

How legal innovation is changing in Australia (/blog/2016/08/29/legal-innovation-changing/)

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Another year has gone by and the Janders Dean Legal Innovation Index sponsored by LexisNexis has wrapped up again.

Now the [LII \(http://www.lawyersweekly.com.au/news/19425-external-collaboration-the-key-to-innovation\)](http://www.lawyersweekly.com.au/news/19425-external-collaboration-the-key-to-innovation) isn't the only Australian legal innovation award – there's the ALPMA Legal Industry [Thought Leadership \(http://www.alpma.com.au/Awards/past-winners\)](http://www.alpma.com.au/Awards/past-winners) Awards and the Lawyer's Weekly Women in Law Awards for [Thought Leader \(https://www.lawyersweekly.com.au/womeninlaw/categories/thought-leader-of-the-year\)](https://www.lawyersweekly.com.au/womeninlaw/categories/thought-leader-of-the-year) of the Year and probably others we've missed.

But we reckon the LII is the best barometer of what is going on in Australian legal innovation because it is the most inclusive. It goes beyond law firms to include individuals, academics, legal startups and legal commentators. It also publishes its shortlist and it awards the Index to several people in each category. So looking at the shortlist and winner list as a whole lets you see different themes emerge each year. It also gives you a real appreciation for how quickly life is changing in Australia for lawyers.

When the Index started in 2013, all the winners were law firms and the innovations were largely cultural and managerial, rather than technological or rethinking the legal business model: 'reverse mentoring', strengths-based approach to people management, 'innovative culture' and KWM for something described as 'all-round excellence' (which we'd like on a t-shirt, thanks!)

Interestingly, some were shortlisted on the basis of their external communications: Pod Legal for its infographics and Maurice Blackburn for its 'microsite which contains snippets of information that address common legal questions clearly'. Australian

lawyers have really upped their content marketing game in the last few years – we'd hope providing helpful legal information on social media and your website wouldn't be considered cutting-edge today...

There was also a theme of knowledge sharing, either internally, such as Watermark's Wiki or Advent Balance's use of Yammer, or external, like Chen Palmer's Public Law

Toolkit.

By 2014, the landscape had changed. The megafirms didn't make it into the final six – they simply weren't the most imaginative folk in town. The Index was dominated by remote and virtual firms (Hive Legal, Legal Vision, Nexus Law Group, Keypoint Law, Nest Legal and Clearpoint Counsel, which operates out of a coworking space). These firms also all challenged the traditional partnership remuneration and hierarchical managerial structure.

Jumping forward two years, remote and virtual firms are increasingly commonplace (to the chagrin of the Legal Services Board which continues to insist on publishing a lawyer's physical address). Even LEAP, that stalwart of the traditional small practice, has introduced an iPhone app, albeit one that prides itself in its time-recording capabilities *facepalm*.

The following year, 2015, was remarkable for its variety and the fact the big guns had come back to the innovation party:

- The top tiers (<http://www.neotalogic.com/gilbert-tobin-and-norton-rose-fulbright-honored-for-innovation/>), by this stage, had all discovered Neota Logic's systems platform and were pumping out the artificial intelligence tools.
- Cutprice docs were de jour – Allens Accelerate handing them out for free and Lawpath automating them and selling them for a song.
- Envato's gloriously plain (<https://studio.envato.com/user-terms>), language drafting scored an inclusion as did an Australian based (<http://www.unisonoutsourcing.com.au/>), legal process outsourcing firm.
- Teaching lawyers to meditate and giving them days off to be healthy also featured (only in the law would this be remarkable, but hey?).
- Plus a lecturer sharing land docs via an online Moodle, a criminal law app and a dream enabler (<https://viewlegal.com.au/product/dream-enabler/>).

Which brings us to 2016, brought to you by the letter 'collaboration', including:

- The Fold Legal (<http://www.thefoldlegal.com.au/blog/the-fold-wins-2016-legal-innovation-index>), whose Managing Director establishes strategic partnerships and equity arrangements with fintech clients to help them manage the cost and risk of delivering their product to market, including taking a role on the client's Advisory Board and sometimes an equity stake

- [Allens Arrow](http://www.allens.com.au/services/alternative/arrow.htm) (<http://www.allens.com.au/services/alternative/arrow.htm>), a multi-disciplinary document review team;
- Corrs Collaborate, a lawyer-client portal that does what it says on the label
- Herbert Smith Freehills, working with clients to optimise their in-house legal processes
- [Clayton Utz's](https://www.claytonutz.com/apps/cu-safe-app) (<https://www.claytonutz.com/apps/cu-safe-app>) app for responding to a serious safety or environmental incident and notifying other stakeholders
- [Divorceright's](http://www.legaltechnology.com/latest-news/innovation-index-winners/) (<http://www.legaltechnology.com/latest-news/innovation-index-winners/>), automated documents and community of multi-disciplinary professionals to help divorcees agree.

Plus two we've already blogged about: [G+T's coding](https://legaleconomy.com.au/blog/2016/08/22/should-lawyers-learn-code-maybe-not/) (<https://legaleconomy.com.au/blog/2016/08/22/should-lawyers-learn-code-maybe-not/>) and [Katie Miller](https://legaleconomy.com.au/blog/2016/06/27/our-5-fave-melbourne-legal-innovations-1516/) (<https://legaleconomy.com.au/blog/2016/06/27/our-5-fave-melbourne-legal-innovations-1516/>).

So what can we learn from this trajectory? We think it shows that legal innovators are thinking more strategically about the outcome to be achieved, rather than using the latest technology or methodology for its own sake (virtual firms! AI platforms! knowledge-sharing!). It also shows how quickly things can change in four years.

We also reckon it shows that the Australian legal innovation and legal tech scene is far more gender inclusive than [overseas](http://www.ft.com/cms/s/2/0a7e6756-5ac8-11e5-a28b-50226830d644.html#axzz4lOsrPi85) (<http://www.ft.com/cms/s/2/0a7e6756-5ac8-11e5-a28b-50226830d644.html#axzz4lOsrPi85>). And the inclusion of academics and commentators in the Index suggests that Australia is moving in the direction of the US where not-for-profit legal innovations promoting public sector accountability, access to justice and academic integrity are [really taking off](http://www.abajournal.com/magazine/article/meet_our_2015_legal_rebels) (http://www.abajournal.com/magazine/article/meet_our_2015_legal_rebels).

Because we can be as parochial as anyone, congratulations to Victorian legal dynamos Demetrio Zema, Katie Miller and Ann-Marie Cade for winning in the individual competition. And with so many legal innovators in Melbourne, LexisNexis, will the party hit the road next year...?

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