



# FIRMS TO WATCH 2016

THE SECOND EDITION OF ALB'S ANNUAL LIST AGAIN SHOWCASES SMALLER FIRMS THAT ARE ABLE TO COMPETE WITH LARGER PEERS THROUGH QUALITY WORK AND SAVVY STRATEGIES. THE LIST BELOW IS IN ALPHABETICAL ORDER. BY **RANAJIT DAM**



Christopher Daniel  
Managing Partner

## ADVOCATUS LAW

LOCATION: *Singapore*  
ESTABLISHED: 2009  
PARTNERS: 4

Punching well above its weight in Singapore's ultra-competitive disputes market is Advocatus Law, helmed by managing partner Christopher Anand Daniel, which also has a transactional practice. Notable work in the past year has included a \$30 million arbitration at the Singapore International Arbitration Centre over an investment by its Korean conglomerate clients in a coal mine in Indonesia, which spawned a number of court actions in the Singapore High Court and the Singapore Court of Appeal, and acting for the Maldives government and successfully reversing in the Singapore Court of Appeal an injunction against the government taking back its international airport from concessionaries. The firm has also been pursuing growth, adding two partners and eight associates, including hiring senior litigation partner Suresh Nair and two associates from Straits Law Practice, in the past year. And Advocatus says it will continue to actively recruit at all levels.



Chetan Chadha  
Managing Partner

## CHADHA & CHADHA

LOCATIONS: *New Delhi, Gurgaon, Mumbai, Pune, Hyderabad, Bangalore, Cochin, Chennai, Ahmedabad, Kolkata*  
ESTABLISHED: 1967  
PARTNERS: 7

Riding the wave of a renewed business confidence in India is the IP law firm Chadha & Chadha, which in the past year witnessed three new office openings – in Ahmedabad, Chennai and Kolkata – and hired seven attorneys as it looked to handle more work – patent filings, for example, have increased by 50 percent. And it has also kept many of its clients happy, with the firm boasting a 98 percent patent prosecution success rate.

Certainly, external factors have attributed to the firm's success, including a spurt in the growth of startups in India, increased awareness of IP protection and enforcement, and a rise in FDI in the country's manufacturing sector. But the firm has also boosted its cause by establishing its presence in different Indian cities, pushing for client development, helping create IP awareness in India and, in the words of the firm, "pioneering IP litigation and ADR." In the next 12 months, Chadha & Chadha expects to see more patent filings, open offices in second-tier cities, raise IP awareness in domestic market, and put more focus on ADR as an alternative to litigation.



## DONOVAN & HO

LOCATION: *Kuala Lumpur*  
ESTABLISHED: 2014  
PARTNERS: 2



Donovan Cheah,  
Shawn Ho  
Partners

Donovan & Ho might be young (launched 2014) and small (five fee-earners, including partners Donovan Cheah and Shawn Ho), but the firm is hard to miss online thanks to its robust social media strategy, which it uses as an efficient way of reaching out to new and existing clients. "We are active on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram. Our firm runs a regularly updated law blog which we use to share legal knowledge and insight from a more practical perspective," the firm says. "Social media has leveled the playing field for smaller firms which do not have a substantial advertising and marketing budget, and has allowed us to make connections with larger clients, including multinationals, that would have otherwise been difficult to penetrate without knowing the right people. It has also given us the opportunity to attract bright young talent to join our firm."

And by the looks of it, the approach is working. Work done by the firm last year included advising Venturra Capital on its Series A investment in Malaysian startup kaodim.com, and it recorded an approximate revenue growth of 300 percent in a 12-month period starting December 2014. But Donovan & Ho isn't stopping there. "We are looking to expand our services into new markets, both in terms of geography and industry," says the firm.



Patrick Tan  
Managing Partner

## FORTIS LAW CORPORATION

LOCATION: *Singapore*  
ESTABLISHED: 2004  
PARTNERS: 4

Fortis Law is a local firm with a regional reach, forging tie-ups with Banthia & Co. Advocates in India, Teh Kim Teh, Salina & Co. in Malaysia, and Siam Justice Center and GPS Legal and Consulting in Thailand recently, with plans for further alliances in China, Indonesia, Hong Kong and Cambodia. The past six months have also seen the hiring of nine lawyers to take the firm to its current strength of 16 fee-earners.

Fortis Law describes its growth strategy in one word: positioning. Its "lean" operating structure enables it to "cost flexibility to our clients, while maintaining our high service standards." And clients have become more sophisticated as well. "Clients are now better informed and are more discerning than they ever have been... today [they] perform very detailed comparisons on the services and fee structures of various law firms before engaging them," it says. "As a result, we are seeing more clients who would traditionally turn to the Singapore legal heavyweights choosing to work with us."



Mark Fraser  
Managing Partner

## FRASERS LAW COMPANY

LOCATION: *Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City*  
ESTABLISHED: 2004  
PARTNERS: 3

The only Vietnam-based law firm on the list, Frasers has spent the past year focused on building brand recognition and client relationships. "In the past 12 months we launched a seminar series, with events held domestically and regionally," it says. "This has helped to build our brand awareness and strengthen the reputations of our partners and lawyers as well as the collective expertise of our firm among existing and prospective clients and law firms which do not have a presence in Vietnam." And its efforts are paying off, with the firm seeing increasing interest in Vietnam from investors in the M&A, real estate and FMCG sectors from Singapore, Hong Kong,

South Korea, the U.S. and Japan; in fact Frasers recently set up a Japan desk to deal with the growing amount of work from that country.

And multinational initiatives like AEC are helping their cause. "Together with Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), we see that the formation of the AEC will also give rise to material benefits for Vietnam and will further enhance the recent improvements to the regulatory and overall investment landscape in Vietnam. We expect to continue hiring new lawyers in 2016 and beyond," the firm says.



Veronica  
Tampubolon  
Managing Partner

## INDPEX LAW FIRM

LOCATION: *Jakarta*

ESTABLISHED: 2015

PARTNERS: 2

One of only two law firms on ALB's Firms to Watch 2016 list to be set up in 2015, INDPEX is also the smallest, with a total of four fee-earners, including the two partners. Work so far has focused primarily on construction disputes, with INDPEX representing clients before the BANI Arbitration Center. However, the firm is seeking to enter the capital markets space in a major way, and as a result, it is looking to hire aggressively. Driven by, in the words of the firm, "an ambition for growth and passion for the legal profession," INDPEX prioritises personalised service as one of its strengths: "We treat our clients' objectives and business plan in a personal way, as if we were an integrated part of the client's organisation." And with Indonesia continuing to grow economically and attract investment, the firm sees its star on the rise as well.



Eric Santoso,  
Immanuel  
Indrawan  
Partners

## INDRAWAN DARSYAH SANTOSO

LOCATION: *Jakarta*

ESTABLISHED: 2013

PARTNERS: 2

The eight lawyers at Indonesia's Indrawan Darsyah Santoso (IDS) are split equally between the corporate practice and the dispute resolution practice. The firm has been busy in both, assisting on cross-border M&A matters on the transactions side, and representing clients in shipping matters on the disputes side, among other work. IDS believes that accessibility is one of its strongest points. "Despite being relatively small in terms of number of lawyers, we provide direct accessibility to our clients in view of maintaining responsiveness," it says. "In our experience, clients always appreciate being able to share their thoughts directly with partners of the firm."

IDS's corporate practice has been involved in work such as assisting startups in establishing their presence in Indonesia. "Having been there from the start, we invest in understanding each client's preferences and methods of doing business in Indonesia and advise them throughout the growth of their business," it says. And with disputes, the firm can offer a full suite of services. "Our commercial dispute resolution practice is keen to assist our clients in preventing the dispute from escalating, but in certain circumstances where it is unavoidable, our litigators are prepared to defend our clients' interests," says IDS.



Joyce A. Tan  
Managing Partner

## JOYCE A. TAN & PARTNERS

LOCATION: *Singapore*

ESTABLISHED: 1998

PARTNERS: 3

In September, Joyce A. Tan & Partners scored a coup with the hire of Sheena Jacob as a partner from Bird & Bird ATMD, where she was the head of IP. Since her arrival, Jacob has acted for Nestle in a groundbreaking action in relation to the three-dimensional shape mark for the two-finger and four-finger Kit Kat products. Additionally, the firm recently added two more associates, taking the total number of fee-earners to 10. According to the firm, by providing "a strong alternative option to clients looking for Big Law expertise in a boutique firm with a strong international network," it ensures that it is "an attractive proposition to clients and other like-minded law firms." In the coming year, Joyce A. Tan & Partners says it "will be executing an implementation plan, including further investment in technology and strategic recruitment with a view to this expansion."

# EVERY PRACTICE, A BEST PRACTICE

WE ARE A BOUTIQUE LAW FIRM OFFERING CORPORATE TRANSACTIONAL AND DISPUTE RESOLUTION SERVICES BUILT ON THE SOUND GOVERNING PRINCIPLES OF INTEGRITY, RESPONSIVENESS AND KNOWLEDGE.

AT ADVOCATUS, WE ARE COMMITTED TO DELIVERING SERVICE STANDARDS OF THE HIGHEST QUALITY WITH A PERSONABLE APPROACH. CHALLENGES ARE MET WITH AN IN-DEPTH UNDERSTANDING OF ISSUES AND A SOLUTION FOCUSED APPROACH.

OUR TEAM OF LAWYERS HAS THE APTITUDE AND ATTITUDE TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE. WE ARE A DYNAMIC TEAM AND OUR PARTNERS BRING WITH THEM RICH DOMESTIC, REGIONAL AND CROSS-BORDER EXPERIENCE AND EXPERTISE, GAINED IN SINGAPORE'S LARGEST LAW FIRMS AND MNCs.

OUR CORE MISSION IS TO PROVIDE TIMELY, EFFECTIVE AND TAILORED OUTCOMES FOR OUR CLIENTS. WE SEE OURSELVES AS STAKEHOLDERS AND PARTNERS ADDING VALUE TO OUR CLIENTS' BUSINESSES AND ARE COMMITTED TO BUILDING LONG-TERM RELATIONSHIPS.

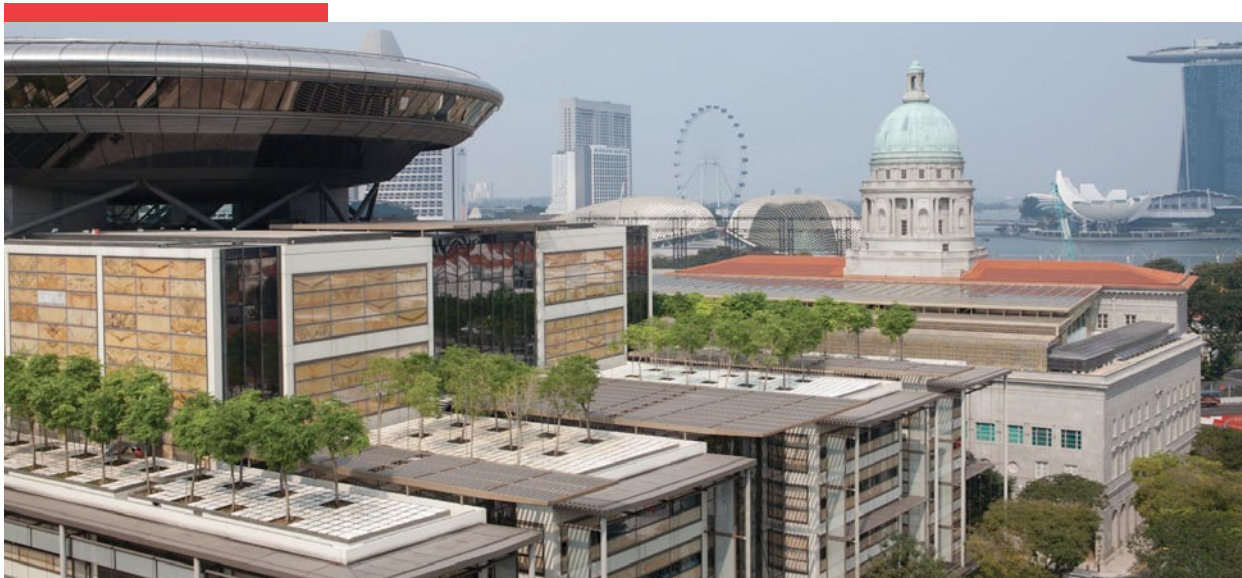
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INTERNATIONAL AND DOMESTIC ARBITRATION  
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WHITE COLLAR CRIME



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John Koh  
Managing Partner

## KOH VASS & CO.

LOCATION: *Hong Kong*  
ESTABLISHED: 2014  
PARTNERS: 2

As UK-headquartered law firm Osborne Clarke's first office in Asia, Koh Vass & Co. has been involved in a number of deals within the region, such as acting on the acquisitions of electrical equipment distribution companies in Singapore, India and Japan; and assisting a mobile phone manufacturer on data privacy issues. Launching with two partners, Marcus Vass and John Koh, and three associates, the firm now has eight fee-earners, including senior PRC counsel Guohua Zhang. The firm also advises several digital business companies, ranging from startups to major players, with its work spanning the Asia-Pacific region, from India to Australia and from Singapore to Japan. Koh Vass & Co., which saw its revenue double in 2015, is looking to expand not only in Hong Kong, but also to Singapore and Shanghai in 2016.



Raymond Mah  
Managing Partner

## MAHWENCKWAI & ASSOCIATES

LOCATION: *Kuala Lumpur*  
ESTABLISHED: 1985  
PARTNERS: 2

The two partners of Malaysia's MahWengKwai & Associates (MWKA) are determined to blaze a trail in their respective areas of practice: Lim Jo Yan, who heads the Corporate and Commercial Practice Group, has been focusing on venture capital, equity crowdfunding and FinTech startups. Meanwhile Raymond Mah, managing director and head of the Dispute Resolution Practice Group, has been particularly active in construction litigation and adjudication. The firm also received a fillip from the return of founder Dato' Mah Weng Kwai who rejoined as a consultant upon his retirement as a judge of the Court of Appeal early last year. The firm remains optimistic about the growth opportunities in the equity crowdfunding and startup space. Additionally, construction disputes is expected to rise even more in the next 12 months; the coming next year could be an even bigger one for MWKA.



Jason Corbett  
Managing Partner

## SILK LEGAL

LOCATION: *Bangkok*  
ESTABLISHED: 2015  
PARTNERS: 3

Barely six months old as this magazine went to press, Thailand's Silk Legal has nevertheless notched up some notable achievements, including advising on big-ticket cross-border deals, helping a Thai firm register its trademarks around the region, and even defending a group of celebrities on criminal charges in relation to improperly promoting a local beer through the social media. Founded by Jason Corbett, the firm welcomed its second partner in the form of Pisut Rakwong in September. With a third partner to be added in February, the firm is targeting a headcount of 23, up from seven at present. Silk Legal, which is currently in an alliance with the U.S.-based Vititoe Law Group over potential aviation litigation, is looking to attract startup work in a big way. Apart from launching a start-up focused website, it has also teamed up with Bangkok-based incubator Tech Grind as its legal partner. And 2016 will be brighter still: It plans to add more than six qualified lawyers in Bangkok, and establish two new offices in Laos and Myanmar, in cooperation with local partners.



Andrew Sutedja  
Managing Partner

## SUTEDJA & ASSOCIATES

LOCATION: *Jakarta*  
ESTABLISHED: 1996  
PARTNERS: 5

The year 2015 was a good one for Sutedja & Associates: Headcount doubled from the previous year and revenue rose by about 2.5 times. Notable work done last year included representing a client against an

eye hospital over a malpractice claim; advising a Malaysian medical services provider on an acquisition in Indonesia; representing a Hong Kong company in the appeal process against a Korean company and an Indonesian company in relation to a claim worth approximately \$2.5 million. The firm also assisted a coal mining company on a sale and purchase agreement worth \$60 million, acted for a contact lens distributor over tax disputes, and advised an eco-tourism company on land acquisition worth more than \$2.5 million. Last year Sutedja & Associates also joined the League of Lawyers network, headquartered in Hong Kong and Germany.



Eric Szweda  
Hong Kong  
Managing Partner

## TROUTMAN SANDERS

ASIA LOCATIONS: *Beijing, Hong Kong, Shanghai*  
FIRST ASIA OFFICE ESTABLISHED: 1997 (*Hong Kong*)  
PARTNERS IN ASIA: 8

The Atlanta-headquartered Troutman Sanders may have been founded in 1897, but it came to Asia exactly a century later, and today, the firm has eight partners and 27 attorneys across its three offices in Greater China. Capital markets is one of its critical practices in this part of the world, and the firm represents investment banks, issuers as well as private equity and venture capital investors. The key to its growth so far, says the firm, is the "excellent working relations" it maintains with Hong Kong's Securities and Futures Commission, HKEx, and central and local governments in China including China Securities Regulatory Commission, Ministry of Commerce, the State Development Planning Commission, and the four previously so-called "specialised banks."

Last year, Hong Kong regained its No. 1 position as the top destination for IPOs globally, but Troutman Sanders has more good news coming its way. "Against the background of China's One Belt and One Road initiative, there will be more outbound investments which also make disputes unavoidable. Hong Kong has long been an ideal venue for arbitration and our firm's international arbitration and dispute resolution team would provide our clients the most effective legal representation possible."

**SILK LEGAL**

- COMMERCIAL LAW
- LITIGATION
- ARBITRATION
- INBOUND INVESTMENT
- REAL ESTATE
- MERGERS & ACQUISITIONS

Silk Legal is an international law firm based in Bangkok, Thailand. The firm provides a full-service of corporate, commercial and dispute resolution specializing in tailored services for high-level clients. The firm's partners are proven experts in commercial litigation, inbound investment and corporate law. Silk Legal is well-placed to advise on interests throughout Thailand.

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