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Imas, LIA tie up with Swiss firm for fund info

Service a boon for funds with wider ambitions; some local players stay out

By **KENNETH LIM**

A NEW initiative to improve access to investment fund information in Singapore may struggle to get smaller local fund houses to sign on, observers said.

The Investment Management Association of Singapore (Imas) and the Life Insurance Association (LIA) have inked a tie-up with Switzerland-based fundinfo AG to offer legal and marketing documents from funds that are being sold in the country.

'Facilitating access for everyone in the retail investment process to original fund documents of fund providers is an important charge of Imas in our mission to promote transparency and efficiency in the Singapore funds industry,' Imas executive director Michael Lim said in a statement.

The documents can be accessed on the Imas and LIA-run website FundSingapore.com for free. Investors previously could get only performance data and background information on the funds, but now they can also get legal and marketing documents.

Philipp Portman, chief executive of fundinfo, said fund providers pay fundinfo to aggregate their documents. He estimates that about 80 per cent of the funds registered in Singapore have already signed on.

Most of these fund houses are those that also have an international presence, and fundinfo has yet to get local asset managers who mostly sell in Singapore alone to participate, Mr Portman said.

'That's now of course arguably our homework to convince the local asset managers to be part of our platforms as well,' he said.

Lester Gray, chief executive of fund manager Schrodgers in the Asia-Pacific, explained that international managers have a clearer economic benefit from using fundinfo, because documentation requirements vary in every market, and keeping track of all that paperwork can be extremely challenging for an international house.

'The management of this data is a very, very big task, so to be able to centralise that task with someone like fundinfo obviously makes sense for international managers,' Mr Gray said, adding: 'A local manager has a much easier task in terms of managing their data. They might only be doing business in one country.'

One local fund manager told BT that the cost probably would not make sense for many smaller, domestic fund managers.

But the fund manager, whose fund hopes to sell products overseas, was considering using the service because of plans to grow beyond Singapore.

Mr Lim said the issue of cost is not unique to Singapore-based local fund managers, but expected some of the smaller houses to eventually sign on.

'In time, local managers may require such a platform as they move towards multiple funds in multiple countries and, also, they may wish to maintain their competitiveness,' he said.

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