Tamper-proof certificate system uses blockchain for authenticity

Anyone with Photoshop skills can recreate a fake certificate in just minutes. With this in mind, Yaz El Hakim, CEO, created VerifyEd to combat certification fraud and become an ally to the education sector.

VerifyEd partners with educational institutions like universities, professional membership bodies and online course providers to issue scalable, low-cost, tamper-proof digital certificates using blockchain. The certificates are issued to their learners/members and are portable via a mobile device, whilst being easily shareable with employers and recruiters. Recruiters can then verify the authenticity of a candidates' credentials instantly anywhere in the world.

Our aim is to create a lifelong learner record for learners, where all certificates or credentials from multiple providers are aggregated digitally in one place. These credentials can be trusted due to the immutable nature of blockchain and because we have issued them by partnering with the educational institution.

My co-founder Abi Waterer and I have 25 years experience in edTech and Higher Education between us. I also worked as Director of Learning and Teaching at the University of Winchester, meaning we have engaged high level networks in UK Higher Education. This has allowed us to build a solid pipeline of UK institutions to gain feedback from and to partner with.

In terms of technology, we are using a <u>blockchain</u> ledger with low transaction fees (unlike Bitcoin, for example), which will allow us to scale easily.

What was the catalyst for launching VerifyEd?

Having worked together at other startups, Abi and I came up with <u>VerifyEd</u> when we were speaking about blockchain and how it was used in the financial systems. Having identified that it could create immutability, we both just clicked and said we should use blockchain in education to create a trusted lifelong learning record of achievement. In doing so, we were particularly excited to think about how such a platform could easily identify the most voracious learners across society.

How does the business today compare to that initial idea?

Pretty closely actually – we have been radically focused, but having validated many of our assumptions with clients before building the platform. Things will inevitably grow, but a blockchain-based digital credentialing platform is still very much the core of our business today.

Do you have external investment?

Yes, we raised a friends and family round of £150,000 to build our MVP, gain paying clients and to issue live credentials. We achieved this in the first half of 2020, despite the pandemic.

We have remained very focused on creating a validated MVP, which we are now taking to market having achieved our first partners. We're now working with a proven edTech academic partnerships leader to take the product to market and generate more partnerships.

How did you come to partner with the University of Northampton, The World

Bank and Law Society of Ireland?

Our partnerships have all come out of conversations with some very forward thinking leaders within each organisation, who understand that learning is now lifelong and the essential role that micro-credentials will play in both education and professional development alike.

The partnership with Law Society Ireland entails issuing Continued Professional Development (CPD) certificates to their members for the hours of training they have done through the Law Society's courses, in order to maintain their professional membership status.

Our World Bank partnership is based around a project to aggregate a selection of courses to be completed and issue blockchain credentials for FutureLearn and IBM on one lifelong learning ledger.

In addition, our partnerships with universities are broadly focused on issuing digital degree certificates and micro-credentials to learners.

What has been a highlight for VerifyEd so far?

Issuing our first live certificates, partnering with the World Bank, and getting our first renewal with the Law Society of Ireland!

What are your aspirations for VerifyEd in 2021?

We are aiming to increase our partnerships and ensure all our partners are brought into our future vision and become our advocates within their networks.

Check out VerifyEd to learn more about how they are working to create a world of trusted certificates and credentials across educational and professional sectors.

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Article by KIRSTIE PICKERING