

# **John McAfee Is 73, Very Stoned, and Running for President**

**By Mark Yarm**

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The midterm elections haven't even been held yet, and already John McAfee has declared his intention to run for president. "In spite of past refusals, I have decided to again run for POTUS in 2020," the antivirus-software pioneer and cryptocurrency evangelist [tweeted June 3](#). "If asked again by the Libertarian party, I will run with them. If not, I will create my own party. I believe this will best serve the crypto community by providing the ultimate campaign platform for us."

Controversial and outrageous, McAfee first ran in 2016, failing to secure the Libertarian nomination. This time, however, he sounds pretty confident of his chances. Not that he has any illusions that he'll ultimately take the highest office in the land. "Don't think that I have a chance of winning. I do not," McAfee [tweeted shortly after](#) announcing his run. "But what truly changes America is not the president, but the process of creating one. If my following is sufficient I get to stand [on] the world's largest stage and talk to... everyone, as I did last time, to tell the truth."

When reached by BREAKER to talk politics, McAfee is in a truth-telling mood. "I am more stoned right now that I've been in, I don't know, a month," says McAfee, who just turned 73. "And I'm perfectly willing to continue this interview because frequently they" —drug-fueled conversations with journalists— "turn out to be my best." He's not wrong: Over the course of 40 minutes, McAfee touches upon everything from his luxe, tax-free lifestyle to his history of bath salts consumption.

**So you're the most stoned you've been in a month. Presumably part of your presidential platform will be legalization of marijuana.**

My platform would be legalization of almost everything, except the obvious: murder, rape. Though let me ask you a question: Has there ever been a successful piece of legislation that legislated and regulated a part of our lives which was ours, private, and involved only yourself and the person willing to engage in it, too? Let's look, beginning with, in America, the age of Prohibition. What happened? We drank more alcohol per capita during Prohibition than at any time in history before or since.

In America, certainly up until 10 years ago, virtually every state in America had outlawed weed, marijuana, THC, along with everything else. Let me ask you a question: Anybody, your [readers] out there, you my friend who I'm talking to: Tell me you don't know at least 10 people who smoke weed?

**Of course I do.**

So does *everybody*. As a statistician, I can tell you that 90 percent of this entire nation smokes weed, excepting the kids—and even the kids, for fuck's sake—so has that been successful legislation? No. It is *impossible*, my friend. You can't stop that spark of human nature, of human hope, of human reaching. Why the fuck should anything be illegal that you're taking alone in your home? You might say, "Well, good God, this guy's snorted 40 pounds of crank over a four-month period and killed all those neighbors," and you're gonna blame it on the crank.

No, blame it on maybe a mother and father who beat him or maybe [serving] 10 years of prison before—but no, you’re just gonna look at that one thing and say, “Ah, see there’s the problem, that’s why you have to legislate.” Bullshit! If you knew he was acting acting weird, call the fucking police. Deal with them yourself or goddamn move.

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*"I'm not going to be elected president. Please God, if there's a single one of your [readers] who knows one-fiftieth of who I am, you know I'm not gonna be the president."*

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### **What's been the highlight of your presidential run so far?**

The highlight was within 15 minutes, the Libertarian Party contacted me and asked me to please come to them and talk to them because I said, when I announced, “I’ll either run under the Libertarian banner or my own.” But I’m not going to give [the Libertarians] any publicity whatsoever, until you know, we understand what our focus is. Because here’s my focus: I’m *not* going to be elected president. Please God, if there’s a single one of your [readers] who knows one-fiftieth of who I am, you know I’m not gonna be the president.

### **Then why are you running?**

I do not believe that presidents change *anything* in this country. The day they take office, what happens? They have a thousand puppet masters, and you are the fucking puppet. But the process of creating one: *Fuck yes*. That changes America, that changes minds. Because in that chaos, there were people hitting a spark for a month and disappearing, but saying something that you fucking remember. And the next one comes up and you remember something that they said, maybe more. Suddenly, maybe, you’re going to get a fucking epiphany. Do you think we get epiphanies under presidents who are already elected? No, we get baby food. We get orchestrated and pre-scripted speeches, tweets.

### **Whatever you feel about President Trump, he's certainly not pre-scripted.**

No, I didn’t say anything about President Trump. In fact, I hope to fuck he gets it again, because I’m not. Because No. 1, he’s more entertaining than anybody else. Is he actually going to change things? Wait eight years, we’ll find out. Probably no. Did Obama change anything? Everything he did was fucking reversed. Please, God. No, what changes our hearts and minds is not the president, but the process.

### **What kind of change did you spur with your last run?**

I changed the *entire* landscape of cybersecurity, which absolutely no one in the Libertarian Party had any fucking interest in whatsoever. I *changed cybersecurity*. I brought the FBI to the debate table on CNN for 15 fucking minutes—this is after I’d lost the nomination—and reamed them a new asshole about demanding that Apple give them a master key for every iPhone.

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Two days later, they dropped their request. This is what I'm good at. I'm just one of those sparks that's going to appear. And maybe if you listen with the right kind of ears, you'll actually hear what I would like to say.

**Okay.**

Were you going to sleep? Were you snoring? I heard you fucking snore, dude.

**I'm quite awake.**

*[Hacking cough.]*

**Are you all right?**

I'm 73, how can I fucking be all right?

**What are your predictions for the midterms then?**

I don't care about the midterms. I'm really only interested in something that draws national attention on the subjects that need to have light shone on them. I don't know who the fuck is running, neither do I care.

**One of the more dramatic moments of the past number of months is you survived what you said was [an assassination attempt](#). Did you ever get to the bottom of what happened?**

If I did, I probably wouldn't say anything, would I? That's a very private affair. I mean, I could say it happened. I could say I got married, but if you say, "Well, what do you guys do in bed?" —I'm sorry, that's a private affair, okay?

**I didn't realize, because you had been very public about the attempt.**

Keep in mind, I'm 73 and I've been dancing in this world, out of the box, where I trash *everything*, including every branch of the U.S. government, foreign governments. I do not play by anybody's rules. I do as I damn well please, and I try not to interfere with anybody else. Live a life like that and people are trying to get rid of your ass. It happens constantly.

I am surrounded by reasonably competent security, though it's nothing like the Russians, of course. You guys want to say hi? [*Bodyguard 1, in the background: "Hey, sir!" Bodyguard 2: "How's it going?"*] These are all ex-military guys. And I have maintained this for nearly 30 years.

**A lot of people in the crypto space now have bodyguards. Is it a difficult way to live, being surrounded by protection all the time, or do you enjoy it?**

I ignore it. I mean, it's been happening so long. What sort of life do you want to live: where you're locked in a closet, armed to the teeth by yourself and your wife, or surrounded by people that will allow you to go see a movie?

**How does cryptocurrency play into your campaign?**

Because financial and economic freedom go hand-in-hand with personal freedom. It means that I am allowed to do permission-less transactions. I don't have to ask anybody's goddamn permission—not my bank, not a government, not a state agency. Not a board of directors. Fuck, I'm doing it. Permission-less. Now try wiring money to Lebanon. I mean, you're going to be in an FBI cell for two days.

Sending money using Monero, for example. Oh, fuck me. No one's ever gonna know who I am, who I sent it to, or what the fucking amount was. Now, which would you prefer?

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*"I don't invest in cryptocurrencies.... It's just too much trouble. Why the fuck would I go about investing in something when I can talk to you or watch Korean movies on Netflix?"*

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**What kind of cryptocurrency do you personally invest in?**

I don't invest in cryptocurrencies. I never do, never have. My people do, the company does. But that's the CEO's decision. I'm not the CEO. I'm just a face, a figurehead, a non-entity, really.

**Why do you avoid investing in crypto?**

It's just too much trouble. Why the fuck would I go about investing in something when I can talk to you or watch Korean movies on Netflix? Why the fuck at my age would I go to the trouble to even look at the price of something? Fuck.

**In order to make money, in order to—**

Listen. I have not made a penny—haven't made a penny in 26 years. I live, literally, completely off of the kindness of friends. End of story. Really. I own nothing.

**What about all that security? That has to cost some money.**

That's the kindness of my friends. They spend millions a year on me.

**May I ask, what kind of friends? Very influential, powerful friends?**

Oh, please God, they're just friends, okay? And they're kind.

**I don't have friends like that. I guess I'm missing out in that regard.**

Don't you think that possibly there may be *massive* financial value in being my friend? Not by getting money from me, but maybe, "Can I use your name for this?" "Yeah sure. Go ahead." What do you think that's worth? But it's not some small thing, it's some big thing, which if I were to sell my name, I would get \$5 million for it. I just say, "Take it." I have the right to do that. The government has no right to prevent me from doing that.

Neither does the government have the right to prevent my friends from paying for my rent, my food, my cars, my yachts, because they're not mine, you understand? I call a friend: "I think you need a yacht, because I would like to use it." *Done*. And then I have a yacht, but it's not mine. And my friends are polite enough not to ever barge in on their yacht without permission from me.

**That's quite a life arrangement. How does one get to that point where you can have others paying your way?**

I don't know. You have to give up all control of your life, No. 1. You have to trust *implicitly, 100 percent* that the people whose hands you are putting your life in are not gonna turn around and fuck you. And a way you get around that is having lots of friends, all who hate each other and will not speak. That's my solution.

**That seems like a very complicated lifestyle. I mean, simple, yet—**

It allows me not to pay taxes because I don't make any money. It allows me to say what I damn well please to virtually any government agency because there's nothing they can take away from me, because what do I own? Nothing. Even the watch on my arm. I have a note in a safe saying this is on loan from a gentleman who runs a jewelry store in Aptos, Calif. So you can't even take my watch. You can take most of my shoes. People get tired of having to buy shoes to send to me.

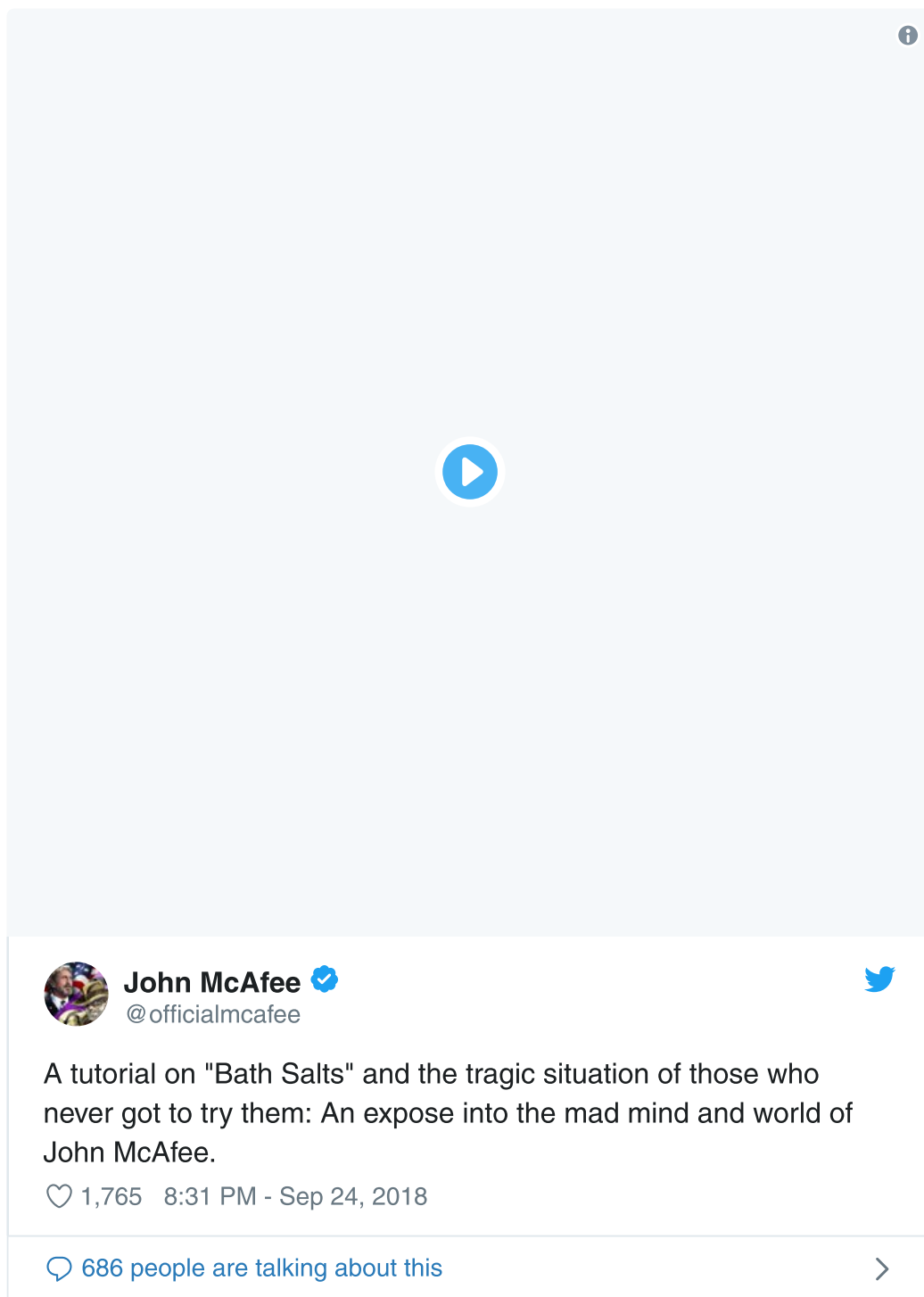
[Laughs.]

**Going back to the presidential run, what have been the other highlights of the last few months?**

Structuring the company, Team McAfee, so that I have don't have to pay any fucking attention for two years, which has been difficult. But you may notice, Jimmy Watson took over as CEO. All of my responsibilities have been abandoned, with the exception of my videos—the tweet videos. Did you see the ones I put up today?

**I didn't, though I saw there was something about you doing bath salts.**

Basically, I lay it all out about my bath salts use. Why? Because when I'm running for president, fuck me, they're gonna dig it up anyway. So let's answer it now in video, let people watch it, and you don't need to ask another fucking question.



**So you're the most transparent candidate ever.**

More than transparent. Please come live inside me while I run for president. Because I'm the only one telling the truth on one thing: I'm not gonna be president. Are you crazy? But I am, with your support, going to be able to talk to the American people about things that I believe, and if you have a brain and a heart—even a glimmer of each—you're going to see the truth and support me in this. Let's all of

us, all of America, talk to ourselves. Let us sit in front of a fucking mirror, me and everyone, and let's just discuss what we see. Can we do that? Please.

### **What will America see when it looks in front of a mirror?**

Dude, I haven't run yet. I'm not gonna know until I get my first convention and get a hundred questions. And, I'll go, "Ah, so that's what you guys are interested in."

### **What were people thinking about during your last run for the presidency?**

They were sure as fuck not thinking about cybersecurity, but they are now. But that was two years ago. Do you realize that tomorrow you're a new fucking person? You wake up and maybe your wife walks out on you in the middle of the night with your best friend and your dog, if you have one, and your bank account. Your life is now in a totally different orbit around reality. So I don't have a clue what they're into now, but I will.

### **How do you intend to engage with the American public?**

Dude, have you ever seen me on stage? Did I have any trouble engaging the 500, 600, 700 people there? I never do. If you look at any of my, literally, close to a thousand national television appearances—CNN, Fox News, ABC, CNBC, the major networks—never have I had trouble engaging my audience. Why the fuck do you think they keep asking me back? Because every time I go on, their ratings go through the fucking roof. 'Cause I'm gonna say some shit that you're not gonna hear on most channels.

### **There's a difference between appearing on CNN and being in a small-town diner in New Hampshire and hearing the concerns of the local people, right?**

Of course, there is. But do you actually believe, sir, that sitting in a diner, even with someone you've maybe known for 10 years, who has a secret or a thousand secrets—"We went bankrupt. We can't tell our neighbors." "Susie got pregnant and ran off. We can't tell our neighbors." "Joey killed the teenage son of the guy next door, and we can't tell anybody"...

### **That's pretty dark.**

...In a diner, even though you're looking in the person's eyes, the closer you are to them, the less you're ever going to know about them. I'd rather have a conversation on the phone or in writing, where people are free to express themselves with less fear. I'd much rather go to a big-ass convention and have, after I have spoken to my tribe, someone stand up and say, "Sir, but..." and then see everybody in the fucking room clapping. That's spontaneous. Dude, I know what I'm doing.

At the debates, instead of them going, "Mr. McAfee, when you become president, what is your first act?" I'm gonna go, "Ask me a rational, sane question, sir. You know, I know. These people in here know, the entire American public knows, I am not going to have a first day of the presidency because I can't be elected. So please, if you have another question, I will answer it. If not, I'm going to take my two minutes and talk about something else."



**You won't even be invited to the debates though.**

Are you crazy? [Laughs.] Please, God, they invite [Vermin Supreme](#) to debate.

**Are you talking about the Libertarian debates?**

Listen, I know how to play these games. No one could get the FBI to talk to them. People wanted to debate them. When I said it, they had no fuckin' choice. I called CNN and I said, "I want to debate the FBI. I want you to handle it, and I'm going to do it exclusively on CNN." And he said, "Done."

**And you think you can do the same thing with the national—**

Fuck me. That'll be twice as easy.

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*"If I win the nomination, I'm going to start on a rant about the marginalization of third parties—and when I go on a fucking rant, the world listens."*

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**You think you could get on a national stage with, say, Donald Trump and debate him?**

If I worked on it, fuck yes. Are you crazy? This is if I win the nomination. Because if I win the nomination, I'm going to start on a rant about the marginalization of third parties—and when I go on a fucking rant, the world listens.

**Obviously, the rise of Trump came from his being able to capture a lot of attention by ranting and—**

Duh! That's why I like the guy. He's clear on crowd motivation. I think I've had more experience than him in real life, so I believe I would have the advantage in a debate.

**So where does the campaign go next?**

I'm still extricating myself from Team McAfee. And when that happens, I will decide what to do next. First, I will probably be choosing a campaign manager among the many who have offered themselves, all of them pretty serious people.

**Is there anyone who could actually manage you? You seem pretty unmanageable.**

The campaign manager doesn't manage me. He manages the campaign, which I have no interest in anyway. So his management is basically going to be scheduling. It won't be a difficult job at all. Getting me where I need to be.

We're running out of time. [My wife](#) just sat down with me, with a longing expression in her eyes. I'm 73. This might be the last chance I get with a woman. So one more question.

**As a 73-year-old, what parting words of wisdom do you have for the BREAKER audience?**

Do what you love. Everything, completely, to the fullest of your hearts and minds.

Whether it’s personal, family, or business. If you stick to that, you will have a mystery for a life and you will never regret a single act. Any other way of living is sad.

*This interview has been edited and condensed. Photo: YouTube*

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# Skin in the Game: Uncovering the Adult Industry's Crypto Fetish

By Jessica Klein

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**S**tormy Daniels enters the room Cleopatra-style, on a golden litter carried by six shirtless men. In front march several figures wearing long, red capes and white headpieces. They look kind of like the handmaids from Margaret Atwood's dystopian novel turned Hulu series *The Handmaid's Tale*. The procession brings Daniels, clad in a royal blue gown, up to the stage, where she assumes her position as rightful queen of the evening's proceedings.

Her subjects, a sea of adult performers, producers, and directors, payment-processor executives, and sex toy-makers, laugh good-naturedly at her extravagant entrance. Compared to many in the audience, Daniels is dressed demurely—no pasties or assless, sparkling jumpsuits for the host of this year's XBIZ Awards in Los Angeles. Still, it's a spectacle worthy of not only the biggest name in porn in early 2019, but one of the biggest names in the U.S. political discourse over the past year, period.

Stormy Daniels arrives at the January 2019 XBIZ Awards.  
Courtesy of XBIZ



The choice to have Daniels host mid-January's XBIZ Awards, an adult industry awards show that's like the Golden Globes to the AVN Awards' Oscars, signifies a more political XBIZ than usual. Generally, it's an insular, self-congratulatory industry showcase. But this year, the porn world's progressive, anti-Trump political stance is made particularly clear: Mid-show, there's a video of several porn actors performing passages from Daniels's book, *Full Disclosure*, mocking everything from the president's alleged spanking proclivity to his supposed penis size.

Daniels is up for crossover performer of the year. One of her competitors is Brenna Sparks, who has been called a "[crypto evangelist](#)." She's sitting at a table right in front of the stage with a host of other cam models who use the website MyFreeCams.com, the main sponsor of this year's show. Most cam models do livestreams on multiple sites, and for Sparks, one of those sites is SpankChain—a

platform for webcam performers that doubles as a mini, crypto-based economy on the Ethereum blockchain, to which Sparks is also an advisor.

Sparks was initially surprised by her nomination, which stems from her involvement with cryptocurrency. “Even though I’ve been in the industry for like two and a half years, I still feel like an underdog compared to a lot of talent I work with,” she says. She’s certain that Daniels will win the crossover category because “she had a way better year” (spoiler alert: she does), but this isn’t the first time XBIZ has paid attention to Sparks for her interest in crypto. She’s been interviewed for its online publication about her work with SpankChain multiple times—she even [wrote an article](#) of her own on blockchain basics—and she has a good idea of why.

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*Cryptocurrency makes sense as a payment method for the adult industry.*

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“People think porn stars don’t really do other things besides porn,” she says. “I think XBIZ likes to highlight that we are normal people that do other things.”

I’m here to see how much these normal people are using cryptocurrency and blockchain, and what that means for the technology at large. Having covered blockchain for about a year, I’ve found that adult entertainment is one of the only industries that’s used cryptocurrency to a meaningful extent. Technological trends often start in adult, so if the industry is adopting crypto, maybe the rest of us will, too.

After all, everybody watches porn.

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Sparks is not the only one at the awards with a crypto connection. At the next table over sits the SpankChain team. The company has [been nominated](#) in three categories: Innovative Web Product of the Year, Emerging Web Brand of the Year, and Marketing Campaign of the Year. SpankChain is there as a trio—CEO and cofounder Ameen Soleimani in a suit jacket over a pink shirt; Allie Knox, community manager and cam model wearing head-to-toe black; and Kiara Skye, social media head/model manager and fellow cam model, in a shiny dress and cat ears.

Earlier in the night, I wait in line with them to walk the red carpet. We barely talk about the awards. Instead Soleimani tells me about his involvement with Ethereum. Soleimani recently spent time in Singapore as Ethereum cofounder Vitalik Buterin’s protégé. Buterin would get up super-early to bang out an [impossibly technical post](#) for his personal website, which Soleimani would later edit. They talked scalability—a key concern for SpankChain and the blockchain community at large—and worked on an open-source project called the [Plasma Group](#).



Several other blockchain-based companies have been nominated for XBIZ awards this year, including Stroken Tokens, [AV Secure](#), and VeriMe, but only one is nominated in the same three categories as SpankChain. It's an enterprise-level payments and reputation service for the adult industry called Intimate.io. Of the various blockchain-based efforts to improve transactions and interactions in the adult industry, SpankChain and Intimate.io stand out for having attracted significant attention in the worlds of both adult and blockchain. Both companies boast a solid product with actual partners and users (in crypto, these *are* standout qualities).

Cryptocurrency makes sense as a payment method for the adult industry. Traditional banks [have a history](#) of banning adult companies and sex workers. Even PayPal has cut off users in the adult industry, in some cases keeping the money sex workers had been holding in their accounts. Entrepreneurs like Soleimani and Intimate.io's cofounder and chief marketing officer, Leah Callon-Butler, have recognized this, and in turn, the adult industry is finally recognizing them.

Soleimani and Callon-Butler also bring a fresh perspective to adult entertainment. Neither were involved in the adult industry before starting their current companies. Soleimani used to work at ConsenSys in Brooklyn, where he briefly lived in the same warehouse-style building as the Ethereum company's flagship office. Callon-Butler, who is from Australia, used to work in sustainable energy. She learned about blockchain through the decentralized [Brooklyn Microgrid project](#), before deciding it was a technology best applied to adult.

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*SpankChain, left to right: Allie Knox, Brenna Sparks, Ameen Soleimani, Kiara Skye; courtesy of XBIZ*



"I've been working in emerging tech all my career, always in very early-stage startups that are still looking for their first customer," Callon-Butler says, "and I thought, 'This is great. Blockchain needs me.'" She's at the awards with Intimate.io's CFO Alex Dohi—both looking awards-show glamorous—and some friends she's made in the adult industry.

I wait hours for the blockchain companies' categories to be announced. The winners of those categories appear, anticlimactically, in a scroll on a projection screen at the very end. None of the blockchain companies win.

This doesn't seem to bother or surprise the SpankChain or Intimate.io teams. "It's very naïve of me to think that we could come in and already start taking the industry

by storm,” says SpankChain’s Knox. “The people we were up against have done this for decades.”

Callon-Butler barely seems to register the loss. Intimate.io won another award the week of XBIZ, anyway. At the Cybersocket Web Awards, which honors “the best gay adult websites and service providers in the world,” it was recognized as the “best new company” of 2018—generous, considering their product hadn’t launched yet. Plus, days after the awards show, Callon-Butler is named an official community ambassador for XBIZ’s Reddit-like forum.

“The other people who were community ambassadors at XBIZ have been in the industry for like 20 to 30 years,” she says, clearly honored. “I had no connection to this industry when I started in October [2017], and they welcomed me with open arms.”

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The adult industry has long been ahead of the technology curve—and well before technology went digital. In *The Players Ball*, a new book about the internet’s rise, author David Kushner explains how showcasing erotica has always been [one of the first uses of new tech](#). Sumerians wrote “sonnets to vulvas” on clay tablets; a Gutenberg press printed a sort of early *Kama Sutra*; and more than 75 percent of tapes sold to the owners of home VCRs in the 1970s featured porn.

Today, the adult industry represents one of the only sectors that has adopted cryptocurrency at a significant scale. The “[world’s first bitcoin brothel](#)” popped up in the U.K. in 2013, and sex workers started [posting online bitcoin tutorials](#) not long after. CamSoda, a website for cam models (performers who livestream explicit videos, usually from their own homes), has been [paying a chunk of its performers in bitcoin](#) for more than a year; AV Secure is working on a blockchain solution to verify porn viewers’ ages [ahead of the U.K.’s “porn block”](#); and Pornhub has accepted crypto in exchange for its premium service since April 2018.

“With most areas that blockchain has entered, adoption has been an enormous problem,” says Stephanie Hurder, an economist with Prysm Group, a blockchain economics and governance design firm. Given the choice of how to pay for something, people won’t normally opt for crypto. But industries that have trouble with traditional payment methods, like sex and cannabis, are “the most likely to get a fully functioning mini-economy [in blockchain] off the ground,” she says.

This optimistic sentiment isn’t exactly reflected in XBIZ’s [crypto panel](#), two days before the awards ceremony, at the Andaz hotel in West Hollywood. Callon-Butler and Soleimani are the only panelists. A third announced panelist, Vice Industry Token CEO Stuart Duncan, fails to show. This may have something to do with the fact that in August, [Playboy sued VIT’s parent company](#), Global Blockchain



Technologies, for allegedly failing to live up to an agreement they'd made about implementing VIT on Playboy's platforms. (It never happened.)

XBIZ's senior tech editor, Stephen Yagielowicz, is the moderator. With only about 20 people in the mostly male audience, it's nothing compared to last year's crypto panel, which took place in May during the week of the XBIZ Awards in Miami. That panel, called "Billing Battle: Credit Card vs. Crypto," pitted established payment services against crypto proponents.

"It was standing-room only," Yagielowicz tells me after this year's modest version concludes. "It was hyped up. Traditional billers were telling the crypto guys that their money was not going to be worth anything: You put real money in and nothing but fantasy comes out." The most exciting moment in this year's crypto panel takes place when a man in the audience asks whether SpankChain and Intimate.io's respective tokens will appear on the major crypto exchange Binance. Both Callon-Butler and Soleimani shrug. The man [leaves the room in a huff](#).

Yagielowicz has been in the adult industry for decades—he's made adult websites, shot porn, produced it, even starred in it. The porn industry was such an early adopter of crypto, Yagielowicz says, that a lot of companies gave crypto payments a shot and realized it didn't justify their time or energy. "Not necessarily because it was difficult," he says, "but because nobody is necessarily using it." One of the only things persuading him of crypto's staying power is Callon-Butler's "enthusiasm."

"I'm eager to use my 75 Intimate tokens," Yagielowicz says. He just has nowhere to use them yet, he tells me. It will be a few weeks until Intimate.io's payment processor goes live with an industry partner.

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Callon-Butler first tells me about her fascination with blockchain via video chat from the Philippines, where Intimate.io's developer team is based, in December. "I became really obsessed with this idea that blockchain was a technology crying out for a use case," she says, recalling when she first learned about the tech a few years ago.

Then Callon-Butler met her eventual Intimate.io cofounder, fellow Australian Reuben Coppa. He was the inventor of an app called Rendevu, which lets users book escorts in real time (an activity that's either legal or decriminalized in much of Australia) with the aim of making it easier for sex workers to screen their clients before meeting. At the time, Coppa was also working with a company that installed Australia's first bitcoin ATM.

"The amazing thing was, he saw that adult and crypto had exactly the same issues," Callon-Butler says. Namely, both had been relegated to society's fringes. Respectable citizens weren't sure how to approach them, or whether to approach

them at all. Both seemed taboo; both had issues with banking and payments. “Ironically, [the two] could kind of solve each other’s problems,” says Callon-Butler. People working in adult, having been shunned by big banks, could use crypto for payments, and crypto finally had a solid use case.

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*Men walk around in Hugh Hefner-style bathrobes and unicorn jumpsuits. Women wear much less. But besides the outfits, it’s a pretty lame party. We are, after all, at a four-day business conference.*

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Today, Intimate.io works with sex education and women’s reproductive-health apps, dating sites, a “[Japanese love hotel group](#),” queer porn sites, and even the “gaming site” Hentai Heroes (it’s like an interactive, pornographic comic book featuring particularly veiny sex organs). The company is also working on a “trust and reputation system,” whereby sex workers and clients can track past experiences and note whether, say, a client paid on time or was abusive.

Shortly after XBIZ, Yagielowicz finally has a place where he can spend his Intimate tokens—he can use them to buy vibrators and lubricants through Intimate.io’s Singapore-based partner Smile Makers. Like all of Intimate.io’s partners, Smile Makers has had issues with people buying their products through traditional financial means, like credit cards, but something else sets it apart. “Launching with ecommerce”—as opposed to escorts—“was really important for us,” Callon-Butler says, “because it’s a way we have to show the breadth of issues with payments and the opportunity that exists in this market.”

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When I run into Callon-Butler at XBIZ for the first time, I don’t even bother saying hi. She’s busy networking with practiced ease among a sea of booths that remind me of a college campus event, where everyone’s trying to get freshman to sign up for their clubs. (I later learn this is called the “meat market.”) Callon-Butler’s constant smile and high energy draw industry executives to her booth, where she poses engaging questions about the state of fees in adult billing.

The same major players—like Segpay, Paxum, and Netbilling—have processed payments in adult for years, so Callon-Butler has to make an extra effort to ensure Intimate.io gets attention. Besides tirelessly attending conferences in both blockchain and adult, she endeavors to make the Intimate.io brand memorable. Today she’s handing out tight, Intimate-branded T-shirts with juicy, red lips splashed across the chest. They match her lipstick shade.

The next evening, Callon-Butler and I take refuge from the conference in a neighboring hotel. She tells me about some of the challenges she faces as a woman working in both adult and crypto.

“I get frustrated at some of the crypto events by how often men will show real interest in my project, and then later find out that I have a partner, or they’re not going to get any sex out of me, and they’ll be like, ‘I’m not going to talk to you anymore because I’ve figured out that you’re unavailable,’” she says. “I don’t give a shit if that’s what people want. I just wish they’d be upfront, because it wastes my time.”

Then there’s the question Callon-Butler gets all the time from potential (male) investors in the crypto space. “What’s your background in adult? What’s your, uh, connection with the industry?” they’ll ask carefully, until the drinks start flowing. Then they’ll get to the point: “Were you a sex worker?”

Callon-Butler was not a sex worker, and neither were her two, male cofounders, Coppa and Nathan Smale, the company’s COO—but they never get asked. So she’s come up with a diplomatic way to answer the question: “Actually no, I wasn’t, and I know your next question would be for Nathan or Reuben, ‘Are you former sex workers?’ The answer for them would be no, as well. But you know, Nathan and Ruben sometimes do webcam,” she pauses and laughs. “Not really.”

Callon-Butler and I plan to meet up again at a pajama/lingerie party on the Andaz hotel’s upstairs lounge later that night. It’s the first time, prior to the awards, that XBIZ looks like it merits its X. Men walk around in Hugh Hefner–style bathrobes and unicorn jumpsuits. Women wear much less. But besides the outfits, it’s a pretty lame party. We are, after all, at a four-day business conference.

Then Callon-Butler arrives, upbeat and beaming, with Intimate.io CFO Dohi and Brad Mitchell, the CEO of MojoHost, a widely used adult web-hosting service founded in 2002. When I tell Mitchell I’m at XBIZ to see whether cam performers are accepting crypto, he replies, “I can answer that question for you: No.”

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*Leah Callon-Butler and Alex Dohi;  
courtesy of XBIZ*



Still, this is the only non-blockchain event I've been to where I can strike up a conversation with just about anyone and find that they've at least dabbled in cryptocurrency. A man who has been in the industry since 2007 tells me he sold his crypto when he heard people talking about it at Starbucks—he figured it had gone too mainstream then. He runs a paywalled hardcore site and laments that there's no longer the kind of money in adult that there used to be. This makes sense. These days, anyone with a webcam can undress live for the wide world of the internet, and Pornhub and countless other tube sites disseminate other creators' porn for free. People aren't paying what they used to for adult content.

This is part of why adult has to remain competitively innovative. "People in [the industry] are so forward-thinking and on the greatest, new groundbreaking technologies before anyone else would know," says Callon-Butler. Maybe the man who runs the paywalled hardcore site reflects the industry at large—maybe, as Yagielowicz suggested to me the day before, crypto has come and gone in adult.

But cam performers don't seem to feel the same way. During the week of XBIZ, I speak with several who either regard it as yet-uncharted territory, or have been finding new ways to profit from their crypto tips.

"I've been dabbling with pop-ups and trying to figure out how much CPU usage I can use," says porn actor Chad White of getting customers to mine crypto for him. He's been getting crypto payments for about five years now, mostly as micropayments, with roughly four to five customers per month asking to pay in crypto. And there's no place where tipping with micropayments is more prevalent than on cam sites.

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There's one story Yagielowicz tells me after the crypto panel that makes me think about SpankChain's potential to succeed. It's about a video on the tip-based camming site Chaturbate (one of XBIZ's many sponsors), starring a woman whom Yagielowicz describes as a "math whiz."

"The nerdy boys are making her rich because they give her math problems to solve on camera," he says. These aren't easy problems, but complex, college-and-beyond-level calculations. While she's solving these problems, she has a vibrator inside her. Whenever she gets a virtual tip, it vibrates. As she gets closer and closer to solving the math problem, the viewers keep tipping her more and more to distract her.

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*In the golden age of digitized social interactions, where influencers have begun to overshadow the typical, Hollywood-made celebrity, the cam industry has flourished.*

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Camming is a social medium, so finding models who share your interests—like math, or crypto—can be an even bigger draw for viewers seeking not just sexual gratification, but also specific types of companionship. In the golden age of digitized social interactions, where influencers have begun to overshadow the typical, Hollywood-made celebrity, the cam industry [has flourished](#). Performers based out of their own homes, or sometimes professional studios, can create regular content to drum up followings and get paid directly from viewers.

However, most cam sites—centralized companies that host models’ live video feeds take a large cut of performers’ profits, usually somewhere between 30 and 70 percent. SpankChain takes just five percent of performers’ pay.

“When SpankChain came about, I decided to boycott the non-crypto platforms I’d been on before,” cam performer Ben Lawson tells me. Lawson, whose unassuming Brooklyn hipster look may suggest otherwise, has been in the adult industry for just over 10 years. He identified as an anti-tech anarchist before discovering crypto, buying in long enough before the crypto bubble burst to not “get rekt.” Today, he’s reveling in the generosity of “Ethereum millionaires.”

“When SpankChain launched, a lot of the people who were early investors in their token wanted to see the platform be successful, so the first wave of models who got on there, we all got tipped, like, ridiculously before we even did anything,” Lawson says of the company’s closed beta phase, which ran from April to June 2018. (The site is now in public beta.)

One of the other models participating in the closed beta was SpankChain’s community manager Knox. A fetish performer, Knox received her first bitcoin in 2014. “A member came into my cam room and said, ‘I’d like to pay you, but I don’t want the site to take half. Would you take bitcoin?’” says Knox, who had heard about the digital currency and figured, “Why not?”

Knox’s early use of bitcoin drew attention. A team from a Showtime series called *Dark Net* [featured her in an episode about sex workers using bitcoin](#). The episode included a scene showing her Coinbase address. This alerted Coinbase to Knox’s profession, and in turn, the company shut down her account and banned her from the platform. She’d violated the company’s [terms of service](#), which don’t allow payments for “adult content and services.”





This is a common issue for people working in the adult industry. Months before Coinbase shut down Knox's account, PayPal banned her—and it was way less friendly than the crypto exchange. While Coinbase let Knox keep the money she'd been holding on the platform, PayPal did not, taking the \$6,000 she says she had in her account.

Soleimani first learned of this problem in the adult industry through a different cam performer who had been kicked off of PayPal. At the time, Soleimani was working as a micropayments expert at ConsenSys. "I was wondering, where are [micropayments] going to happen first?" he says. "And I was like, everything starts in adult."

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In SpankChain, Soleimani ultimately came up with a business that both facilitates micropayments for cam performers and safeguards them from financial

deplatforming. Tips made through SpankChain—in the form of its Ethereum-based BOOTY tokens—go directly into performers' own digital wallets, so there's no threat of a central authority taking control of their earnings.

Soleimani tells me this over lunch one day during XBIZ, at a burgers and beer place right next to the hotel. We're also with Knox, Skye, SpankChain's lawyer Allan Gelbard (Twitter handle: @XXXEsq), and the company's head of product/cofounder Wills de Vongelaere.

I ask Soleimani how many users SpankChain has.

"Right now we have..." he trails off.

"How many were you going to say?" asks Knox.

"I was going to say like 500."

"Five hundred is what I was going to say," says Knox. There are about 50 to 100 active tippers on the site, they add, and it has a transaction volume of about \$10,000 per month. It's not a lot of money, and none of the cam performers on SpankChain make a living from the platform alone.

Then Soleimani goes into his crypto history. He first discovered bitcoin in college, in 2012, when he bought mushrooms off the Silk Road. He learned how to code and did bitcoin arbitrage, making \$1,000 when the price of bitcoin had its first steep rise in 2013. With [Mt. Gox's infamous collapse](#), Soleimani lost it all. "I left crypto for like two years," he says. "I was like, 'Fuck this.'"

He changed his mind in early 2016, when he saw people online starting to talk about Ethereum. While bitcoin did just one thing—transfer money—Ethereum let users build features and programs on top of its code, opening up endless possibilities for what the blockchain could accomplish. He's now deeply involved in Ethereum's development. Besides working as a "disciple" of Buterin's, he's built grants-focused Ethereum guild [MolochDAO](#).

When presenting SpankChain to others in the Ethereum community, Soleimani often has to explain why he's entered the adult industry. "A lot of people are like, 'That's just porn, dude, right?' And it's like, we're doing cutting-edge research in scalability, and at the same time, we are putting it towards an actual use case," he says. "I didn't want anybody to come to me again with questions like, 'What problem are you solving?'"

That's a common question in the blockchain space, known for people desperately trying to find the elusive "[killer app](#)" that will finally showcase the technology's true

potential and unlock adoption. Not many people land on a use case as solid as SpankChain's.

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When I first meet Brenna Sparks, she has just flown in from her home in Vegas. She's getting ready to prepare for an anal scene the next day, which means soon she'll have to start fasting. Sparks is incredibly friendly in spite of her insistence that she's media shy, but admits to having already started drinking when we grab some wine in the hotel.

Sparks has ample reason to be shy of the media. At the end of last year, Coindesk named her among the Top 10 [most influential people in crypto in 2018](#), and it backfired. Crypto enthusiasts scoffed at her inclusion, hurling vicious insults at her via social platforms, saying she'd gained weight and even calling her "Miss Piggy."

"People were upset that a sex worker made it into the Top 10," she tells me. This is a bit hypocritical, she thinks, for a libertarian-leaning industry that talks constantly about inclusion. Sparks admits she's no techie—she's an entertainer. "I push crypto in my space to the everyday, normal person," she says. Arguably, that's a lot more valuable for adoption than the perpetual circle jerk of crypto diehards.

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*People may look down at porn, [but] the adult industry remains a safe haven for those with progressive thoughts and novel ideas.*

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Still, Sparks has become the pornographic face of crypto to the point that she's getting recognized for it at XBIZ. She's done so by promoting projects she's actually investing in, like Ethereum, and encouraging people to do their own research before choosing what coins to buy. She's also made some crypto-themed porn. Sparks masturbated to a picture of Vitalik Buterin on camera. "I'm sure he saw it," she says of Buterin, because someone from the Ethereum Foundation retweeted the video. She's considering making similar videos with other crypto names, like [Roger Ver](#).

Nerdy requests often come Sparks's way, such as "hot babe sucks coder boy's dick." It's a scene she's done before, and it overlaps with her type in real life. Sparks learned about crypto from her past "coder boy" boyfriends, the most recent of whom talked about crypto "80 percent of the time," she tells me. "I realized that there's a lot of sex workers that date guys in crypto," she says. She can think of at least 10 couples. I ask her why this might be.

"I guess it's because some of them work long hours? I don't know," she pauses, evaluating her answer. "That's not hot."



It wasn't until 2015 that Sparks got her first bitcoin payment, and it wasn't until Ethereum that she got really into crypto. "There's a stereotype that you cannot get out of the [adult] industry and do something else, such as cryptocurrency," she says. Her nomination at the XBIZ awards this year proves that you can be in adult and also break into other industries, but doing so still isn't easy.

Crypto is a largely white, male-dominated industry, and Sparks is a woman of color (she's of Laotian descent) working in adult. "Believe it or not, I feel more respected in the adult industry than in crypto," she says.

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Back in the real world, outside of the XBIZ bubble, Callon-Butler gets a similar taste of male prejudice. It's not unlike what she often gets from men in the blockchain industry, but this time it's piled on with skepticism toward crypto. When speaking about her work with people outside of adult and crypto, she has to defend the legitimacy of both. Callon-Butler is basically fighting a war on two fronts.



Callon-Butler

This is made particularly clear when Callon-Butler is back in the Philippines at an Anzac Day party in late April. The holiday commemorates Australian and New Zealand Army Corps soldiers who served in the Battle of Gallipoli during World War I. It's a big deal for Australians, so a number of ex-pats who are in the Philippines have come together to celebrate. Callon-Butler ends up making small talk with a man who asks her what she's doing there.

"We have a software development team up in Clark," she tells him. He gives a wink-wink, nudge-nudge about the prevalence of sex work there (it used to be home to a U.S. military base), then presses on. What is her team working on? Payments, she says. What kind of payments? "We do cryptocurrency."

"That's your bitcoins, yeah?" he replies. He doesn't trust it, he says, and calls it snake oil, but he still wants to know more about her work. "We're all about financial empowerment and income inclusion, and our specific use case is the adult industry," Callon-Butler says.

With that, the mood changes. "I might as well have just turned on the CD player with some 'bow-chicka-wow-wow' music," she tells me, because that's when the man starts leaning in extra-close. "He just turned into this major creep, asking

inappropriate, weird questions,” she says. “Just because I’m in the sex industry, doesn’t mean I’m free game.”

Those outside of the crypto and adult industries still hold their assumptions about both—that crypto is snake oil, and people who work in adult are promiscuous. And while a lot of crypto people may look down at porn, the adult industry remains a safe haven for those with progressive thoughts and novel ideas, like Callon-Butler.





“I’m at this Anzac Day party wishing I could go back to L.A. and be at the porn conference,” she recalls, “because I knew I wouldn’t be harassed there.”

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