



# FROM NECESSITY TO STRATEGY: HOW SPAIN'S LAW FIRMS ARE NAVIGATING THE AI REVOLUTION

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## WHY SPAIN IS A COMPELLING CASE STUDY

Spain offers a particularly interesting lens through which to look at how the legal profession is changing. Its legal market has traditionally been seen as formal, procedure-heavy, and deeply relationship-driven. For years, that meant change often came slowly. But over the last five years, Spain has become a surprisingly revealing example of how quickly a legal market can evolve when client pressure, operational demands and regulation start moving (almost) in the same direction.

What makes Spain stand out is not simply that law firms have adopted more technology. Many markets can say that. The more interesting story is how that adoption has happened. It began as a practical response to disruption during the pandemic, then accelerated under pressure from clients demanding more predictability, transparency and value. Now it is entering a new

phase, shaped in large part by artificial intelligence (“AI”) and the regulatory framework developing around it.

Generative AI and Agentic AI have now intensified that shift. It has exposed the gap between how firms operate and what clients increasingly expect, and it has done so very quickly. For Spanish firms, that creates both risk and opportunity. For outside observers, it makes Spain a useful and interesting case study of what legal modernization looks like when driven not by theory but by real commercial pressure.

## THE PRE-AI MODERNIZATION ARC (C. 2021–2023): OPERATIONAL CHANGE DISGUISED AS CONTINUITY

From the outside, the first phase of modernization in Spain did not look revolutionary. In many firms, it appeared as a practical consolidation of habits adopted during the pandemic, such as more remote coordination, more structured document

handling or closer attention to cybersecurity. But the deeper shift was not really about gadgets, it was about process. Spanish firms were slowly beginning to treat legal work as something that could be organized, standardized and monitored more deliberately, rather than left entirely to individual working styles.

One important nuance in the Spanish case is that this was not the starting point of judicial digitization. The foundations had been laid earlier through the framework for electronic justice and the general obligation for justice professionals to interact electronically with the courts. What changed between 2021 and 2023 was the sense that digital interaction was no longer just a formal requirement, but an operational reality that firms had to build around. The Ministry of Justice’s (the “Ministry”) 2030 agenda and its 2022–2023 digital transformation projects placed interoperability, common electronic commu-

nications, digital infrastructure and access to the electronic case file at the center of reform.

That mattered in practice. In 2023, LexNET (the digital platform for the electronic exchange of documentation between judicial bodies and legal professionals) was already operating at very high volume, with hundreds of millions of notifications and well over one hundred million submissions by professionals. The Ministry also launched Carpeta Justicia in June 2023 as a single access point for citizens, companies and legal professionals, with the stated aim of improving access to digital justice services regardless of territory and advancing full interoperability; by October 2023, professionals' access to the electronic case file through Carpeta Justicia and Visor Horus (the file visualizer used by the Ministry) was being expanded. For firms, this meant that digital workflow discipline was becoming part of day-to-day legal practice, not a back-office improvement project.

At the same time, clients were also changing. Spanish market studies on LegalTech in law firms and in-house legal teams increasingly framed efficiency, intake, pricing and better process visibility as unmet needs. The firms that adapted best understood this early.

## 2024: THE YEAR "LEGAL OPERATIONS" EVOLVED FROM A DEPARTMENT INTO A STRATEGY

By 2024, the conversation in Spain had clearly moved beyond simply adopting new tools. The real issue was no longer whether firms should digitize, but how legal work should be organized, supervised and delivered. That shift was visible across the market. For instance, the Informe Innovación y Tendencias del Sector Legal 2024, presented at Madrid's Bar Association (Ilustre Colegio de la Abogacía de Madrid or ICAM) – the biggest bar association in Spain – highlighted that technological innovation was gaining real weight in the business and growth strategies of Spanish legal operators, while the debate around generative AI was already being framed as part of a broader rethinking of the legal function.

In practical terms, that meant a more operational mindset. Firms and legal teams were paying closer attention to standardization, workflow design, consistency and turnaround times. The best example came from Iberdrola's Legal Hub, recognized in 2024 by the Financial Times for operational transformation through a contract lifecycle platform that digitized the full contract process and legal queries at scale. The broader

market conversation was moving in the same direction, with Spanish legal leaders openly linking AI to efficiency, shorter delivery times and new models of supervision. By that point, legal operations were no longer a side function. It was becoming part of the service model itself.

## THE LAST MONTHS: GENERATIVE AI AND AGENTIC AI

If the earlier phase of modernization made legal work more structured, the last 18 months have made it impossible to talk about efficiency without also talking about AI. In Spain, generative AI has landed at the same time as the EU AI Act. That timing matters because it turns AI from a productivity tool into something much closer to an operational and regulatory issue.

The Spanish angle makes that shift even more concrete. Spanish Agency for Supervision for Artificial Intelligence ("AESIA") was created precisely to supervise, guide, raise awareness and support the implementation of national and European rules on AI. In practice, the debate has become much more specific in recent months, as the AESIA has published practical AI Act compliance guides covering areas such as risk management, human oversight, data governance, transparency, cybersecurity and technical documentation.

For law firms, that raises the stakes. It means governance can no longer stop at procurement or confidentiality clauses. It now reaches training, supervision, accountability, human review and data protection by design. That is why the commercial question for firms is changing in Spain. Clients are no longer just curious about whether their lawyers use AI. Increasingly, they want to know how it is controlled, where the risks sit, and whether the firm can explain its use of these systems in a way that is credible, disciplined and trustworthy.

## THE SPANISH CONTEXT

Spain's path has been uneven for reasons that are quite specific to the market. In our own experience, we found clear gaps in areas such as matter intake, pricing, budgeting and predictive risk tools, while much of the market still focused more on managing legal work than on improving the operational side of firms themselves. Some studies also pointed to cultural resistance and limited technological training among lawyers as real barriers to adoption. Against that backdrop, the milestones mattered. Procedural digitization had already pushed firms toward more disciplined digital workflows, and the arrival of the mentioned EU AI Act, together with Spain's growing super-

visory architecture, made it harder to treat modernization as optional. Spain's story, then, is not one of sudden disruption but of steady pressure that finally becomes impossible to ignore.

## THE IMMEDIATE FUTURE FOR SPANISH LAW FIRMS

The next stage in Spain will be less about experimenting with AI and more about learning how to build around it. The real challenge is not technology alone, but combining it with judgment, communication, leadership and ethics. In practice, firms will need to invest not only in tools but also in supervision, internal standards, and new ways of developing junior lawyers whose early learning used to depend on repetitive tasks.

There are also deeper professional questions to solve. Firms will need to think carefully about how junior lawyers (reduced by 14% in the last few years) are trained in an environment where some traditional learning tasks are being compressed or automated. As all around the world, they will need to make sure tools are reliable, appropriately governed and used with proper human judgment. And they will need to remain alert to issues such as bias, over-reliance and uneven quality.

The firms that get ahead will be the ones that treat AI as part of professional design, not just as a productivity tool. In the years ahead, the strongest firms in Spain will not be those that use the most AI, they will be the ones Spanish and international clients trust to use it well.

## CONCLUSION

Throughout 2026, artificial intelligence tools will solidify their position as a strategic pillar in law firms—not merely as support functions but as key drivers of competitiveness and profitability. The future law firm in Spain will compete as much on its operating system as on its legal intellect—and clients will increasingly purchase the former as a condition for trusting the latter.



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