

‘Teching’ the law into their own hands

Four young counsels trade law practice to start or co-start legal technology companies

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They had promising careers, but four young counsels traded law practice to start or co-start legal technology companies instead.

From data-driven contract software to legal knowledge management and artificial intelligence-powered engines for decision-making, as well as starting a one-stop legal advice online platform, they have created legal technology solutions to solve industry needs.

For Mr Ivan Rawtaer, leaving law practice involved a series of small steps, before he took the big one to co-found a legal technology firm.

The Singapore-based company, Pactly, provides contract review software for corporate in-house legal teams.

Mr Rawtaer said: “We’ve been around since 2017 and frequently work with legal teams of all sizes to implement software that helps to simplify the process of reviewing contracts.”

The 31-year-old, who practised for three years before the switch, said his firm is currently working with DBS Bank to develop and implement the firm’s contract review solution for the various procurement agreements the bank enters into with vendors.

“The objective is to reduce the total time spent negotiating contracts and to put in place a data-driven approach towards contract negotiations.”

Lawyer Chang Zi Qian, who was called to the Bar in 2012, said the inspiration to switch came from “how Google sought to build a search engine by capturing the links between websites”, and the idea of building a retrieval system for the legal industry started from there.

“When I was still working in a law firm, I realised that the law could be understood to be a ‘map’. There are relationships and connections between various words, concepts, cases, legislation, regulation.”

The 34-year-old said these relationships exist in a lawyer’s memory and are activated when research needs to be done.

“A young lawyer will need to spend a lot of time trying to find out such relationships. There was no mechanism to build on existing institutional knowledge, making research work tedious.”

Mr Chang shared the idea with some close friends – one from an engineering firm and another in an investment bank – who later became his co-founders.

The company they formed – Intellex, with offices in Singapore and London – is an AI-driven knowledge management platform for professionals to maximise their collective knowledge intelligently.

“We automate knowledge management processes and augment knowledge resources to allow professionals to work faster and smarter,” he added.

Lawyer Flora Suen-Krujatz, 36, practised law for nearly a decade, specialising in mergers and acquisitions and private equity.

She spent most of her legal career in London and Hong Kong with international law firm Linklaters.

Ms Suen-Krujatz recalled that when she began her legal career, AI technology had already begun fundamentally changing how business was done in many industries for the better. She said: “However, to my frustration, the legal sector had largely been spared from the much-needed technological disruption.

“I thought I could do a lot more for the future development of the legal profession and at a much faster pace if I stepped out and created something new.”

Ms Suen-Krujatz founded Narus, a start-up specialising in turning complex legal information into structured data.

“Combining the technical skills of my co-founders – Tom Wu, a PhD research scientist, and Ms Jihyun Kim, a software engineer – we built AI-powered software engines that enable data-driven decision-making across verticals, from criminal law to corporate law.”

Ms Suen-Krujatz, who is also the company’s chief executive, added: “Narus has built a successful and widely used software engine that automatically turns legal and factual information into structured data.

“This helps lawyers and civil servants make legal assessments that are consistent and fair every day.”

When Mr Chan Yuk Lun, now 31, graduated from Singapore Management University in 2014, he started an online platform SingaporeLegalAdvice.com

He said: “There was very little information online about legal issues in Singapore and I had a chance to do something different.

“Since then, it has grown to become a platform with more than 250,000 visitors monthly.”

Mr Chan, whose mantra is to make a positive impact for others in this digital age while enjoying what he does, added: “The challenge with legaltech is that ‘legal’ is very broad, and legal matters from divorce to contract review all require different solutions.

“Over the years, we have developed a Find a Lawyer quotation service, a Call a Lawyer service and a Willmaker service to cater to varying needs.”

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IVAN RAWTAER

“The development, and the pace of progress, in language technologies is tremendous. This has enormous benefits for the legal industry, one that is very much about the written word.

“Vendors will always wish for a faster pace of conversion. However, such projects aren’t merely about the purchase decision and are often intertwined with certain organisational and cultural changes required.

“While we are fortunate to have clients and investors who buy into our vision, we are also mindful that such change takes time. For that reason, we remain hopeful that as the market matures, more will see that we offer a better approach.”



FLORA SUEN-KRUJATZ

“The real roadblock to tech adoption is that law is complex, and consistency, reliability and data sensitivity issues are key to the industry.

“AI helps as it can see patterns in large data sets a human cannot see, and the two complement each other. Also, most industries operate on numbers, but the legal industry operates on text – mainly lengthy documents of unstructured data that require trained humans to decipher.

“This is where our company, Narus, comes in. We turn such unstructured data into structured data so that machines can start their work.”



CHAN YUK LUN

“SingaporeLegalAdvice.com is Singapore’s everyday legal platform.

“The problems we want to solve are the delivery of legal services here in a more efficient way and accessibility for everyday people.

“I still remember trying to market the product over the years, but now we have grown to become a platform with more than 250,000 visitors monthly.

“The Willmaker service is a do-it-yourself online service that allows users to generate their own wills. In response to changing media consumption habits, we’ve also created an Instagram account, called @singaporelegaladvice, that’s doing well.”



CHANG ZI QIAN

“There was no concept of ‘legal tech’ in 2015 when we founded the firm. It was difficult to form a team which could build out the envisioned AI application.

“The industry was also generally sceptical but over the years we overcame the challenges.

“Intellex helps to unify know-how from different silos, automatically organising and enriching it with context.

“These offerings take the form of an online application which we call Intellex Stacks, which is like the firm’s internal library. The documents are automatically sorted for easy retrieval.”