



DOMINGOS CRUZ

CCA Law Firm: more than seven decades of legal innovation in Portugal

From expansion to Shanghai to the adoption of advanced technologies, a look at the evolution of a leading law firm headed by Domingos Cruz

by mercedes galán

Originally known as Carlos Cruz e Associados, CCA Law Firm is a Portuguese law firm that has been active for more than seven decades. The firm was associated with the Spanish firm Ontier for five years. **Domingos Cruz**, the managing partner, has steered the firm for two decades towards the adoption of emerging technologies and expansion into international markets, notably opening an office in Shanghai. In addition to being an entrepreneur and business angel, Cruz has played an active role in the evolution of the firm amidst a legal environment facing digitalization and globalization. In *Iberian Lawyer*, we have explored everything from his initial interest in law to his vision for the future of the profession.

Besides being an entrepreneur and business angel. What sparked your interest in dedicating your life as a lawyer?

«After realizing that more than 50% of our talented professionals was either a millennial or a gen Z, we decided to create an Inspire ExCom based on a famous Harvard Review Case»



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With the wisdom of hindsight I believe I decided to become a lawyer, because not only did I have very strong examples of wonderful humanist lawyers in my family, but because I was drawn to everything that related to law from a young age. I was mesmerized by the Raymond Burr's Perry Mason in the eighties, or Steven Bochco L.A. Law Tv series, I craved for every new John Grisham's book.

Fortunately enough, after actually managing to become a lawyer I was able to confirm that I was exactly where I wanted to be, doing what I wanted to do.

What would you say has been the core value that has defined you throughout your career development?

A core belief that what me and all the lawyers at CCA Law Firm have been doing for the last 20 years mattered, and that by creating a healthy working environment all stars shine brighter.

Could you tell us more about the firm and its origins?

CCA Law Firm is a firm built on a foundation of continuous adaptation and innovation, we embrace a deeply rooted philosophy that prioritizes collaboration and openness. We are proud that our office operates without walls, and partners do not have separate offices, fostering a true team environment. This collaborative space encourages the sharing of ideas, eliminates communication barriers, and promotes active discussion and innovation. We are committed to simplifying our work processes and delivering efficient services to our clients and partners. Our bold approach and dedication are driven by a culture that challenges our teams to take risks and think creatively, ensuring we provide unique and effective solutions to our clients. At CCA, we live law differently, with a focus on teamwork, and an unwavering pursuit of excellence, which has been key to our long-standing success and reputation in the legal field for the last 75 years.

The firm is opening new departments in insurance and EU and competition law. As managing partner, what would you highlight about your strategic plan?

CCA Law Firm remains committed to enhancing its capabilities and strengthening the legal

«In the words of the author Taylor Alison Swift, never be so kind, you forget to be clever, never be so clever, you forget to be kind»

support provided to its clients. The establishment of these new practice areas, both in EU and Competition Law, and in Insurance and Reinsurance, is part of a broader strategic plan aimed at anticipating market needs proactively. The new teams of experts, in both fields, bring extensive experience in legal advisory services and address areas that have increasingly been in demand from our clients. Looking ahead, our goal is to continue identifying new strategic areas aligned with our positioning and our clients' needs. We anticipate further developments in this regard by the end of the year.

In your opinion, what are the current challenges and opportunities facing law firms in Portugal, especially in the context of increasing globalization and digital transformation?

One of the significant challenges facing law firms in Portugal, especially amidst increasing globalization and digital transformation, is the need to continuously adapt to rapid technological advancements and the digitalization of legal services. This demands constant updates and investments in AI tools, which, in turn and for instance, have already allowed our lawyers at CCA to save an average of 23% of their work time over the past year. While leveraging such technologies positions us at the forefront, it

is crucial to balance this with the ongoing challenge of hiring and retaining top-tier professionals, as their expertise remains irreplaceable despite technological investments.

How was the experience of establishing CCA Law Firm's first overseas office in Shanghai, making it the first Portuguese law firm to launch in China?

It was one of my most challenging and enriching professional experiences. At the time, Portugal was going through a severe financial and economical crisis, with foreign direct investment at historical lows. Law firms in general started to look abroad for business, and most of them focused on African Portuguese speaking countries. We thought differently, by asking ourselves a simple question - where is there less competition and a potential bigger upside. Mainland China, seemed the right decision for many reasons. It was the best decision we could make, as China became the biggest foreign direct investor in Portugal in the years that followed.

Were there other reasons that influenced the decision to establish an office in Shanghai?

Establishing CCA Law Firm's first overseas office in Shanghai was motivated by our prior experience in China, that included assisting clients and establishing wholly foreign-owned enterprises in Shanghai. Despite competition from established global firms in these regions, we leveraged our expertise to provide agile and specialized services to SMEs expanding abroad. Competition from global law firms posed a significant challenge, but considering our experience, we believed we could deliver more flexible services and faster responses than our global competitors.

How has the human capital within law firms evolved to compete in an increasingly competitive market?

To thrive in today's competitive legal landscape, firms are reshaping their human capital strategies by diversifying skills, enhancing technological proficiency, and fostering business expertise while prioritizing client relationship management. Implementing client-centric

approaches and flexible work arrangements, such as our 3+2 work week allowing two days of remote work, and our "CCA Nomad" which allows 30 days per year of remote work, enhances talent retention and client service delivery.

What are CCA Law Firm's recent initiatives to enhance professional development and adapt to the needs of a new generation of legal professionals?

At CCA Law Firm, we've refined our home office policy to provide flexibility and benefits, ensuring a supportive environment. We've tailored career development plans, enabling transitions across technical and managerial roles. Throughout 2023, we conducted comprehensive training in management, languages, and mindfulness, underscoring our commitment to professional growth. After realizing that more than 50% of our talented professionals was either a millennial or a gen Z, we decided to create an Inspire ExCom (based on a famous Harvard Review Case) that shadows the ExCom, and suggests ideas, champions causes, and promotes change.

Looking back on your career and with your background as entrepreneur, what advice would you give to young lawyers aspiring to build successful careers in law today?

For young lawyers aspiring to build successful careers, it's essential to master your chosen legal field (that is the only thing you can rely in your professional career) and stay adaptable to changes in the sector, embracing technology to streamline your work and improve client service. Building a strong professional network is crucial; connect with peers, mentors, and potential clients through industry events and associations. Cultivate communication, negotiation, and interpersonal skills to build strong relationships and effectively advocate for your clients. Focus on understanding and prioritizing client needs and find ways to differentiate yourself through specialized expertise or innovative solutions. Finally, and in the words of the author Taylor Alison Swift (three girls at home heavy listeners of the pop princess), "never be so kind, you forget to be clever, never be so clever, you forget to be kind". ▣