**WHY YOU SHOULD CARE ABOUT BLOCKCHAIN AND ‘CRYPTO’**

If you are new to this space, then you probably do not have any idea what the hell the above terms mean. It’s important to unpack these two since the first is primarily an under-the-surface technology and the second is a popular umbrella term for the technology itself as well as the numerous facets and uses that have developed around it. First is tech. Second is the culture around the tech.

WHAT IS BLOCKCHAIN?

You could ask any number of blockchain experts, evangelists, and developers what it is and get a wide range of answers that leave you curious, confused, or both. You might get technical answers beyond your understanding, philosophical answers that try to present a big picture but leave out fundamentals, or political answers that lean towards libertarianism or ‘crypto anarchy.’ This is a field in such a state of flux and acceleration that even those within it are frequently surprised by its progress, hence the lack of universal definitions.

One of the difficulties in describing blockchain and its implications is that context is key and context leads to more verbiage. An attempt at a brief history lesson about databases and cryptography is difficult to fit into a conversation without it turning into an impromptu lecture.

You might have heard of Bitcoin, that strange Internet money that pops up in conversation on occasion. Its debut occurred on Halloween 2008, when an anonymous person/persons going by the name Satoshi Nakamoto presented a white paper, “Bitcoin:   
A Peer-to-Peer Electronic Cash System,” on a cryptography mailing list. This document detailed how a medium of exchange outside of the control and influence of intermediaries and authorities could be actualized. A few months later, the Bitcoin network went live.

The term blockchain comes from the ‘chain’ of digital signatures formed by the validation of the network’s transactions, which are then grouped into ‘blocks’. Translation: the network is designed to periodically reach an agreement on its current state, or “truth.” This provides many features such as security, transparency, and verifiability that give blockchain its unique edge.

This shift from the traditional database to decentralized alternatives can be used to power truly peer-to-peer networks, platforms, and applications that better distribute value and participation amongst users. Finance. Social media. Governance. Insurance. Media publishing. Supply chains. Internet of Things. The use cases are wide-ranging.

WHAT IS ‘CRYPTO’?

Well, it’s a prefix, a prefix often affixed in words such as ‘cryptography’ and ‘cryptocurrency.’ Much to the chagrin of many cryptographers and blockchain specialists, the term has become the catch-all term for an entire field and the culture that has grown around it: the economics, politics, science, and occasional zealotry. For example, if someone has invested in crypto, that could mean that they have exchanged fiat currency for cryptocurrency such as Bitcoin or Ethereum or have contributed to a project’s crowdsale in exchange for tokens that power (possibly) the application or service.

As it stands, the crypto community consists of developers, technologists, decentralization evangelists, and early supporters who see the potential for cryptocurrencies and/or blockchain to solve many of the problems with the legacy systems that are imbedded in our lives. Mainstream use is on the horizon if the blockchain developers can build sustainable and scalable environments on which to build and implement these solutions. If the forward momentum of this space is any indication, this may not be too far off.

In short, crypto is a microculture that is poised to slowly merge into society at large. When and how this will happen is impossible to predict. It is entirely possible that the mainstream implementations will utilize blockchain in such a manner that the end users are completely unaware of it. These systems will simply work. Most of us do not marvel at the database aspect of Facebook. We just happily give them access and experimental privilege with our personal data.

The emerging, complex technologies such as artificial intelligence, VR/AR/Mixed Reality, Robotics, Automation, and others are receiving the most attention because it is familiar science fiction actualized in front of our eyes. Our future is winking back at us.

Blockchain and its constellation of technologies may have vast implications, yet society at large may not notice the change.

Stay tuned into the advancements on these fronts because their effects on your daily life are not probable, but certain.