

In-housers to bridge Middle East culture clash

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In-house lawyers are set to play a crucial role mediating between the contrasting business cultures at the heart of the explosion of international investment activity in the Middle East, according to one of the region's most senior lawyers.

Speaking at the inaugural Legal Week Corporate Counsel Forum Middle East, David Brimacombe (*pictured right*), Standard Chartered Bank's regional head of legal, said a dramatic increase in cross-border activity had fuelled demand for in-house lawyers across the region.

He added that it was incumbent on the local in-house legal community to strike a balance between cross-border legal and business norms and the local way of doing business, where trust and handshakes played a far greater role and documents often fitted on a single page.



“While we are here we should take something from the region and start cutting back down and get back to basics,” said Brimacombe, who chaired the conference, which was held at the Madinat Jumeirah resort complex in Dubai on 24 June.

The conference saw 60 of the region's top in-house lawyers, including Jumeirah Group's chief legal officer, Robert Swade, and Emirates' legal head, James Dunn, discuss the challenges associated with building and running legal teams in the Middle East.

Top of the agenda was the rise of corporate governance in the region as Middle Eastern companies — the majority of which are privately-owned — seek to make acquisitions across the world as well as gearing up for an eventual listing.

Delegates also discussed the significant increase in the number of in-house lawyers in the Middle East.

Justin Connor, director of legal and regulatory affairs at Emirates International Telecommunications and founder chairman of the Dubai Corporate Counsel Group, said “More and more multi-national companies are setting up operations in the region and because of enhanced corporate governance regimes like the US Sarbanes-Oxley Act and the UK Combined Code on Corporate Governance, they need to know exactly how they are doing business and what the legal risks are.”