our clients," said Robertson, who uses e-Travel in their Vision Assure product.

In addition to alerting companies of unforeseen events such as bombings, earthquakes or tsunamis, e-Travel supplies a "know-before-you-go document" that tells employees of the risks associated with traveling to more politically unstable countries such as Syria.

It also makes workers aware of the locations of Canadian embassies and any visas or special legal documents they may need. Potential health risks are also covered and employees are informed of any inoculations they may require.

Churchill said his company issued 19,000 warnings – mostly via emails – to travelers in the wake of the Boston bombings.

As a way of enhancing their services to clients, e-Travel recently partnered with Montreal-based MagnaTech Travel Management Systems to offer their tracking service as a smartphone app.

Churchill said the partnership provides clients "further enhancement to tracking" that pinpoints the exact location of the traveler by the GPS chip in their mobile phone and has

the ability to see where that person has been walking, or driving by a process known as "bread crumbing."

He added the app will help e-Travel expand on the 500 travel agencies that currently use the service. Churchill said he has 110,000 active travelers in the company's database and that number is growing by "10 per cent a quarter."

Verman, who was an early adopter of e-Travel, said he used the technology recently to help reroute a colleague after an earthquake shook Chile.

"It makes us look great that we can provide more than just an airline ticket."

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