

A bright future for digital content creators

By  Michael Smolenski

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The internet has proved to be a double-edged sword for content creators. Never before has it been so easy to create content and to publish it to large audiences. However, it's never been so easy for the public to access content without having to pay for it.



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At the heart of this issue is content protection. If content creators were able to protect their content, and only allow it to be consumed by people who pay for it, they would be able to earn more money from their endeavours and even end their relationships with middlemen.

Blockchain is being heralded as the solution to this content protection problem — the great hope for exploited artists everywhere.

Unfortunately, it's not quite as simple as that. Blockchains aren't designed for the storage and transfer of large data files. The Proof of Work (PoW) consensus mechanism for the transaction verification process is tortuously slow. Processing times can take long periods (hours) of high network congestion. This results in crippling scalability issues.

Another issue is privacy — personal data on the blockchain is viewable to all. Lastly, it's incredibly expensive to store data exceeding just a few kilobytes on Ethereum. The fees are kept high to protect against further system congestion.

Improving the blockchain

However, the solution to the content problem does still start with blockchains like Ethereum — as long as new internet technology layers can run on top of it. These new layers could be made up of a combination of blockchain, off-chain storage infrastructure, and peer-to-peer (P2P) file-sharing technology. The blockchain layer is best thought of as a layer for managing permissions and payments.

Using these technologies, a DApp could be created that allows peer-to-peer sales of digital content (for example, music, videos and eBooks). Artists, producers and authors could publish and sell content directly to fans — dynamically granting or revoking permissions. To receive access to the media file, customers would simply send the requisite amount of cash — in the form of tokens — as outlined in the smart contract.

A new relationship

There would be no need for intermediaries such as Apple, Spotify, Amazon or Netflix to store and distribute content. Content creators could decide the terms of their content's consumption, offering new opportunities for value exchange. For example, a musician could show their appreciation of an album purchase through a direct feedback channel and maybe offer their fans discounted tickets.

This new protocol could also provide a permanent decentralised record showing exactly how content had changed hands. Suddenly, laws that protect data rights could be enforced.

Exciting opportunities provided by a blockchain-based infrastructure like this could extend beyond the world of entertainment. For example, a decentralised election DApp could feature an automated authorisation mechanism to reveal votes after the casting time had expired. Alternatively, a DApp could allow a patient to retain and manage their health record on their own devices, with access granted to medical physicians and third parties when needed.

A mainstream technology

Blockchain technology has rightly gained widespread acceptance as a safe and secure data repository that can be used in a wide variety of industry sectors and applications.

But a blockchain-powered content protection solution is necessary for blockchain to debut as a mainstream technology, and to be used for content publication instead of simple transactions. Everyone from independent creators to large businesses could benefit. With low costs, decentralised governance, and an open ecosystem, it represents a seismic shift away from traditional data-sharing options. A new era of the internet, characterised by the ownership of personal data, could be upon us.

ABOUT MICHAEL SMOLENSKI

Michael Smolenski is the CEO and founder of Lightstreams, a blockchain based network with an authorisation protocol for controlling access to data.
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