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Headline: Singapore Government encouraging tech adoption in legal sector

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The Singapore Government and the Law Society are actively encouraging legal practices to adopt technology solutions through the SmartLaw Guild.

By Mohit Sagar 22 May, 2019 in Digital Transformation, Singapore, Smart Cities



Minister Iswaran was recently speaking at the launch of the SmartLaw Guild, where he discussed digitisation in Singapore and the importance of adopting technology in the legal sector.

He said that the legal fraternity has an important role in the evolution of a regulatory architecture and the creation of legal solutions to deal with these challenges. Hence, as part of the effort to build the trusted ecosystem, the Government funded the establishment of a Centre for AI and Data Governance in the Singapore Management University's School of Law.

Various legal stakeholders embracing digital transformation

He added that the Judiciary has a long history of leading the charge in court technology, such as the use of technology for filing of documents and managing of cases, and the use of video-conferencing for conducting certain hearings. More recently, the Judiciary has started exploring the use of AI.

At the Attorney-General's Chambers (AGC), a Legal Technology and Innovation Office pilots and deploys technology solutions. AGC is taking significant strides forward by implementing advanced document and file management systems. In addition, the team is exploring the use of text analytics to improve knowledge management and enable more efficient review of large volumes of documentary evidence.

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The Minister went on to say the impact of technology adoption by the legal sector also derives broader systemic benefits, as clients will stand to benefit from greater access to justice, a quicker resolution of disputes, and more consistent outcomes.

How Singapore law practices can respond to digitalisation

The vast majority of Singapore Law Practices are small and medium sized firms, and it is quite understandable that they may require some help to adopt technology. This is not unique to the legal community. He said that we have 200,000 firms in Singapore, over 90% of them are SMEs and Enterprise Singapore and IMDA have embarked on a major effort over the years to reach out to the broad base of SMEs, recognising that it is a challenge for them, but also recognising the essential need for that transformation to take place if these companies are to stay competitive.

According to the 2018 Legal Technology Survey, commissioned by LawSoc, more than 80 percent of SLPs agree that technology helps to improve the delivery of legal services and that it is also crucial to the future development of the legal profession and sector.

The Law Society and the Government recently launched Tech-celerate for Law, which is a step-up from Tech Start for Law. This name change reflects what they are hoping to do in the next phase of our programme. Previously, the focus of Tech Start for Law was to achieve mass adoption of baseline technology solutions by SLPs.

The Government wants to accelerate the adoption of technologies in two ways. The first is to broaden the use of technology within the legal sector, by having even more SLPs come on board to adopt a wider range of legal technology. Secondly, among the firms that have already started using technology solutions, they want to accelerate their adoption of advanced solutions, such as document review and automated client engagement solutions, so that they can realise even greater benefits.

Under Tech-celerate for Law, \$3.68 million has been set aside to provide SLPs with up to 70% funding support for both baseline and advanced digital solutions, which are funded by the Productivity Solutions Grant and the Local Enterprise and Association Development fund respectively. These technology solutions will empower SLPs to enhance the delivery of legal services, strengthen their capabilities, and increase their competitiveness in the regional and global landscape.

How lawyers can respond to digitalisation

At the undergraduate level, IMDA has worked with SMU to introduce a joint law and computing degree. This will help create a new generation of lawyers who would be adept at bridging law and technology. But perhaps more generally, we are seeking to infuse digital technology knowledge and some basic modular understanding for all disciplines at our universities and polytechnics because this is an essential skill so that whatever domain we are in, we know how to ask the right question, and at least be in a position to evaluate at the fundamental level.

For practising lawyers, like those in many other vocations, they can benefit from the range of technical skills training that is available through IMDA's Techskills Accelerator initiative, or TeSA.

Firstly, legal professionals can acquire knowledge and skillsets in emerging areas such as AI, Cyber Security and Data Analytics, through courses that are supported by TeSA's Critical Infocomm Technology Resource Programme Plus, or CITREP+ for short. Secondly, TeSA is working with trade associations like the Singapore Computer Society to reach out to professionals in non-tech sectors to encourage them to pick up digital skills.

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LawSoc has also been organising workshops and seminars, to provide its members with training on cybersecurity, legal technology solutions and technology adoption strategies. Over the last two years, over 1,000 law firm employees and lawyers have participated in LawSoc's technology-related training sessions

The Minister said it is timely that we launch the SmartLaw Guild today. All SLPs that are certified under LawSoc's SmartLaw Recognition Scheme, which recognises SLPs that have adopted technology to improve productivity and increase business capabilities, and or are beneficiaries of LawSoc's technology support schemes, will be included in the SmartLaw Guild. This platform brings together like-minded SLPs who want to reinvent themselves and future-proof their legal practices.