

CLIENTS WANT 'BUSINESS-FOCUSED LAWYERS' PROVIDING CLEAR, CONCISE ADVICE

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External law firms must understand better the role of in-house lawyers and 'provide advice in bullet points, not 30-page memos'

In the future, clients will want more business-oriented lawyers who can provide them with clear, concise and succinct advice, participants at the recent Iberian Lawyer Legal Summit 2015 heard. The event – which was held at Lisbon's Pestana Palace – sought to examine the current challenges facing in-house lawyers, and it was general counsels' need of external lawyers with a business-focused approach that emerged as one of the key themes.

"External lawyers need to understand their client's business, the role of the client's in-house lawyer and have a good understanding of what the client actually does," said one participant. He added: "They [external lawyers] also need to understand the role of the in-house lawyer, and appreciate that the general counsel is providing a service to colleagues in their organisation."

Consequently, external counsel need to ensure that their legal advice is brief and quickly gets to the heart of the matter. "Twenty to 30-page memos are not acceptable," said one attendee. "What in-house lawyers need are bullet points and an executive summary."

Develop 'sub-skills'

The need for external counsel to "speak their client's language" was another trend identified during the discussion. As one participant put it: "Clients want a more 'business-type' lawyer, they want someone who speaks their language, so they need multi-jurisdictional and multilingual lawyers. But that's not all. In addition, clients want their external counsel to have a set of 'sub-skills', which include problem-solving and being able to manage people.



From the perspective of external counsel, one of the concerns raised was that, if a law firm is retained by a client to handle their 'day-to-day' legal matters, that firm then tends to be overlooked for big-ticket work. Another challenge for law firms is that while IBEX 35 companies, for example, want the most senior lawyers, they only have small budgets for legal services.

Despite the view among some participants that clients increasingly want international law firms, other attendees argued that there would always be a place for local firms. "For tax and employment matters, for example, we always go for a local firm," remarked one participant.

One trend that was observed and will cause some concern among private practice lawyers is the tendency for clients to train non-legal staff to carry out some legal tasks. One attendee said that some clients train staff on the business-side of the company to do some legal work and that external firms are used merely for "second-opinions".

[Click here to see more about the event](#)

Event: Iberian Lawyer Legal Summit
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