



Interview with Darrell Gunter

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KENNEALLY: Over his career in publishing, Darrell Gunter has helped bring to market digital-driven initiatives such as Factiva, ScienceDirect, Scopus, and others. The technology next in line to transform publishing, says the industry veteran, will be blockchain.

Welcome to Copyright Clearance Center’s podcast series. I’m Christopher Kenneally for Velocity of Content. Darrell Gunter doesn’t claim to be an expert on blockchain, just an enthusiast. His new book, *Transforming Scholarly Publishing with Blockchain Technologies and AI*, collects essays from more than a dozen contributors who share his enthusiasm for the power of technology to remake essential elements of the publishing profession, from business models to peer review.

In addition to his consulting work advising startups like Underline and Ripeta, Darrell Gunter writes “The Innovator’s Saga” column for *Against the Grain*. He is adjunct professor in the W. Paul Stillman School of Business at Seton Hall University as well as host of “Leadership with Darrell Gunter,” which is available as a podcast and airs Saturdays on WSOU-FM, Seton Hall’s noncommercial college radio station. Darrell Gunter, welcome to the program.

GUNTER: Chris, thank you so much. It’s a pleasure to be here.

KENNEALLY: Well, we’re looking forward to chatting with you about your new book and helping us understand better blockchain technologies. Most listeners will at least be familiar with the idea that blockchain is the basis of cryptocurrencies like Bitcoin. But as we’re about to learn, it’s about so much more as well. So when did you become interested in the topic? What turned you into an enthusiast?

GUNTER: I was at a conference – *The New York Times* would do conferences at their New York Times conference center in New York. This was 2014, and it was on finance and Wall Street. During the Wall Street panel – it was an interesting discussion, but then this woman raised her hand and said, so how is blockchain being handled on Wall Street? The panelists did not know what she was talking about. Guess what? Neither did I or 90% of the people in the audience. What typically happens after a panel discussion has occurred – people will run to the stage to talk to the speakers. Well, they didn’t this time. They ran to where the woman was who had asked the question. I had a brief discussion with her. At



the time, I was deep into semantic technology and AI, and I put it off to learn more about blockchain, just because I was just trying to get my arms around artificial intelligence.

Then it was June of 2018. A good friend of mine, Carlos Fernandez (sp?), called me up on a Saturday in June and said, Darrell, I got an idea for us to work on together with blockchain. And I said, Carlos, I have to study it. I really don't know blockchain. So the next Saturday, I engaged another friend – who happens to have the name Carlos – for Carlos and I to have a conversation with him. He was heavy into cryptocurrencies. So over the next couple of weeks, I was just grabbing any information I could, mainly from Medium, which is a great website to grab really vetted information.

Then it was the middle of July now, and my living room was covered with papers on blockchain, driving my wife crazy. And then I got a phone call from a gentleman named John (inaudible) who said, Darrell, we have a conference coming up August 9, and our speaker for blockchain has dropped out. I know you're involved in technology. Do you think this is something that you could do? I said, oh, yeah, absolutely. Meanwhile, my wife looked over the counter at me like, you don't know anything about blockchain.

So what I did over the next few weeks – I prepared for that presentation, studying more and putting together what I thought was a good framer presentation for the audience, and I explained to them that I am not an expert, but I am an enthusiast. See, when you say enthusiast, people immediately go, OK, this gentleman is interested in blockchain, but not claiming to be an expert, because I wasn't and still to this day am not. But that presentation was received very well.

The next month, I started the MIT course on blockchain. It was a seven-week course. And it was probably one of the best experiences that I've had in my professional career going through the MIT course and really underscoring why I think that blockchain is going to really help us into the next phase beyond the semantic web.

KENNEALLY: It sounds like you really followed your intuition there, and there's a bit of fate as well that drove you to explore this topic more deeply. So here we are now, 2021, almost a decade since that first introduction you had to blockchain. What's the state of blockchain and AI in scholarly publishing today?

GUNTER: You know, it's early days. When you think back to the middle '90s, when the scholarly communication industry was moving from print to digital, that's the phase that we're in right now. It's a very, very early adopter phase. The people who are the laggards – they don't want to hear about blockchain. It's really the people who want to be on the leading edge, the cutting edge, if you like.



Like to give you an example, there was a pilot that was done between a few publishers in digital science. I believe Springer Nature was involved. Taylor & Francis was involved. I think that was like 2018, 2019. It's part of my research that's in the book. They were looking at peer review. That project, unfortunately, has since been disbanded.

But recently on Facebook, I posted the item about my book, and someone wrote back to me, yeah, we're looking at blockchain for peer review. So I think it's very, very, very early days still. There's a lot of opportunity. But it requires a lot of good leadership as well.

KENNEALLY: I think that says a lot about scholarly publishing, doesn't it, Darrell, that things take time and have to work their way through traditional practices, traditional management, and traditional perspectives. So from your perspective so far, though, are there significant changes to scholarly publishing that are already underway as a result of the introduction of blockchain?

GUNTER: Not yet. Not yet. For AI, yes. AI, we're seeing a number of positive changes, disruptive changes, and we'll talk about that in a little bit. But for blockchain right now, no, we're not seeing it. And you might ask, OK, where could those areas be? I would venture to say that that could be achieved in peer review. It could be achieved in search and discovery and to understanding who is looking at what material, and then how do people get access to that material? Looking at it from CCC's perspective, you could look at how blockchain could enhance micropayments, where someone could actually pay for a sentence or a paragraph versus having to buy a whole article. Those are the areas that I see where blockchain, I think, can have an immediate impact once they're developed.

KENNEALLY: And your book brings together, as I mentioned in the introduction, over a dozen different contributors. One of them, Carlo Scollo Lavizzari, is an attorney representing scholarly publishers, and he has written a chapter on legislative developments related to these new technologies. He sees publishers needing to assert a curation role for data, just as they have traditionally been curators of information.

[CARLO SCOLLO LAVIZZARRI QUOTE]

Darrell, do you think that the courts and legislatures have a role to play in developing and pushing forward – advancing blockchain and even AI when it comes to publishing and other industries?

GUNTER: Yes, I do. I think that as always, legislators and laws, they have to catch up to the technology, because they need to make sure that the technology is something that is going to be in the main domain and that they need to address it. Because as you know, scientists



and researchers are always working on some new and exciting stuff, and our legislators' time is so precious. So they want to make sure that whatever the technology is going to be, that it's legitimate and that they will need to regulate it in a way to make it most productive for humanity to use. There's always a catch-up period there.

But I think that the publishers – I think it's going to require them to move forward to make the case as to why this technology, blockchain, will be very beneficial to the community. They will do the use cases, and they will make their ROI arguments. Then the legislators will catch up to it. But the legislators will be involved, because – keep in mind that we want this technology to be used in the most positive way. We don't want it to be used in a negative way, where it's going to hurt society.

KENNEALLY: Right. And when we're talking about change, Darrell Gunter, there's a change management process that goes with this. What advice do you offer in the book for successfully navigating that change management? Tell us about some best practices for incorporating the kind of change that blockchain and AI are going to drive in publishing.

GUNTER: We actually have a whole chapter on it, Chapter 7 by Pete Stockmann. He wrote about best practices for incorporating change. This is where the change needs to be led by the CEO, adopted and approved by the board to make sure that they're providing the CEO and his team with the proper financial support, but also moral support as well. And then from there, the CEO's role is to have their lieutenants to educate the team members, if you will, as to why this new technology is going to help to transform the organization to be a better publisher, versus people thinking, oh, this new technology's going to replace me. No, it's about how do you leverage your current assets?

So it's all about the CEO setting a strategy and the strategy to be approved by their board, and then to present the strategy and overarching goal to the team members and make sure everybody understands why it's important to them, why it's going to benefit everyone, and have a plan of action with performance metrics that's going to track the implementation of the technology, but also to have performance measurements to measure the items in the business model that said, oh, we're going to have an ROI of X to make sure that those are being measured and monitored and communicated and celebrated. And then, of course, if there are some missteps along the way, which will happen, because we're all human, is to understand those missteps, but to readjust, realign, and reinject into the process.

KENNEALLY: And blockchain and AI technologies are expected to find a place not only in scholarly publishing, but in the complementary area of research libraries. Contributor Anthony Paganelli of Western Kentucky University shared these thoughts.

[ANTHONY PAGANELLI QUOTE]



Darrell, what are your own thoughts and considerations about the place of these technologies in research libraries?

GUNTER: Oh, Anthony and I have been working together now three years. We collaborated on a presentation at the Charleston Conference two years ago on where we see the benefits of blockchain in the research area.

Imagine, if you will, that a researcher is trying to tap into resources that are right there on the campus. Right now, they got to go through the directory and find somebody and then say, OK, let me check the papers that they have written. But with blockchain, with the information that's in the hashtags, you'll be able to do a semantic search within those hashtags, so you can find the most important concept that you're searching for in a matter of seconds. That is huge, because you have all of this content that's in the research library, but it's like a sea of content to wade through. But with blockchain technology coupled with semantic search, you'll be able to find what you need in the most efficient and effective and complete manner.

KENNEALLY: Darrell Gunter, you conclude your preface to the new book with “Hazard Yet (sic) Forward,” the school motto for Seton Hall University, where you graduated from the Stillman School of Business. What do those words mean in this context, “hazard yet (sic) forward,” whatever the peril, ever forward? I guess what you're doing is challenging the industry to take up these new technologies.

GUNTER: Absolutely. Being a graduate of Seton Hall, it took me a lifetime to understand what “hazard yet (sic) forward” really means. It's moving forward with the faith and belief that what you're doing is the right thing, and even though you may stumble, continue to move forward.

The same thing applies to blockchain and AI or any new technology – is that you have to believe in your hypothesis and make adjustments when necessary, but you want to make sure that you're always focused on that overarching goal of trying to improve scholarly research for the betterment of mankind.

KENNEALLY: Darrell Gunter, thanks for speaking with us today about your new book, *Transforming Scholarly Publishing with Blockchain Technologies and AI*.

GUNTER: Chris, thank you so much. It's a pleasure to be able to share this on your great podcast.



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