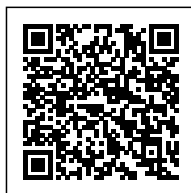


THE IN-HOUSE ROLE: MORE DEMANDING BUT MORE IN DEMAND

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Category: [In-house news](#)



The role of in-house lawyers is changing continually, according to participants at a recent high profile conference in Madrid.

The conference, hosted by ACC Europe, part of the Association of Corporate Counsel (ACC), a global organisation based in Washington DC, attracted over 200 general counsel to attend a three-day programme as part of its annual European gathering.

ACC is an international association of in-house lawyers, originally based in the US where it has more than 24,000 members, but now operating across Europe where it counts around 1,000 members. The theme of this year's conference was *In-house lawyers as leaders in a global World*.

"The in-house profession is facing exciting though perilous times," says Frederick Krebs, President of ACC. In the period since he began his leadership role, in 1991, he believes that the process of globalisation of business has placed increasing pressure on in-house lawyers, raising both individual and client expectations.

In response, he says, the in-house legal profession has become better organised, self confident and more prestigious. "The role has become both quantitatively and qualitatively better in that in-house lawyers now work much more closely with and bring a higher value to the business, assuming, that is, that the client lets you in."

While in-house lawyers have in the past been introduced to save costs and complete commodity type work, conference participants heard how the situation is reversing with a growing realisation among many company executives of the increasing strategic importance of the in-house legal team. It is the commoditised work which is now more routinely being sent to external lawyers.

"The in-house message to their business is get me involved early and I can assist as a facilitator but if you get me involved at the end my role is only that of a policeman," says Krebs.

A key element of this process has been the rise in personal professional liability of business executives, the criminalisation of certain business activities and business structures, as well as the increased use of class action litigation – "It would be very unfortunate if US plaintiff litigators were to import class actions into Europe," he adds.

Maria Jesus Alonso, representative of ACC in Spain, believes that there has been an under-representation of in-house lawyers in Spain, although this is now changing. "Increasingly businesses are seeing how in-house lawyers can assist the enterprise and add value," she says. "Internal lawyers know the business better and the key issues that are often hard to communicate to external lawyers."



ACC Europe President, Tony Wales, and General Counsel of AOL International, agrees. "This process is inevitable, I believe, as Spanish companies increasingly operate across Europe and globally. The complexity of doing business cross-border is difficult wherever you are in the world."