



The Straits Times' News In A Minute



Parliament: New law gives shoppers



The Real 'Property' Ace Profits Academy

Recommended by

Cutting tedious legal research with intelligent search engine



Intelllex was set up by lawyers (back row, from left) Mr Chang and Mr Koh, together with (front row, from left) Ms Ng, formerly from the PMO's Public Service Division and Ms Li, former chief operating officer of an IT start-up. The website has helped lawyers reduce research time by 30 to 60 per cent. ST PHOTO: LIM SIN THAI

🕒 PUBLISHED SEP 14, 2016, 5:00 AM SGT

Thanks to website launched in January, lawyers now have the time to take on more cases



Amelia Teng (mailto:ateng@sph.com.sg)

Legal research can be the bane of every lawyer and law student's existence.

From poring over textbooks in law libraries to trawling through cases online and offline to prepare for submissions, it is a process that can take hours.

To ease the burden, a group of local entrepreneurs - some of whom are former lawyers - have designed a website that helps lawyers search faster, keep notes and organise their research better.

Launched in January, Intelllex, meaning "intelligent law", has already attracted more than 1,000 users - about half of whom are lawyers and the rest law students.

The service is currently free, but a subscription fee is likely to be introduced next year. Lawyers said it has reduced their research time by 30 to 60 per cent, meaning they can handle more cases.

Mr Chang Zi Qian, one of its four co-founders, said: "The base of legal information is growing exponentially as more cases are reported and at a faster rate. Lawyers have to take into account what is happening around the world and things are more complex than decades ago.

"Demands of clients have also increased. They want all angles and arguments covered and that means a lot more work.

"We're trying to use artificial intelligence and machine learning to solve the problem of knowledge management."

The 30-year-old Singapore Management University law graduate, who served his apprenticeship in commercial litigation at Rajah & Tann Singapore, added that sometimes, partners ask for "fact-specific research" or "quick-turnaround for answers", which can be tough to obtain with existing legal platforms.

His website uses a search algorithm that understands legal case relationships so that it offers more relevant cases, commentaries and statutes across countries.

It focuses on jurisdictions which adopt common law like Singapore, and is able to pick out the legal context of a word or phrase instead of the plain English meaning.

It can also save results for future reference and organise cases according to each lawyer's needs.

"A junior litigation lawyer spends 35 per cent of his time every day doing research," said Mr Chang. "You cannot be billing the client (for) every hour because you have to remain competitive in pricing."

Mr Chang, who spent about four years at the National Research Foundation under the Prime Minister's Office (PMO), enjoyed studying law but wanted to be an entrepreneur.

He and the other co-founders left their jobs a year ago to focus on the start-up full time.

One of them, Mr Edmund Koh, 31, worked as a lawyer in banking and financial disputes at Wong Partnership for four years. The others are Ms Li Jianxin, 28, formerly chief operating officer of an IT start-up based in the United States and Ms Felicia Ng, 28, who worked in talent management at the PMO's Public Service Division.

The team plans to open a Hong Kong office next year.

Lawyers said the service helped to speed up their workflow. Mr Kelvin Ong, 30, a litigation lawyer who has been using Intelllex every day since April, said it consolidates not just cases, but other reference materials not found on other platforms, and offers more relevant results.

"As a litigator, research is our bread and butter," he said, adding that it reduces about 60 to 70 per cent of his research time.

Mr Ronnie Tan, 56, managing partner at Central Chambers LLC, a mid-sized firm with about 23 lawyers, said the access to wider content such as research papers and legal publications on Intelllex saves practitioners from going to other sources like Google.

"When I ask them for research on a point that could be very obscure, they can get back to me within 45 minutes, which is very good," he said. "If they are more efficient, they have the capacity to handle more files."