

TECHNOLOGY IN THE SINGAPORE COURTS

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Distinguished guests

Ladies and gentlemen

I. Introduction

1. I am grateful for the opportunity to talk a little bit about the use of technology in the Singapore courts. I will first set out how technology is being used in our courts to enhance (a) the administration of justice, (b) transparency and (c) access to justice. I will then provide a glimpse into how we are looking to deploy technology in the near future.

II. Enhancing the administration of justice

Integrated Electronic Litigation System

2. We started electronic filing of documents in 2000. The current system is the Integrated Electronic Litigation System (eLitigation). This is a web-based case management system that provides multi-dimensional end-to-end service. It enhances the administration of justice in various ways.
 - (a) First, eLitigation provides a single access point for commencement and active management of cases. It is available 24/7 and judges and lawyers can conveniently access eLitigation from anywhere and at any time. Documents can be filed, served and retrieved electronically. eLitigation also helps the court and lawyers to manage their diaries better.

- (b) Second, eLitigation improves the efficiency of work processes. For example, when filing applications, lawyers can select suitable hearing dates from a list of available hearing dates, or request urgent hearing dates through the system. Collection of court fees is more efficient and lawyers can also easily retrieve details of fees paid for purposes of billing their clients.
- (c) Third, by monitoring the progress of cases, eLitigation helps our courts to manage cases more efficiently to meet targeted disposal timelines.
- (d) Fourth, since documents can be easily retrieved electronically, eLitigation enables hearings to be paperless or to use less hard copy documents.

Technology in the courtrooms

- 3. Next, a suite of technological facilities are available in our courtrooms.
- 4. A Digital Transcription System provides audio recordings of court proceedings. Transcripts can be prepared using the recordings although transcripts may also be done in real-time. The use of audio recordings speeds up the trial process since judges no longer need to record witnesses' evidence by hand. Judges can also use their computers to retrieve and playback the audio records at any time.
- 5. Several Technology Courts are fully equipped with state of the art facilities. Video conferencing enables foreign witnesses to give evidence by video-link. The Technology Courts also provide facilities for more effective multimedia presentations, including visualisers and interactive display boards which allow experts and witnesses to sketch, annotate on documents and narrate on the case with the whole process being recorded. Lawyers may also link up their laptops to the audio-visual systems so that evidence may be projected onto the monitors and screens for simultaneous viewing by everyone.
- 6. The court's Mobile Infocomm Technology Facilities can be used to equip any courtroom with the technological tools that are available in the Technology Courts.

7. Counsel can also appear remotely before Registrars via Skype for certain non-contentious matters, thus saving time and costs.
8. Let me give two examples of how the technological tools have been used. The first example is that of a recent case in which the court's facilities were able to support the use of Opus 2 Magnum software. Paginated, indexed and searchable electronic bundles of documents were created within 10 days out of 250,000 pages and printing was reduced by 100x. The trial was largely paperless. The use of hyperlinks made cross-referencing of documents more efficient. The result of all these was a speedier trial and savings in costs.
9. The second example involved the first case handled by the Singapore International Commercial Court. The multi-jurisdictional bench, comprising three judges from Singapore, the UK and Hong Kong, was able to conduct several case management conferences via video conference effectively. Documents were generally accessed via eLitigation and physical documents were tendered with the aid of visualisers.

Integrated Criminal Case Filing and Management System (ICMS)

10. First launched in 2013, the ICMS is a multi-agency, paperless e-filing and e-workflow case management system for the administration of criminal cases. Repetitive data entry is avoided and documents can be filed and retrieved electronically at any time of the day. Court orders are generated immediately and transmitted to relevant parties. The system also tracks cases and alerts judges if the disposition timeline is exceeded.

III. Enhancing Transparency

11. Hearing lists of cases are available on the Supreme Court, State Courts and Family Courts websites.
12. Court judgments are available online via LawNet which is a one-stop subscription portal. Another portal, Singapore Law Watch, provides a free daily legal news service which features the latest Singapore law headlines, judgments, case highlights and legislation.

13. The Sentencing Information and Research Repository (SIR) is available, through LawNet, to judges, counsel and the public. The system enhances consistency and transparency in sentencing in criminal cases by providing information on sentencing outcomes and factors in previous cases.

IV. Enhancing access to justice

14. Singapore's statutes are available online to the public, free of charge, on the Attorney-General's Chambers website.
15. The Supreme Court, State Courts and Family Justice Courts websites provide extensive information about court procedures, including the Rules of Court, Practice Directions and how-to guides. Videos on YouTube explain court processes. Viewers also have a better idea of what to expect when they step into the court building or court room.
16. eLitigation is available to litigants in person at two service bureaus.
17. An illustration of how access to justice has been enhanced is a recent press report of a woman who was able to navigate the legal procedures for adoption, on her own. She filed adoption papers using eLitigation. The whole process cost her less than 30% of what a lawyer would have charged.
18. Justice@State Courts is a mobile app developed by the State Courts. Users can find out information about the State Courts on the go, including how to file cases, hearing dates and payment of fines. It also provides a virtual tour of the State Courts.

V. The courts of the future

19. Having described briefly how we are using technology in our work today, I now turn to how we hope to harness technology to help us prepare for the future.
20. A Courts of the Future Taskforce has produced a Technology Blueprint for the courts over the next five years. The Blueprint proposes IT initiatives aimed at enhancing the efficiency of our processes, enhancing accessibility and lowering costs to court users. These initiatives are targeted at three broad phases in the life cycle of a case – the pre-filing/pre-hearing phase, the hearing phase and the post-hearing phase.

Pre-filing / pre-hearing phase

21. The initiatives for the pre-filing / pre-hearing phase seek to develop self-help solutions. I will touch on three examples of these initiatives.
 - (a) The first is a One Judiciary Portal which will provide a single point of service to the public and lawyers for all matters across the Supreme Court, State Courts and Family Justice Courts. It will provide an integrated view of information relating to the three courts as well as a single point of access to all judicial matters. The portal will host educational content and online guides with information being customised individually based on users' preferences. A user will be guided on the procedures and provided with relevant information to help him make better decisions. With the help of artificial intelligence, an interactive virtual assistant will provide answers to a wide range of questions posed in natural language.
 - (b) The second is an Outcome Simulator which will use information from previous cases to provide likely outcomes for potential litigants in motor accident cases, small claims and maintenance disputes. This will help potential litigants decide whether it is worthwhile proceeding with litigation in court or whether they should opt for alternative dispute resolution.
 - (c) The third is virtual platform for Online Dispute Resolution. This removes the need to attend court in person. It gives parties freedom to manage cases at their own time with expert guidance remaining accessible.

Hearing phase

22. Initiatives for the hearing phase involve developing solutions to promote an efficient justice system. The initiatives include:
 - (a) eScheduling which will allow parties to schedule and change hearing dates especially for interlocutory applications and pre-trial conferences. It can also assist the judge fixing hearing dates as he can check the hearing schedule of all parties across the three courts.

- (b) e-Plead Guilty which will allow those who have committed regulatory offences punishable by fines to plead guilty online and pay the fine without having to attend court.
- (c) War Rooms: By using live streaming of court proceedings, war rooms can be set up for more senior and experienced lawyers to provide remote support to the lawyers conducting the case in court, instead of having to be physically present in court themselves.

Post-hearing phase

23. Finally, initiatives for the post-hearing phase involves the intelligent use of data. The initiatives include:
- (a) Use of Data Analytics to provide insights to judiciary management to support operational decisions and for resource planning. This will include the use of statistics, analysis of cause and effect relationships and predictive analytics.
 - (b) Use of Artificial Intelligence to help judges make use of structured and unstructured data to make the best possible decisions in the shortest possible time.

VI. Conclusion

24. In conclusion, I hope this brief sketch has given you some insight into how the Singapore courts have and will continue to leverage on technology in the administration of justice. I look forward to learning from your experiences. Thank you.
