

AT HOME AND ABROAD, THE NEED TO ADD CLIENT VALUE - VIEIRA DE ALMEIDA

Posted on 16/08/2008



Category: [Uncategorized](#)



The poor economic climate means that law firms must get even closer to their clients, and to demonstrate that they can add value on inbound and outbound business, says João Vieira de Almeida of Vieira de Almeida & Associados.

A recurring issue but also clearly an opportunity for Iberian law firms is how to demonstrate value to clients as they manoeuvre through the prevailing testing business environment, believes João Vieira de Almeida, managing partner at Vieira de Almeida & Associados, which must inevitably also extend to those clients looking to expand beyond merely domestic operations, regardless of where firms themselves operate.

"For law firms the prevailing economic crisis means that we need to make sure we stand by our clients and to help them through any hardships, to focus on and allocate resources to the practices that are in demand but also to anticipate what will be required from us when the good times start to roll again."

These are times to make tough decisions, he says. "But I also believe that this is the moment to make smart decisions and for companies, and their law firms, to prepare for the inevitable upturn of the cycle."

It is undeniable that the cost of financing and the weariness of lenders have made it difficult to structure any transaction, no matter how good it looks, he says, but nonetheless the potential clearly remains for excellent deal opportunities on the buying side.

"It is amazing how the balance of power has changed at the negotiating table, from the seller to the buyer, even within Portugal it is very clear that certain companies, including flagship ones now trade at bargain prices -and that means there are plenty of opportunities."

The international experience of many Iberian law firms – in terms of commercial business outlook and deal expertise – can inevitably bring value to companies assessing their options, at home and abroad, says Vieira de Almeida.

"We do believe we can add, and have added, value to our clients, and particularly those doing deals abroad. But it is, however, a different equation from the large international firms, who can assist their clients by providing local law expertise, through their own networks of local offices, or by advising on UK or US law which can apply to many deals irrespective of the relevant jurisdiction."

An Iberian, or at least Portuguese, presence in international transactions may well require a different scope and function.

"We may act where, for example, the local applicable laws are similar to ours, such as when clients undertake transactions in the former Portuguese colonies, or where we are so close to the client that we are required to take on a coordinating role, instructing local counsel and 'translating' their advice," he says.

In addition, there are certain business sectors and practice areas, such as project finance and public and private partnerships (PPPs), where Portuguese firms have amassed enormous know-how, which can prove invaluable to clients irrespective of where they are doing business, he believes.



"The fact that we know the client can make a significant difference in terms of ensuring a seamless transaction process, wherever they do business."
João Vieira de Almeida, Vieira de Almeida & Associados

"Surprising things do happen. When we first went to Brazil with motorway operator Brisa to negotiate the country's first road project, we were delighted to find that the concession agreement put forward by the Brazilian government was basically the same as we had drafted for the Portuguese Government for the New Tagus Bridge project. A Brazilian team had spent time studying the Portuguese case and adopted the same draft."

Iberia's law firms must therefore continue to look ahead, to identify where the next opportunities may lie, and in order to best position themselves and to help clients take advantage of situations as they unfold, says Vieira de Almeida.

"The fact that we know the client, their risk profile, the soft-spots, the overall strategy and goals, the compliance requirements, for example, can make a significant difference in terms of ensuring a seamless transaction process, wherever they do business."