

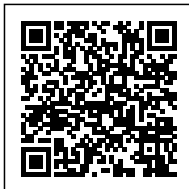
A TESTING GROUND FOR SOCIAL NETWORKING - OSBORNE CLARKE

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Marta Plana

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The global growth in online social networking is prompting US-based businesses to establish a permanent presence in Europe, and Spain is high on their agenda, says Marta Plana, Head of IT and IP at Osborne Clarke in Barcelona.

'There is an industry belief that the cultural make-up of Southern European countries makes people here more likely to embrace the social networking concept, and as a result a number of players wishing to establish a permanent European operational base are initially focusing on Spain.'

Plana spent a number of years as a lawyer with Microsoft in the US, and therefore understands some of the strategic drivers of technology companies. A local presence enables operators to think

globally but act locally, she says. A European presence helps to shape the nuances of sites, but also to ensure the necessary translation of concepts and legal terms, as well as to better support local users.

'The global economic crisis is bringing changes to the market, including international expansion, quicker than might otherwise be the case. US players particularly are very interested in a better user balance, which means focusing on Europe, while the opposite is also true – European networks are establishing themselves in the US.'

El crecimiento global de las redes sociales está haciendo que muchos operadores se hagan 'móviles' y consideren establecerse de manera permanente en Europa, teniendo España prioridad en sus miras, comenta Marta Plana, Responsable de IT en Barcelona de Osborne Clarke.

But there is much more to social networking than sites such as Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn, she emphasises. The entire concept is evolving with new players and business models, including the expansion into entertainment and media networks, as announced in October by MySpace.

'A significant factor in this is the creation of 'lite' versions of established sites and the migration to mobile and smart phones, but which itself raises new regulatory and business issues.'

Spain is also seen therefore as a testing ground in many respects for these new delivery channels, because of the strength of its data protection, communications and regulatory frameworks, says Plana.

'The evolution of social networking raises issues both for the service providers as well as, for example, mobile carriers – not only in the way data is transmitted, accessed and downloaded, but even in the way and where devices are used.'