

DEMONSTRATING VALUE THROUGH BUSINESS PRINCIPLES - NOVABASE

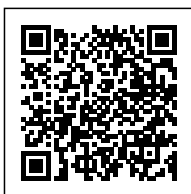
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“ Unfortunately, increasingly busy arbitrators have led to greater delays in issuing awards. It is incumbent on arbitrators to do their work quickly and intensely once the parties have finished theirs. ”

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To communicate the rationale behind a growing team, legal managers have to use the same language as their business colleagues, says Carina Branco Oostergetel at Novabase

El papel del departamento legal de Novabase, empresa Portuguesa líder en el sector de las nuevas tecnologías, ha cambiado en los últimos años. Según Carina Branco Oostergetel, directora de asesoría jurídica, ahora ya no se centra en el crecimiento, sino que trata asuntos similares a los que preocupan a muchas otras empresas en épocas de recesión: cumplimiento normativo, gestión de riesgos y expansión internacional.

The role of the legal department at leading Portuguese IT company Novabase has undergone a clear change of focus over the last few years, says the Head of Legal, Carina Branco Oostergetel. Having gone from an emphasis on managing the growth of the Group, and of the legal team, the main issues now facing the department are similar to those affecting many other businesses in light of a domestic economic downturn: compliance and risk management are priorities, as well as how to oversee the company's increasing international operations.

"The downturn has placed more pressure on areas like sales and marketing and in our business sector there are inevitably more market players chasing fewer new business opportunities. We have however to be mindful that the ambitious targets that are sometimes set do not lead to any cutting of corners. As a company we have to do things properly, at home and in the new markets we are exploring."

The ultimate goal of the legal team is therefore to ensure that the ways in which the individual business divisions meet their targets is in line with the Group's wider corporate culture and reporting obligations.

"In some sense we are now policemen, making sure the business divisions do not do whatever they 'have to' do in order to reach their goals. But we cannot be merely reactive or perform this role in isolation. We have to walk the corridors, talk to managers and understand the day-to-day pressures and issues they actually face."

Founded in 1989 as a software house, Novabase has evolved to become Portugal's leading IT business solutions company. It has been listed on the Lisbon Euronext exchange since 2000 and in 2010 recorded revenues of €236.3 million, almost 15 percent of which was generated outside of the country. It now has over 2,000 employees, operations in 28 countries and offices in Portugal, Spain, Germany, France, Angola and in the Middle East.

The international growth of Novabase inevitably presents legal issues but the strategies adopted by the legal team abroad echo those utilised at home, insists Branco Oostergetel. The company's lawyers have accompanied colleagues to markets across, Asia, Europe and Africa.

"We are usually among the first members of the organisation to go to a new market, to meet our suppliers and partners and to help determine the types of agreements we want to enter into. To truly understand the operational risks a new country presents, and the legal structures required to

mitigate them, cannot be done from our desks in Lisbon.”

Branco Oostergetel began her career at Lisbon firm Albuquerque e Associados where she gained an intensive training in cross-border transactions, she says, subsequently joining Novabase in 2002 to lead the legal team albeit as only the company's second lawyer. Nonetheless the scale of the company's ambition and its rapid growth quickly prompted a need to expand the in-house capability.

“First, we had to demonstrate that in-house lawyers are more than just a cost. We therefore utilised the company's own reporting and business language and methodologies to justify the need for growth that we were facing. Using the same influencing tools as our sales colleagues we had to show how the Group as a whole would benefit from the reinforcement of the legal force.”

This meant monitoring daily workloads, recording areas of increasing demand, and using international benchmarks to measure the existing team's performance against the norms of the IT and software sector – although most measures did not then include Portugal.

Three years on, the legal team now comprises four lawyers and a paralegal with work being allocated along corporate and commercial, litigation and public procurement lines, which better reflected the major internal client need, explains Branco Oostergetel.

“What was significant was that by communicating well what we had already achieved we gained the trust of the Board who saw the cost benefit of what we wanted to do. And as we predicted, a larger in-house team is still significantly more cost-effective than using a larger number of external law firms.”

Carina Branco Oostergetel is the Head of Legal at publicly-listed Portugese IT and solutions company Novabase.