

Lawyer jailed for pocketing clients' payment to firm

■ BY ELENA CHONG

A LAWYER who pocketed clients' funds totalling \$84,000 was jailed for three years and eight months yesterday.

Leong Wai Nam pleaded guilty earlier before District Judge Sarjit Singh to five counts of criminal breach of trust involving \$56,600 and one of cheating a businessman of \$4,300.

Ten other charges were taken into consideration and the sentence was backdated to his remand on Feb 17.

Deputy Public Prosecutor Ong Luan Tze told the court that Leong, 41, who was called to the Bar in 1994, chose not to register himself with any law practice after leaving his last law firm, Regional Law, in 2007.

His practising certificate expired in March last year and was not renewed.

She said that Leong established a profit-sharing arrangement with a number of law firms. He also made a similar verbal agreement with his friend and former colleague, Mr Benjamin Ang, an associate di-



Leong Wai Nam had struck a verbal agreement with friend and former colleague Benjamin Ang, an associate director of Engelin Teh Practice, in which Leong would liaise with the client and relay instructions to Mr Ang, who would carry out the legal work involved.

rector at Engelin Teh Practice (ETP).

Under this agreement, Leong would liaise with the client and relay the instructions to Mr Ang, who would carry out the necessary legal work.

If the client needed to be represented, Leong would be the one to appear in court.

Leong was meant to split the fees equally for work done with Mr Ang in relation to ETP's clients. But instead of forwarding the fees to the client's account under the firm, Leong deposited them into his own bank account.

Between 2005 and 2007, Leong represented five clients in various matters and pocketed all fees directly.

Early last year, he cheated a businessman of legal fees, by letting him believe that he would act for him on two matters when he was no longer practising.

In response, his lawyer Leonard Loo said Leong, who had learnt from his mistakes, had partially paid back \$25,000 before he gave himself up to the police in 2007.

He said his client had cooperated fully with investigations to "redeem his errors", and the fact that he made a police report against himself showed that he knew he had to rectify the situation by coming clean.

Leong, he added, is likely to face a second round of disciplinary proceedings from the Law Society.

elena@sph.com.sg