
Episode 158: Ian Balina on Trading Strategy

Kelley Weaver: Welcome to Crypto Token Talk, a crypto 101 podcast exploring how blockchain applications like Bitcoin, Ethereum, and other crypto-assets could change the world. Learn from blockchain experts, thought leaders, and founders of some of the most innovative companies and world-changing ideas of our time. I'm your host, Kelley Weaver, CEO of Melrose PR, a leading blockchain communications agency. Thanks for joining us today.

PJ Braham: Hello. I'm PJ Braham. I'm the COO of Melrose PR, and I'll be your guest host for this episode of Crypto Token Talk. Today, I'll be speaking with Ian Balina. Ian, welcome to the show, and let's dive right in. We want to thank you for taking the time to speak with us. And I'd like to start off with having you giving us a little background on who you are and what you were doing prior to crypto.

Ian Balina: Yeah. Thank you so much for having me on the show, it's a pleasure. So my name is Ian Balina. I'm a cryptocurrency investor, full-time, doing this full-time, traveling around the world meeting blockchain projects. Just this year alone, I've done over 20 different countries. So this is something I'm very, very passionate about. Prior to kind of getting into this space, I was working at IBM. I worked four years at IBM, 3 years as a IBM Sales Engineer, covering the IBM and the Linux brand, and my last year as a IBM Sales Executive, covering all of IBM North America for IBM cloud analytics, and basically blockchain. So I come from a very tech background. Prior to that I was working as a IT Consultant at Deloitte and I also have experience working as a Software Developer, my background is as a Computer Engineer. So I've always been a techie at heart, but I've also been an entrepreneur.

I just like taking an idea and turning that into something real. Alright, so I was doing that as a Developer, creating applications, had lots of other businesses on the side and I was also an investor. But I always never really wanted to be a part of the corporate life. Although I like the corporate life and was something that basically helped me put food on the table, I always wanted to kind of go out there venture out on my own, and have my own ideas, my own projects. And even though I was working for IBM I always had businesses on the side, working as a freelancer, side hustles, investing and I just ended up stumbling one day across crypto as a medium for investing.

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And that came through me meeting a friend of mine, who I was friends with back in college in D.C. who told me, "Hey Ian, IBM's doing lots of cool stuff with blockchain. Can you put me in touch with the director of blockchain at IBM?" And I said, "Sure but why exactly do you have an interest in this blockchain thing?" Right so I was basically qualifying him, trying to make sure it was worth me even putting him in touch with this person. And he kind of basically told me what he was doing in blockchain, was working at some Bitcoin developer, he was launching his own Bitcoin fund, and a fund to invest in Cryptocurrencies so that's when it really opened up my mind to Cryptocurrencies as a medium for investment. Because prior to that to me I viewed cryptos as just really the dark web, this marketplace people would go to buy and sell drugs, basically. Alright.

PJ Braham:

Silk Road?

Ian Balina:

Yeah, Silk Road, right. I obviously had a bad view on Cryptocurrencies, right, and me working in the corporate world we talked about blockchain but we always avoided crypto. Crypto was one of those words you didn't really talk about when you're trying to sell blockchain to a client. So when he really opened up my eyes and I've always been the money guy, I love money, I love investing, right? When he said, "Hey, you can make money investing in Bitcoin." I said, "Hold up, you sure you can make money on Bitcoin?" So I began asking all questions, he told me he was making 200% just hardening Bitcoin and Ethereum. And I said, "That beats the 20% I'm getting on the stock market." Right? So I was like, "I definitely have to look more into this space." So that's when I began going down the rabbit hole, and everything changed after that.

PJ Braham:

Interesting. You know, a 20% return, that's really good. But crypto back then I imagine, this is when 2014 and 2013, what time period are we talking?

Ian Balina:

So I got into crypto October 2016 or so.

PJ Braham:

Okay.

Ian Balina:

Kind of bought my first Bitcoin so that's when I [crosstalk]. Yeah so I got in when Bitcoin was around \$900 or so.

PJ Braham:

Wow.

Ian Balina:

Right, so I thought I was late but that was just the beginning.

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PJ Braham: So let me ask you this. When you're in the IBM, you're in the consulting space, you're building analytic applications ... How where were you before your friend asked you about IBM's blockchain? How where were you about what IBM was doing in the blockchain space?

Ian Balina: I mean, so I was pretty aware IBM at that time had a service called IBM blockchain that was built with IBM Bluemix, which is IBM Cloud and that was something we would sell to clients and that was basically a very simple version of IBM's Hyperledger foundation framework. Right, but I mean in terms of everything else all we knew was blockchain was something brand new, this is the future, clients like using this for putting their records or things that are vital on a public ledger or even private ledger.

And it was something that was very, very hot in the fields of logistics, shipping, I even had a big partnership with I think one of the biggest companies out there in the world for this space, for logistics and international transportation, so it was something that was brand new and the sales force was trying to just kind of catch up to speed below this brand new technology, right? And to be honest it wasn't one of the biggest tools in our bags as sales reps going out to Fortune 500 companies, right? And trying to sell them IBM Software we would typically go with the [inaudible] software that customers would purchase. Going in there and trying to sell them something brand new wasn't really the thing we would lead with, but we were slowly getting up to speed with the space and [inaudible] education on the sales force. Trying to teach them how to leverage blockchain with clients, trying to show the value add, and trying to see what clients this would be a good fit for.

PJ Braham: Right, that's pretty amazing though 'cause I like your background, and your story as it relates to crypto and blockchain 'cause what I've learned, it always starts small. It's like a small spark, and then that interest just blooms so you have a conversation with your friend, he wants to get connected with the IBM blockchain, you learn about Bitcoin, you study it more as an investment vehicle, so now take us from there, that point to Ian Balina now the big YouTube influencer.

Ian Balina: Yeah so things kind of move pretty fast in crypto.

PJ Braham: Yeah, they do.

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Ian Balina: After I bought my first Bitcoin, I put in \$100 into Bitcoin, and heard I was into Ethereum from Coinbase. I had no idea what Ethereum was when I bought it, but I said hey you know what, now that I finally own a piece of a Bitcoin, I have to know what I'm investing in. That's was in my thoughts, I need to know what I'm investing in. So I went out there and got two books on Cryptocurrencies, first one was "Digital Gold" the other one was "The Age of Cryptocurrency." Read those two books over the course of about 2 months or so, and after reading those 2 books I become a believer.

I basically, as I was going through those books I slowly added more money to crypto. So after putting in \$100 into both Bitcoin and Ethereum, I put \$250 into both Bitcoin and Ethereum. And fast forward to early 2017, after I came back from vacation around February 2017, as soon as I got my first commission check from Q4 from IBM. I was like, "You know what? I've read the books, I know what I'm investing in. I know there's space from where it is now to where it was when it launched, so I'm now gonna put some serious money into this." So I put in \$2500 into Bitcoin, and \$2500 into Ethereum, and about a week and a half Ethereum price doubled. I got into Ether around \$9-\$10, but it was basically going up and down around that price for a while. But then Ethereum announced the Ethereum Enterprise Alliance and it went from \$15, \$25 to like \$40 so it basically doubled in a week and half. That was probably the fastest money I made in my life. I mean, I had made money before but that was the fastest big splash move. I was like, "Holy Crap. This is for real."

PJ Braham: It became real.

Ian Balina: This is real, this is real money, this is like somebody's monthly paycheck I just made in like a week and a half. So that's when I really realized the power of this, and I said, "Hey, you know what you guys, pause everything. Time to go all into crypto. This is it." And that year I had a goal of quitting my corporate job at IBM, and basically going full time being self employed, and breaking the chains from the corporate world.

PJ Braham: Mm-hmm (affirmative)

Ian Balina: My goal was to quit by the end of 2017 by any means possible. So failure to me was not an option. So I was looking around at all the other different side hustles I had and cryptocurrency, especially after Ethereum doubled was the biggest no-brainer. I said, "You know what, if I'm gonna 80/20 all the different things I'm doing and focus on just a few this is the one I want to go all into 'cause this can

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really make money very, very fast." So I began reading, and basically had two full time jobs. I'd work at IBM 9 to 5, then from 6 to midnight I'll do crypto full time. Just researching, talking to people in different groups, networking, trying to just learn more about this space and educating myself.

So all this happened, then fast forward to I think late spring, probably maybe April, May I decided to attend my first crypto conference. This was Token Summit Conference, and I went there, it was in New York, I went there and this was really my first time meeting people in crypto in person. 'Cause before I was just reading about this stuff online, watching videos online, telegram groups online but this was my first time meeting real people. And they were pretty smart people. They weren't just a bunch of people in their basements talking about Silk Road or trying to overthrow the government, like these were pretty smart people with credible backgrounds, real jobs, and just kind of having a chance to get to know them, see their backgrounds, meet the projects, see what they're pitching, see the credible founders who've had prior [inaudible]. I also had a chance to see Vinny pitch Civic for the first time, also had a chance to see Tezos pitch, which ended up being 2 investments I made that year as well in their ICOs, but more importantly though I met my first crypto millionaires.

These were people who made millions in Crypto, and to me back then it was just something I just read about, right? About people who been millionaires holding Bitcoin, Ethereum. [inaudible] somebody real life, in person, have a drink with them, invite them out for dinner and just kind of pick their brain, and see hey, this is what I'm doing full time. This is a thing now. It's not just something you read about, this is a thing that I do. Investing, trading cryptos full time, and seeing the mindset and how they got there and most of them got there by doing ICOs. I mean, there were some that were traders, but most of them got in early and were just basically had a great entry price, entry point in their investment and would just kind of hold for the long term. So that's when I really got opened to this whole new field called Initial Coin Offerings. It is getting into products very early on, like Ethereum, like I met a few who are a part of the Ethereum ICO, and they got in at Ethereum around \$0.30. And I was like, "Holy crap, the price is now like \$40." Right?

Just kind of meeting people like this, that's when I began investing in ICOs after that conference. Now when I began investing in them, this was still the Wild, Wild West. I mean, people think ICOs are bad now. Imagine like, one or two years back. It was really, really bad. To a point that was just gambling. And my

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goal was to quit IBM, and kind of be self employed by the end of the year. 'Cause I was just getting tired of working in a bad environment in sales where it's cut throat, people fighting for commission deals, and I just wanted something that was stress free. Right? Something where I could just kind of do what I want, especially just taking back control of my own time. That was the number one thing I was trying to take back, was control of my own time.

So I said, "Okay, there has to be a better way of investing in ICOs." And I tried to, I basically just looked around, and said, "Okay, what advantage do I have? What skills am I good at?" And to me it was very obvious, it was working with data, 'cause that was my job at IBM for four years, working at IBM analytics brand, I had been featured in Wall Street Journal for a model I did that would predict March Madness brackets, and basically help me pick my bracket using IBM Watson.

PJ Braham: Oh Wow.

Ian Balina: I said hey, maybe I can apply this to ICOs and see if there are any patterns in this data. So I just took basically about a week or so, burning the midnight oil, gathering as much data on ICOs as possible, and then going through and trying to figure out okay, let me sort all these ICOs based on the ones that had the highest ROI. And they were ICOs like Ethereum, Stratis, NEO, known as ANT Shares at that time, and I try to find what patterns did they have? So I went through their websites, their ICO posting pages back then a while back, and I began to see patterns in the data.

And one of the biggest patterns I kind of noticed was the ones that did well were basically infrastructure projects and they also had some kind of ship code, some kind of prototype before they asked for people to give them funds, before they had an ICO. Even something as early as Ethereum, they had proof of concept, they had some modules and stuff that Vitalis put out there, and the team also had a credible background. Right, like Vitalis was a writer for Bitcoin magazine before asking for people's money, right? So I went through every single team member's background for example Stratis, a very unknown project based in the UK, they had a Bitcoin Core Developer, so it didn't matter how small the project was, they had somebody who was credible, right? Somebody I basically call an all-star, an all-star team member. So I went through all these different things and after a while basically kind of created a small checklist of things I look for in a project before even considering investing.

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The checklist became based on the data, 90% of the projects had a prototype, and 60% of the projects that had an all-star team member and all-star advisors. So I began taking all of this patterns from this historical data, and then created a grading system to apply this towards new upcoming ICOs, to basically see how well they fared against this data, and this system I was creating. And I put everything into a spreadsheet and at that time I was getting into YouTube, doing YouTube videos, and I began doing live streams.

One day I just began doing a live stream, and just kind of began sharing my idea, or my theory at that time 'cause it hadn't been proven yet. And I had a very small audience, people began following me, I think they probably thought I was just some crazy guy and thinking he can change the world or whatever. But to me it was just more about creating a community and dialogue, and making everything open and transparent, 'cause working at IBM I was working in part of the IBM Open Source team and I heavily believe in the Open Source model. And I was just trying to create content so that anybody who wants to learn anything can really have that resource. If they don't have the money or the resources, right so I'll just master in my research process.

So after one month I basically, announced my picks, or products I personally was [inaudible] on, based on the data. And those projects were Zero-X Project, just Zero-X, and at first I was kind of nervous 'cause I had a small audience but they were following me. And when those projects, those ICOs ended, and the projects hit the exchange, and they began trading, they just kind of run bananas. Zero-X did a 10x in a month, district0x did 24x in the first month, and that's when I was like, "Oh you know what, I think we're onto something here." And then my audience began kind of getting bigger, and bigger, word of mouth began spreading, people began telling their friends how they're making money from using data and analytics and that was August 2017. And by December 2017 the community had gotten so huge, it's now kind of known as the spreadsheet community, or token metrics community and by September 2017 I was able to quit my job at IBM.

And I'm [crosstalk] full time. So basically in 2 months I'm doing the spreadsheet thing with data, it was so successful in just 2 months that I was able to quit my job full time at IBM, and go full time into this. And then by the end of the year I made my first million, and it was all from cryptocurrency and now I've traveled the world just kind of sharing my story, and just trying to teach people how this can really be used for greater good. Not just making money, I mean making

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money is good but I think to me it's more about taking back control of your time, but also reassuring people this could be put to good use and now I'm actually involved in charity work. I'm trying to show people this money I've made from crypto can now be used to finance things that I love and help other people.

PJ Braham: That's a very inspirational story and it's awesome that you're sharing that and inspiring other people with that. So we definitely commend you for that.

Ian Balina: Thank you.

PJ Braham: Wow. So that happened organic? [crosstalk] that's great. That's awesome. So let's touch on the ICOs for a little bit, and it's awesome that you created your own do-diligence process, right? Like any investor should. What did you learn in that process, in terms of ... I'm sure you figured out okay, these sorts of projects I want to stay away from, but we're not gonna call this investment advice but what's one thing that you can say that you learned in this process that you'd like to share with anybody that's interested in investing in crypto in the crypto space?

Ian Balina: I mean I basically learned the integrated system, and you have to repeatedly test that system, and adapt it, right? 'Cause after the crypto metric system began working, you then had all these new ICOs try to game the system. 'Cause now they knew hey, if they scored well on Ian's spreadsheet they'll basically get a community just like that and go viral, right? So now we have to go back to the drawing board and then basically redefine our data, and change our system almost every 1 or 2 months, right? I'm basically adding new data points and seeing how well it fares and see okay, what's changed, what hasn't? Right? So it's constantly evolving and changing, and also trying to kind of make sure you stay up to date with what's happening in the space, 'cause crypto's with the ICO space, I think most trends last 1 to 3 months. Almost every 3 months is a whole new trend, 'cause we went through the whole white list phase, then it became the private sell phase, and things are always changing. Exchanges are changing and it's just kind of the space so you always constantly have to keep on adapting. So create a system and adapt it almost every few months, and try to see if it still works.

PJ Braham: Got it. That's very sound advice. Now you've mentioned a couple projects that you were excited about, one there was Ethereum, t00x, what are some projects that you see coming up on the horizon as the industry's going through this

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transformation and projects have to be legitimate to really gain traction in the community? I would say that the community is a lot wiser now, a lot more prudent in what projects they get behind, so what are some projects that you see happening, developing right now that you feel are world changing?

Ian Balina:

Yeah, so I think definitely the space is evolving, and we're trying to filter out the noise and really see what products will stand the test of time. Some products that I personally like that I've invested in, and I've also actually advising in, so I feel like I'm very intimately close to the team and being able to kind of almost be in the passenger seat and also offer my advice and see how they're kind of building and trying to attack problems and help change the world. So projects like Chromopolis by ChromaWay, which is a relation of blockchain, taking the best of both worlds from blockchain and a database, and combining them into one project. So I think that's one that's very, very good. Actually traveling to Tel Aviv, Israel and we'll be meeting one of the team members there. I like a project called MetaHash which is a blockchain as well coming from Russia, from Moscow. Had the pleasure of traveling to Russia for almost a month and had a chance to meet the team in person, get to know them for over 3 weeks, and just really grow them and just kind of see what they're trying to do.

And I feel like blockchain is a global movement, but it also has a regional impact as well, right? In the same manner like for example what ICON has done for Korea, and really help put Korea on the map as one of the most mature blockchain ecosystems out there. I think they're gonna be lots of different regions, and I feel MetaHash can do the same in Russia but also go more global than most Russian products have done. So that's a project worth investing in, and advising in, and the good thing about them is they launched their ICO after building their product, which is something that's very rare in this space. You have lots of projects that are just ideas, or very, very early stage, but they built the full product first before really offering this to the world.

The project I also like more recently is Phantasma. That's a project I visited a while back based in Portugal, but recently they just announced a brand new game on their platform. So this team is getting developers in the house to build on their own platform, show people how to use this, and I think I'm very bullish in the space of gaming on blockchain, 'cause I feel if this is to go global and mainstream, and go out there to the masses, it may not really be through something that has the most utility per say. Maybe something that's more recreational. For example, I mean, how useful is Pokemon the game? But I

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mean, how many kids have played Pokemon growing up? So I feel like gaming is especially right ... the biggest app right now on blockchain has been CryptoKitties, which is really a collectables game. So I think this is something that I'm personally very bullish on, and they recently launched a game called NachoMen which basically allows you to be a wrestler and go out there and really, it's kind of like Pokemon but wrestling. Turn-style based games, but you can earn basically tokens which you can then sell. Right, so you can basically use it as a way to earn some income on the side if you're very good at the game.

And I feel like that space as a whole is something could really bring in younger people to blockchain, and as we know millennials and also just in general kids typically are the first ones to adapt new technologies, because they haven't really kind of gotten used to or comfortable with the old way of doing things. They're more adaptable.

PJ Braham: Interesting. Those are some interesting projects, and I think our audience will be very interested in learning more about those. Changing gears for a second, what do you see as the biggest issues that the crypto and blockchain community faces as we go into 2019?

Ian Balina: I think just ease of use, how user friendly it is for the average person who's not a techy to use, I mean people are still have to send money by sending hexadecimal addresses basically [crosstalk]. And that's something my parents, or just anybody who's not a techy, that's a roadblock to adoption. So I think there has to become a simpler way where you can send money, just as simple as sending money on PayPal or Venmo, so I think in general that's something that has to be solved before the masses can really start adopting this. And also security, right, I mean as an influencer I was targeted for a hack, and I've been hacked earlier in the year.

PJ Braham: Heard about that.

Ian Balina: Around April, so I got hacked for almost \$2.5 million, and as much as I love crypto and the space, it really tell me something, I said, "Hey you know what, I mean if I'm here getting hacked I'm not the smartest person out there when it comes to technology and security, obviously. But I'm also not some beginner." Right? So if somebody like me can get hacked, that means anyone can.

PJ Braham: It can happen to anyone.

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- Ian Balina: It can happen to anyone. And how's that, imagine my mom getting hacked or somebody who's not tech savvy getting hacked? I mean that's a very big road block to adoption, and really showed me hey, it doesn't matter how much you love this, but this is something that has to be really simplified to where anybody who's not tech savvy can use it and doesn't have to worry about security as much.
- PJ Braham: Right. Okay. Very interesting point. I want to ask you now, what do you think is the moment, or what is the event that will signify that crypto and blockchain has crossed over and made it big, made it big time and is now mainstream? What do you think has to happen?
- Ian Balina: Oh wow. I think that's kind of tough to determine. I think that the tipping point I would call it, for crypto crossing over to me would be if it becomes part of every day vocabulary and use. Where, imagine, I think apps that have crossed over for example, Uber, right? You can go anywhere in the world and get a Uber, or say Uber and somebody knows what you mean, right? So I feel like Uber has kind of hit that tipping point. I mean, even just dating I mean, like Tinder. Tinder's pretty global, and it's pretty interesting because probably 10 years ago, online dating was weird, right? But now college kids think it's cool. I think if the same thing happens with crypto ... sure, it's been mentioned in the media, but to me I think it's more of a culture adoption.
- PJ Braham: Right.
- Ian Balina: If it becomes part of everyday culture, and then you'll also start having other names, not just Bitcoin but Ethereum, or even Ripple for God's sake, right, or just all the altcoins starting to become part of everyday culture, I think that's when you really know that okay, this has really arrived and is being adopted by the masses. And I think it's somewhat hard to measure, I don't think there's really a concrete way of measuring this, right? So to me that's kind of, I think, it's more of a culture adoption.
- PJ Braham: Okay, fair enough, fair enough. And I agree with that. I definitely agree with that. I think it has to become to the point, whether it's Bitcoin or some used case that everybody, it's accessible to everyone and it doesn't require any technical jargon for people to understand, or the hexadecimal inputs that they have to put into a wallet or address, what have you. Okay, well you know as our time is drawing to a close I wanted to give you the opportunity to share with the audience something that you're doing outside of the crypto space. It's been

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great to hear that crypto has been a vehicle to allow you to take control of your time, and kind of freed you from those corporate chains. And that's something that I can relate to. So, why don't you share with us what you're doing outside of the crypto space?

Ian Balina:

Yeah, so some of the things I'm trying to work on, I'm trying to help give back and show people that I mean, crypto has changed my life, but now I wanna help change the lives of others, so we've been doing a world tour for the last 1 year. Traveling around the world, evangelizing this space, but after our Middle East tour which is happening this month, in December I'll be having my Africa tour. So, this is basically my homecoming. I was born in Kampala, Uganda and Uganda in Kampala is going to be one of those countries I'll go back to, and I've never been back after I came to America. So I came in America in 1997, so I mean, 20 years basically. So this is gonna be my first time going back, it's going to be beautiful, and I just wanna help kind of really be more involved and giving.

So philanthropy is something we're definitely very big in, so I've began being part of Black Girls Code for example, and also Children of Uganda, basically charity programs I'm kind of starting to get back in, so for example on my channel on YouTube, YouTube launched a new feature that basically that lets people, my audience, pay to have their comments be super chat comments basically, as opposed to having to filter through tons and tons of comments, those people who have the option to pay have the option to have their comment be highlighted so I can see it. So all those payments people make, I'll be donating them to Children of Uganda, as a way to give back, and then also wanna start eventually my own school. Some kind of education or a system to help either sponsor kids from Uganda to come study in America, to have school, or even to even to start my own launching of Crypto Academy. And we can start to just evangelize the space, and help people learn the technology of the future. So that's one way I'm trying to give back.

PJ Braham:

That's awesome. That's great. It's great to hear your story and how crypto is, not only being the vehicle for you to benefit from and profit, but also allowed you to give back and help liberate others, and really provide value. So I really commend you for what you've done, and are continuing to do. How can our audience keep in touch with you, and stay updated with all the activities and great things that you're doing?

Ian Balina:

They can follow me on my website ianbalina.com, that's I A N B A L I N A dot com, I have free materials on there teaching beginners and getting them

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introduced to what Bitcoin is, what an ICO is. I have free eBooks, about 15 pages very in depth, just teaching people for free what the space is, right? So if you go on my site click the link, download my free eBook, and just it gets people involved in this space, teaches you what this space is about, why I'm very passionate about this. And then I also have my community where people can come via telegram, and just really engage with people around the world. We have over 27,000 people in our telegram group, and I also have a alerts channel people, where I just send out daily alerts on just things I like, things I find very interesting in the space, and also where I'm traveling to.

PJ Braham: Awesome. Awesome. Well, Ian it's been an absolute pleasure speaking with you today and having you as a guest on Crypto Token Talk, I look forward to catching up with you at some point in the future in this community, and keep doing great things. We thank you for your time.

Ian Balina: Thank you for having me. It was a pleasure.

Kelley Weaver: That's all for today's episode of Crypto Token Talk. To learn more about blockchain and keep up to date with this fast-paced industry, subscribe at cryptotokentalk.io where you can also find today's show notes. If you have suggestions for topics or guests, please drop me a line on twitter @CryptoKelley, or you can follow the show on twitter @CryptoTokenTalk. If you enjoy this show, please rate and review it on iTunes, and share it with family, friends and colleagues who want to stay up to date on how blockchain technology is changing the world. Thanks for listening.

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