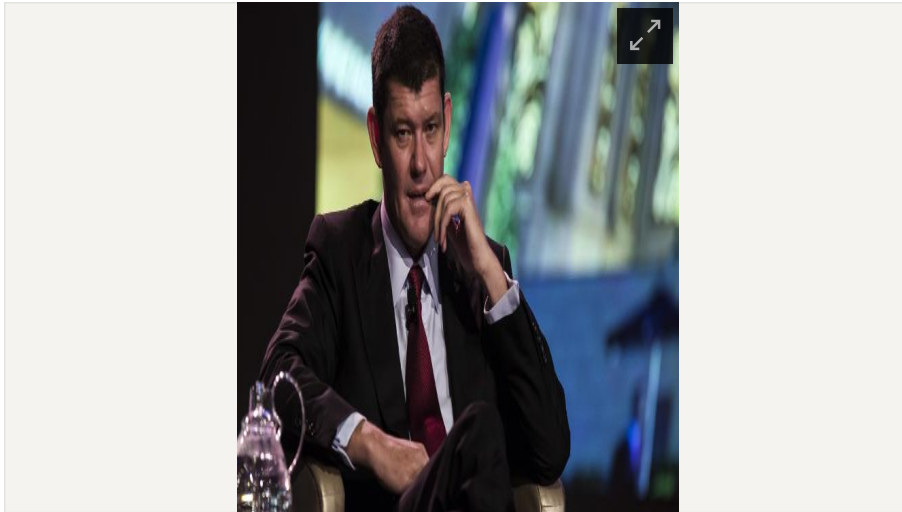


## James Packer's Macau casino chased high rollers, Four Corners reveals



James Packer's Crown casino in Macau has struggled since the arrest of 15 people late last year. Picture: Bloomberg

SARAH-JANE TASKER THE AUSTRALIAN 9:15PM March 6, 2017

The James Packer-backed Crown Resorts' head of international marketing drove an "expensive" recruitment program to boost its China team to chase high rollers, before Chinese authorities swooped on the employees for gambling-related offences.

Macau casino consultant Michael Lee told ABC's Four Corners, in its program on Crown's China arrests aired last night, that the casino company's head of international marketing, Michael Chen, was "very ambitious" in his plans for attracting Chinese VIPs.

"He obviously had a very high target to meet to justify, I suppose, his appointment and he in turn went on a very expensive program to recruit just about anybody and everybody he could in terms of on the ground marketing experience," Mr Lee said.

"He went through Macau, Hong Kong, China, even down to Cambodia, Malaysia, Singapore and recruited a very, very big team of people."

Crown's VIP business imploded in October, when 15 staff were detained and arrested in China on gambling-related matters. Only one person has since been released, with 14 still awaiting charge.

The well-orchestrated raids suggested the operation was some time in the planning. Crown's vice-president of international VIP, Jason O'Connor, who was on a short visit to the mainland at the time, is among those detained. Chinese authorities also reportedly took laptops and mobile phones from the Crown employees that were said to contain extensive details of the high-roller operation.

Four Corners said it had been told that Mr O'Connor had become increasingly anxious about travelling to China but felt under pressure to keep the business growing.

"He was there because he was told to go there, he was just doing his job ... he wasn't a rogue employee, he wasn't doing anything he wasn't told to do, he was doing what his job required him to do," Andrew Scott, publisher of Inside Asian Gaming told the program.

Despite the obvious impact from the Chinese arrests, Crown's VIP activity is down 45 per cent, and market rumours that it related to not only the marketing of its Australian casinos but also involvement in money transfers, Crown chairman John Alexander said recently that Crown's China strategy was on "pause rather than retreat".

"There is no intention to retreat from the market on where we stand as a six-star hotel providore," he said.

Crown chief financial officer Ken Barton said at the release of the company's financial results last month that the company was still trying to get clarity on why its employees had been arrested, almost five months after they were detained.

Four Corners reported that Crown's China marketing guru, Mr Chen, was at home in Hong Kong the night of the raids, adding that he was free but had been put on permanent leave by Crown. The program also said it had confirmed reports that some of Crown's

top VIP clients in China had been brought in for questioning by police.

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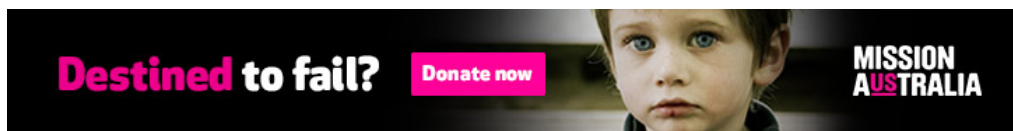
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