

Episode 159: Bryce Bladon on the Impact of CryptoKitties

Kelley Weaver: Welcome to Crypto Token Talk. A Crypto 101 podcast exploring how blockchain applications like Bitcoin, Ethereum, and other crypto assets can 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.

Nikki Brown: I'm Nikki Brown, senior content strategist at Melrose PR, and I'll be your guest host for this episode of Crypto Token Talk. Today, I'll be speaking with Bryce Bladon, co-creator of Crypto Kitties, and director of communications at Dapper Labs. Welcome, Bryce.

Bryce Bladon: Thanks, Nikki.

Nikki Brown: Let's go ahead and dive in. Let's start out with a brief introduction to who you are, and what you do.

Bryce Bladon: For sure. As you so astutely said, I am Bryce, I am one of the co-creators on Crypto Kitties. For the past decade, I have primarily been a communications consultant, specializing in finding business and consumer cases for emerging technology, and usually making the opportunity, or shall we say jargon associated with those things a little bit more [inaudible 00:01:08].

Nikki Brown: There's such a need for that. Do you want to tell us a little bit more about your role at Crypto Kitties, and what your responsibilities entail?

Bryce Bladon: Absolutely. I'm part of the founding team behind Crypto Kitties. We've grown quite a bit since we launched roughly a year ago, and we even founded an entire company based off of Crypto Kitties success. My role in the project, itself, was primarily tied to marketing, branding, communications, content, PR. All that super fun stuff that nobody really likes to do, especially when you're on a team of engineers, and designers, I had the joy of doing, which means all the cat puns associated with the game are entirely my fault.

CRYPTO TOKEN

TALK

Nikki Brown: Well, that's a good thing to blame for. For people who are new to Crypto Kitties, perhaps you can provide us with a little background on what the game is and how it works.

Bryce Bladon: Absolutely. Crypto Kitties launched in late 2017, and it got a lot of attention as one of the worlds first consumer blockchain products. It's actually still the worlds most used decentralized app outside of Exchanges. What the game itself is relatively simple. It's a game centered around breed-able, and collectible cats. We call it Crypto Kitties. Each cat is one of a kind. It's a 100% owned by the player, and it comes with all the securities of what blockchain technology can empower for digital assets.

That was one of our fundamental principles with what we were doing with Crypto Kitties, and that was allowing people to actually experience this technology. We launched at time when there was a lot of froth associated with the blockchain industry, a lot of interests, but also a lot of ignorance. People were making a lot of promises about what this technology could do, but we were a little frustrated that people weren't just shipping practical products.

We were a little frustrated that everyone was launching an ICO instead of looking at sustainable revenue bobbles, and we were also a little frustrated that cryptocurrency, which absolutely a very reasonable use of blockchain technology, and one of the biggest opportunities was pretty much the extent of blockchain technology for nearly a decade, so we wanted to introduce a practical innovation in the form of the non-fungible token, just to explain that jargon, right there, a fungible token is like currency.

One is the same as the other. You could split it up, and if you cut it in half it's worth half of much like any other form of money. A non-fungible token, well, anything non-fungible is unique, it's special by definition. Art is non-fungible, if you split it in half, it's not half as valuable, it's ruined. Each one of these Crypto Kitties is non-fungible, each one is unique with a unique visual characteristic. You are non-fungible. I can't cut you in half and still think it's terribly valuable. I took that metaphor a little too far, but there's the basic concept.

Nikki Brown: No, that's a great explanation of that. I'm curious to learn more about how Crypto Kitties came to be. You spoke a bit about this need in the blockchain, and crypto sphere for applications that would appeal to a wide range of people beyond engineers, and developers, and crypto investors, was that kind of the genesis for starting Crypto Kitties, or how did the idea come about?

[Cryptotokentalk.io](https://cryptotokentalk.io)

[#askCryptoKelley](https://twitter.com/askCryptoKelley)

[@cryptotokentalk](https://twitter.com/cryptotokentalk)

Don't forget to subscribe so you never miss an episode!

CRYPTO TOKEN

TALK

Bryce Bladon: At the core of almost everything we're doing, it was the goal of building a bridge to the blockchain for people. Not just consumers, to be clear, there is obviously a lot of industry interest in this, and frankly Crypto Kitties has kind of kick started an entire industry of blockchain games, and non-fungible, collectibles, and that's all incredibly exciting, but as far as the genesis of the game itself some of it was tied to some frustrations we felt in the industry that we could make a meaningful shift at, some of it was tied to us seeing an opportunity to practically innovate in this space, but the simple genesis is relatively simple.

Co-creators Mack Flavell and Dieter Shirley were pretty fundamental. Mack is the chief creative officer at Dapper Labs, and one of the co-founders of that company, of our company, I should say. Dieter Shirley, likewise is another cofounder and the CTO, and the original author of the ERC-721 IE, the non-fungible token we're talking so much about. To put it simply, Mack wanted to put cats on the blockchain. Dieter wanted to do a practical innovation on a blockchain, and we thought it was time for the Internet's mascot to do the same thing they did for the internet with getting your mom on Facebook to share cat memes for the blockchain, and that's relatively a simplification of where it all came from.

Nikki Brown: That's so cool. Perhaps you could give us a little bit more about could Crypto Kitties be possible without blockchain technology, and we know it's not possible, so explaining why that is.

Bryce Bladon: Yeah. Certainly, there could be a completely centralized cat breeding game called Crypto Kitties, but it wouldn't be nearly as interesting, and it wouldn't be nearly as successful. What makes Crypto Kitties unique, what made Crypto Kitties such a sensation when it launched was the blockchain technology that empowered its unique abilities, specifically, and most pertinently digital scarcity. This is an entirely new concept to most people. The idea that a digital asset can be limited in number.

When Crypto Kitties launched, we saw something similar to being like the hot ticket Christmas item of a traditional physical good. We had these founder cats. We had genesis, actually, since we keep throwing around the word, Crypto Kitty number one that sold for hundreds upon hundreds of ether, and I think it was over 200,000 USD at the time, and a big reason they were able to command such high prices, these really big ticket items, is because people had the security of knowing these are limited in quantity, you can truly own these things, and to many people they valued it the same way they would a piece of art, you know,

[Cryptotokentalk.io](https://cryptotokentalk.io)

[#askCryptoKelley](https://twitter.com/askCryptoKelley)

[@cryptotokentalk](https://twitter.com/cryptotokentalk)

Don't forget to subscribe so you never miss an episode!

CRYPTO TOKEN

TALK

the personal connection, the industry connection of what it means in the history of this technology. Maybe even society itself.

In the 1990s we saw how internet and peer to peer [inaudible 00:07:13] technology shifted our relationship with digital media from one where somebody would wait all day next to a radio with a tape recorder on the off chance of hearing their favorite song, and then owning a version of that song to suddenly being able to copy and past literally any digital good. When things can be infinite in supply, it doesn't matter what the demand is, there can be no intrinsic value.

As silly as these cats may seem to some people, we did have a very serious point to make, and that was to show what is now possible with this technology. If there was no blockchain technology behind Crypto Kitties it would be a little more than a novel game, but because of the technology behind it, it is so, so much more interesting, and so much more impactful as a result.

Nikki Brown: That's really well said that it really comes down to this idea of digital scarcity, as you mentioned, if it was a centralized game, and that's part of the problem with kind of the internet as it stands is that digital art and things that are supposed to be unique online can be copied, so easily. Right?

Bryce Bladon: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Nikki Brown: I think that's really fascinating. Partly, why I was so interested in speaking with you is because I actually studied evolutionary biology in college, and this just seems like such an interesting kind of iteration of that, where you're creating an ecosystem, and developed these digital cats that have unique genetic codes, and yeah, I was interested to learn more about how that works. What aspects did the developers keep in mind, and think about as they're creating this ecosystem and these cats with their cattributes? Did they study or look into genetics, and biology?

Bryce Bladon: Yeah, actually, to a certain degree. How much Dieter Shirley knows about both biology, technology, emerging technology, and his ability, and I shouldn't just say Dieter Shirley, there was an entire team of engineers who worked with him on this, of course. But, yeah, there was an immense amount of thought that went into this to the point that it isn't just a credit toward developers, but also our designers, particularly [inaudible 00:09:32], one of our lead designers, and

[Cryptotokentalk.io](https://cryptotokentalk.io)

[#askCryptoKelley](https://twitter.com/askCryptoKelley)

[@cryptotokentalk](https://twitter.com/cryptotokentalk)

Don't forget to subscribe so you never miss an episode!

CRYPTO TOKEN

TALK

the person responsible for what Crypto Kitties looked like, because there is that genetic aspect.

This digital code that gives your Crypto Kitty life, and results in quite literally trillions of visual combinations, but on the other side of this is well trillions of visual combinations that can all fit together, and look super beautiful, or super weird, or somewhere in the middle. An immense amount of thought went into this, because Crypto Kitties, this core experience you see when you go to cryptokitties.com it is a very, very deep breeding game at its heart, but it's also transitioned to a platform in a lot of ways.

I've talked a lot about how blockchain technology empowered the most interesting aspects of Crypto Kitties when it launched, but today we're seeing the evolution of that. We're seeing how these digital assets can not only have real value, but they can be interoperable, which is to say the Crypto Kitty you breed at cryptokitties.com can also be your character in the cart racing game that a third party developer is creating. It can also be your social profile on a decentralized social network. It can be a variety of things.

We're seeing utility being added by third party creators in all sorts of interesting ways, and a big part of that is that the life behind the cat, and some people see the complexity of this genetic aspect of it, and get scared away, and that's understandable. Some people just like Crypto Kitties to create their perfect cat. Some people are serious collectors. Some people really want to win the game. Some people try to turn a profit. It's very interesting all the unique ways people have approached this, but the time and thought that went into having a literal genesis of life, and metaphorical, hard coded into these cats. It's very interesting.

Nikki Brown:

Yeah. It's really a fascinating world that your team has developed. That's so cool that there's room for lots of different people, too, with different attractions to the game. I'm just curious to kind of hear from you, and maybe some of this you can't necessarily speak about, but hypothetically where could this go? What sort of mutations could happen? Is it possible a new species could be developed? Could attributes be introduced that are more behavioral as opposed to appearance based?

Bryce Bladon:

Oh, yeah. I don't think enough people appreciate how much this thing has evolved in the past year let alone all the years we have in front of us. We've already seen something called [inaudible 00:12:07] traits, and you got to

[Cryptotokentalk.io](https://cryptotokentalk.io)

[#askCryptoKelley](https://twitter.com/askCryptoKelley)

[@cryptotokentalk](https://twitter.com/cryptotokentalk)

Don't forget to subscribe so you never miss an episode!

CRYPTO TOKEN

TALK

pronounce that with the purr at the beginning, which are a combination of getting your cat's visual genes that you can see combined with hidden genes that you can't see, recessive genes, if you're a biologist, to create articulary visually unique combinations. Ones that break the usual mold of what a Crypto Kitty body shape had to look like. I know that sounds a little rudimentary in some ways, but how it perpetuates itself is genuinely fascinating.

For example, there was a cattribute released relatively recently tied to the color of your cats eyes, but if you bred it just right you'd actually get a rainbow effect, which meant that your cat would have a disco background behind it, essentially. If you bred a unicorn horn into your cat as a result of that, it would now be a rainbow unicorn horn, and within Crypto Kitties, the core breeding experience we're seeing all these mutations occur in a variety of interesting ways. Likewise, and this was something I was actually primarily responsible for, a lot of people assume that the genetic code also correlated with behavior already.

If you create Crypto Kitty, that Crypto Kitty will come with a bio. The vast majority of which I was responsible for writing about 14 months ago, but they've also evolved quite a bit and a lot of people spent a lot of time trying to figure out why some cats seemed angry and how it correlated with the genetic code, and at the risk of on doing a lot of peoples work, today, I can tell you right now the genetic code doesn't correlate with the bio.

However, when we say maybe if there is a Crypto Kitties experience where you can actually play with your cats, and train them like they were a Pokemon, absolutely that genetic code could correlate to strength or speed, or temperament, or a variety of other factors. That's what's so very interesting about this, if you were to take a Crypto Kitty off of our platform, which again somebody could absolutely do, they could create their own filter for these, and suddenly every Crypto Kitty could have a corresponding Crypto Puppy, for example.

People could put it through their own visual filter in some ways, and maybe it's the same core cat behind it, but there are just a variety of interesting ways these things can evolve and grow over time. I don't think anything quite showcases that like what we're doing with the KittyVerse, and how in less than a year we already have well over 50 teams building 70 experiences on top of Crypto Kitties, so these cats have all sorts of new tricks up their sleeves, now.

[Cryptotokentalk.io](https://cryptotokentalk.io)

[#askCryptoKelley](https://twitter.com/askCryptoKelley)

[@cryptotokentalk](https://twitter.com/cryptotokentalk)

Don't forget to subscribe so you never miss an episode!

CRYPTO TOKEN



TALK

Nikki Brown: Your team has been incredibly successful in getting lots of users and people involved in the KittyVerse. What's the secret to your success?

Bryce Bladon: I honestly think it's just the simple fact of letting people actually experience the stuff for themselves, and letting them experience it in a novel, and fun based way. I'm not going to imply that everything we've done has been right, or that every move has been a complete home run, but it's a combination of a lot of the talent that went into our founding team. It's a lot of how we were spun out of Axiom Zen, a company that specializes in startups, and emerging technology, so when we caught fire in December, and accidentally melted the Ethereum Network, we could suddenly grow our team from 12 to 18 to 24 over a course of a month, because these were our coworkers.

We were experienced with working with them, we didn't need to spend three to six months recruiting, and as a result we got to scale up very, very fast and it also meant that we got to capitalize on all the interest, and get a lot of these third party teams basically trained up on blockchain technology. We have a launchpad program for getting third party creators to a sustainable path of revenue. I can't remember what the official name for it is, but we have a developer program, oh, it's the developer program, but with purr at the end.

A lot of puns on this product. I really got to apologize for that, but it gives everyone access to our tools, our public API, even some office hours, if they'd like, but essentially, sorry, this is a very long winded answer to what was a relatively simple question, why are people building on top of Crypto Kitties, because games are found in an emerging technology, and they give players, and developers a like a working fluency in that technology.

There's been a lot of hype around blockchain. Some of it very well deserved. Some of it complete nonsense, to be honest, but if you want to find out for yourself whether if it's as a creator, as a consumer, or somebody who's just curious I honestly think there are very few things that can compare with Crypto Kitties as a way to learn.

Nikki Brown: Definitely. You know, a big point of discussion in blockchain and in crypto in general, lately, has been how will we achieve mass adoption of these platforms and of the currencies, and it seems Crypto Kitties is doing a pretty good job of that through getting people interested, and providing tools so people can get educated about this. What do you think are the biggest challenges to mass

[Cryptotokentalk.io](https://cryptotokentalk.io)

[#askCryptoKelley](https://twitter.com/askCryptoKelley)

[@cryptotokentalk](https://twitter.com/cryptotokentalk)

Don't forget to subscribe so you never miss an episode!

CRYPTO TOKEN

TALK

adoption, because we do have a long way to go? How do we overcome these obstacles?

Bryce Bladon:

Yeah. That is a very good question, and one that can result in a very long answer, but to give the bullet points, I think first and foremost, and this the challenge we ran head first into, a little bit soon than expected, and that is just the simple issue of scalability. The two most dominant block chains right now are built on the concept of value transfer, which is very relevant, but this is just a long winded way of saying when we saw over 15,000 people trying to play Crypto Kitties at once we accounted for over a quarter of the traffic on the worlds super computer, and we made the experience for all of those people, and anyone else working on the blockchain very subpar, so how do you get to mainstream adoption if tens of thousands of people can't use the technology at once?

Fortunately, block chains problem is what I call a software problem verses a hardware problem. Whereas, it takes years to get processors, and things of that effect to speeds to overcome these challenges, the challenges of scalability are ones that can be solved by a lot of clever thinking. A lot of these soft skills that can be grown over time, and maybe one of these KittyVerse developers is going to be the person who solves scalability for the blockchain.

I don't know. I think first and foremost if there's a lot of very good questions about mainstream adoption, but until the scene has been set for people to actually use this technology in a way that works for them, that fundamentally provides value, we need to overcome that before we get too hypothetical about it, but I'd say the next step from there is just setting the expectation of that value. For example, the game's industry right now it made over, I think, over a \$110 billion dollars in 2017, and the vast majority of that revenue was tied to the sale of virtual items, which is to say items you lease from the developer. Players don't get to own these things.

That's spread across 2.3 billion players, almost a third of the world's population. Yeah. Games might seem a little silly, but that's a lot of real money, and as soon as that expectation is in players minds, that wait a second I'm throwing all this money, and I'm not actually getting anything out of that, as soon as that expectation is they get to own that end game asset, that fortnight skin, that emote, whatever, then you're going to see a lot more mainstream interest in blockchain technology, because the value will be clear. Those are the two big things, in my mind. Scalability and letting people actually experience the value

Cryptotokentalk.io

[#askCryptoKelley](https://twitter.com/askCryptoKelley)

[@cryptotokentalk](https://twitter.com/cryptotokentalk)

Don't forget to subscribe so you never miss an episode!

CRYPTO TOKEN

TALK

for themselves, and you can't get to that value part until you can get a lot of people able to experience the value for themselves.

Nikki Brown: There's certainly lots of room for growth. Kind of looking into the future, what do you either predict, or hope the ultimate impacts of this technology will be?

Bryce Bladon: Hope and predict can be such an interesting tension to navigate. I will say, my hope is that this technology doesn't just stay in the hands of industry insiders. That's not to knock anyone building or developing in this space. I think that is so, so wonderful, but it's very easy for us to get our nose too close to the grindstone, and for us to think this project we're working on is all that matters, and it's us against them.

Blockchain comes with concept of decentralization, which means a lot of things to a lot of people, but fundamentally I personally I hope that all these values of decentralization, the idea of individual empowerment, of true ownership, of owning your digital experiences, your digital identity, your digital assets, all these great promises, I do hope they are realized not for the individuals, or the people who have the technical acumen to navigate a crypto wallet, but I hope they're realized for everyone.

I do predict that some semblance of that will come to place, but I think one of the things that, and this is my prediction part the thing that will need to be navigated for mainstream adoption, and I apologize for the jargon of decentralization, but how do you balance centralized convenience with decentralized value, which is to say people today are used to being able to just one click order on Amazon, and then actually within hours now an order arrives on your door. That's centralized convenience.

Decentralized value is the idea of each bitcoin you can actually own, each Crypto Kitty you actually own, and can do all these things, and when utility is added, and the market grows, you see those benefits, but it's also a lot slower. When you breed a Crypto Kitty, there's a delay between having your two cats breed, and a new cat being produced just because of the simple latency of how blockchain technology works, and I think finding that right balance, one that prioritizes value without compromising some semblance of convenience, IE, usability is the next big thing to navigate, especially with that big specter of scalability blocking the way for mainstream adoption.

[Cryptotokentalk.io](https://cryptotokentalk.io)

[#askCryptoKelley](https://twitter.com/askCryptoKelley)

[@cryptotokentalk](https://twitter.com/cryptotokentalk)

Don't forget to subscribe so you never miss an episode!

CRYPTO TOKEN

TALK

- Nikki Brown: Really well said. Before we wrap up here, for someone who's looking to get their first Crypto Kitty, how should they get started?
- Bryce Bladon: Well, you go to cryptokitties.co, you click start, and then you make a profile. It is as relatively easy as we can make it, and I will say that every week we try to reduce at least one step from the process. I'll be honest, it still takes longer to get started with Crypto Kitties than we think is ideal. A lot of this is related to the challenges, and frankly the beauty of leveraging third party tools we don't have complete control over.
- This includes, the Ethereum Network, this includes wallets that we don't own or make ourselves. This includes things like [inaudible 00:23:01], but its as simple as going to the website, and clicking that start button. We have spent the past year doing everything we can to improve the first user experience, and that is always going to be our priority, so the longer it's been since this episode has been published, the easier it'll be. Just go to cryptokitties.co, and find out for yourself.
- Nikki Brown: Awesome. What's the best way for people to stay in touch, and updated on what Crypto Kitties is doing, but also what you're doing?
- Bryce Bladon: Oh, well that's a very sweet question. For Crypto Kitties, and Dapper Labs as a whole, I strongly suggest following us on Twitter, that's [@CryptoKitties](https://twitter.com/CryptoKitties), and [@Dapper_Labs](https://twitter.com/Dapper_Labs). We are producing a lot of blog and thought leadership content these days, myself included. You can also follow me on Twitter, [@BryceBladon](https://twitter.com/BryceBladon), and yeah, I honestly think those are the simplest ways. Otherwise, we have newsletters associated with all of our products, with our company as a whole, with a few things we've got coming out that we've only teased to a few folks, but check us out on social media. You'll find links to all that fun stuff, and yeah, stay tuned, the future is really exciting.
- Nikki Brown: Excellent. Anything else you'd like to add to our conversation, today?
- Bryce Bladon: Nope. Just a heartfelt appreciation for you taking the time and asking such good questions, Nikki.
- 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

[Cryptotokentalk.io](https://cryptotokentalk.io)

[#askCryptoKelley](https://twitter.com/askCryptoKelley)

[@cryptotokentalk](https://twitter.com/cryptotokentalk)

Don't forget to subscribe so you never miss an episode!

CRYPTO TOKEN



TALK

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 the 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. This podcast is for entertainment and informational purposes only and does not constitute financial or investment advice of any kind.

Cryptocurrencies are an extremely volatile and risky investment. You should not make any decision, financial investment, creating, or otherwise based on any of the information presented in this podcast without undertaking independent due diligence. Anyone wishing to invest, should see his or her own independent financial advisor.

Cryptotokentalk.io

[#askCryptoKelley](https://twitter.com/askCryptoKelley)

[@cryptotokentalk](https://twitter.com/cryptotokentalk)

Don't forget to subscribe so you never miss an episode!