



Executive Q&A on Blockchain Technology

With Jeffery Denton

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Q. How has the pandemic affected the way blockchain is viewed in the supply chain?

A. Oh, how I wish blockchain for traceability was in place and used widely prior to the pandemic! Understanding where medicines and supplies are and how much is in stock would have been integral to faster responses. This is something that was not thought about just a couple years ago. The U.S. exempted vaccines from recent regulations as counterfeiting was not a global concern. The good news is, some supply chain visibility gaps have been exposed and as a result we are in a better position to achieve advancements in the next few years, which could have taken decades if it had not been for the pandemic.

Q. What is the major difference between blockchain implementations today and blockchain implementations three years ago?

A. There has been a dramatic shift in the sense that rather than looking for a problem to fix, the conversation has shifted to considering what the possible solutions blockchain can enable. We are not at the implementation stage yet, but instead we are examining and driving toward an architecture that will be flexible to meet a number of use cases including inventory control, revenue management, and other areas where high levels of data collaboration is needed.

Q. How has your knowledge and usage of GS1 Standards played a role in planning for a blockchain implementation?

A. We already have an understanding that the only way to achieve complete interoperability is with the use of standards, regardless of the technology. The same rules apply to blockchain solutions. Whether you're processing data or identifying products, the need for speaking the same language doesn't change. And when it comes to enhancing visibility in the pharmaceutical supply chain, ensuring all locations are identified with globally unique Global Location Numbers (GLN) can also support regulatory compliance such as the US Drug Supply Chain Security Act (DSCSA).

Q. What is the biggest benefit of using blockchain in the pharma industry?

A. Across the industry, there is a significant amount of collaboration and trust required. In current EDI, for example, we exchange over 11 million documents in just one week. Much of this could be managed by way of "lighter" transactions within a trusted blockchain that allows for both pull and push of information to others.

Q. If you could give one piece of advice to anyone starting their blockchain implementation journey right now, what would it be?

A. Gain the highest possible level of sponsorship within your organization to reduce the need to repeatedly justify specific benefits. Once you have high-level support, let the project team dive deeper for defining the value. This requires trust in the team but allows for the best findings in achieving objectives. I believe this approach will likely lead to much more overall value and allows the technologist within your organization to demonstrate the possibilities to the business teams including a platform that is extensible beyond the initial need. Take advantage of existing knowledge and expertise. There are a number of service providers that really understand blockchain implementation and can provide input into the architecture, design and deployment in a way that a company can maximize the potential. It would be a miss for an organization to try to go it alone.

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*For information about the act, see the [2013 Drug Supply Chain Security Act](#)

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