

# Legal info made short, simple – and free

## Tan Tam Mei

Searching for legal information online should be as easy as hunting for the next restaurant or weekend activity to try, and website LawGuide Singapore hopes to make it so.

LawGuide's founder, Mr Jonathan Wong, 39, hopes the free online portal will educate Singaporeans about the law, something often viewed as complex and indecipherable without the help of a lawyer.

Mr Wong, a lawyer who has 13 years of practice under his belt, said: "Many people need basic answers before they engage a lawyer, even from the onset of deciding whether they need one. So we're helping them by taking complex and often confusing information and presenting them in short, simple pieces."

The website, which was set up last year, will be relaunched today with a new design and an artificial intelligence chatbot, which Mr Wong believes is the first law-related chatbot of its kind.

The website covers topics like criminal, family and civil law, and presents information in jargon-free videos and infographics. It also has a directory of the over 800 law firms here. The site sees about 10,000 unique visitors monthly, and its Facebook page, on which it does most of its outreach, averages a reach of more than 150,000 people weekly.

It all started out as a passion project for Mr Wong, who is in private practice. To date, he has spent a five-figure sum on it, and now runs it with a team of 10 volunteers.

"Over the course of my years as a lawyer, I started to wonder if something more could have been done for someone who was unrepresented, or could the situation have been different if they knew their options," said Mr Wong, who does civil and criminal litigation.

LawGuide volunteer Carrie Leong, 20, who will start law school next month, said: "Looking at the growing and active community that we've created on social media, we're encouraged that our message and content are being delivered to the people who need them most."

The site has received multiple queries from the public, but Mr Wong is quick to point out that the portal is not meant to provide legal advice and cannot completely replace a lawyer.

He said: "LawGuide will give them a basic understanding of the processes and options, and help them make an informed choice when approaching a lawyer."

"It also benefits lawyers when clients are aware of their situation as it will save time."

He added that legal and law-related issues can turn up in many aspects of life – for example, being involved in police investigations, experiencing domestic problems, or resolving a business dispute.

"Unlike researching on personal health or finance, perhaps there's not enough interest and awareness of one's legal rights and solutions," said Mr Wong.

"When law-related information and services become easier to find, understand and use, I believe it can help provide even greater access to justice."

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Mr Jonathan Wong, who runs LawGuide Singapore with a team of volunteers, says searching for legal information online should be as easy as hunting for a restaurant to try. ST PHOTO: CHEW SENG KIM