

TAKING HEART

Technology as a means to access justice

18 teams competed in the competition organised by WongPartnership LLP to raise awareness of technology as an enabler for pro bono organisations

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WONGPARTNERSHIP LLP collaborated with Alt+Law – an interest group formed by National University of Singapore Law students – to organise the first ever LegalTech competition, Code for a Cause.

The competition garnered interest from more than 60 students from various disciplines and the finale event on Sept 18 saw 18 teams coming together, with the top three teams presenting their ideas.

Teams were required to develop a legal technology platform or solution that can help one or more groups of beneficiaries of the Pro Bono Group, a student-run organisation dedicated to the promotion of pro bono among law students at the NUS Faculty of Law.

Ng Wai King, managing partner, WongPartnership LLP, said: "We are the first Singapore law firm to embrace legal technology for lawyers and clients. As strong advocates for the use of technology, we were delighted to organise an event that would raise awareness of technology as an enabler for pro bono organisations."

"Too often, access to justice is undermined by the lack of information and inefficient processes. This initiative seeks to find ways in which we can leverage technology to overcome these challenges so that legal aid is more accessible to those who need it."

Eleanor Wong, vice-dean, student life & global relations, at NUS Law, said that this project challenged students to come up with innovative technical solutions for a good cause and many teams, within the span of two weeks, had come up with a programmed working prototype of their ideas.

The winning team comprised five students from the engineering and law faculties. They designed a chatbot, named NatashaBot, which can converse in over 100 languages. It aims to make answers to basic legal questions understandable to migrant workers of various nationalities. It is hosted on Facebook to extend its reach as far as possible.

Its maintenance is simplified as individuals are able to change the content of NatashaBot even without a background in coding.

Team member Yu Kai Yan said: "Three of us (in the team) have had experience working with migrant workers and this group resonated with us the most. We went over the problems they might face and developed a chatbot that could answer basic enquiries. Upon refining the idea, we realised that automatic translation was important too. The whole two weeks were spent working on the chatbot."



Mr Yu added that besides time pressure, the group was trying to come up with a product that catered to both migrant workers and the people helping them. Future proofing the chatbot was essential as well so that parts of the technology would be open for future edits. That meant a lot of testing and research on feasibility and useability.

"We plan to have the chatbot cover a wider scope of scenarios so that it can be of greater use to its audience."

One of the judges, Lam Chung Nian, partner and head, intellectual property, technology & media, telecommunications and data protection practice, at WongPartnership LLP, said: "The winning team had the best demonstrated plans and personnel for turning their ideas into a useful reality. They also demonstrated good collaboration in reaching a common understanding of the problems from the legal and technical perspectives, translating

the legal problems to be addressed into data and logical structures."

Mr Ng said that compared to monetary donations, which have a finite impact, the value of innovation when applied to the right causes is priceless.

"Change begets change and what is particularly heartening in this initiative is the collaboration among students from different faculties to understand the problem and identify a possible solution. We are hopeful that this competition will lay an important foundation on which a more technologically savvy legal pro bono community can be built."

(From left) WongPartnership LLP managing partner Ng Wai King; guest-of-honour Lam Chee Kin, DBS managing director and head of group legal, compliance and secretariat; and winners of the LegalTech competition, Code for a Cause – P Srivatsa, Suresh Viswanath, Natasha Tan, Melvin Tan and Yu Kai Yan.

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