

Vocal

A Platform for Decentralized Political Change

Chris Buonocore

Anup Vasudevan

Ahmad Jarara

Abstract—The inability to communicate directly to and from government is a fundamental roadblock to political effectiveness. Online communication via email and sites like change.org provide an interface but do not provide a mutual tool for prioritization of policy change. Residents require an easy to use platform to reach their policy makers, and those policy makers need a manageable amount of distinct concerns to satisfy their voters. Vocal answers two large issues with previous methods of encouraging political action: association of problem topics with the location they are relevant to, and democratic prioritization of important issues. Leveraging Ethereum to create a proof-of-stake blockchain provides a token economy: participating in a localized issue generates Vocal recognized ether, creating an issue consumes it. Vocal is a platform for mutually incentivized political communication and task prioritization.

I. INTRODUCTION

Politics has long been a business dominated by an older generation, with youth engagement dropping to lower and lower levels. There are websites currently in place designed to make voting and discovering new political and social issues more user friendly (see change.org), however, these websites tend to suffer from the inability to quickly find issues that are pertinent on a very local and individual level.

Vocal is a political currency platform designed to engage youth in new ways around political topics. Individuals interested in establishing correspondence with any tier of government can earn token by voting on existing issues. For each vote that a user submits, that user is turn rewarded with additional token that can be redeemed for the creation of new issues and/or the promotion of existing ones.

This provides a rate limit that makes users consider what is genuinely valuable to communicate to their policy makers. There are two details worth investigating:

1) *Bootstrapping*: How can the network effect hindering widespread adoption be mitigated?

2) *Crypto Tie In*: What utility does the ethereum backed Vocal coin serve?

II. SCOPE OF USE

We divide our consideration of the Vocal coin system from the perspective of two very different granularities. Constituents and political organizations associated with those constituents, in particular geographic jurisdictions.

1) *Constituents*: These are residents dissatisfied with public policy affecting the region. Each resident is associated with a generated Vocal account. Users may support, reject, or create an issue. Each one of these actions are accepted by the Vocal

network, and once made these decisions can't be reversed as the ethereum backed Vocal ledger is immutable. As it is now, it incentivizes research before endorsing an issue, provided this fact is made clear to the resident user.

Constituents are the ones that introduce Vocal as a platform to their community. The initial aim of Vocal is to grow a geographically clustered user base. This presents two immediate decisions: Vocal must prioritize ease of adoption so that any one who can access the internet has access to this platform, and must target a specific geographic area to bootstrap.

The first means that Vocal coin must first abstract away all the details in the UI so that people don't have to set up software to communicate with the Ethereum based network. For now, this accomplishes the usability aspect. Each individual will have a private key, and thus an account, mapped to their platform activity, but it will at first be stored on Vocal's servers, and thus completely transparent. Only when sufficient abstraction exists should this key be exposed by default. This strategy may negate some of the benefits of decentralized consensus, but it's sacrificed temporarily to mitigate the technical on boarding cliff so that Vocal can become a household name for political organization.

2) *Organizations*: While differing in topology, political organizations have an attribute in common: regional jurisdiction. At first political organizations won't play a large role on the Vocal platform. In the ideal case we'd have some map of jurisdiction as it applies to multiple levels of government. In the United States, there is a hierarchy of governments, with no uniform way of communicating to them and critically identifying who is behind what policy. This weakness is particularly why a cryptocurrency backed ledger is vital: the developers of this platform cannot hope to market its utility effectively to every government system, but once a resident base has formed they can build their own government access protocols on top of the Vocal coin backbone.

In particular, letting organizations occur as a result of user participation on the network addresses the network problem: Governments will not care about an empty platform. It is much more attractive to link policy makers to an active, vocal community.

III. EXISTING WORK

Open trade is a fundamental aspect of Vocal coin (and financial activity in general). There are a few other efforts which seek to build politically-focused currencies that are publicly trade-able.

In contrast, Vocal's model is simpler. Vocal provides a medium for a mutually beneficial relationship between organizations, activists and the general public by providing an exchange of social campaign content that benefits both parties.

IV. VOCAL COIN

The Vocal coin is the main unit of exchange and credit in the Vocal ecosystem; however, the utility of Vocal extends to these primary areas:

- 1) As a main unit of bookkeeping for political campaign publishing and viewing.
- 2) As a store of value - the vocal coin may be able to redeem more or less in the future.
- 3) As a unit of purchase - the vocal coin can be redeemed for offers and services from public retailers.

V. DESIGN

The Vocal coin is an ERC20 based currency, which will have an initial public offering which buys a predefined amount of social/political campaign credit. Once the coin has reached the required funding level, the Vocal market will open to public - enabling open trade and use of the coin on the Ethereum blockchain.

As users view and interact political campaign, the vocal coin is recorded in the user's application and delivered every Sunday night to the user's wallet in a single transaction. These records are proof of all Vocal coin transfers and are stored publicly on the Vocal blockchain. This transparency is sorely needed in policy decisions, and can be used to make explicit the mechanisms of policy creation and modification.

A. Blockchain Overview

The above model for tracking and transacting Vocal coin implies a large volume of activity (carrying a large amount of additional weight on the network). At the time of this writing, not all of this activity will be able to take place on the Ethereum main chain (due to known scaling limitations of the Ethereum blockchain).

These scaling concerns may be mitigated by the upcoming Ethereum blockchain improvements such as Metropolis (the next upgrade to the Ethereum blockchain scaling system). However, we will plan to use a batched approach which provides both the benefit of reducing the cost of transacting for the end user on the main network and reduces the complexity of tracking public transactions.

Vocal is largely a coin which will connect to other blockchains via public exchange - largely backed by the Ethereum coin. Activity on other blockchains can interlink with this chain. The Vocal chain validates the activity of the behavior of all the participants on the main net (albeit if transactions are performed off the main chain these cannot be tracked, see the website LocalBitcoins.com as an example).

The Vocal coin itself is providing the computation and enforcement of the design via the smart contract protocol. Owning Vocal coin grants the user the right to validate this chain through transaction fees, payment, interchange, trading, and clearinghouse use.

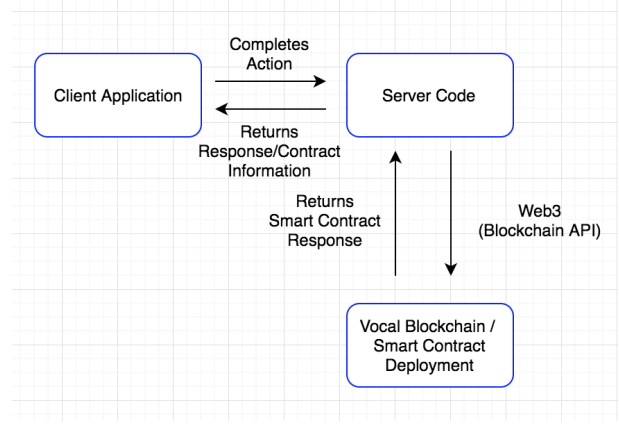


Fig. 1. Basic Vocal Client/Server Architecture

B. Holding Vocal Coin

VI. DISCUSSION

The Vocal architecture can be defined as a simple 3-tier system as illustrated in the below figure.

VII. COIN SUPPLY

Vocal coin follows a fixed coin distribution model as to be described in this section.

A. Total Cap

Vocal will be capped at a total circulating supply of 100,000,000 coins. Coins will be earned by engaging with campaigns (either by interacting, voting or opening campaigns). The coin quantity earned for each action will vary according to the total number of supply still remaining. In this sense, voting in campaigns has become the notion of mining - rewarding users for participation on the network.

As more coins are mined and held - the coin quantity reward granted will diminish; however, the corresponding market or redeemable value of the coin may correspondingly increase in value. This model lends itself similarly to Bitcoin. In that users will still be given roughly equivalent reward for the amount of work and early holders/participants are rewarded for their early entry point and involvement.

VIII. DISTRIBUTION

The distribution of the coin will proceed as follows.

- 1) Vocal Launch (50%) Vocal is inherently a publicly traded and earned coin that plays a critical role in the expansion of this new campaign engagement platform. We are fully committed to creating a sound governance structure and we plan to dedicate significant resources to the continued Research and Development of the platform.
- 2) Retained by Vocal Coin (15%) The Vocal coin core development team will be able to sustain itself using funds raised through the coin launch. If the Vocal platform proves itself to be a fundamental technology as we believe it to be, the retained Vocal coins will allow

the Vocal development team to sustain operations for many years.

- 3) **Developer Fund (15%)** The Developer Fund will be used to make targeted capital injections into high potential projects and teams that are attempting to grow the Vocal Coin ecosystem, strategic partnerships, hackathon prizes and community development activities.
- 4) **Founding Team (10%)** The founding teams allocation of Vocal will vest over a traditional 4 year vesting schedule with a one year cliff. This is standard practice for equity vesting and we believe the same standards should be applied to the coin offering.
- 5) **Early Backers and Advisors (10%)** Our backer and advisors are valuable resources to the expansion and growth of the Vocal platform. This remaining 10% will be reserved for them, as a continued incentive to offer guidance and sustain a coin that holds genuine utility.

A. Challenges and Limitations

Creating a political and social campaign-based currency poses several challenges. We highlight a few of them here; for example,

- 1) In order for activists or individuals to participate, the opportunity for them should be equal to or greater than current other opportunities and channels.
- 2) Is that true for participation in Vocal? For their participation, they would be both paying for Vocal and be willing to provide a good or service to a consumer in exchange for coins. How is this better than distributing coupons from a government organizations point of view?
- 3) Why would an individual want coins? What do they do with them thereafter?
- 4) The quality of the social/political campaign view is important to its value. For instance, if a user is voting in campaigns continuously, the value of a single campaign may not be necessarily very high. How does Vocal mitigate this? And how does this affect the reach and importance for individuals or communities who wish to become involved with Vocal Coin?

These are fundamental questions to be solved by our Roadmap below.

IX. DEVELOPMENT ROADMAP

TABLE I
VOCAL COIN TIMELINE

Nov 2017	Finish coin proposal and development.
Dec 2017	Finish Client facing coin application.
Jan 2018	Vocal Coin Presale.
Apr 2018	Mobile application released for Android.
Jul 2018	Coins redeemable for goods and services.
Dec 2018	Obtain retail partnerships for additional offers.
2019	TBD: Ongoing security and product development.

X. CONCLUSION

Vocal is a coin that has potential both as a store of social or political campaign value and as an accounting system for political campaign engagement. Taking inspiration from both the Bitcoin and Ethereum mining models, one of Vocal's main goals is to create a coin ecosystem whose rewards stay consistent over time (but with greater potential for individual growth with a more early the entry point). The coin is designed to be easily accountable by transactions discoverable on the public ethereum (ERC20) blockchain.

Vocal coin's initial offering will be done in early January 2018.

APPENDIX

A. Founding Team

Vocal was founded by Ahmad Jarara, Chris Buonocore and Anup Vasudevan. Ahmad Jarara is a software engineer who's worked in the New York and Boston area. He specializes in building enterprise applications. Chris is a former consultant and now developer from silicon valley with over 8 years of development experience. He brings wealth of relevant experience to take Vocal to consumers - holding expertise in creating and scaling mobile-based software platforms. Anup is a technical consultant with over 8 years of development experience - primarily web application development and big data pipelines.

B. Acknowledgements

We would like to express our gratitude to our mentors, advisors and to the many people in the Ethereum community that have been so welcoming and generous with their knowledge. In particular, we would like to thank the folks in the Boston Cryptocurrency and Ethereum developers meetup groups for their support and advice.

C. ERC20 Vocal Protocol

Vocal follows the ERC20 (ethereum-blockchain) protocol for recording transactions. ERC20 establishes a standard contract ABI for coins on the Ethereum blockchain and has become the de facto representation for all types of digital assets. ERC20 coins share the same contract interface, simplifying integration with external contracts. Core ERC20 functions include:

- 1) transfer(to, value)
- 2) balanceOf(owner)
- 3) approve(spender, value)
- 4) allowance(owner, spender)
- 5) transferFrom(from, to, value)

EIP101 includes a proposal to change ether to follow the ERC20 coin standard. For now, a wrapper smart contract may be used as a proxy for ERC20 ether. For reference, see the Maker implementation or the Gnosis implementation.

1) *Contract ABI*: EIP50 proposes an extension to the contract ABI to support structs. This would allow the community to establish standard Order and Signature data structures, simplifying our contract interface and integrations with external contracts.

2) *Ethereum Name Service*: EIP137 or Ethereum Name Service (ENS) will be used to resolve human-readable names, such as myname.eth, into machine-readable identifiers that may represent Ethereum addresses, Swarm and/or IPFS content hashes or other identifiers. It can also be used to associate metadata with names, such as contract ABIs or whois information. ENS will be used by 0x protocol to create more intuitive message formats that optionally reference Makers, Takers and Relayers by name. Voit 2012

REFERENCES

Voit, Karl (2012). “TagTrees: Improving Personal Information Management using Associative Navigation”. PhD thesis. Graz, Austria: Graz University of Technology.