



LEGALINK
INTERNATIONAL BUT PERSONAL

THE INTERVIEWS
SERIES

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Cocuzza & Associati

COCUZZA & ASSOCIATI

Studio Legale



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— COCUZZA & ASSOCIATI

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What is new with your firm?

The last year (2020) started with the arrival of new partners at Cocuzza & Associati, and with the opening of a new office in Bologna. We did not have the time to get used to these novelties, that we were overwhelmed by the pandemic. Italy was stricken first among western countries: as Italians we feared that our economy would collapse; as lawyers at Cocuzza & Associati we feared that our firm would suffer (if not worse) from the negative consequences of the pandemic on economy. One year later even though the pandemic is not over, and even if we cannot say that Italian economy is flourishing, our firm is not only keeping the pace, but has also registered a sensible increase in work and turn-over. We are proud we did not have to dismiss a single associate or employee, and we consider that our best success for 2020. For sure, the last year was challenging: we had first to adapt to working from remote

(which was not easy as we value team work side by side), and we had then to rethink working at the office, setting forth rules for avoiding gatherings of people, and implementing measures to ensure a healthy working place. Adapting to the new situation was not easy!

Which practice areas are the most in demand in your firm?

Cocuzza & Associati is a boutique law firm based in Milan, and in Bologna. We are a business law firm, and we have been in the market for nearly 30 years. Although we advise in several sectors of business law, our long-dated core business is real estate in the retail sector. Through the years we have advised several internationally known retailers in their development in Italy. As the pandemic stroke we have experienced an increase in litigation. The contingency legislation in Italy has not taken care of retailers, and particularly has not regulated the payment of the rent. Is the rent due during the lockdown? Should the rent be lowered in non-lockdown periods since social distancing and the other measures against the spread of the virus do not encourage people to shop. Due to the lack of specific legislation, a certain number of disputes is raging at courts; our long-dated reputation as retail real estate lawyers has gained us the trust of old clients and new ones, which have chosen us to represent them at courts. And I can say that these disputes are extremely enthralling as they explore new territories that are unknown to Italian case law. As for me, I still do a lot of transactional work, and I have never stopped assisting some clients which - optimistically - have not given up their

real estate expansion notwithstanding the pandemic; still, I am also more and more involved in the litigations against landlords, and I can say I deeply enjoy this new development in my career.

Can you share an example of cross-border work with another legalink member?

Ever since admitted to Legalink Cocuzza & Associati has been referred several clients by other members, particularly by Mark Surguy and Gary Jones of Weightmans, and by Adriaan De Buck of Ekelmans & Meijer Advocaten. I look forward for being involved in a cross-border M&A with other Legalink members: Cocuzza & Associati has a wide experience in cross-border M&A as well as domestic, and we would be pleased to put our experience to the service of other Legalink members.

What are your views on legalink expansion?

I have been attending the Legalink meetings since 2016, and I can say that in these 5 years I have experienced a sensible and constant growth of the network with new members every year. I can imagine that finding new firms is not an easy task to perform especially in these unhappy years. Shortly before the pandemic I was appointed Legalink Ambassador for South and Western Europe with Adam Rose, but the outburst of COVID-19 slowed down our involvement in this new role: I hope that we will soon be actively involved in the search and recruiting of new firms in aid to the committee.

As regards to legalink, are you happy about your firm's membership? what can we do better?

Cocuzza & Associati values Legalink as a network of highly reputable firms. This network puts us in contact with the most outstanding firms of their countries, which we can trust to refer our clients. I look forward to meeting again, and I hope this happens better sooner than later! We have appreciated the efforts of the committee in giving us an online meeting last autumn, and we hope that new meetings will come through online, while waiting for when we can meet again in person. What can be done better by Legalink? I would try to fasten our connections with more video meetings during the years, and I would do it even when the pandemic is hopefully over. The pandemic brought along a lot of suffering and grief, but it also made us make a leap into the future! Just a couple of years ago, video-meetings were not really a normal thing, now we spend a lot of the day in virtual meetings. Therefore, why not taking advantage of this, and virtually meeting more often? I think about the PGs, for instance: it would be good to meet more frequently, and discuss what is new in the different jurisdictions. I am sure that this would, on one side, create more reliance on each other, and, on the other, may also possibly generate more business for the benefit of members.

What is your favorite thing to do in your spare time?

I have more than one!
I am travel addicted, and you can imagine my suffering over the last year during which we have all been grounded. In recent years I have been to Burma, Madagascar,

Java and Bali in Indonesia, China, Brazil, Jordan, Morocco, Iran, South Africa, Peru, Oman, etc. I went on budget travels: although I strongly appreciate 5 stars hotels, I deem that only budget travels can put you in contact with local people; and, although I love visiting monuments and museums, I value more talking to locals, getting to know their culture, and talking about mine. I will never forget the conversation I had one day at around 6 am in the Shwedagon Pagoda in Yangon, Burma, a few years ago with a Buddhist monk who stopped me, and asked me a lot of questions about how we lived in Italy. That meeting is the best surviving memory of that travel, and sometimes I ask myself what might have happened to that guy in these difficult moments for his country.

I am also an avid reader: I like to read novels, and I am now reading, Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell, an alternate history novel of some years ago, which I would suggest to all those who think that England is somewhat a magical country. The next book waiting for me is not a novel though: I am intrigued by behavioral economy, and after reading Nudge (Sunstein-Thaler) and Misbehaving (Thaler) a few years ago, I have bought the latest book by Cass Sunstein, How Change Happens. Change is the essence of being human, of feeling alive: better know how it works!

Thank you very much!

**Maria Grazia
Colombo**