

# Singapore to launch S-E Asia's first legaltech accelerator

**Accelerate! will groom legaltech startups, incubate new business models or services conceived by law firms**

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## Singapore

SINGAPORE is taking the lead to digitally transform its legal sector. Come April, the country will be home to South-east Asia's first legaltech accelerator. Named Accelerate!, it aims to groom legaltech startups as well as incubate new business models or services conceived by law firms.

This was unveiled by the Singapore Academy of Law (SAL) on Wednesday at the launch of its Future Law Innovation Programme (Flip), an initiative announced last July that will prepare the legal industry – said to be one of the last to think about innovation – for technological disruption.

Flip comprises three components, of which the first two were launched on Wednesday. They are a Legal Innovation Lab located at coworking

space Collision 8, which will incubate innovations by law firms and legaltech startups; and LawNet Community, a virtual collaboration platform which allows the legal community to network and access tech tools.

Accelerate! – the third component of Flip – is a 100-day accelerator programme that will be powered by Singapore-based corporate accelerator JFDI. It will provide startups with mentorship and seed funding from Spring Singapore and venture capitalists. *The Business Times* understands that Accelerate! is now looking to raise S\$2.5 million to begin with.

JFDI chief Hugh Mason told BT: "Flip is a remarkably visionary initiative. In terms of timing, honestly it's a mix. There are still a lot of very conservative legal firms in every territory, but there are also some great instances of machine learning applied

to evidence discovery etc." He added: "It will be interesting because tech is not going to make lawyers redundant but supercharge them. I think a part robot, part human being solution is what could emerge from the programme."

Mr Mason added that Singapore is well placed to lead efforts in legaltech, given that it is an economic and commercial hub. "It's a place where you come for stability and structure. The legal community is quite small. We make up our own rules. If Singapore were to pick a few sectors to compete on, law jumps out."

On Wednesday, SAL signed two Memorandums of Understanding with the Singapore Management University (SMU) and Infocomm Media Development Authority (IMDA). SMU will be SAL's academic partner for issues relating to legal innovation and the future business of law. IMDA will partner Flip to nurture legal technologists and build a legaltech toolkit for the smaller law firms.

Basileios Drollias, chief operating officer at UK-based legaltech startup myLawyer, said that a mindset change among lawyers – particularly in the way that they "face tech" – will be key to ensuring Flip's success.

He told a panel discussion at the launch event: "Lawyers are not exactly technophobes. They are more techno-lazy. They are not keen to do a small amount of work to push them over a little hump. That said, I'm not convinced that only the older generation of lawyers have this issue. Breeding a new generation of lawyers ready to adapt to change is very important."

Philip Jeyaretnam, Singapore chief executive officer and global vice-chair at Dentons Rodyk & Davidson, disagreed that lawyers are "techno-lazy". He also noted that an important goal of Flip is to nurture lawyers who think about innovation. "It's about lawyers themselves being able to consider new ways to do things that can speed things up, or be useful to the clients. This comes down to how a firm organ-

ises people to change the way they are doing things. Lawyers should think about what they are doing, and apply their own ideas. Ultimately, is your organisation one that is a learning organisation?"

When asked if law firms should create a separate entity to invest in tech, Rajesh Sreenivasan, head of tech, media and telecoms practice at Rajah & Tann Singapore, said that there was no need to. But it has its benefits, including a greater focus, discipline in key performance indicators and the ability to create new revenue streams.

Notably, the law firms that have carved out dedicated tech arms are mostly the big ones. Rajah & Tann Singapore has Rajah & Tann Technologies, while Dentons has Nextlaw Labs (its legaltech accelerator) and Nextlaw Ventures (its tech investment arm).

Mr Sreenivasan said that Flip will expand the legal ecosystem and help lawyers adopt a multidisciplinary approach. "The next step for lawyers is to move out and provide collaborative solutions. Clients like that."

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