

# Blockchain releases new android wallet



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Popular bitcoin wallet provider Blockchain.info is releasing a major new version of its Android app, allowing you to store, receive and send bitcoins directly from your Android phone. The key thinking behind the update is to make bitcoin more accessible. It hides the complexity of the protocol in order to encourage mainstream user adoption.

“ Our Android app has to do with making bitcoin so easy to use that people don’t even have to think about addresses for example,” co-founder and CEO Nicolas Cary told me in a phone interview. “ That stuff exists in bitcoin, but just like there are complicated things happening in email, they are hidden.”

So here’s what you can expect from the new app. If you want to send bitcoins to someone, you can just browse your address book and tap on someone’s name. After that, there are two possibilities. If this person is already a bitcoin user with an associated bitcoin address, it will simply send the bitcoins. If it’s someone new, it will send an email with a redemption code so that they can get their money.

Also coming with today’s update, there is a map view of with merchants who accept bitcoins. “ It’s a world’s first,” Cary said. “ We verified every single one of these merchants and we’re bringing new ones every week.”

Finally, there are a lot of education features. When you create a wallet, Blockchain will help you understand how to manage your bitcoins. It will tell you to set a very strong password and two-factor authentication, it will suggest backup solutions, and it will show you tutorial videos.

“ When you explain why bitcoin is valuable, 99 percent of people understand that it’s useful. But it gets a little intimidating when they actually start using bitcoin,” Cary said.

As always with Blockchain, Cary also defended the company’s decentralized approach during our interview. Blockchain COO Peter Smith already said on stage at Disrupt NY that people shouldn’t trust bitcoin services that centralize everything. Most startups try to reproduce the old banking system and actually store bitcoins on their servers. As Mt. Gox has shown us, these services can be compromised.

Instead, Blockchain develops open-source wallets, and the user is handling his or her own bitcoins. “ We are more like a storage service, ” Cary said. “ We store encrypted files as a backup. When a user logs into the website, it fetches that file and decrypts it. Blockchain never sees this user’s bitcoins.”

It means that Blockchain can’t actually take a small transaction fee when a user sends bitcoins like other services. That’s why the company relies on advertisement. There are two million registered users on Blockchain. info and using the apps. Hundreds of millions of people visit Blockchain’s websites every month. But the startup is still mostly known for its open source wallets.

The company has upcoming updates for its other wallets as well. “ The Android wallet is the first update to our wallets. We’re bringing branding, design and feature parity to Chrome, Firefox, the website and the mobile apps,” Cary said.

Recently, Apple made a U-turn when it comes to wallet apps in the App Store. The company is now accepting bitcoin transfer apps again. When I asked Cary whether the company has plans to come back to iOS, his answer was “ yes, as soon as possible.”

But it might not be in the App Store at first. “ We are building an HTML5 wallet, and we’ve built a pairing solution for credentials,” he said. “ We completely reengineered the QR code reader to work in HTML5. We’ll be open-sourcing that as well.”

At a larger scale, as Blockchain is developing the most popular wallet apps in the world, it has the opportunity to improve how transactions are handled. If two Blockchain users want to exchange bitcoins, sharing an address through a QR code might not be the most elegant solution.

Instead, the company could take advantage of its massive user base to switch to NFC or Bluetooth-LE. If two nearby users are using Blockchain’s apps, you could pick the other person’s name in a nearby list. “ We’re doing some research and development,” Cary said.

It might take a while, but these improvements might be a much-needed simplification of the bitcoin protocol to bring the cryptocurrency to the next ten million people.