



Marta Staccioli

Senior Legal Counsel, Litigation (Italy and Greece), Google

Marta Staccioli is senior legal counsel, litigation (Italy and Greece) at Google's Milan offices and a former senior associate in our Rome TMT practice.



Seeking out responsibility

Having passed the bar exam during her time at a boutique firm in the Italian capital, Marta worked mainly on copyright issues for media and broadcasting clients and was never one to duck a challenge.

Life was great, but she knew there was much more out there to experience. So, just three years later, she took destiny in her own hands and left Gallavotti Honorati & Partners to join Hogan Lovells.

“Everybody was very friendly and the work was fascinating. But, I wanted to really challenge myself. And, I was keen to test my mettle at a big law firm.”

Proving a point

“I'd heard a few scare stories about Big Law – extremely competitive and unfriendly environments – but, that could not have been further from the truth at Hogan Lovells.

Life is never perfect, of course, but I enjoyed it immensely. The work, the clients, and especially my colleagues, many of whom became good friends.

You could walk into any colleague's office, ask a legal question, and get into a discussion that opened up a whole new perspective. Without fail, you would go away better equipped to do your job.

People were always there to help and 60% or 70% of the time you were doing something for the first time, which encouraged you to be creative and to learn.

I worked a lot with Google throughout, including almost a year on secondment, which partly explains why I'm with them now. As you might imagine, they had a lot of legal issues.

I was concerned that working at a big law firm might mean I specialized too much in one area. But, working primarily with Google during my time with Hogan Lovells, I experienced a lot of different areas and was able to avoid that.

It was demanding at every turn, but I was fully committed and really felt part of something. I will always be grateful for the experience the firm gave me and how it equipped me with the tools I need to work in-house for a company like Google.”

Deeper understanding

Marta's Google experience began not long after she joined Hogan Lovells. Such an early secondment was an opportunity she would not spurn.

“Until that point, I'd always wanted to be a lawyer in the traditional, external sense, but my view began to change when I started to appreciate Google's business at a deeper level.

If you understand how things run outside the legal department, what the core objectives, principles, and strategy of the company are, the better you can work for it.

My team at Hogan Lovells had a very business-oriented mindset, so I learned enormous amounts from my colleagues and it really helped not only with the secondment, but also, when I eventually moved in-house, I already knew what was expected of me.

But, at the start, I did have to remind myself every day that I was no longer the outside counsel. Some of the work wasn't mine, but I took on a lot, including some of the external activity because I thought it was all my responsibility.

Then, I remembered how good the Hogan Lovells team was and could relax. I could focus more on what I needed to do internally and let the outside counsel do their job.

The first big challenge was to understand my place in the company and to learn how it worked at Google. The company had grown a lot since I was first seconded, so I had to figure out the new issues they were dealing with and how things had changed.”

Shared benefits

People can be resistant to change, of course. That's true whether you're joining Google

or trying to navigate a world increasingly transformed by technology.

“We know the pros and cons of things with which we are familiar, but things we don’t recognize tend to pose different questions. Seeds of doubt can be sown.

If you don’t always understand what a company like Google is trying to achieve, it’s only natural you might sometimes feel uncomfortable.

Copyright is a great example. Old media would prefer to keep doing what they’ve always done. They don’t want to change their business models because they fear they won’t be able to evolve. So, they try to stop people like us moving things forward.

But, while a gap exists between Google and more traditional media organizations, we aren’t trying to widen it, as that might exacerbate some of the negativity.

Instead, we want to teach them how they can take advantage of innovation and to show that, together, we can move forward. So, we have a lot of initiatives explaining to publishers, for instance, how they can better engage the public using our services.

There are benefits for the entire digital ecosystem, for its users, and for the broader media industry. It’s not all altruistic on our part, of course. We do it to help ourselves, but the benefits are there for everyone.”

Shared responsibilities

It may sometimes feel like we’re charting new waters, that this period of innovation is unique in our collective experience. But, it’s not the first time and probably not the last.

“Every now and then, humanity faces a similar issue. In the 19th century, for example, people were afraid technology would take their jobs. And, we see that again today.

Just like back then, though, new kinds of jobs will and do appear – developing, installing, maintaining, and repairing the new technologies. I get people’s fears, but innovation won’t be stopped and that’s a good thing.

It is tempting to blame technology. Social media, for example, takes a lot of criticism. People argue that the technology discourages

us from using our brains or from engaging with each other in person.

But, then we’re quick to put the onus on the creator of the technology to crack down on problems like hate speech, when to my mind it’s up to the individual to use it more responsibly.

I wouldn’t say companies like Google bear no responsibility, but you have to find a middle way. Something might be bad in one jurisdiction and no problem at all elsewhere, so how do you police things when you are global?

What criteria do you apply? How much freedom of speech or of expression can a private tech company limit? If a tech company does something, it’s seen as too much. If it does nothing, it’s seen as too little. So, there’s no perfect formula.”

Blurred lines

Tech firms face global challenges. Few and far between are the regulators that don’t want to put the spotlight on Google and its counterparts and to draw lines that they should not pass.

“Legislation is always designed to solve problems that already exist. It can’t precede a problem. And, regulation is all well and good, if it is clear enough for people to understand and therefore comply with.

It becomes problematic, however, when it creates doubt, leaving the stakeholders to interpret it for themselves, only then having to wait for the legislature to decide afterwards what is right or wrong. That is the current situation, I fear.

Of course, it’s always going to be difficult to make laws that satisfy everyone. But, it’s important not to make the fear of sanction greater than the incentive to do something positive.

The intent behind the EU’s General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) around

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individuals’ data protection is very good, for example, and the evolution of privacy laws is on the right path. But, are those laws clear enough to protect the people they’re supposed to?

GDPR stipulates that people should be able to access ‘clear, concise, and complete’ information about how their data is to be processed.

But, what is clear, concise, and complete for me is not necessarily clear, concise, and complete for you. And, if something is clear and concise, it cannot, by definition, be complete. And, vice versa.

Placing that burden on a private tech company is very tough, when its tech is essentially a neutral tool. It is the uses we put it to that determine whether it is good or bad.

So, maybe the biggest negative of technology is that it allows some people to avoid taking personal responsibility. Everyone would benefit from a more polite internet, yes. But, that’s very difficult for Google alone to achieve.

Respect starts with the individual. Perhaps, therefore, we should be a little braver as people and accept that we all need to shoulder some of the burden.”

