

MAKING GREAT BODY SHOPS EVEN BETTER



Leading global body shop equipment supplier Symach has boosted its local presence by establishing an Australia-New Zealand office in Victoria. *BodyShop News* Editor *Darren House* got to know the company's newly appointed General Manager, Australia-New Zealand, Mark Cunningham. Born and raised in Dublin, Ireland, Cunningham has worked for some of the industry's biggest names.

BODYSHOP NEWS: Mark, have you always worked in the automotive repair industry?

MARK CUNNINGHAM: I did the usual odd jobs as a teenager and later worked in a nightclub bar, which was interesting, before starting my pathway in the motor industry.

BSN: How did you come to enter the automotive repair industry?

MC: After finishing the year 12 equivalent in Ireland, I commenced a motor mechanic

apprenticeship in a dealership. I completed my trade, eventually moving into a trainee estimating role in another dealership. That journey started almost 22 years ago.

BSN: What companies have you worked for?

MC: After studying for three years at night with the IAEA [the Institute of Automotive Engineer Assessors] at the Dublin Institute of Technology, I set up a motor collision assessing business in Ireland and managed a new site set up for Ace Autobody, also in Ireland. I have

had several operational roles in other organisations in my career. My family and I relocated to Melbourne and I started with Capital S.M.A.R.T covering various roles including Estimator, Production Manager, Customer Relations Manager and Operational Support Manager. I then went to Perth to help set up their first high-severity site in Western Australia.

BSN: Who did you work for immediately prior to your appointment as General Manager of Symach Australia-New Zealand?

“We understand that there is an opportunity to make every square metre of a body shop more efficient.”

MC: I was National Operations Manager with MotorOne Repair Division. I had the opportunity to work with some amazing people and I wish them every bit of luck into the future.

BSN: What brought you to Australia, and when did you arrive?

MC: When I was a kid, I loved the idea of travel and Australia was always a dream destination. As my business in Ireland was considerably affected by the global financial crisis around 2011, my wife and I felt it was a good opportunity to follow our goals. Soon afterwards in early 2012, I moved to Melbourne.

BSN: Are there differences between the Irish and Australian industries?

MC: Yes and no. We repair vehicles the same way. In Australia, the volume model was new to me, along with efficiency concepts and equipment. In 2012 I was introduced to the Symach brand, their equipment and the massive capabilities available to sites using their equipment.

The standout difference when I first arrived would be the innovation behind the Australian business ideas.

Business owners from both countries require a good team, a business vision and future goals to succeed. Another similarity is that hard work is the backbone of any successful business, and the Australian and Irish industries have great reputations

across the world. Symach acknowledges this hard work and provides clever ways to assist a more successful outcome.

BSN: What attracted you to the Symach role?

MC: When a previous colleague offers an introduction to [Symach founder] Osvaldo [Bergaglio] that's a huge plus, but then an opportunity to work with an innovative industrial leader and the opportunity to offer clients in Australia and New Zealand a chance to build for the future – who can say no to that? I believe the Australian market is truly high quality, and the opportunity to provide clients with more options made it a quick and easy decision. Many US, Canadian and European OEM leaders use Symach concepts and technology, and with Symach the Australian collision market can also lead the way.

BSN: What drives you?

MC: I am tenacious for learning and improving. I enjoy offering solutions to teams and business owners who want to push our industry into the future. I'm lucky to have worked with some great people who have had a lasting effect on me professionally and personally. That being said, I have an opportunity to help our industry move forward with my role in Symach. I believe we all have a part to play and I admire business owners who put time into learning via the likes of TAFE and



I-CAR. I love being part of an industry that wants to be better. This drives me.

BSN: What's the best piece of advice you've been given?

MC: A good friend of mine advised me to be patient and grateful for what we have every day. Nothing is perfect but it does not stop you from working towards something that is better. Every day is a learning curve.

BSN: Do you have a favourite quote?

MC: I have lots of amazing people who have passed through my life in business and life generally, but an old football coach used to always say, "Fail to Prepare, Prepare to Fail." This has stuck in my mind.

BSN: Do you have a business idol?

MC: To just pick one person is tricky. I would have to choose someone who picks themselves up, dusts themselves off, and goes again. Someone with their own view, who likes the idea of simplicity and brought about change to the technology market. It would have to be Steve Jobs. He had many failures, some of his own doing, but he still found a way to improve and go again.

BSN: Excluding family, name four people, living or dead, who you'd love to invite to a dinner party.

MC: I would love to pick ideas from past relatives but Steve Jobs for design and leadership. Elon Musk, from Tesla, for innovative insight. Roy Keane, an Irish sporting great, for overcoming setbacks, addressing failures and a winning team mentality. Lastly, Sally Pearson for her mindset of success and achieving so many goals for Australia in her sporting career. There are lots of strong personalities here, but it would be an interesting dinner party.

BSN: Why establish an Australian Symach office?



MC: Symach's long term plan is to grow and service our client base globally. Symach has found a growing trend of clients looking to be leaders within the collision industry and improve efficiency within their companies. Symach wanted to establish an Australian office to support existing Australian customers and to build the future of Symach while still controlling the destiny of the brand.

BSN: How was Australia serviced prior to your appointment?

MC: Our client base in Australia was previously serviced by our team in Italy which required travel to Australia, and some remote solutions. We also invited an Australian-based maintenance company to Italy for product and maintenance training.

BSN: Tell me about your role as General Manager.

MC: My role as GM has been different from most. Upon my return from full training in Italy, Australia was impacted – along with the rest of the world – by the outbreak of COVID-19, and with it, isolation restrictions. However, with the aid of technology I have been able to chat over the phone and via video with market leaders, such as paint producers, equipment distributors and business owners. I feel the growing need from clients to set up a more efficient layout, such as Symach's Fixline system, which will allow businesses to improve performance during the times ahead.

BSN: Do you plan to appoint more staff?

MC: We have a business plan to evolve the Symach brand, which includes adding key appointments in sales, technicians and the admin team to support our clients' requirements. Phase by phase is our goal.



Mark with wife Jessica (left), dog Ole, daughters Kerri (centre) and Olivia (second from right) along with Mark's mother Maria, who came to Melbourne on holiday from Ireland but could not return due to COVID-19 restrictions.

BSN: How will you attract and service clients outside of Victoria?

MC: The Symach brand is world renowned. Victoria has a large footprint for the collision repair industry within Australia. We aim to attract and service all clients nationally, not just Victoria, and feel quality conversations with business owners and forward-thinking MSOs, groups, insurers and individuals is the correct stepping stone to listening to our clients or future clients' needs. Quality over quantity is our aim.

BSN: How can customers benefit from Symach's products and services?

MC: Symach offers a full turn-key package and our own manufacturing plant ensures quality products are produced. Symach's world leading technology uniquely equips our clients with LEAN processes, which in turn allows quicker ROI and reduced labour and energy costs.

We understand that there is an opportunity to make every square metre of a body shop more efficient. Symach's many years of experience in this area of

business allows our clients to reduce the cost of repairs per vehicle, on average, by 30 per cent. Our processes reduce the key to key times, which allows more vehicles to be completed, improving the business' bottom-line.

BSN: What short- and long-term goals have been set?

MC: I believe the short-term goals need to be adjusted considering the global pandemic. Putting health and wellbeing above everything else is a must. Part of these short-term goals in the current environment has been to network, which I can continue to do in order to offer advice via phone calls, emails and Skype.

Our long-term plan is to grow our network by having positive relations with distributors, paint manufacturers and clients. Adding valuable team members to our Symach Australia and New Zealand team and constantly working towards a better future by having these conversations today is all a part of forward planning.

BSN: Apart from pausing face-to-face communication, how has COVID-19 impacted Symach?

MC: COVID-19 has hit every business globally in one way or another; Symach is no different. Regardless of COVID-19, at every stage there will be obstacles when

Symach was established in 2001 in Bologna, Italy by Osvaldo Bergaglio. Operating from a 15,800-square-metre facility, Symach produces equipment for body shops and offers professional consulting in process design, organisation and training.

Symach says it supports industry change through the design of new repair processes and body shop layouts. This support covers training programmes for technicians and managers, including topics such as programming roles, daily scheduling of repairs, correct management of spare parts flow as well as weekly reports and KPIs.

In 2002, Symach patented Drytronic technology, which it says dries all paint produced in just a few seconds. Drytronic is the basis for more than 30 different Symach body shop products, including RoboDry, EasyDry, SprayTron, KombiTron, CarMover, and ShopLine. UV

technology products are also available, such as the UVA-LedTronic M1 handheld lamp and the FlyDry robot for preparation bays.

In 2004, the company introduced the SPAP (Symach Paint Application Process) to aid the efficiency of body shop processes.

A decade later, Symach introduced an innovative conveyor system called Fixline, a combination of unique repair processes based on the size of repairs. Symach says Fixline has a creative layout centred on innovative and automated equipment, using new proprietary technology that allows technicians to work continuously and efficiently from the beginning to the end of a repair. The company says these processes reduce the cost of repair by 25 to 30 per cent and yield a key-to-key time of two days on average. More than 140 Fixline systems have been installed across the world.

setting up a division, but I feel confident in the Symach brand and what it offers to the Australian and global markets. Symach offers a cost-effective solution on long term plans, and from what I have seen, Australian business owners are investing time researching innovation that allows them to be more productive, and savvier with future planning.

Once COVID-19 passes, which it will as all the brilliant health workers across the globe are working extremely hard to eradicate it, our collision industry will grow into a more innovated industry and business owners will investigate leading technology. Investing in Symach solutions today equips you for the future. It is the 'changemaker'.

BodyShop
Australia



watch the video



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