



Business challenge

With the proliferation of fake news online, Block Expert sought to use blockchain technology to build a platform that could provide instant proof of authenticity for online news.

Transformation

Safe.press can help an organization protect its brand—and business—against online disinformation. Developed by Block Expert, the innovative platform uses IBM® Blockchain technology to authenticate news sources with a single click. Telecom giant Orange is the first member of a consortium to use the blockchain-secured digital badge to fight fake news online.

Results

Proof of authenticity

with a unique and tamper-proof digital footprint

Immutable and decentralized

building trust, transparency and reliability

Consortium-based certification

with protocols agreed to by all participating members

Safe.press

In an age of fake news, IBM Blockchain delivers a badge of trust for online media

Block Expert is a French technology company founded by Benjamin Gievis and Jean-Philippe Raynaud, creators of [Safe.press](#). For more than 20 years, the team has been pushing the internet forward with award-winning work. Passionate about innovation and new technologies, the duo founded Block Expert to help enterprises change their businesses with decentralized apps based on blockchain technology.

“We had an edge on every other technology company because the IBM Blockchain Platform was really ready to use as an enterprise technology.”

—Benjamin Gievis, Co-founder, Block Expert

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Real impact of fake news

Online disinformation has been used to influence public opinion. But fake news isn't just damaging to everyday readers. It can also have serious implications for businesses. Beyond clickbait and misleading headlines, sophisticated hoaxes can significantly damage brand reputation, resulting in lost customers, lost revenue—and a loss of public trust. Several years ago, a bogus press release sent a French company's stock into a freefall when it was picked up by major media outlets. The hoax spread and sent the company's shares down by as much as 20% in one day. The ruse was exposed, but the event still took a toll on the company's valuation.

"This was really a wake-up call," says Tom Wright, Head of Press Relations at France's leading telecom provider, Orange. "And not just for our company; journalists really woke up once that story came out and started tackling the problem of fake news seriously."

Wright sees the press as a whole—as an industry—struggling to find its way in the 24-hour news-cycle. While there's a real effort by journalists to check sources, they're under enormous pressure to get articles out as fast as possible to stay relevant.

"We've lost some of the substance in our relationships with the press, some of the context," says Wright.

"Today, everything moves so fast that they put much more trust in a press release than they would have in the past."

Benjamin Gievis, Co-founder of Block Expert, saw an opportunity to help organizations fight fake news. "It is critical for businesses in France, Europe—and around the world—to protect their reputation and prevent counterfeit press releases," he says. "We thought blockchain was the kind of technology that could solve this problem and provide a new layer of security for organizations."

Block Expert was interested in using Hyperledger technology to create a decentralized platform—with no third parties—that could automate the verification of press releases to provide proof of authenticity for every news story in real time.

Orange gets a green badge of trust

Block Expert created a proof of concept (PoC) for a solution called Safe.press, which is a decentralized and consortium-based certification platform that uses IBM Blockchain technology to track and authenticate the source of a published news story with one click. Each news item is recorded on the platform's blockchain ledger and all members of the consortium have a copy. The details that the ledger provides—where, when and by whom a story is

published—are safely hosted by all consortium members. Protocols are made through consensus and agreed to by all participating members—building trust and transparency not only for consortium members, but for journalists and the public at large.

Block Expert asked Orange to be the first member of the Safe.press consortium—and to be one of the inaugural media companies in Europe to use blockchain technology on its website to fight disinformation.

Wright says Orange was immediately interested in the prospect. As a major technology company in France, Orange valued information security and was committed to finding the best way to communicate with journalists. "We had already made investments in R&D to use blockchain solutions in other areas of the business, so the technology wasn't completely alien to us," he says. Orange was interested in finding a breakthrough technological solution to address the problem of disinformation. "We were very taken by the proposal, because it just corresponds very precisely to our DNA."

Working side by side with the development team at Orange.com, Block Expert built the technology in six months, launching it live on the corporate website late in 2019. Each new blockchain-secured press release is instantly recognizable by the green Safe.press badge of trust.

"It's incredibly simple, reliable and tamper-proof," says Wright. "You open the press release in the press room on Orange.com. You click the green badge and you get the authentication. And it's based on something that's an external verification, not just Orange authenticating itself. If our site is hacked, it wouldn't be authenticated in the same way. The fact that it's decentralized is key."

"There is nothing else like Safe.press in the world and we're very proud of its development," says Gievis. "It's a premier platform. We're providing a simple way to verify data and to verify information automatically—with no third parties. We're disrupting the third-party industry by bringing this peer-to-peer way of communicating and a layer of security, which is within the code and within the hardware itself."

With the platform live, Gievis says their next step is to scale and build out the consortium of members. "We won't have any huge challenge scaling globally," he says. "Every fingerprint from every stakeholder is going to be shared on the same ledger, which is the main principle of blockchain. To have a shared ledger between many different stakeholders builds trust, transparency and reliability and also adds this layer of security, and that's what the blockchain is all about."

Platform built for the future

Safe.press was implemented onto the Orange corporate website within a year, and while new, the platform is very stable. Orange has had a positive response from journalists for the ease of use and innovative approach to providing proof of authenticity. Gievis says the fact that Block Expert was able to build out the platform, implement it onto the Orange.com website so that users can do a live query and have a live certification for each press release is an incredible accomplishment.

“I wouldn’t say that it was easy, because that wasn’t the case,” he says. “But we had an edge on every other technology company because the IBM Blockchain Platform was really ready to use as an enterprise technology. I’ve been involved in technological development more than 20 years. One of the key components of success when you’re getting into a new technological field is to be able to rely on the right platform.”

Solution component

- IBM® Blockchain Platform

Take the next step

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