

REFLECTING THE CHANGING IP FACE OF BARCELONA - GRAU & ANGULO

Posted on 26/04/2011



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Evidence of Barcelona's reinvention as a city of modern industry and technology can be found in the changes evident in the city's own law firms

Barcelona intellectual property (IP) litigation boutique Grau & Angulo counts a wide range of multinational companies across the high technology, fashion, pharma, mass consumer and automotive industries as clients. It could be held up as an example of the industrial and entrepreneurial spirit that Barcelona attracts and fosters in the people who work there. La transformación de Barcelona como ciudad de nuevas tecnologías se hace notar en los despachos, que ahora tienen una variedad de clientes en los sectores de la moda, el automóvil o la tecnología punta. Para Alejandro Angulo y Jorge Grau, de Grau & Angulo, ello plantea retos sobretodo en PI claves para la competitividad internacional de las empresas.

But this only tells half the story, say the firm's lawyers. Grau & Angulo has also capitalised on a fairly recent shift in the legal market in which boutiques have thrived. Their success, they say, is no more down to the Barcelona economy than that of Belize.

"It isn't very important in which part of Spain we are located," says Co-Founding Partner Alejandro Angulo. "We always deal with our foreign clients' company headquarters abroad."

And here lies the paradox for Western European cities. With almost all traditional manufacturing having relocated to the East, be it Europe or Asia, modern industries like IT, life sciences and design are as attractive to law firms as sectors such as the textiles, automotive and steel production they



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increasingly replace. But, say Angulo and his Co-Founding Partner Jorge Grau, Spanish IP law is not centred in any particular location. Instead, its reach is both nationwide and international, reflecting the geography of "big brand" clients and the nature of the cases they engage in.

It is a theme that reveals the macro challenge faced by Western European cities, including Barcelona, that compete for industries that now operate in a global market.

"Our cases are not only presented before the courts of Barcelona because the competent court depends on the domicile of the defendant," says Grau. "We regularly also present cases in Madrid (where we have an office), Valencia and Alicante – specifically because of its community trademark and design court, whose judgments impact across the European Union."

Only 20 percent of the firm's clients are Spanish, they say. The strategic focus is towards IP litigation and advice rather than filing work with the Spanish Patent and Trademark Office. Grau & Angulo has grown significantly since it was founded in 2003 and now counts around 26 lawyers and seven partners. The firm is also now building a dedicated Knowledge Management department for clients. One reason why boutique firms continue to find success in the economic downturn is because of the ever shrinking budgets of in-house legal teams, they say. "A consequence of being specialised is that while charging the same hourly rates, one can get the job done more efficiently so fewer hours are needed," says Angulo.

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With such optimism, the firm is therefore relatively relaxed about the outlook for the years ahead but nonetheless remains careful not to over-extend itself.

"We will hire two or three more lawyers during 2011, but growth is not our primary goal. We are a potent but manageable size right now. But who knows, the increasing

demands of our clients could force us to expand further," says Grau.

Interestingly, Barcelona can claim some ownership of its IP lawyers. The city has a thriving Court of Appeal and Judges with deep commercial awareness, probably with the highest degree of specialisation in the country.

"This is one of the reasons why, traditionally, Barcelona always attracted good lawyers," explains Angulo. Although with the specialisation of other courts such as Alicante, Barcelona is no longer the only one in terms of IP specialisation, he adds. Perhaps not, but it cannot do the city any harm to have historic roots in an expanding market.