

# From media and mentorship to progressive data infrastructure

Executive coach and Maddyness columnist Victor Snyder spoke with Pavel Bains, co-founder and CEO of Bluzelle Networks, about the future of financial databases.

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Pavel Bains has been at the helm of Vancouver's Bluzelle Networks since 2015, when the idea of global telecommunications and enterprise finance firms actually using distributed ledgers was dismissed as a pipe dream. No wonder he calls himself a "futurist."

But before Bains got involved with Bluzelle, he was an executive leader at a wide variety of company types, from game development shops to fintech apps to Storypanda, a self-publishing platform for kids. He's also an investor and a 500 Startups mentor.

I recently had the opportunity to have a conversation with Bains about his public persona, where information systems are headed, and the differences between leadership and management.

[Victor] Given the diverse companies and roles you've been in over the years,

what aspects of your team leadership approach have remained a constant, and what aspects have you worked on tweaking to be situation-specific?

[Pavel] Because I came from a sports background, that's the leadership model that I've always maintained. Act like a full team, and stay focused on winning a championship. The challenge for me with running an operating company is that there is no "championship" per se. So for myself and others, I like to create mini phases that we are racing to.

Two things I've had to tweak are separating "leadership" and "management." There is a distinction that I really started to understand better this year. You can't just start a company, appoint yourself as a CEO and say you are a leader. Leadership needs to be earned. At first you are just the manager.

In this COVID period, I realized that setting lofty two-year goals doesn't mean much to people. No one knows where the world is going or what their situation might be in three to six months. So why pitch the nonsense of a "don't worry, we'll get through this together" feelgood movie speech? I think people are too smart to buy into that. And if they did, I don't think I'd want them on my team.

Instead I focus on "let's see what we can deliver in the next 90 days. If we push to that, and it turns out well, then we have momentum for the next 90 days."

Bluzelle can be used by partner companies to build both decentralized finance (DeFi) apps and decentralized databases (data delivery networks, or DDNs) as secure information warehouses. Given the valuation roller coaster that the DeFi sector saw in Q3 this year, which of these areas and use

# cases, DeFi or DDN will be your emphasis for 2021, and why?

DeFi is still the best use case for blockchain. It's the area where people are using products and growing. What I see happening in 2021 is more DeFi products starting to decentralize more of their tech stacks.

Right now centralized solutions from AWS and Google are reliable to them. But as Bluzelle and other decentralised storage networks get more battle tested, then DeFi apps will start using us more.

Plus, there is that elephant in the room of regulations coming in, and if they don't like a DeFi product, what prevents them from telling centralized tech providers to stop servicing crypto projects? That's why decentralised storage and infrastructure like Bluzelle is needed.

## What is it exactly about decentralised databases that makes them necessarily more secure? How do you explain the value of a DDN to a less technically minded founder?

Right now, when a company stores data, it's held in a data center somewhere. It will have a backup either in the same data center or somewhere else. An attacker can gain access to that one place and steal or manipulate the data.

With Bluzelle, every piece of data stored is on multiple data centers at the same time. Everything is already backed up and available.

Any data change needs to be validated by all the nodes on our network, much like how the blockchain validates every Bitcoin transaction. So no outside intruder can hack the data unless they get hold of your private keys.

## You're active in both the public speaking circuit, speaking at leading blockchain

industry conferences, and as a thought leader who guest posts on major business publications and niche blogs. Does this type of personal branding activity come to you intuitively, or is it something you've grown into because you've seen so much value from it?

I've always been good at public speaking and writing. So it's pretty natural for me to do both. I like getting my thoughts out there.

When I got to Singapore and was invited to speak at some events, I learned, got better and then more opportunities came along. I never really looked at it as personal branding – I always thought that phrase was kind of douchey. I do it more to spread the word of our space, educate others, and often it's to give some advice to people to avoid mistakes I've made.

Hopefully I'm giving value to plenty of people other than myself.

What's your advice to other founders on maintaining personal branding scalability while also running a company?

Don't look at it as personal branding. Once you do that, you're making everything about yourself and not the company.

Better to look at it as you being an *extension* of the company brand. This is especially important in the early stages, as everyone will associate the company with you and you with the company.

Not until you've done a number of successful ventures that are associated with you, can you start calling yourself a brand like Elon Musk or Mark Cuban – as Jay-Z put it, "I'm not a businessman; I'm a business, man."

