Emily Vaughn Sits on Blockchain Panel Providing Personal Security Solutions In the Midst of FCC Privacy Protection Repeals

The FCC voted to temporarily suspend government regulations protecting personal online data in 2-1 ruling on last week, the first major move of the Ajit Pai led commission. The rules, that were set to take effect last Thursday, would have required internet service providers (ISPs) like AT&T and Comcast, to take "reasonable" measures [PDF] to protect millions of customers' personal information. These measures would have included greater transparency for consumers if their data was compromised and more stringent regulations around the ISP's collection of data.

Panelists at the Distributed: Markets conference discussed ways that blockchain could intersect with the advertising industry in light of the data privacy concerns that last week's decision may foreshadow.

Panelists Justin Fisher, founder and CEO of VeriBlock, commented on the freedom that ISPs have in their distribution of viewer data.

"Essentially [the FCC] is going to give Comcast or your ISP the ability to watch all the websites you visit, and then sell that data and market it as such," said Fisher. "I think it's an interesting opportunity to maybe slide in between there and say, 'If you're going to watch what I do, at least give me a layer of protection.'"

ISPs have near omniscient insight into their customer's information and the marrying of their core internet services with the ability to collect and sell this data could potentially jeopardize highly sensitive information like social security numbers that might be embedded to a broader data scope.

Unlike Fintech, Healthcare and other data-centric industries, advertising, until recently, had not been flirting with blockchain technology in any public way. Adam Helfgott, the CEO of recently launched blockchain-based adtech company MadHive, commented on blockchain's power to essentially disconnect the consumer from the metadata associated with their ad identity to maintain their privacy.

"The actual identity doesn't matter so much. We don't actually need to know who these people are," said Helfgott. "A decentralized system where everyone has an ID of sorts and encrypted metadata around their ID, based upon who captured that metadata, that can be unlocked on a case-by-case basis for each campaign, allowing new types of targeting."

He proposed that a blockchain solution would not only reduce the potential for human error and meddling, but could create efficiencies through some of distributed ledger technology's key attributes.

"Right now the collation of this metadata and personal data happens manually a with double blind list and someone in a secure room at Comcast connecting things together," said Helfgott. "Smart contracts and hashed keys for transactions can make that a lot easier and cheaper for the ISPs and more fault-proof for all members of the ecosystem, including customers"

Also on the Distributed: Markets panel was Emily Vaughn, head of accounts at Gem. The enterprise blockchain solutions company is creating a pilot that, among other things, would give patients in the healthcare space greater control over who can access their medical records via cryptographic keys. Following in this same vein, a blockchain based advertising ecosystem could redistribute the power of identity management back to the original source of data; the consumer.

"With the right infrastructure, in a distributed environment, we can provide people with the power to choose when and where they share their personal data," said Vaughn.

Given FCC's calls to give fairly untamed reach to the ISPs and large data corporations, blockchain could empower consumers with a means to circumvent their susceptibility via alternative identity solutions. With MadHive, Helfgott hopes to work with the industry to form technologically sound standards that could achieve this long term and while also enabling great ad targeting.

"Blockchain could easily keep track of user identity in a pseudonymous way. This can be done on a per campaign basis, though there's different ways to do it," said Helfgott. "In the similar way that identity is pseudonymous in Bitcoin, we could keep the identities private through the blockchain network, bringing to the surface the relevant targeting parameters for brands."