

LEGALESE ANGEL ROUND PRESS RELEASE

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In *Tomorrow's Lawyers*, Richard Susskind OBE predicted that the legal industry will be challenged and changed by information technology - and [Legalese](#), a Singapore-based LegalTech/FinTech startup, is betting on that. Legalese has recently secured SGD600,000 in funding commitments, led by VC firm [Walden International](#).

“We were impressed by their ambition: to automate every legal service that can possibly be automated,” said Yong Soo Ping, executive director of Walden International Singapore. “The legal industry is worth about \$400 billion a year, and it runs on expensive manual labour. Software is transforming contract law through automation and A.I. We like their business model: Legalese is not selling primarily to lawyers, but directly to in-house counsel in enterprises.”

Will an army of Legalese robots put lawyers out of work? “That’s not going to happen,” explained Alexis Chun, one of the co-founders of the startup. “As an ex-litigator myself, I don’t expect an A.I. to argue court cases. But when it comes to business contracts, SMEs prefer online solutions over traditional law firms—just look how well DragonLaw is doing in

Asia, or LegalZoom in the U.S.” Ms Chun read law at Queen Mary in London, was called to the bar in Singapore, and previously worked at TSMP Law Corporation and Rajah & Tann, two of Singapore’s most preeminent law firms.

“Two in three small businesses needing legal services cannot afford a lawyer. So they DIY. They copy from friends and write agreements themselves,” said Ong Chiah Li, another co-founder. “But using found templates is risky. Our web apps will help users to DIY with confidence: configuring the terms, verifying the content, capturing the parties’ details, generating the PDFs, and even chasing for signatures.” Ms Ong previously worked at Expara-IDM Ventures in Singapore, and at JFDI.Asia, Singapore’s first startup accelerator.

The Legalese software was developed at JFDI.Asia in 2013 and 2014, and spun out of JFDI.Asia in 2015. The product has already helped over 30 startups produce paperwork for more than \$1.5 million in funding, said Ms Ong. “The need for something like Legalese became obvious during my time at JFDI; during peak periods we’d be making a dozen investments in a single month. Law firms would have charged an arm and a leg! We looked for software that could handle the volume, but we couldn’t find any. So we wrote some software ourselves. It was so popular we incorporated Legalese as a standalone startup.”

Among its users: Legalese itself. “We used our app to close our own round. That’s what Silicon Valley calls eating your own dog food!” said Ms Ong.

“As an active tech investor myself, I know the pain point,” said [John Tan](#), one of the investors in Legalese. “No startup wants to burn money on lawyers—it’s pure overhead. After using their product for one of my other investments, I was so delighted I asked to join their round.” Mr Tan is married to a lawyer.

“It’s the perfect team,” said Legalese investor [Ravi Mantha](#). “Not only is Meng is a founder with exits under his belt, but he spent years at JFDI mentoring a generation of entrepreneurs that I’ve done very well investing in! When I got wind Meng was assembling a team to solve a pain point they know intimately, backing them was a no-brainer.” Before becoming an angel investor, Mr Mantha was a fund manager for Fidelity Investments in Boston.

“In recent years software-as-a-service has disrupted nearly every industry,” said Rowan Simpson, a New Zealand-based early-stage technology investor. “Companies we’ve invested in and worked with, like [Xero](#) and [Vend](#), have grown rapidly to become category leaders, with customers globally. So we’re excited to see Legalese apply the same deep tech approach to the legal industry. As an early investor I get the problem; as a software engineer I like the solution.”

“2016 has been a good year for us,” said co-founder Wong Meng Weng. “We got a USD 8,888 grant from cryptostudio [String Labs](#) and a AUD 30,000 Innovation Grant from [ISIF.asia](#). After doing three startups myself and watching many more succeed and fail, I know that cash is king and revenue is vital. After we close this round of investment, the clock is ticking, and we’re on the hook: in the next 12 months our job is to turn capital into revenue,

launch the product commercially, and strengthen the source of our competitive advantage, our core IP which supports the rest of our tech stack. That means talking to PhDs.”

This year Wong was appointed as a [Fellow](#) at Harvard Law’s Berkman-Klein Center for Internet and Society. “For the past few months, I’ve been talking with postdocs and faculty at Harvard and at MIT about designing a new programming language, for tomorrow’s lawyers to code in.”

“Legalese is a deep-tech startup,” said Walden’s Ms Yong. “They’re not just building a marketplace for lawyers or a search engine for court cases. Legalese is applying recent advances in computer science theory to disrupt the legal industry.” Ms Yong holds a Bachelor’s degree in Electrical Engineering and an MBA from the National University of Singapore. She manages Walden’s portfolio of digital and Internet investments.

Legalese is part of Singapore’s [growing wave of FinTech innovation](#). “When it comes to financial instruments, LegalTech and FinTech are two sides of the same coin,” said Wong. “We interpret ‘smart contracts’ broadly, to include both blockchain and off-chain transactions.”

“Legalese’s approach is unique,” said Virgil Griffith, a researcher at smart.mit.edu and advisor to the startup, “in applying technologies developed for blockchain smart contracts to the legacy world of paper. Contract drafting lawyers are basically hapless programmers working without a formal language: the poor souls code in English! They’ve been in pain their entire lives, but they do not know it doesn’t have to be that way.” Griffith, who received his Ph.D. from Caltech, spoke on Legalese in September [at the Ethereum Devcon 2 conference](#) in Shanghai.

“Software has transformed industry after industry,” said Wong. “Who are some of our inspirations for computational law? Computational creative: Adobe. Computational accounting: Intuit. Computational 3D design: Autodesk. Computational chip design: Cadence Design Systems.”

“I think Legalese has a good shot at becoming a standout legal-tech startup,” said John Young, an American telecoms executive and investor based in Dubai. “When I heard Meng was forming Legalese and raising funds, I booked a flight to Singapore to meet the team and make a commitment. I’m confident this team has the capability to have a global impact.” Mr Young is a member of the bars of DC, California and the United States Patent Office and became active in the angel community while in Singapore with Intellectual Ventures.

Legalese has attracted contributors from all around the world. “Our DNA is opensource and our team is global. We have developers in Bangkok and Bangalore, and community contributors from Canada to Malaysia. We run remote-first, on Slack. We have offices all over the country ... well, in every café with good cold brew, that is. Singapore is the legal and financial hub for Southeast Asia. Lawyers here are often foreign-qualified for jurisdictions all over the world. Since one of our goals is to abstract away the jurisdiction and

language of an agreement to a single 'import' line at the top of a file, Singapore actually makes more sense than the U.S., which is more legally insular," said Wong.

How will the team spend their new money? "[Lean Startup methodology](#) gives us a list of milestones and assumptions to de-risk," explained Wong. "If our revenue experiments are successful, we'll be in a good position to raise a seed round in late 2017."

For more information, visit <https://www.legalese.com>.

What other investors in the round have said

Seasoned angel investor and entrepreneur, John Tan of *Saturday Kids*: "As an experienced angel investor, I got the value prop right away: in fact I couldn't wait, so I used Legalese to produce the paperwork for my own company! So I'm not just an investor, I'm also a happy customer!"

Ravi Mantha, one of India's most prolific investors: "I've known Meng and the Legalese team for almost 10 years! Meng is one of the most incisive minds I know."

Rowan Simpson, computer scientist and experienced early-stage investor in high-growth tech companies: "I've co-founded and invested in startups that have grown into category leaders: Trade Me is the eBay of New Zealand and Xero is rapidly transforming SME accounting. I'm impressed by the scale of Legalese's ambitions, and look forward to being part of Singapore's first billion-dollar success story. As a software engineer, I appreciate how tools and techniques which are well known by programmers can be used to transform the current manual and inefficient processes of the \$400 billion legal profession, of which about \$80 billion is corporate contracts."

John Young, angel investor and general counsel of Ireland's *Orixcom Limited*: "I've looked at a lot of startups both as a technology lawyer and as a potential investor, but this team at this time using this approach feels to me like a good bet. Deep learning, AI and computer science are at the point where automation of routine legal matters is well within reach. That does not mean it will be easy, but I think they can do it. Partly because their business model is customer-centric and open in a way I have not seen before. It would be nice to see a couple of technology law journals follow Legalese as its story unfolds--this is going to be interesting!"

Roland Turner, software and network engineer, computer scientist, startup mentor and advisor, and experienced early-stage investor: "Bugs in hand-written natural language contracts have been causing avoidable losses for centuries and have already put tens of millions of dollars at risk in a single incident last year with the DAO's hand-written smart contract. Beyond simple templating, Legalese is bringing engineering approaches to improving quality and reducing costs to bear in contract drafting, thereby making robust contracts available for use in a far wider range of situations than is currently feasible."

Standard descriptions

Legalese

With Legalese, startup founders can generate, customise, sign, and manage dependencies for each and every document needed for a fundraising round — even ancillary documents like directors' resolutions, pre-emptive waivers, members' resolutions, *etc.*

Walden International

Walden International is a leading international venture capital firm that has provided investors access to cross-border, IT opportunities with the advantage of an unrivaled Pan Asia network since 1987. The firm's funds total over US\$2.3 billion in committed capital. Walden International's investments include GoPro, Inc., Creative Technology, MindTree, SINA, Semiconductor Manufacturing International Corp., AutoNavi, Inphi, Silergy Corp., Ambarella, Inc., Ndoors, Com2uS, SundayToz, JobStreet, Brandtology, HungryGoWhere, YFind Technologies, iKang Healthcare Group, Sinosun Technology and Solaredge Technologies Inc.