

LawTech in London with Legal Geek

Giving some insight in the daily work of Legal Geek and sharing his experience is Jimmy Vestbirk, founder of Legal Geek.

Legal Geek is the largest Law/Tech startup community in the world putting startups first and thereby creating structures for the unstructured LawTech startup community.



Hello Jimmy. Can you tell us more about Legal Geek? How did the company start in the UK?

Legal Geek is not so much a company but it is more of a community. Legal Geek started with my market research into the legal space. I had a previous business relating to technology but I was interested in legal startups and conducted research in this area. So I started Legal Geek as a community to do research into the legal market as a whole (I wanted to understand the space and help the area to develop further) and it ended up as a platform for startup events. From there it has really grown and has become a mission, which is making London a hub for LawTech startups.. The whole community works very much as a grass roots movement. It is always free for startups and students to attend our events.

This sounds very interesting; so you are the driving force behind this movement in the UK?

One of the main things that we do is to create structure around the startup world. The startup world by its nature is much unstructured and what we do and offer them, is to create a structure. We also allow universities and companies such as Thomson Reuters as well as law firms to understand what startups are relevant to them.

This sounds fascinating. How close do you work together with other hubs? We saw on your homepage that you have a collaboration with San Francisco. Do you have close links to this hub?

Yes, we do one of our events in the US each year. I would not say it is necessarily in San Francisco though. It can be either San Francisco or New York. But it started in San Francisco and we are now about to organise an event this year in the US. It will be either in summer or fall of this year -watch this space!

About the events, you organise to make London “the best place in the world to launch LawTech startups”. What kind of challenges do you face when you host such events for international audiences?

It is not the events that are challenging but it is hard to attract the audience. The legal space is always quite reserved. What we try to do is find the people who always have a

positive spin on technology and what it can do. We believe it can improve the life of lawyers whereas often it is portrayed that technology is a threat to lawyers. That is just going to replace their jobs. We think it is going to make life better but it is a challenge to get the right audience, to get people in the right mind-set, thinking that this is a positive thing and not people doubting that it is going to happen. The biggest challenge is creating the community.

You recently organised a conference for Women and LawTech startups. What were the highlights of these conferences?

What we look to do is to identify different areas of the industry that seem to be broken and try to fix them. To me it is really an interesting dynamic and space. In law there are 60 % of law students who are female but only 30 % are partners. There is a huge amount of women leaving the profession. This just does not seem right. There is a huge skill set there. Therefore, what the Women in LawTech series of events tries to achieve is to understand this, build some community around it and try to find a solution. These events run quarterly. Many things that we look at relating to technology allow more flexible working, allow working from home, allow people to be a lot more efficient in their work. Maybe if some of these changes were implemented in the legal profession we could manage to keep more women in law, which I believe, is important. This community and these series of events have been very interesting to me.

We also just started a new series called Lawyers of the Future, which is targeted at your demographic. Meaning students, junior lawyers and associates. The classic route to becoming partner in the legal profession is student, training contract, associate, senior associate and partner at a law firm. However, not many people will go on that journey, as there are loads of different opportunities whether this is to work in a technology company or directly go to a counsel role. We try to identify these opportunities and make a discussion around those different paths.

This sounds amazing. What have been the highlights for you when organising these events?

We have had a series of highlights. One of the highlights is something that I am very passionate about, namely our Law for Good program. It started in March last year. It is a not-for-profit program where we look to get coders to donate time to legal charities. It is similar to the way you work at qLegal when you do pro bono work with a law firm or you might do a law clinic, workshop or high school outreach class. In particular, we look for law firms, lawyers or technology companies that donate their time or skill sets to develop software and technology that law centres can use.

To give you an example of this: one of our hackathons resulted in Freshfields building a virtual receptionist for a law centre. Freshfields went on to donate hundreds of computers to the law centre network, which previously could not buy these computers. With our Law for Good program, we actually do some tangible things of which we are very proud.

How does the Law for Good program work? Is it mostly a collaboration with law firms such as Freshfields, which support you?

No, so it is more of a collaboration with individuals. For our hackathons, we get loads individuals' skill sets like coders or designers and pull them together so they can build a solution to problem within 24 hours and they pitch it in a competition.

However, often they do not go on to deliver the product because it was just a weekend thing. For them it is fun and it is a competition. It's a great opportunity to create a buzz, so what we do in the program is saying there are all these low hanging, simple problems that can be solve with technology and we will recruit volunteers and we will manage the process. We got a grant from the Legal Education Foundation to manage that process. Through this process, we will deliver tangible pieces of software with a booking service for legal charity or a new website.

Why do you think London is a good place to set up a law tech company?

We see London as a global leader in the legal profession and education sector. We think that the service-oriented architecture (SOA) is progressive with some of their policies to allow alternative business structures to exist. There is a huge amount of investment in technology and a big hub for startup technology. We have great case studies in FinTech, HealthTech and LawTech. Therefore, there is a good access to investment money, to technical talents as we have a global leading legal profession. Furthermore, London has a forward thinking legal structure to execute the changes.

Can you tell us some more about your LawTech Startup Map, where is the inspiration from? What is the next step regarding the LawTech Startup Map?

Our mission is to make London a hub for LawTech startups, so the Map represents a London tube map.

We are currently about to do our second version of the Startup Map which will go online in a month, it will have 20 new startups on it. Five of the startups currently on the Map will be removed. It will have a profile for each startup with some really interesting information and it will become a more useful resource.

Lawyers of the future, how can law students get involved?

The best way is to go to our conferences and events and sign up to our email list. This way you will get alerts for our events. Some of those will resonate such as the Women in LawTech event or the Lawyers of the Future. Or just volunteer for the Law for Good program. We are always looking for volunteers which we call FOLGs. This means Friends for Legal Geek. Our programs are community based, so we are looking for people to donate their time to help with registration or photo taking. We also got some students to do some paid work for the LawTech Startup Map.

Would you like to add something?

I would love to see more startups and students to enter into the LawTech space or get involved with startups, rather than go down the traditional route in the legal profession. It is a really interesting time right now in the profession.



Thank you very much for this unique insight into Legal Geek. This interview showed us a new Community connecting people in LawTech by offering a series of different programs and workshops. It was a most insightful talk which we enjoyed. We look forward to hear more of Legal Geek. If you are interested to know more you find further information on upcoming conferences, events or projects of Legal Geek please follow the link below.

<https://www.legalgeek.com/>

Interview by Napoleon and Cornelia.