

Why I'm Focusing on Blockchain Applications for PR

I Suspect That Public Relations Largely Dismisses Blockchain Technology Because of Its Strong Association with Bitcoin. This is a Mistake.

In 2000 or so, I was introduced to the concept of the “weblog” by [Dan Gillmor](#), then a columnist at the [San Jose Mercury News](#). A new world opened up to me at a time when I was looking at my day-to-day work as a PR person in Silicon Valley and asking “[Is this all there is?](#)” In August 2001, I [started blogging](#) and [writing](#) about these and other developments. The rest of the story should be familiar to most of the people who read this; for everyone else, there’s [LinkedIn](#). Suffice to say, it’s been an amazing time to be in this line of work.

Of course, a *lot* of innovation on the social web has happened since, to say nothing of the new and different ways companies continue to adapt, leverage, and at times struggle with it. However, granting at least [one notable exception](#), very little has affected me in quite the way that my first personal discoveries of the social web did nearly a decade-and-a-half ago.

This is changing. As I continue to observe and engage with the community that is exploring [blockchain-based concepts](#), I find this kernel of inspiration germinating once again. The [signals](#) are impossible to ignore and the possibilities for communications and community engagement are far too compelling.

Certainly, there are a lot of the usual signs:

- [Venture capitalists](#) are throwing money into this space.
- There’s an [active enthusiast press](#).
- The [business press](#) has taken notice.
- Companies both [small](#) and [large](#) are doing interesting things.
- Global regulatory viewpoints [are literally all over the map](#).
- We’ve seen a financial [boom and bust](#) that tracks against the [Gartner Hype Cycle](#) somewhat.
- There’s even the requisite amount of [fear mongering](#).

All of this should be familiar territory: We saw it to roughly the same degree (though with *considerably* lower stakes) in the 2000s as the social web was coalescing.

So, why do *I* feel compelled to do explore blockchain applications for corporate communications *now*? There are five principal reasons:

- **It’s Uncharted Territory for PR:** [As I’ve written earlier](#), PR needs to figure out how to deal with hierarchy-averse environments—quickly. Far too many in our trade don’t know what to do with a media property that doesn’t have an editor-in-chief or a mailing address. So, imagine what happens when [a reputation-significant online source](#) or

[service](#) exists merely as highly distributed software, perhaps even outside the control of its creators. That's the world I want to be prepared for and help others to do the same.

- **It's Where the Creativity Is:** One cannot help but be in awe at what the communities who are building these technologies and applications are imagining and bringing to life.
- **It Uniquely Addresses a Very Real Need:** For any scenario that requires collusion-resistant verification, high levels of transparency, or a solid proof-of-performance, blockchain technology answers the challenge elegantly. The demands for corporate transparency are only going to increase and, now, companies have at least one tool that puts some real teeth in the oft-promised ideal of self-regulation.
- **It Ticks All of the Right Boxes for Me:** Open source? Voluntary collaboration? Peer-to-peer frameworks? Flummoxed government institutions? Consensus-driven approach? Corporate labs trying to make sense of it all? Everything about this screams "Phil."
- **The Advertising Industry Hasn't Yet Figured Out a Way to Pollute It:** I feel like somebody or a group of somebodies will make this all about who launches a new potato chip flavor on a blockchain first. I would consider that an abuse of the medium, especially at this stage. This is much bigger than that, and much bigger than social media was.

So what am I doing? At this early stage, I am:

- **Walking the Walk:** As a simple demonstration, the text of this post has been registered on the Bitcoin blockchain. The cryptographic summary of this text has been saved in [PDF](#) and submitted to [ProofOfExistence.Com](#), where it has been notarized. There is now indelible proof that I published these thoughts today, no matter what happens to my blog, LinkedIn...or even ProofOfExistence.Com.
- **Doing My Thinking In Public:** As before, I'm [writing](#). I'm thinking. Hard. Maybe years from now I'll look about my early blockchain-related writings the way I now look at [this impenetrably verbose stinker](#), but at least I'm investigating the possibilities. It's [Cunningham's Law](#) in action.
- **Asking Questions of Smart People:** I recently authored [an article about smart contracts](#) with the thoughtful and generous input of [Sergey Nazarov](#), co-founder of [SmartContract.Com](#). I've also been corresponding with [Bitnation's Susanne Tarkowski Tempelhof](#) for some time now, discussing the broader issues of competitive governance, trustless verifiability, and individual freedom. I have a list of all the people I want to talk to across all different points of the value chain, from core development to commercialization. (If you think you should be on this list and would like to chat, you know where to find me. Coffee/drinks/nachos on me.)
- **Sharing What I Know and Believe:** Last week, I presented about bitcoin and blockchain technology for Edelman's "Wisdom Wednesday" global internal education series. From what I can tell, it was well-received. At least one executive has expressed

interest in receiving a briefing on this topic. Some of these efforts will undoubtedly spill into my public life at conferences and posts like this.

Watch this space. I'm only going to be writing about this more often.