

LITIGATE TO ACCUMULATE - IRWIN MITCHELL

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José María De Lorenzo

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Mediation and arbitration activity are on the rise in Spain, and Irwin Mitchell's office in Madrid is poised to capitalise

La oficina de Irwin Mitchell en Madrid ha conseguido en el último año un crecimiento del 17% en su facturación y ya está planeando los siguientes pasos a seguir, afirma José María De Lorenzo. Para el 2013 pretende duplicar el número de abogados y abrir nuevas áreas de práctica.

Irwin Mitchell's route to Madrid has been markedly different from most. The firm opened in Spain in 2005, specifically Malaga; not the first destination for many firms of its size when entering into the Spanish market.

José María De Lorenzo, Managing Partner in Spain, explains that the Malaga office initially focused on litigation for international clients but grew fast, resulting in more domestic clients requiring services, especially banks requiring defence counsel in civil cases. As the financial hub of Spain, critical mass in Madrid was vital to meet changing client needs.

Irwin Mitchell's Madrid foothold was consolidated 18 months ago with the takeover of L&E Solución Legal and Empresarial to take advantage of rising litigation and data protection demands.

"Spaniards are not historically as litigious as the UK, but there has been a significant rise in activity since the downturn and the problems with the cajas," says De Lorenzo. "Banks are increasingly facing claims regarding mortgage enforcement or the mis-selling of products."

De Lorenzo points out that Madrid is not just about banking disputes; insurance and commercial litigation are also prevalent.

"We're also seeing more mediation and arbitration, with alternative dispute resolution becoming an attractive option because it is easier and cheaper than traditional litigation," says De Lorenzo, "plus the Spanish civil courts can be slow in processing cases".

Irwin Mitchell's Madrid office saw a 17 percent growth in revenue last year and is now looking at the next step of evolution. The branch started with three lawyers and currently has 17 – the ambition is to double that amount in 2013 and to expand further into dispute resolution and other practice areas.

With Irwin Mitchell as one of the first firms to apply to become an alternative business structure (ABS) in the UK, it remains to be seen how this will affect its offices in Spain.