

WHAT CLIENTS WANT: GETTING UNDER THE SKIN OF THE IN-HOUSE COUNSEL

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Iberian Lawyer's In-House Club Event showcases new Study highlighting the needs of In-House Counsel, and debuts its inaugural 'Gold Awards'

Knowing what your client wants is likely at the top of any law firm's 'wish list'. And at an Iberian Lawyer Event held at the Intercontinental Hotel in Madrid, over 120 leading lawyers from Spain's largest companies, and Iberia's most prestigious law firms, were given just that information. Iberian Lawyer's In-House Club presented the audience with the first Study in Spain to look in-depth at the Iberian In-House legal market, sponsored by GdGESTION, Cuatrecasas Gonçalves, Pereira, Ecija, Garrigues, Linklaters and Pérez-Llorca.

Iñigo Cisneros, Head of Legal at GESE Holding and coordinator of the Study in collaboration with Iberian Lawyer, stated that times have changed dramatically, and In-House Counsel must now adopt a business approach to the management and contracting of legal services. "The findings of

the Study demonstrate the way forward for law firms in order to achieve the most productive relationships with in-house legal departments."

Of the 200 General Counsel and Heads of Legal invited to participate, over 90 percent responded, representing 85% of the IBEX 35 and other domestic companies with a turnover of over €300m. The findings of the Study were debated by a panel of General Counsel, that included Beatriz Martínez-Falero - Head of Legal at Mahou-San Miguel, Juan Venegas - Corporate General Counsel at ADVEO, Javier Somoza - General Counsel at Pullmantur, Pablo Darna - General Counsel at Hospital Clínico, and Luis Elías - General Counsel at Grupo Planeta.

The fundamental theme that ran throughout the research and the debate was the importance of 'trust' between In-House Counsel and their external counsel. "The relationship between an In-House Counsel and their external law firm can only be successful if founded on the basis of mutual trust," says Venegas at ADVEO. As panel member Somoza, at Pullmantur, highlighted that he had been using the same law firm consistently throughout his career despite changing sectors. "When I find someone I trust, I stick with them."

In particular, strong relationships were key in light of downward pressure on legal department budgets at a time when the regulatory and compliance needs of many businesses are on the increase. "Just because we are in a crisis doesn't automatically mean that legal budgets should decrease," says Martínez-Falero at Mahou-San Miguel. "The current environment means that problems are multiplying and so companies need their legal counsel even more." More than ever, In-House Counsel find it is necessary to find and agree new formulas for increasing the efficiency of legal expenses.

The current environment requires a level of imagination, innovation and creativity to do so, and secondments were highlighted as a means by which to do so and also by which closer bonds can be built with external law firms.

"I am a big fan of secondments," says Somoza at Pullmantur, "but you really need someone who understands your problems". For external law firms, he adds, sending someone in-house has huge advantages - they get to know your problems and how you work."

This overall emphasis on trust was exemplified in the climax of the event as Iberian Lawyer launched its first ever 'Gold Awards' - a recognition of outstanding lawyers and law firms by their own clients.

Recognising legal excellence

The 'Gold Awards' were based on a part of the Study where Heads of Legal from Spain's largest companies were asked to nominate law firms in three distinct categories.

The 'Gold Award for Most Trusted Legal Advisers' recognises the law firm most valued by clients in terms of trust. The award went to Garrigues, with Uría Menéndez and Cuatrecasas Gonçalves Pereira second and third. Accepting the award on behalf of the firm, Fernando Vives, Managing Partner at Garrigues said: "The award is recognition of the nature and spirit of the firm, in that we always strive to be the 'client lawyer'."

Allen & Overy was the recipient of the 'Gold Award for Added-Value', which acknowledges a law firm that offered a service on a specific project that exceeded client expectations. Baker & McKenzie and Herbert Smith Freehills came in second and third place. "I believe that the most valuable benefit that we can offer our clients is to be creative in our approach and find solutions to complex situations," said Iñigo Gómez Jordana, Managing Partner at Allen & Overy. "It is an honor to be recognized by the major Spanish companies for that."

The final 'Gold Award for Individual Lawyer Excellence' went to Juan Barona, Partner also at Allen & Overy in Madrid, who was recognised as offering an outstanding service to the client .

research@iberianlegalgroup.com