Women in Technology: Deborah Im

Interviews and Profiles

Technology, Privacy, and eCommerce

In the September 2017 Technology issue, the Docket *spoke to six women who are leading the vanguard in Silicon Valley and beyond. From San Francisco to Austin and Singapore, these women exemplify the mix of fortitude, talent, and foresight necessary to succeed where there is no roadmap*

When Deborah Im tells people that she works for Facebook, their eyes light up. The social media company has become synonymous with innovation, and is globally recognized as a leader in the tech industry. Based in Singapore, Im serves as Facebook's associate general, APAC, and is a shining example that working in-house can be as creative and experimental as the tech engineers sitting across the table — navigating the nuanced legal questions associated with engaging nearly two billion active users monthly.

Im is resourceful. She is especially aware of Facebook's regulatory position in Asia and works tirelessly to maneuver the company through regulatory frameworks in a variety of jurisdictions. Given the company's pioneering position in the tech industry, Im believes that the legal department must be prepared to expand its scope of responsibility to ensure success. "There's a poster at Facebook that says, 'Nothing at Facebook is someone else's problem,' and that's a value we all try to embrace," she says.

By creating "disruptive technologies" — which include novel products such as Facebook Live — the company often operates in uncharted territory with regard to data privacy and content sharing. Managing regulatory issues in Asia, in particular, presents a unique challenge for Im because most countries in the region have rapidly evolving and disparate government systems. Although this may seem like a daunting prospect, Im accepts the challenge with open arms.

"I think the work we do is important," she says. "Every person at Facebook has an important role to play in helping the company fulfill its mission." To illustrate this point, she notes an anecdote about a time when US President John F. Kennedy visited the NASA Space Center. He introduced himself to a janitor carrying a broom and asked him what he was doing. "Mr. President," the janitor replied, "I'm helping to put a man on the moon."

As a woman in technology, Im is proud of Facebook for instituting a top-down commitment to diversity — starting with CEO Mark Zuckerberg and COO Sheryl Sandberg. Thanks to initiatives that support inclusion and eliminate bias in the workplace, Im feels heard, respected, and valued by her peers at all levels of the organization. "A company's values are just the sum of its parts. So each of the employees at Facebook play an integral role," she states. To Im, Facebook's interest in making the world a more inclusive and connective space extends beyond its policies, and is a primary contributor to the company's expanding global position among its users.

To provide some perspective, when Im joined Facebook in 2014, the Singapore office had roughly 60 employees. Now the company has over 600 employees in Singapore alone, with over 1,000 employees across the Asia Pacific region. The rapid increase of employees is necessary to support growing consumer interest in the platform. This desire to connect with the people and things customers care about continues to rise exponentially. " The growth of Facebook in Asia has been nothing short of incredible," she notes.

Im is a product of what she describes as a nomadic childhood. Having lived in Northern Virginia, London, Seoul, and Northern California, Im has seen a lot. However, when asked about the future, she remains steadfast about her intention to remain at Facebook. Working as in-house counsel for one of the world's most innovative and recognizable companies, and in an exciting, evolving region, is a challenge that will keep her busy for quite some time.

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