

CLIENTS LOOKING FOR NEW TYPES OF LEGAL SERVICES AND PROVIDERS

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Legal departments continue to focus on cost control, greater efficiency and sourcing new forms of legal service

Over 150 General Counsel and Managing Partners from major Spanish and Portuguese business and law firms were able to share their reflections on the impact of the international financial crisis and the changing face of legal services at the recent International Legal Summit, organised by *Iberian Lawyer* in Lisbon.

"There is much talk in the air of a revolution in the delivery of corporate legal services but our aim is to discover what's actually happening on the ground," said Peter Cornell, former Global Managing Partner of Clifford Chance and now a Director at Terra Firma, who opened the Summit.

Law firms are however struggling to adapt to what some call the "new normal", participants

heard. Professor Richard Susskind, author of *The End of Lawyers? Rethinking the Nature of Legal Services* addressed the conference stating that the nature of the delivery of legal services is undergoing a period of extreme change. Law firms that do not examine what this change means to them and their clients are at serious risk.

"The future is never the same as the past. There are a lot of ideas around new technologies and we have been adapting and making use of this potential. Such concepts may be provocative and challenging but not out of reach," stated Rui Mayer, General Counsel of Galp Energia.

Law firms servicing Galp are already using new delivery methods and outsourcing work to smaller firms where it proves more efficient, he said. "Big problems cannot be solved, they have to be broken down in to smaller problems. We look to break matters down and allocate work to those best suited to do it, in line with where we see the best value for us."

Law firms need therefore to objectively ask what elements of their current workload can be undertaken more quickly, more cheaply, more efficiently, or to a higher quality using different and new methods of working, heard participants. There is a market pull towards commoditisation and the development and uptake of new and disruptive legal technologies.

"A general trend emanating from the crisis is that even profitable companies face pressure to reduce costs and find greater efficiencies. From a legal perspective, this means paying less for external advice," said Antonio Alves, General Counsel, Portucel Soporcel Group.

Other European countries may now be seeing a modest return to growth but the economic challenges that continue to face Spain and Portugal means that here cost control will however remain the dominant trend. "The focus will remain firmly on the bottom line, for the next one, two or three years at least," said Alves.