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Mighty Capital Presents:

Building Blockchain Products with AIKON

Foreword by Marc Blinder

Blockchain and cryptocurrency technology have rapidly evolved since the infamous 2008 Bitcoin Whitepaper. This technology is more than just buzzwords like 'Bored Apes' and 'Degens.' It's already reinventing the world of finance, healthcare, and supply chain management — and promises to reimagine gaming, media, and the arts as well. But we've only scratched the surface of what this technology can bring to both businesses and consumers across the globe.

As more and more of our daily lives are online and use blockchain and crypto technology, now is the time to understand and prepare businesses and the global population for a secure digital future — and that begins with our identities.

Personal information is just one aspect of a digital identity. In Web 2.0, much of the financial value has been created around the tracking and selling of a user's personal information. In the new Web3 world of blockchain, financial value is being shared between platform creators and users while protecting their privacy.

Marc Blinder
Blockchain Founder & CEO
AIKON

Eventually, all of our financial assets will be stored online in wallets across different blockchains, cryptocurrencies, tokenized equities, and NFTs – including bonds and even the title to your house or car. But there are still major challenges ahead. Today, blockchains are fragmented. Each requires its own specific login and an often complex user experience. How are we supposed to expect non-technical business leaders – let alone people like my parents! – to adopt this technology and navigate this new future?

Solving that problem is what drives us. Our company is on a mission to connect digital identities to the blockchain with simple, secure and seamless solutions for both businesses and consumers.

But we know that mass adoption of this technology won't be solved by a single company. It requires a collective industry approach and intuitive, secure products.

In this podcast series, I host my esteemed AIKON colleagues, advisors, and some of the leading industry minds. We discuss building scalable products with blockchain and cryptocurrency technology and why the education gap is one of the biggest hurdles to mass adoption. Through these conversations, it is my hope that AIKON can help bridge that education gap and make blockchain and cryptocurrency more accessible to all – even my parents!

Palm NFT Studio Design Director on NFTs as the Gateway to Crypto

This is the first in AIKON's Mighty Capital-sponsored podcast series on building blockchain products. Here, AIKON Co-Founder and CEO Marc Blinder speaks with Palm NFT Studios Director of Design Connie Wong. Marc and Connie discuss the balancing act involved in building blockchain products, as well as how NFTs are driving larger interest in blockchain and cryptocurrency. They also discuss Connie's other job as a DJ, and how there might be overlap between music and product design.

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> **Connie Wong**
> **Director of Design**
> Palm NFT Studio

On building products for experts and novices alike

Connie's experience in designing blockchain products spans multiple companies, including stints at Kraken and EPIPHANY. So to kick off the discussion, Marc asks Connie about key considerations when designing products for the blockchain industry. Connie says it involves a bit of a balancing act.

Connie says, "In order to design intuitive and delightful products that people like to use, and that scale in any industry, you have to know, first, who you're designing for, what personas. And take a data data driven approach that's user-centered. We're still in the early days of blockchain and crypto adoption. So for the newbie, that's if you're completely new to this space, there seems to be a pretty high barrier to entry. If they don't understand technologies. If they don't understand the jargon and nomenclature that's

heavily used. It can be intimidating and scary for them to even enter this space as a new user.

"So it's important to optimize for both the crypto savvy user that lives and breathes it, like we do, as well as just also make sure that we're not keeping that barrier to entry too high for the novice. And many in the industry are still kind of failing to see that, which is why we're not seeing as much mainstream adoption as we can be.

"There are platforms that cater to consumers. Coinbase does a really good job of that. The key is finding the right balance between the two. So you're not dumbing it down too much for the advanced, savvy user, and providing enough guidance and education for the new user."

On trends in product design and music

Connie also has a second profession: as a DJ. Her experience includes several sets at Burning Man, among other places. So what about the overlap between product design and music? Whether preparing a music set, or building a new product, there is a lot of time spent preparing something for someone who's not there. How do you know what people are gonna like before they see it or before they hear it?

Connie says, "I take different approaches for design and for music. But for music, I always have my finger on the pulse. You know, what genres are kind of rising? And what genres are fading? And then also having a personal touch as well. A good DJ doesn't just play what is mainstream or hot today. You have to have your own personal spin on it. Pun intended.

"For design, there's constantly design trends that you have to track. When it comes to product design, it's a little more concrete than visual design. There's going to be visual design trends that come and go. Do you remember the aqua pill buttons? You can always pick out the era the design came from just by looking at some of the UI.

"For product design and UI/UX design, there are paradigms that we follow. And as far as trends, I think that doesn't impact flows and interaction as it does impact visuals. But these are all things that I always track, like what UI frameworks are being used in the tech stack. It's really important to understand how things are going to be implemented in code as well.

"To break it down even more, you can say that the UX and the interaction design is the foundation of the house. And then the visual design is the facade. So while the facade can change, depending on what products you're designing, you just want the flows to be intuitive. To follow convention. To give the proper affordances to the user that's going to be interacting with them. So those aren't as impacted by trends."

On NFTs as the gateway to crypto

Connie leads the design team at Palm NFT Studio, where they are partnering with artists and creators and content owners that are looking to launch NFTs on the Palm chain. It is well-known that NFTs had a huge year in 2021 – Yahoo Finance referred to it as the "Year of the NFT." Connie thinks the breakout year for NFTs is big news for blockchain in general.

She says, "I refer to NFTs as the gateway drug to crypto. There are crypto enthusiasts and crypto 'degens,' which is a jargon that we use for people who live and breathe crypto, and that trade NFTs. But many NFT holders are new to the blockchain industry.

"Buying an NFT resembles buying any other collectible. We have a partnership. We're dropping 200,000 uniquely generated NFTs for Batman. It's called the Bat Cowl collection. So it's really exciting. A lot of the people that we predict are going to be buying these NFTs are new to the industry. They are just big fans of Batman and DC. And they're treating it like a collectible. It's not unlike buying any other kind of fine art.

"It's something visible and beautiful that you can see, as opposed to an invisible digital asset or stored in an invisible wallet. So it's something tangible, which is what I think makes it easier to comprehend and digest.

"The next natural progression is to buy, trade, and HODL other digital tokens, after you have already been introduced to the blockchain space, in smart contracts through NFTs. So that's why I'm calling it kind of like the gateway bridge to other forms of cryptocurrency.

"The next great thing about NFTs is it's helped artists build a community and fandom around their art. It just gives them a much wider reach. There's a lot of activity in Discord channels around communities based on being fans of the IPs or these artists. So, NFTs are not just an asset, but it also gives you access to special events. Or it's like an access pass into the fandom. So it's a lot of excitement and loyalty that's being gained in all of these communities that are centered around NFTs."

AIKON Head of Strategy on Freedom, Censorship, and Moral Responsibility on the Blockchain

This is episode two in AIKON's Mighty Capital-sponsored podcast series on building blockchain products. Here, AIKON Co-Founder and CEO Marc Blinder speaks with AIKON Head of Strategy Rick Schlesinger. The wide-ranging conversation touches on why technology is morally neutral, the responsibilities of PMs when it comes to censor-proof tech, and how PMs can get started in blockchain.

So grab your cafe au lait and your tightest black turtleneck. This episode gets deep into the philosophy of freedom, censorship, and moral responsibility on the blockchain.

On why technology is neither good nor bad

Not infrequently, blockchain and (especially) cryptocurrency get something of a bad rap. Critics say an untraceable and decentralized currency will be abused by criminals and generally used for nefarious purposes. But these technologies are simply human instruments, and as such are inherently neutral, morally speaking. Rick expands on this idea below.

"Technology is neither good nor bad. Humans are what imbue subjective value into anything, whether it's a car, a piece of land, the ocean, crypto…. People that are in war torn areas, instead of lugging gold and silver and diamonds, and whatever value you might have to get out of a really bad situation, now you only need a small USB thumb drive. You stick it in your pocket, and then boom, you can walk across into a safer area. And wow, you have all your money.

"Then on the flip side, will this create the ability to evade sanctions? I think we also need to think about, well, are those sanctions morally justifiable? Who is the arbiter of moral truth in this case? As we think about technology, it's neither good nor bad. It's how it's being used.

"The world has to wrestle with the fact that you're going to have encryption. You're going to have things that prying eyes and ears are just not going to be able to access. Is that bad? I don't know. It doesn't seem that bad on the surface, but I could understand if it's being used for nefarious means – for terrorism, for human trafficking, something really, absolutely evil.

"We can't just expect technology to solve all of the challenges humans have had in our multiple thousands of years of history. Bitcoin's going to come along and solve human trafficking? No. We still have a role for law enforcement, and a moral code to which we all uphold ourselves."

On the moral responsibility of PMs and digital book burning

If blockchain technology is indeed not susceptible to censorship, what is the responsibility of the PMs and businesses building products on top of it? Is there a moral responsibility for the content produced there? It's complicated.

Rick asks, "If you're building a product, are you going to be designing it for every single edge case of, say, evasion of economic sanctions, or putting something really offensive online so that you can censor or take that down? I don't really think that that's the best approach to product design. However, it is something that we do need to kind of wrestle with.

"And we're seeing a lot of Web 2.0 companies fumble through this a lot. We are seeing incongruent censorship and de-platforming across Facebook, YouTube, Twitter. I mean, even Google search results, right? It's pretty messy…

"It's something that we as humanity are going to need to deal with. Because, from my perspective, if you start erasing and removing record on the internet, simply because you have been sort of pressured to do so, or you just felt it was right, I view that as a digital book burning…

"What we don't want is the erasure of history. We know how destructive that can be. Look at 1930s Germany, and the actual book burning that they did. Look at the Library of Alexandria. Look at what happened when the Bolsheviks took over Russia and led the Communist revolution. Look at what Mao did in Communist China. Massive amounts of not only book burning, but that then also ends up justifying genocide. So we should really be keen on our history and recognize that when you do have this sort of censorship of ideas, unfortunately, it can lead to even worse outcomes for the health and well being of humans…

"Does blockchain solve all this? No, I'm not gonna say that. But it certainly can be helpful. At least here, because you're on a distributed decentralized network, you have multiple records, on multiple servers, on multiple computers globally around the world. And you can access some of those records, even if some of them go down. And I think that that is an important sort of disaster recovery perspective that we all need to start to take into consideration."

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Rick Schlesinger
Head of Strategy
Aikon

On how PMs can get started in Web3

For PMs who are currently based in centralized Web 2.0 companies, how might they get involved in blockchain? Rick recommends "dipping your toe into the Bitcoin world. That could take on many different forms. That could just be buying a little Bitcoin. That could be reading the Satoshi Nakamoto white paper. It could be getting involved with a company that is developing products for Bitcoin. Or going into the Etherium ecosystem."

Rick also says that "it's about learning the differences between how centralized companies and open networks are really operating. It's getting back to that core understanding. And from my perspective, the first rule is do no harm, and approach from a neutral perspective. Leave your biases at the door. Be open to learning. Be open to understanding, because you're going to meet, within this world, many different cultures, many different perspectives. And the perspective and biases that you have today may be changed as you learn more."

Marc agrees that the Web3 world involves encounters with a myriad of rich perspectives, adding, "I've got a personal ax to grind. I see a lot of people online, and in other podcasts, especially on the progressive side of the aisle – which is where my politics lie – talking about 'Crypto Bros.' And I've been in the tech industry a long time now. This is tech company number six I've been involved in. Blockchain is the most diverse geographically, most diverse philosophically, most diverse racially and gender-wise I've ever seen.

"The tech industry is truly open to people – anyone, anywhere in the world. Don't believe what you hear when people talk about 'Crypto Bros.' Blockchain is something that is truly for everyone, if they know how to use it."

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The tech industry is truly open to people – anyone, anywhere in the world. Don't believe what you hear when people talk about 'Crypto Bros.' Blockchain is something that is truly for everyone, if they know how to use it.

Marc Blinder

Here is episode three in AIKON's Mighty Capital-sponsored podcast series on building blockchain products. In this conversation, AIKON Co-Founder and CEO Marc Blinder sits down with Newmoon Accelerator MP Trang Le Bozon. They touch on several topics, all related to the acceleration of the New Age in gaming with blockchain technology. First, they discuss challenges in blockchain technology, as well as opportunities presented by NFTs.

Many of the topics revolve around the way blockchain changes the relationship between ownership and digital assets. The relationship between gaming and blockchain runs deep, so it only makes sense that blockchain game technology is at the forefront of this decentralized technology.

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> **Trang Le Bozo**
> **Accelerator MP**
> Newmoon

On the challenges in blockchain gaming

"If you talk to a gamer, and you say, here we have this blockchain game. And you can make money. And here you have the game of Bloodborne. Which one do you want? Gamers don't play games to make money. They play games for fun, to get away. Making money is a great idea. That's a great side note and can happen. Like Axie Infinity, there were a lot who left their work in the Philippines, for example, because they made money from it."

Gamers "want to have the same game experience. Like when you log in to your game, it takes two seconds. And okay, if we told him, You have a private key, or you have to do this, or you have a wallet. They would look at you like, That's five extra minutes where I can be playing games with my friends! They probably wouldn't sign up for that.

"And that's the demographic. It is generally young kids, or men who are single, who just want to play and dive in. And you have to explain a lot of the logistics of blockchain. It's gonna scare a lot of people.

"I ran into you guys because of what you guys offer. Oh, God, this is so simple. I don't have to deal with this. Because I mean … there's no way I will let my daughter play an NFT game and give her my wallet. … But if she could log in with her gmail account that she has at school, using your solution that you guys have, well, then why not? And I know it's all secure. Then it's on. I think that is the biggest hurdle right now."

On how game developers can use NFTs

"I think one of the things – and it's something you're going to hear about a lot in the next few years; it was at the very beginning, when blockchain came out – is decentralized autonomous organizations. DAOs.

"And a lot of game developers are looking at that. How to associate a DAO to their game, where you let your players come together and collaborate. What the gameplay should look like. What kind of decisions can be made together. And that can make the game a lot more fun.

"There's very creative ways that gamers and developers are working together to make it more fun and more interesting that you don't find in these triple A games yet. Or they don't do it because there's a risk of the IP and whatnot. So it's a very different way of looking at gaming that we haven't seen yet."

Marc asks, "I know there's no one answer to this. But in your opinion, do you think more NFTs are going to be in-game items, like swords that have different levels of power? Or more cosmetics like skins and different looks for the players?"

Trang says, "I think it depends on the type of game. So if it's an MMO game, like a massively multiplayer online game, where there's a lot of actual gaming happening, it would be like the swords that you're talking about. But if it's a kids game, where there's collectibles, like Animal Crossing, like a Pokemon, like Axie Infinity, I think it would be skins. Because kids love avatars.

"And there's something that's also happening in fashion, which is called wear to earn. There are a lot of designers coming up and saying, here's some things you can create for your avatar that you can put on and wear to earn. So I think those two will cross over, eventually, like fashion into gaming. On the collectible side, at least. I see a lot of companies come in."

On how blockchain changes digital ownership

The metaverse is a virtual reality where it is possible to enter into a whole alternate world of commerce. Because of that, the ownership of content on the Internet is changing. Marc says that change is huge.

Marc says, "To me, this is one of the most concrete differences between the blockchain approach and the sort of traditional approach. The traditional approach to the internet and user-generated content is that the users generate all the content on the Facebook social network, and Facebook makes all the money."

He continues, "On the blockchain, the content you create you own and you make up all the money, if there's money to be made. It's just such a different mental model to say, but you're saying, here's some land, build your city. Good luck. Have fun. Have fun, we hope you have fun. We hope you put in a lot of work and make a lot of money for all that hard work, but we're not going to take it from you."

Trang takes this further, saying, "When you tie a DAO [decentralized autonomous organization] to it. And people collaborate and discuss and say I would love to do this in the game. Or if you're going to make a change, we all need to vote on it. That gives another whole different experience to someone who loves gaming.

"A lot of gamers wanted to change World of Warcraft. World of Warcraft had another version of it made by their players, and it was shut down because it was illegal. They had a million players using it.

"And that is the lore that surrounds Vitalik [Buterin] and Ethereum. Why he created Ethereum, one of the reasons was, he was playing his game and he knew he was going to get his sword and they said, No dice. And then he's like, forget this. I need to have ownership of my digital assets. Supposedly, that's the birth of Ethereum."

AIKON Co-Founder and CTO on the
Potential of Blockchain in Product

This is the fourth and final episode in AIKON's Mighty Capital-sponsored podcast series on building blockchain products. Here, AIKON Co-Founder and CEO Marc Blinder talks with AIKON Co-Founder and CTO Tray Lewin. Their conversation begins with a discussion about how blockchain can be used to validate the provenance of important documents. Next they talk about how to make blockchain more user-friendly – which also happens to be AIKON's main mission. A third key topic is about key considerations for PMs when choosing a blockchain for their products.

On how blockchain proves provenance

Because of the transparency of blockchains, Tray cautions that people need to be careful about what information they store there. But while you shouldn't use a blockchain to store private information like a birth certificate, you can use a feature called a hash. A hash is a cryptographic primitive that blockchains have built into them. It serves a useful function as a kind of signature of the data.

Tray says, "That's a key use case for blockchain: proving that the data hasn't been altered. It doesn't all have to be on the blockchain, just the hash."

A great real world example of how blockchain could be used to prove provenance is getting title insurance for a house. As Tray explains, "If you've ever bought a house, you know you have to spend hundreds of dollars to a title insurance company. And what they do is just investigate that nobody else has a claim against that house. So every single time you buy the house, you could go through the same process and pay title insurance companies, even if you sell the same house three times in a row."

Tray continues, "It would be so much better to have that title hashed and stuck on the block-chain. And then when someone needed to prove who owned it, it would be very clear. This entity owned it. This entity sold it.

"So this is a good example of how you can re-duce the layers of overhead. You don't need a trusted party. And you don't need an intermediary. You could just have a single button to click and see the exact history of that title and all its transfers. So completely collapsing this whole cost structure. And to me that's a canonical use case of a blockchain – proving provenance of whatever content, in this case a house."

> " **That's a key use case for blockchain: proving that the data hasn't been altered. It doesn't all have to be on the blockchain, just the hash.**

On making blockchain more user friendly

A major problem with blockchain is usability. The potential of the technology is enormous, but right now the friction for users is quite high.

That is exactly what AIKON is working on. As Marc explains, "We have a product called ORE ID. And that basically connects your existing users with the existing login they're used to, and gives them a wallet, puts tokens in their wallet, and gets them up and running." In this way, users don't actually need to know anything about tokens or wallets – they are just able to use the technology.

This kind of friction reduction is key because, as Tray says, "the average person needs to be comfortable doing it. Everybody's now comfortable using applications on their phone because it's so frictionless. Blockchain puts lots of friction up in front of you."

For product people, the ramifications are huge. Tray explains, "If, as a product person, you want to add blockchain to your app, then the user has to have a blockchain account. In order for that to work, you have to have an account created for that user. And then different blockchains are really hard to create accounts. And sometimes they cost tokens. So you have to have tokens for this new user to pay for an account. Well, who's paying for that? How does that work? And so really, there's just a lot of things that you have to do to just get the basic sort of plumbing in place for users, like getting an account on the blockchain for them."

The goal for blockchain products is that they will eventually become as easy to use as smartphone apps. But, Tray says, "We're definitely in the early days. So making a decision now around blockchain and what blockchain to use and what technology to use and how it's going to be used in your app? You do have to understand the technology today. You don't have to be an expert on it. But you need to have at least partners that understand that."

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Tray Lewin
Co-Founder and CTO
Aikon

On how PMs can choose the right blockchain

Another problem with blockchain is that there are so many. How should product managers go about choosing the right one for their products? There are certain trade offs to consider, mostly around features vs. trust.

Tray says, "it starts with knowing why you're using blockchain. What are you going to do with the blockchain? So let's say you're building an app to do titles for your mortgage company or something. Well, how many transactions you're going to have per action? You can have one transaction every 10 years for property or something. So you're gonna have very few transactions. But you want it to be very trusted. You want to know that if you're putting it on this blockchain, you don't want anyone to say, Oh, that's a new blockchain that's not trustworthy.

"Usually for blockchains, the longer the blockchain is running, the more trust you can place in it, because it's harder to recreate that from the beginning. So the longer it runs, the more trust you can place in it. So the OGs, like Bitcoin and Etherium, have a huge trust factor with them.

"But some of the newer blockchains are designed to be faster and cheaper, they have a better fee structure, a different fee structure. So for let's say, like micro payments, doing small payments infrequently. I would say pick a blockchain that is designed for high volume transactions.

"There's a number of them out there. One's called Algorand, which is really well suited. They want to make it easy for you to send transactions back and forth, like a point system, and have fixed fees that are very low. So I would look for something like that, where you know what your fee structure is, your fee structure is fixed.

"Whereas other chains, the fee depends on how popular the chain is at that moment. That's a hard thing to figure out when you're modeling your cost of doing business for the customer. So getting a predictable fee is really important. And picking a chain that's optimized for what you need, either high trust, or high frequency transactions, or low fees, is very important."

In closing

From the irreverent to the deeply philosophical, these four conversations offer rich insight into the current landscape and future potential of blockchain products. It is clear that blockchain, cryptocurrency, and NFTs have only just begun. As Web3 technology becomes more and more prevalent, product managers and designers will undoubtedly find new ways to innovate these transformative technologies.

In order to do that, blockchain must become more user-friendly. The good news is that is exactly what AIKON is focused on with ORE ID. With a lower barrier to entry, more blockchain products will become available, illuminating the unknown future frontiers of blockchain technology.

We can't wait to see what's next.

AIKON Podcast Series

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