What's the Deal with® Investing in Bitcoin For Retirement?

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Do bitcoins belong in your retirement portfolio?

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For years, investment firms and professionals have advocated the need to include a small percentage of high risk and potentially high reward assets into your retirement portfolio. They reason that including a small percentage of your overall asset allocation (from 5 percent to 10 percent) into these assets can provide high potential returns with only a small impact on your portfolio if the risk becomes too great.

As Brad Zimmerman says, "the general rule of thumb with alternative investing, according to Investopedia, is no more than 10 percent of your portfolio should go towards these investments."[1]

According to Robert Powell, defined benefit plan managers often go beyond stocks and bonds to achieve high returns by pursuing more "nontraditional strategies."[2]

Powell points out that a "new white paper suggests that you can boost returns, reduce volatility, and beat inflation by investing — if your 401(k) or

[1] https://99bitcoins.com/could-bitcoins-be-a-valuable-investment-for-your-retirement/
[2] http://www.marketwatch.com/story/invest-like-a-pension-plan-pro-2013-06-12

403(b) plan offers such options — in real assets, emerging market equities and debt and liquid alternatives."

For those who have their retirement in defined benefit plans, you may be surprised to find that in March 2012, 29.8 percent of the average large defined-benefit plan was invested in U.S. equity, 17.6 percent in international equity, 30.3 percent in U.S. fixed-income, 2 percent in international fixed income, 3.2 percent in cash, 4.5 percent in real estate, and 10.2 percent in alternatives, according to Asset Allocation Trends for Defined Plans.[1]

The individual investor is being "pitched" more and more these days by their own adviser and their firm to consider a small percentage of their portfolio into these "nontraditional strategies" and alternative investments.

Much is heard on radio these days about the ability to consider gold, silver and commodities as alternatives for your retirement account. Many of the other alternative investment choices for retirement are real estate-based or provide you access to hedge fund like management styles through alternative funds.

These alternative investments provide not only the high potential for returns, but having a level of diversification to your portfolio can be effective in addressing the overall risk taken in a portfolio. However, they come with a caveat.

As Powell points out in his article, "The Financial Industry Regulatory Authority, known as Finra, issued an alert this week advising investors to be aware of the unique characteristics and risks of alternative funds.”

Many of you know of my interest and curiosity about bitcoins. So I have to ask myself: If there's a value in having an alternative investment in my retirement portfolio, can bitcoins be discussed as part of that asset class?

The first question to consider is, "are bitcoins really an asset?"

It seems that even with all of the good and bad publicity surrounding bitcoins, the reality continues to be that anyone can possess bitcoins and in fact, trade them on exchanges. Although every day there seems to be another story about the imminent demise of bitcoins, they continue to be an actively traded and valued asset for investors worldwide. In fact, earlier this month, a judge ruled that bitcoins were in fact, money.

The next question is "How will I know what they're worth?"

I come from the school of thought that says that I won't buy an investment if I can't pick up the newspaper and find the price of it in that newspaper. Sure, this thinking has led me to miss many opportunities but it has provided a level of comfort as well.

So before I'm going to considering put money into bitcoins, I want to know that I can get a price for them on an active exchange with real prices. You can buy, sell and price bitcoins on numerous exchanges and even get a quote on bitcoins on Bloomberg workstations and as an add-on for your Chrome browser.

The last question and probably the most important is "Am I truly able to manage this asset or do I need advice and guidance?"

I've written before, owning bitcoins requires an electronic wallet that can become an issue when considering the passing of assets between family members. Although you can buy, sell and hold bitcoins on your own, it does require that you become the sole manager and adviser of these assets. At this point, no financial adviser will advise you on when to buy or sell them. And at this point you can't hold bitcoins in your traditional investment account.

But that may be changing as the Winkelvoss Twins of “The Social Network” notoriety are considering plans to create a bitcoin ETF. The path to this ETF will be a rocky one and there are many people skeptical of its ability to survive scrutiny as it seeks SEC approval. If it does get approved, it will create an investment that will be risky, but with high potential for profit, as bitcoin loyalists believe.

When and if, this does becomes a reality, it will not only elevate the visibility and interest in bitcoins, but it would also create the potential to easily invest in them as part of your overall retirement portfolio.

One day soon, you may actually be hearing these words from your adviser: "Just remember that only a small part of your retirement account should be in bitcoins."

It is certainly a "nontraditional" investment world that we live in these days.

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Why should you add bitcoins to your retirement portfolio?

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"Practice what you preach" was the Golden Rule in my parent's house. These days, this adage seems less a rule and more a relic of the past.

Clearly few of our national leaders follow this rule. The same could be said of our most highly valued business leaders as well.

Whatever happened to the law that a celebrity couldn't endorse a product unless that celebrity really used that product? Clearly that's gone the way of Don Draper's career and Orson Welles's need not to drink a wine "before its time."

As those who read my articles may or may not be aware, I've written about bitcoins both in articles on MarketWatch and as a co-author on one of the first books to examine the topic, "What's the Deal with Bitcoins?"

In line with my work regarding retirement, I've discussed bitcoins as a potential alternative investment for retirement portfolios. Most asset allocation models advise that a properly allocated retirement portfolio should have a small (read this again — small) part of that portfolio in a class of investments called alternative investments. These recommended numbers can range from 5 percent to 20 percent of the portfolio (please remember that any portfolio allocation should be a personalized decision based upon your own needs and level of risk—don't rely on recommended numbers).

However, it isn't clear whether or not you can actually classify bitcoins as an alternative investment. Most current alternative investments focus on currencies, hedge funds, private equity, commodities or real estate. Many people familiar with bitcoins will state that it falls into the currency or commodity category. However the U.S. government recently decided that bitcoins aren't currencies (those phony Ben Franklins from recent bank ads were noted to have breathed a sigh of relief from this decision) but are property and they can be taxed similar to transactions related to other properties such as real estate and well, uh, stocks and bonds.

It seems that if the Fed plans on profiting from bitcoins, why can't an American citizen do the same? If the government shares in our profits from real estate and stocks and bonds, you begin to think that bitcoins may not be so "alternative" after all.

So if I'm looking to live up to what I'm preaching (or at least writing) about bitcoins, maybe I need to practice it as well.

It was after watching a documentary about one of my heroes of "real" journalism, George Plimpton, that I came to a conclusion. For those who don't remember, George Plimpton was a writer who would tackle a subject by "living" it. When he wanted to write about being a professional baseball pitcher, he actually became one. He took this same approach to writing about being a professional football player, boxed Sugar Ray Robinson and played hockey with the Boston Bruins. He even tried to create the world's biggest firework — all so that he could write about his experiences. To him, it wasn't only the best way to get the story, but it was the most honest way to relate to his readers.

Now, let's be clear, I'm no George Plimpton, nor will I ever play him on TV. But, I think we need a good old dose of his attitude mixed with some old time advertising ethics in today's financial journalism.

So, I decided that I will find a way to invest my own actual funds in bitcoins as part of my retirement portfolio. I've owned and used bitcoins as currency in the past, but have not used them as an investment in my retirement account. Should be easy, right?

It was probably easier for George Plimpton to play tennis against Pancho Gonzales, but in my next article I'll discuss the realities of trying to find a suitable way to invest bitcoins for my own retirement account — while trying to convince my wife, my financial adviser and even myself that it makes sense.

Plimpton, by the way, was demolished in that match.

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How do you find an appropriate bitcoin investment?

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I'm in search of a bitcoin investment for my retirement account—but that doesn't mean that I consider bitcoins safe for retirement.

By placing a bitcoin investment into my retirement account, I'm adhering to an asset allocation "rule" that suggests I should have some small portion of my overall portfolio in "alternative investments." Alternative investments include hedge funds, private equity, real estate, commodities such as gold and silver—and I think that bitcoins fall into that category.

My search to find a bitcoin investment for a retirement account hasn't been easy.

There is no way that I've found to place individual bitcoins into an IRA or any retirement account. Although you can buy and sell bitcoins on exchanges, my research shows that this can't be done in a qualified retirement account. Many of you may say, "that's a good thing,"—and you would probably be right.

Let's be honest, bitcoins are a risky investment vehicle. In fact, most investments considered "alternative" are risky.

Alternative investments are used in asset allocation models as a way to provide diversity, and in many cases, to limit volatility caused by market swings and events. Most alternative investments have low to no correlation to market securities such as stocks and bonds. This provides some cushion for your portfolio should events create wide swings in the returns of these securities.

"Alternative Investing and Your Retirement," an article online reminds us that alternative investing isn't for everyone—and certainly not a novice:

" ... alternative investing is no safe bet, and requires both a deep knowledge and experience to master, thus making professional financial advice key. Furthermore, even the best advice may not be enough and the general rule of thumb with alternative investing, according to Investopedia, is no more than 10 percent of your portfolio should go toward these investments."[3]

Many advisers and investment firms saw wisdom in alternative investments after the crisis in

[3] https://trustprovident.com/resources/articles/alternative-investing/

2008 and more than likely, if you don't have alternative investments in your portfolio, your adviser probably discussed them with you.

In fact, if you don't think that alternative investing is for you, ask your current adviser if you have any alternative investments in your portfolio (retirement included) or if any of your existing holdings in funds have them. You might be surprised by the response.

The difficulty that I’m having in finding an appropriate bitcoin investment vehicle as an alternative investment for a retirement account proves that investing in bitcoins, regardless of what you may believe about them, is a risky business at this point.

There are plans in the works for an exchange-traded fund for bitcoins. Most talked about is an investment that has been associated with the Winklevoss twins. But until this is created, the average investor won't be able to avail themselves of an investment that can be placed in a qualified retirement account.

An accredited investor, though, isn't the average investor.

A favorite author, and a fellow RetireMentor, Mitch Tuchman, wrote about accredited investors and their ability to invest in alternative investments for *Forbes*:

"It's why hedge fund investors are 'accredited,' that is, they attest to their personal wealth and willingness to lose money in the markets. Accredited is a fancy way of saying you can afford to take a hit. Retirement investors can't. No retirement investor should be rolling the dice with the gunslinger managers of Wall Street. The problem with gunslingers is that, eventually, they come face-to-face with a faster gun. Somebody ends up face down in the dust."[4]

So the bottom line at this point is that for the average investor, bitcoins aren't accessible for their retirement account—yet.

My research has shown, though, that the Winklevoss twins aren't the only managers "gunning" to make bitcoin investments available to the average investor through ETFs and other vehicles.

[4] https://www.forbes.com/sites/mitchelltuchman/2013/09/27/hedge-fund-thinking-for-retirement-portfolios/#317abb884559

One such investment is the Bitcoin Investment Trust, which is a private, open-ended trust that is invested exclusively in bitcoin and modeled on the popular SPDR Gold Trust ETF GLD, +0.16 percent. There are plans to make the trust available to average investors, but for now, it's only available to accredited investors, who as Mitch says, can "take a hit."

Of course, you could say that about many alternative investments that I've seen over the years—and perhaps there should be more concern when you're considering bitcoins for a retirement account. Don't think so? Check out some of the comments provided by my “supporters” in last week’s column.

In the next article, I’ll discuss the process of investing in the Bitcoin Investment Trust and the specifics of this investment. Due to its availability only to accredited investors and because of the sizeable amount of disclosures and paperwork required, it’s clearly not for the average investor. And as my check is in the mail and the paperwork is soon to be processed, I may soon be the only person who has bitcoins in their retirement account (or at least the only person I know).

If there's anyone else out there who has done this for a retirement account, I'd love to hear from you. I need all the support I can get!

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How do you get bitcoins into your retirement account?

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Most investors have little trouble making an alternative investment in their retirement account. The current "rule" of asset allocation says to have about 5 percent to 10 percent of your overall investment portfolio in alternative investments as a complement to other assets such as stocks and bonds.

Before 2008, alternative investments were discussed strictly as an investment option with "accredited investors," or those who have over $1 million in assets (exclusive of their home) and reach an income requirement (have made at least $200,000 for each of the last two years). This was to define the investor who was willing to accept the lack of transparency inherent in most of these investments, and (perhaps more important) could absorb a potential full loss of their investment in these highly risky investments.

Much of this changed after 2008, when investors were searching for investments that had little to no correlation to market swings. Advisors were also anxious to find investment vehicles for investors, who were now no longer enamored with stocks and bonds.

Currently, the average investor can add alternative investments as a small part of their investment portfolio through investments in exchange-traded funds (notice how many ETFs have been created since 2008?) that invest in REITs and commodities. These "liquid" alternatives gives the average investor the ability to gain more access to "hedge fund type" managers and investment styles then they had in the past, when it was primarily reserved for the wealthy investor.

As discussed in my last two articles in this series, I believe that an investment in bitcoins can, and should, be considered an alternative investment. And as such, I'd like to make an investment in them to fit into my asset allocation "category" of 5 percent-10 percent within my retirement account. These articles have examined my journey thus far to meet that "goal" and at this point, I've discovered:

- A method for buying bitcoins in a qualified investment account doesn't currently exist. Sure, you can designate a non-retirement, investment account for this purpose and buy individual bitcoins, but you can't do this in a qualified retirement account. To see a person who took this route and their experience, click here.

- Bitcoin investment vehicles for the "average investor" such as an ETF investing in bitcoins, which is being touted by the Winklevoss twins, aren't currently available and will require approval by the SEC, which could be a lengthy process.
- The only current method for making a bitcoin investment in your retirement account is to have a self-directed retirement account and be an accredited investor. The options for the investments to be made in this type of account are limited.

I've researched the few available investment options and have gone through the process of setting up the self-directed retirement account. I've also filled out the necessary, and lengthy, paperwork that acknowledges that I'm an accredited investor and have decided that I'll be making the minimum investment into something called the Bitcoin Investment Trust (BIT) and placing that into my retirement account.

The Bitcoin Investment Trust (BIT) is a private, open-ended trust that invests solely in bitcoins. What that means is that it's an investment that is not currently available through an open market or traded on an exchange, but must be subscribed to through a private placement memorandum and exclusively by accredited investors. The disclaimer information for the investment should be enough to frighten away the most prudent investor: "The BIT is a private, unregistered investment vehicle and NOT subject to the same regulatory requirements as exchange-traded funds or mutual funds, including the requirement to provide certain periodic and standardized pricing and valuation information to investors. There are substantial risks in investing in the BIT."[5]

The investment simply buys bitcoins and places them into this trust. It's modeled on the SPDR Gold Fund, which takes a similar approach with their gold portfolio, which is available to any investor, in any type of account and is traded through the New York Stock Exchange (NYSE).

As an accredited investor in BIT, your investment in this trust gains you a slice of this

[5] http://www.bitcointrust.co/

portfolio of bitcoins. If the price of bitcoins increase, your holding increases. If it drops, your investment drops.

Along with investments of this type come rules that you agree to. One rule is that you can't sell your investment for at least one year. After that time, you will be able to sell your shares in the OTCQX market, where theoretically, any investor could then buy these shares being offered for sale.

Barry Silbert of SecondMarket, which runs the BIT, describes this sale to the general public, "The people who have already invested, when they decide to sell, they can do so to the public market. So, the amount of shares available to the public market will be dependent on the existing shareholders' desire to sell shares."[6]

What this all means is that although the "average investor" can't currently gain access to an investment such as the BIT, in the future, all investors will potentially be able to buy a bitcoin investment vehicle, even in their retirement account. By that time, the Winklevoss Bitcoin ETF may also be available, providing another bitcoin investment option to the general public.

[6] http://www.coindesk.com/secondmarket-ceo-barry-silbert-talks-big-picture-vision-bitcoin-investment-trust/

I guess at this point in time, I'd have to conclude that by having a bitcoin investment vehicle (BIT) in my retirement account, I'm not your “average investor.” It'll be interesting to see what the future holds in terms of making other bitcoin related investment vehicles available for all investors. Until then, I'm stuck with this investment—at least for one year.

The investment that I've made into the BIT is equal to less than 5 percent of my overall retirement account. Although I admit that I'm nervous about this investment because of its risky nature, I feel that by using effective asset allocation in one's portfolio, it adds diversification and risk (with potential for higher reward, as well as significant loss) without "betting the ranch" and potentially destroying the retirement "nest egg" that I've worked hard to create over the years.

I'll discuss more about asset allocation and how alternative investments play into that allocation, particularly in retirement accounts, in my next article in this series.

After that, I'll be checking in on an irregular basis on the bitcoin investment I've made and its impact on my overall plan for retirement in the future. By doing so, I may be able to chronicle the rise, or fall of bitcoin (or at least, my investment in them) over that time.

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How do you customize an asset allocation that works best for you?

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Over a month ago, I embarked on a financial journey that was built around evaluating the asset allocation of my retirement funds. Here I now stand, a month older (not sure if I would say a month wiser), and I'm holding bitcoins in my retirement account.

How did that happen?

For those of you who have read the articles in this series on my bitcoin retirement investment, I won't recount the details of the journey. Rather in the final article of this series, I want to return to the reason for this journey—asset allocation.

Let's take a look at the definition of asset allocation. According to Investopedia, asset allocation is "an investment strategy that aims to balance risk and reward by apportioning a portfolio's assets according to an individual's goals, risk tolerance and investment horizon."[7]

Even the SEC gets involved by defining asset allocation as "dividing an investment portfolio

[7] http://www.investopedia.com/terms/a/assetallocation.asp

among different asset categories, such as stocks, bonds, and cash."

It's the next part of the definition that is perhaps more important than the focus on what asset categories are considered: "The process of determining which mix of assets to hold in your portfolio is a very personal one. The asset allocation that works best for you at any given point in your life will depend largely on your time horizon and your ability to tolerate risk."

Ah yes, the elements of time horizon and risk tolerance. That's why asset allocation isn't a one-size-fits-all proposition and is clearly a very personalized and customized process that begets the following questions:

- What is your investment goal?
- Where are you in your life?
- How much risk can you take (or what level will keep you up at night)?

My goal is to retire in less than 10 years. Because of this goal, I'm also concerned about taking on too much risk and wiping out my retirement investments, which would extend out my desirable time horizon of 10 years.

If we go online and use an online asset allocator by CNN Money, I soon find that with these goals, time horizon and risk tolerance, I should have 45 percent of my portfolio in bonds, 30 percent in large-cap stocks, 10 percent in small cap domestic stocks and 15 percent in foreign stock.

But I have a financial adviser. So what's their conventional wisdom towards my situation?

When you work with someone personally, I believe that there's more of an ability to properly identify risk tolerance than an online tool can do. They are also more likely to consider all aspects of your situation beyond just your investment portfolio. This can include aspects such as business valuation, real estate and other potential sources of income.

For anyone who has discussed asset allocation with their financial adviser in the last seven years knows, the category of alternative investments has become a consideration for asset allocation as much as the choice of stocks, bonds or cash. There are many reasons for this.

The one that's identified most often is the need to include non-correlated assets into a portfolio to protect against market meltdowns and economic issues. This means if there's another economic crisis like 2008, you'll want assets that will be less impacted than stocks or bonds. Often mentioned as alternative investments are commodities, gold, real estate and hedge funds, which have been available only to the wealthy. Liquid alternatives have been created such as the SPDR GoldGLD, +0.16 percent exchange-traded fund, which can be bought by any investor. We're also starting to see funds and other ETFs that mirror hedge fund management styles being made available to the average investor.

As these products for the average investor proliferate, the discussions about including alternative investments into one's portfolio is also becoming more of a topic during regular review meetings with one's adviser.

So how did I ultimately get to bitcoins?

As I've learned from the comments received from my past articles in this series, I'm in the minority of investors who believe that bitcoins aren't only a viable concept, but can be viewed as an investment option as well. Time will prove whether they're the tulips of our time or the future of payment processing. Either way, there's no argument from me that they are risky.

However, according to the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission, , "when it comes to investing, risk and reward are inextricably entwined. You've probably heard the phrase ‘no pain, no gain.’ Those words come close to summing up the relationship between risk and reward. Don't let anyone tell you otherwise: All investments involve some degree of risk. If you intend to purchases securities — such as stocks, bonds, or mutual funds — it's important that you understand before you invest that you could lose some or all of your money. The reward for taking on risk is the potential for a greater investment return.”[8]

I feel that bitcoins are very risky. Along with that risk, comes the potential for high reward.

Believe it or not, I'm actually a very prudent investor. I believe in asset allocation. I believe in defining a risk tolerance level as what keeps me up at night—especially because I'm a light sleeper.

I also believe that bitcoins can be viewed in a similar manner to gold or real estate. Clearly not in the physical manner (it is a *virtual* currency, after all), but in terms of investments. In fact the

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[8] https://www.sec.gov/reportspubs/investor-publications/investorpubsassetallocationhtm.html

government is now treating their tax status in a similar manner.

A market exists for gold and real estate. A market also exists for bitcoins. The irony is that you can actually exchange bitcoins for cash much faster than you can for gold or real estate. And with no middleman involved.

To me, bitcoins fit the bill for an alternative investment and are actually more transparent than a hedge fund type of investment or real estate. I can get a quote on a bitcoin at any time of the day.

As I said, I'm actually a prudent investor and there's no way that I would consider investing a substantial percentage of my retirement assets into bitcoins. But if the asset allocation models call for someone with my time horizon, risk tolerance and with my investment goals to have 5 percent-10 percent in alternative investments, then an investment of 5 percent into bitcoins seems prudent.

You may not agree with my investment selection and belief in bitcoins. That's OK—I love the comments I've gotten so far. I'll also be checking in irregularly with where the investment is so that we can see who will ultimately be correct.

However, the one thing that we should all agree on is that asset allocation is an important part of anyone's investment portfolio. Not only important, but necessary!

After all, I'm a prudent investor (I need to keep telling myself that!).

DISCLOSURE: Jack Tatar has a holding in the Bitcoin Investment Trust, which invests in bitcoins.

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So you lost half of your retirement investment in bitcoins...what now?

Published on Marketwatch.com 10/7/2014

It's nearly four months since I placed a portion of my retirement funds into bitcoins. Specifically, I invested $25,000 into the Bitcoin Investment Trust (BIT) as part of my SEP contribution for the past year.

Since my investment, bitcoins have declined steadily. And last weekend's flash-crash in bitcoins sent the digital currency below $300, which seems to have steadied Monday at $335.

My initial investment in BIT was at a per unit net asset level of $64.51. As of Monday, my new asset value for each of my units of the trust was $31.16.

I've lost over half of my investment—ouch!

During that period we've seen the Standard & Poor's 500 Index grow from 1,940 to over 1,965.

However, this isn't about chasing returns (or at least, that's what I keep telling myself). Rather, the reason for my investment was about asset allocation and the incorporation of alternative investments into that allocation. The reality is that the bitcoin investment is less than 5 percent of my overall portfolio, so hopefully this assures me that I won't be eating dog food even if my investment in the Bitcoin Investment Trust goes to zero. On the other hand, as with other alternative investments, the hope is that with high risk may come the reward of high return.

No one likes to lose half of their investment in whatever they invest in. For many of us, if we were losing that much, we would have sold out a long time ago (hopefully).

For those who invest in alternative investments such as hedge funds and partnerships, the reality is that you have less flexibility on when you can sell and are often tied into an investment for a period.

One rule with my BIT investment is that I can't sell my investment for at least one year. After that time, I will actually be able to sell my shares in the OTCQX market, where theoretically, any investor could then buy these shares.

In the future, when bitcoins are traded in exchange-traded funds, I'll have the ability to sell on price drops when prudent investing requires it.

So, was my investment in bitcoins genius or just plain stupid?

Well, if recent performance is any indication, I'd have to be considered at least "pretty stupid." But even with a drop of 50 percent and all the "love" I've received through comments from those who equate bitcoins with tulips, I don't feel entirely stupid. At least, not yet.

The reason I feel this way is because even with the bad news and poor performance around bitcoins, there's actually some bright spots that lead me to speculate that my next three month performance checkup may bring me closer to being considered a genius (hope springs eternal). Here are some recent news items around bitcoins that give me hope that the end isn't near for them:

- You can donate bitcoins for good! The United Way has begun accepting bitcoin donations.
- Sir Richard Branson, the billionaire and business visionary believes that bitcoin is "working" and is accepting them as payments for his Virgin Galactic business which will provide commercial spaceship travel.
- Maybe those in the financial planning industry have been reading my articles because the Financial Planning Association has just published a report in which they state that

"*individual investors can benefit from holding a small amount of bitcoins in a diversified portfolio.*"

- MIT students received $100 in bitcoins that they could spend at school this year, and other universities such as Duke and NYU are offering classes on bitcoin.
- EBay announced their acceptance of bitcoins through their widely used PayPal solution.
- Apple Pay may not be the "bitcoin killer" that many think it is. CNBC's Brian Kelly feels that, Apple Pay actually brings the need for a new payment process to the forefront and that could be good for bitcoins. (You can read my extended comments on Apple's new Pay solution here.)

Of course, I may be wrong about bitcoins all together. Only the future will tell. But I'm actually glad to be involved in following the future of bitcoins and for good or bad, I'm looking forward to the journey. After all, progress occurs on a bumpy road.

I'm also glad that I didn't invest *that* much money in bitcoins. What do you think I am? Stupid?

DISCLOSURE: Jack Tatar owns shares in the Btcoin Investment Trust, which invests in bitcoins.

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Do bitcoin investors really need education and regulation to succeed?

Published on Marketwatch.com 12/12/2014

A recent book by Brian Kelly of CNBC is raising interest (and heated discussions) about bitcoin and cybercurrency.

Kelly's book is called "The Bitcoin Big Bang" and although it isn't the first book on Bitcoin, his thesis is that bitcoin is poised to take over the financial world.

Kelly discusses that many of the benefits of bitcoin and its Blockchain technology hold "the potential to decentralize the system."[9] This movement away from a centralized financial system that we've grown familiar with that involves banks, credit cards, and their associated fees and regulations to one that is capable of moving currencies more quickly and cheaply through a decentralized system holds much appeal on a worldwide basis.

[9] http://www.cnbc.com/2014/12/01/bitcoin-set-to-take-over-the-financial-world-book.html

"The Bitcoin protocol replaces the banker with the miner and by doing so removes the cost of a middleman," Kelly writes. Kelly feels that not only the banker can be replaceable but the Federal Reserve as well.

As much as this sounds Rand Paul like and will excite many libertarians out there, don't lose sight of the fact that other high profile and "financially mainstream" people are stepping out and discussing the opportunities that Bitcoin brings to the current financial systems.

At a recent forum on bitcoin at Bloomberg headquarters in NYC, a panel included not only the heads of the CFTC and the U.S. Financial Crimes Division, but the highly regarded Arthur Levitt, former SEC chairman. Mr. Levitt has come out not only as a proponent of bitcoin, but he is now on the advisory boards of two bitcoin-focused companies.

At the conference, Levitt made it very clear that if bitcoin was to gain the acceptance that it needs, it will need to understand that regulation isn't bad and should be viewed as a "seal of approval."[8]

"I think a lot of people in the industry think that mainline is something bad," Levitt said. "There are obvious ways you can do it and one way is to recognize that regulation isn't in and of itself an evil word. It can be a stamp of acceptance, of approval, of having arrived."[10]

The other major takeaway I got from Levitt at the conference was his view that bitcoin needs better PR. He believes that bitcoin has suffered from many reputational issues, as well as a clear lack of understanding of the "whats and whys" of bitcoin and cybercurrencies overall. As reported by Tanaya Macheel, "The problem and challenge for the industry, he (Levitt) added, is defining what it does and what it will be doing 10 years from now – a definition that could turn public opinion in its favour."[8]

It's probably fair to say that education is not only needed for the general public and investors but for legislators, attorneys, tax professionals and financial advisers as well. Kelly's book and other books on

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[10] http://www.coindesk.com/regulation-takes-center-stage-bloomberg-bitcoin-event/

bitcoin can help, and I'm sure that we'll start to see even more on the topic. To help with this, a new organization called the Digital Currency Council is providing education and even a certification program for professionals and investors on cybercurrencies.

At this point, bitcoin and cybercurrency may seem confusing, but it does remind me a bit of years ago when the concept of something new called the "Internet" was viewed in a similar manner. I'm not saying that the comparisons are similar between the impact that the Internet has had and the potential that cybercurrencies can have. As investors, though, I'd recommend that we not stick our heads in the sand. We should learn what we can about bitcoin, cybercurrencies and the Blockchain technology.

I'd also recommend that the overall bitcoin industry heed Levitt's calls for recognizing the need for regulation and for clarifying what this bitcoin stuff is all about.

DISCLOSURE: Jack Tatar has holdings in the Bitcoin Investment Trust which invests in bitcoins.

This section originally appeared on Marketwatch.com - http://www.marketwatch.com/story/why-bitcoin-investors-need-education-and-regulation-2014-12-12

How do you know this isn't just a big Ponzi scheme?

Published on Marketwatch.com 5/19/2015

It was one year ago that I invested my yearly SEP contribution into bitcoins.
Actually, it was into something called the Bitcoin Investment Trust, which at the time was the only investment vehicle that I could find after researching options for investing qualified retirement funds into bitcoin. At the time bitcoin was trading in the $500 to $600 range.

Six months ago, I wrote about losing half of my investment in the Trust and received much "love" from those who had sympathy for me (actually I'm still looking for those comments but I'm sure that someone out there does care). I also was very clear at the time that there was no need to worry that I'd be "dumpster diving" for my next meal because I was doing what every investor needs to do—proper asset allocation. Meanwhile bitcoin was trading in the $400 to $300 range, and no one likes losing money.

My investment in the Trust and bitcoin is a small portion of my investment portfolio and considered as part of the alternative investment class of my overall investment portfolio. Some of you have gold, oil wells or real estate in that category. I prefer things less tangible (I read a lot of science fiction growing up).

So here I am, one year later. Bitcoin is trading at $230 as I'm writing this. Maybe it's time to listen to the naysayers and realize that it's time to give up and just recognize that bitcoin is nothing more than a Ponzi scheme, a harsh trick played on people from a guy named Satoshi and little more than the outlawed game of Three-Card Monty that was so popular before Mickey Mouse invaded my beloved Times Square?

Before writing this article, I decided that before I could put the nail in my bitcoin "folly," I wanted to get a better view of the current bitcoin landscape, so I went to the Inside Bitcoins conference in New York City to see if in fact, the end of bitcoin is around the corner, as so many commenters had said to me six months ago.

What I walked away with was a cautiously optimistic outlook on bitcoin, but an overwhelming level of respect for something called the blockchain. Without going into too many technical aspects, the blockchain is the "ledger" that all bitcoin transactions are recorded on. When you recognize that this provides a decentralized and permanent record of all of these transactions, you soon come to understand why venture capital is pouring into new ventures that use the blockchain.

New companies are looking to use the power of the blockchain, including Factom, which plans to create a method that will allow for the permanent storage of records such as land titles, medical records, books, and pretty much anything that requires being reported, through the use of the blockchain.

When I spoke with the CEO of Factom, Peter Kirby, you realize that he's not only the "smartest guy in the room" but he's also keenly aware of the skepticism that exists about bitcoin and the blockchain. Although there is a rush of venture capital out there for blockchain companies, Kirby has decided to also raise money for his company through a channel called Koinify, which allows anyone to invest in startups such as Factom. Kirby explains that his reasoning for seeking investors through that channel was due more to the need to build a community, rather than it being the only channel available to him.

By selling "factoids,” the Factom form of cybercurrency to new investors, Koinify allows Factom to reach a wider range of investors, who can become enthusiasts for the application, while allowing any investor to participate in the startup stage of a company. It does require that you purchase factoids with bitcoin, but in case you haven't noticed, the opportunities to buy bitcoin have grown immensely from a year ago when I began my efforts to do that.

So, one year later, I'm still out over half of my original investment. Because of the structure of the investment, I can't get out of it (although it will soon transfer into an exchange-traded fund type of investment soon and will trade on an exchange). Yet, I'm encouraged by what I'm seeing in not only the advancements around bitcoin, including the wide range of opportunities for the blockchain, as well as the level of intelligence and enthusiasm around the individuals and executives involved in the companies in this space.

There have been many comparisons between what is currently occurring with bitcoin and when the Internet first became widely known. There were intelligent and enthusiastic people at the start of the Internet days as well. Money was made and money was lost. I'm sure that will happen again (I guess I'm living proof of that).

I'm fortunate enough to be alive and around long enough to see how the Internet has been one of those rare things that actually did change the world. I look forward to seeing whether bitcoin and the blockchain can do the same thing.

Until that happens, I'd just like to see my original investment return. Hope springs eternal...

DISCLOSURE: Jack has invested in Factom's factoids through Koinify and (still) owns shares in the BIT.

This section originally appeared on Marketwatch.com - http://www.marketwatch.com/story/taking-another-bite-out-of-bitcoin-2015-05-19

New fund makes it easy to trade bitcoins—but what will it cost you? ?

Published on Marketwatch.com 6/5/2015

One year ago, I began a journey to invest in bitcoins for my retirement account. My thinking was that bitcoins are clearly a long-term investment and by using my asset allocation model, I could provide room for them as part of my alternative investment allocation.

At that time, there was much discussion about making the purchase of bitcoins easier for the regular investor but there were few options, especially for those looking to place them into qualified accounts for retirement.

There was well publicized talk of an exchange-traded fund, ETF, from the Winklevoss twins that would allow investors to gain access to bitcoins through the traditional markets. Even the simple act of trying to purchase bitcoins at that time was clunky and cumbersome.

One year later, we see many viable options to buy bitcoins. Whether through Coinbase or other outlets, including itBit (the first bitcoin exchange that New York granted a banking license to and has

Sheila Bair and Bill Bradley on their board), the ability to buy bitcoins with funds accessible through your existing bank accounts isn't only possible, but elegantly done and user friendly. However, that doesn’t address the ability to place them into qualified retirement accounts, or even any of the traditional brokerage accounts.

After doing my search (which was documented here on MarketWatch), I decided a year ago to invest retirement assets into the Bitcoin Investment Trust. It was a trust that came with many stipulations. Primarily, it was only available to accredited investors and had to be housed in an account that “locked up” the investment for a one-year holding period. At the end of the holding period, the intent was that the Trust would begin trading on the OTCQX exchange and you would be able to freely trade those assets if you desired. That “lock up” period allowed me to watch my account value lose more than half of its value as the price of bitcoin went from \$600 to its current levels in the mid \$200’s. Ouch!

Well it’s a little over a year since I began my journey to find a bitcoin investment for my retirement account and unlike the Winklevoss ETF, Bitcoin Investment Trust is now trading on the OTCQX exchange under ticker symbol: GBTC. Not only will I have the opportunity to sell my holdings, but I could buy more if I wanted. In fact, any investor can now buy into GBTC for whatever account they'd like.

As stated on the Greyscale (managers of the GBTC) website, "Eligible shares are quoted on the OTCQX, the top marketplace operated by OTC Markets under the Alternative Reporting Standards. Investors can buy and sell shares through most traditional brokerage accounts at prices dictated by the market."[11]

In theory, the bitcoin fund functions much like the SPDR Gold ETF that it reflects the price of bitcoin, just as the gold ETF simply reflects the underlying value of gold bullion. The underlying value of each share of GBTC is worth a tenth of the current value of bitcoin. So if bitcoin is trading at $300, the underlying value of one share of GBTC should be approximately $30.

However, as with other similar investments, the bitcoin fund can trade higher or lower based upon investor interest and demand for the investment.

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[11] https://grayscale.co/bitcoin-investment-trust/

Another caveat for GBTC is that it comes with a hefty management fee that needs to be figured into the underlying value as well. With the GBTC, that fee is a whopping 2 percent versus the 0.04 percent expense ratio for the SPDR Gold ETF (managers of GBTC defend the fee citing the need for safekeeping and current trading expenses in the bitcoin markets).

The exchange version of the Bitcoin Investment Trust has been trading for one month now. It’s currently very thinly traded and although you can buy shares of it for your investment account, whether retirement or other, it’s average daily volume over that time has been slightly above 2,000 shares (compared to the SPDR Gold fund which trades over 5 million shares on an average day).

As seen in the chart above, GBTC has traded at a significant premium to net asset value, or the underlying value of it’s bitcoin holdings. Whether this is due to thin volume or other reasons, the decision to invest in bitcoins is something best left up to you and your financial adviser. The opportunity to do so, though, is now easier due to companies like Coinbase and Grayscale.

I’d expect to see more investments follow including separately managed accounts from bitcoin and cybercurrency managers as well as ETFs and open-ended mutual funds down the road. Whether they'll end up rewarding investors and/or the issuers of those investments, will be something that we'll see down the road.

If it's a road you'd like to venture on, you'll see me there, for better or for worse. I may have to hitchhike, so if you see me, please be compassionate…

DISCLOSURE: Jack owns shares in the Bitoin Investment Trust and GBTC, and he has an

This section originally appeared on Marketwatch.com - http://www.marketwatch.com/story/new-fund-makes-it-easy-to-trade-bitcoins-but-it-aint-cheap-2015-06-05

Did your financial advisor tell you about Bitcoin?

Published on Marketwatch.com 11/10/2015

Allow me to share a story with you. You're an affluent investor who understands the concept that taking on more risk may bring higher rewards. You also understand the importance of asset allocation and not putting all of your eggs in one basket. One day, you're playing golf with a friend who keeps checking his smartphone during your round and his constant smiling is beginning to annoy you (especially after you missed that short putt on the last hole). Finally, you ask him what he’s looking at on his phone.

"I'm watching this investment I have go up 25 percent just today. In fact, it's gone up about 50 percent just this month. Pretty good, huh?"

"What's the investment?" is your immediate reaction. After your friend tells you what it is, you're surprised that he was even able to invest in it. You soon learn that it's not an investment that that any of his financial advisers told him about. He also reveals that he only has a small amount of his overall portfolio in this holding, because, well, it's risky, but clearly with that risk comes sizeable reward.

This is not fiction. This occurred to a friend just recently. The investment is the Bitcoin Investment Trust GBTC. Yes, any investor can currently buy it in any of their investment accounts and no, your financial adviser is probably not going to tell you about it unless you ask.

Since its transition from an investment only for accredited investors to the OTCQ exchange (June of this year), where it can be bought and sold by the general public, the trust has ranged from $28.55 to a recent price of $51 in less than six months. The trust is simply intended to mirror the price of bitcoin, which has been on a tear as of late.

I wrote about this investment in various columns on this site in the past and earned many sneers (a nice way of putting it) from those who thought that I had lost my mind. Many of those who criticized bitcoins were those who felt that gold was a better way to gain exposure to an alternative investment. A recent column on this site discusses how bitcoin has actually been a better current investment than gold.

Full disclosure: My involvement with this investment began when I invested a recent SEP contribution into the trust, when it was only available to accredited investors and bitcoin was trading well over $600. With bitcoin on the rise and trading even at the $450 level, I still have a loss on my original investment.

However, I did this investment as an alternative investment for asset allocation purposes and committed only a small portion of my portfolio to it (less than 5 percent). Those investors who have financial advisers have probably had discussions with their advisers over the last few years about the merits of including alternative investments in their portfolio as a means of asset allocation. Typically, those alternative investments have been hedge funds or private-equity funds that provide little transparency about what they contain or have strategies that even your adviser will admit that he or she doesn't understand.

So, with GBTC’s current performance, the question I have is whether or not your financial adviser may begin bringing up the option of investing in bitcoins for your portfolio. I believe that over the next year, you'll begin to hear them doing just that, whether it's discussing GBTC or how various companies, such as established banks, are integrating bitcoin and blockchain technology into their businesses and the potential impact that will have on their bottom line and stock performance.

The question you may also ask is if they're not discussing this topic and these options with you, are they the right financial adviser for you? These are not investments for everyone, but certainly you'll be reading more and more about them over the next year and your financial adviser should be prepared to discuss and advise accordingly on them, as they are available to all investors.

Regarding my friends who were playing golf—once it was revealed how much was made over the course of the day in GBTC, it was decided that the next hole was the 19th hole, and that my smiling friend would be buying the refreshments. I know for a fact that he used cash and not bitcoins to pay for that.

Disclosure: Tatar owns shares of GBTC.

This section originally appeared on Marketwatch.com - http://www.marketwatch.com/story/did-your-financial-advisor-tell-you-about-bitcoin-2015-11-10

Hope springs eternal?

Published on Marketwatch.com 12/28/2015

Happy Holidays!

As many of you who have read my columns are aware, in October of 2014, I wrote about losing half of my retirement investment in a security called the Bitcoin Investment Trust. At the time, it was the only investment vehicle available for investing qualified retirement funds into bitcoin. My initial $25,000 SEP contribution was worth less than half what I had initially invested.

That, however, has changed for the better. Significantly so. I'll discuss that, but first, some background on the original investment and how bitcoin can be used in a retirement account at all.

I should remind you that my investment into bitcoin was done with a small percentage of my overall portfolio (less than 5 percent) and positioned for asset-allocation purposes in the alternative-investment (AI) class of my portfolio. Other investors may keep hedge funds, real estate or even gold in the AI portion of their portfolio.

For me, this was not just about bitcoin, but was even more so about asset allocation and my belief that bitcoins can be considered an alternative investment for those investors who believe in prudent asset allocation and can handle the risk associated with these types of investments.

Little change

In May 2015, I provided a one-year update of this retirement investment into bitcoin, and there hadn't been much of a difference in value. I was still losing half of my initial investment.

Being the optimist that I am, I wrote of how I was still seeing good things happening for bitcoin and how great strides were being made in the use of blockchain technology. I closed the column expressing that my "hope springs eternal" that my investment would stop falling and potentially, provide a gain.

Obviously, most people can't stomach the 50 percent loss I had taken, and any smart investor would probably have gotten out of that investment as part of a prudent investment strategy. But not me. I still believed in the value and potential for bitcoin; but then again, I used to believe in Second Life as well. (Don’t ask, it's a long story.)

So I held my investment, and because of my asset allocation, I didn't actually lose any sleep. Even with all of the love and support I got from readers (it's amazing how many ways you can be called an idiot) and comments from even my old college buddy and investment pro, Barry Ritholtz of the Big Picture, I stayed in this investment.

So here it is, the end of 2016.

Coming back

The last few weeks have been a roller coaster ride for equities. Since that last update in May, the Dow Jones Industrial Average has dropped about 3 percent (May 17, 2015 to Dec. 16, 2015). During that same period, a market favorite like AppleAAPL, -0.20 percent has fallen 14.5 percent, while Facebook FB, +0.58 percent has risen about 32 percent and Alphabet GOOG, -0.39 percent has risen about 34 percent. In terms of alternative investments, the Gold SPDR ETF GLD, +0.16 percent has fallen 12.5 percent during that period and hedge funds haven't fared well either.

Since my optimistic column in May, we've seen banks falling all over themselves embracing blockchain technology as the future, the launch of the largest bitcoin venture and even a debit card that allows you to spend bitcoin wherever Visa is accepted (there are some limitations, but the ability to use bitcoin as currency through this debit card is a big advancement).

Oh, and during that time, the Bitcoin Investment Trust, which trades on the OTCQX market as GBTC, is up 133 percent.

That's right, the value of my retirement investment in bitcoins since I last wrote about it has doubled. As amazing as that performance is, I'm just now back at where I started with my investment. Such is the nature of a risky investment, which is what most alternative investments are.

So to celebrate this, I'm considering holding off on making an investment decision on the shares that I own and would like to ask you, my loyal reader, what should I do? You've shown me love in the past (love means different things to many people), and I'm sure I'll get even more of it now. So I ask you, should I sell, hold or buy more? Please provide your comments below.

And go out and spend some bitcoin this holiday season—you can use that bitcoin Visa debit card.

Disclosure: Tatar owns shares of GBTC.

This section originally appeared on Marketwatch.com - http://www.marketwatch.com/story/bitcoin-comeback-makes-retirement-portfolio-look-good-again-2015-12-28

Why bitcoins are the best investment in your retirement account?

Published on Marketwatch.com 6/17/2016

In 2013, I posed a question that seemed out of character (many also said that it was "irresponsible") for a financial journalist. The question was "Do Bitcoins Belong in Your Retirement Account?"

I asked this question based not entirely on speculation, but with an eye on prudent asset-allocation strategies. It was my belief at the time that, since bitcoins had a dollar-denominated value and were trading on worldwide exchanges, they could be considered an investable asset.

I also believed that if I was to invest in something so speculative, they could be considered as appropriate for the alternative investment sleeve of my portfolio. After all, advisors were (and still are) advising clients to have a small portion of their portfolio (typically around 10 percent) invested into "non-correlated" assets such as gold, real estate or hedge funds to protect in order to manage the risk of your portfolio.

At the time, I made the case that bitcoins could be considered an alternative investment, and as a writer focused on retirement, I took the added step of trying to find an investment that would be suited for my retirement account. You can read the columns here about this journey, but suffice it to say that I was able to invest into something called the Bitcoin Investment Trust (BIT), which was initially only for accredited investors and required me to hold the investment (without the ability to sell it) for one year.

In 2014, six months after making a $25,000 SEP contribution into the BIT, I wrote of how I lost one-half of my investment due to the drop in the price of bitcoins. I invite you to read the comments to that column because I don't believe that any writer was ever called "stupid" or an "idiot" so frequently. To all of those who commented and showed me such love, I must say that I appreciate it because at least you read the column, so thanks!

Keeping perspective

At the time, rather than mulling over my situation of losing money, I looked at the glass-half-full" perspective that there were actually good things happening regarding bitcoin and I decided that even though prudent investment rules would say "sell," I felt that there were huge opportunities around bitcoin, so I decided to stay the course. Plus, I was unable to sell as the BIT investment required me to hold it for one year.

At the end of 2015, things were different. The BIT had become GBTC, which is an investment that can now be bought and sold by any investor. It had transformed (by design) into the first investment that an investor can actually participate in the ups and downs related to the bitcoin-price fluctuations without having to buy bitcoin directly from an exchange, such as Coinbase.

In a column on *Marketwatch*, I wrote of how GBTC had increased over 100 percent since my last article detailing my 50 percent loss in my retirement investment. At the time, I was making a profit in this investment and at the end of 2015, bitcoin was valued over $400, and GBTC was trading at $63 a share.

It should be noted that the net asset value (NAV) of GBTC is based on one-tenth the value of a bitcoin. If bitcoin was $400 and GBTC was trading at $63, it's trading at a premium to its underlying value. This clearly shows how there's an interest on the part of investors to participate in bitcoin through these types of investments.

Six months into 2016, I'm reporting back to you that, as of this writing, bitcoin is over $700 and GBTC is trading over $100 a share. It has clearly been the best investment in my retirement account.

Do I wish that I bought more? I based my initial investment on an allocation as an alternative investment in my portfolio and thus a smaller position that my equity holdings, so I'm content that these returns came within the context of, what I consider was based on a prudent asset-allocation strategy.

Time to take them seriously

At this point, the time has come to finally declare that bitcoin and other cryptocurrencies should be considered investment options for investors.

Chris Burniske of ARK Investment Management, and Adam White of Coinbase recently wrote a white paper that takes my view of bitcoin and other cryptocurrencies as alternative investments a step further by declaring that they should be considered their own asset class.

If you're unsure of what I mean by other cryptocurrencies, the reality is that although bitcoin is the dominant digital currency (with a market cap of over $10 billion currently), it's not the only one. ETHER is another cryptocurrency from Ethereum that has surged from around one dollar in late 2015 to a current price of over $16, having been higher but running into some problems of late. Ethereum has been considered a competitor and complement to bitcoin, and its relevance is such that the largest crowdfunded investment, The DAO was funded with over $150 million of ETHER.

Although you can buy bitcoin and ETHER on an exchange such as Coinbase and the GDAX, you'd have to venture into the many small cryptocurrency exchanges out there to gain access to other currencies such as DASH, LiteCoin, or even TrumpCoin. The truth is that it's not easy for the average investor to participate in these assets, and you need be aware of current regulatory issues, and that's why a company called Lawnmower is working on make investing in portfolios of these cryptocurrencies simpler and available to investors.

What's blockchain?

However, now is the time for investors and advisors to get their heads out of the sand and recognize that not only should these types of vehicles be considered investment options, but that it's now time to also start paying attention to blockchain-related activities in which many current public companies are involved.

Blockchain is the underlying technology for bitcoin, and it's been recognized as a powerful and efficient model for financial companies to pursue. If you're not interested in investing in cryptocurrencies and have been following recent activities of companies such as Chase and IBM in their activities related to incorporating blockchain technology into their current systems, that may also be a way that you can also invest in this new technology of bitcoin, cryptocurrencies and blockchain. Find companies that are making a commitment to blockchain technologies and invest directly in them. I'd venture to say that you'll probably see an ETF around that at some time in the near future.

What I've come to realize through this investment journey is that we live in a time of rapid changes, and as investors, we need to pay attention to those disrupting developments out there to identify potential investment options. Many people are likening the opportunities around blockchain and cryptocurrencies like bitcoin, to where the internet was many years ago. Only history will bear that out. But if investors only stay tied to the status quo investment options that we've been lulled into for years, and ignore the new technologies and disruptors out there, you'll miss some huge investment opportunities.

Do your own research. Get familiar with what's going on around bitcoin, cryptocurrencies and blockchain technologies. This is not only true of investors, but of advisors and wealth-management firms as well. For clients will soon recognize that if their advisor is not discussing these options with them or is only redirecting them back into the "same old" investment options, they may come to the conclusion that it may be time to find a new advisor or do more on their own.

Disclosure: Tatar owns GBTC, bitcoin and ether, and is an advisor to Lawnmower.

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Jack Tatar is co-author of "Cryptoassets: The Innovative Investor's Guide to Bitcoin and Beyond" with Chris Burniske.

Prior to writing the book with Chris, Jack was the lead bitcoin writer for About.com and TheBalance.com, and wrote regularly as a RetireMentor for Marketwatch.com

Jack has written numerous books on retirement and finance including his first, "Safe 4 Retirement: The Four Keys to a Safe Retirement" which lays out his foundational approach to viewing retirement in a holistic fashion by including the Four Keys: Financial Preparedness, Health & Wellness, Mental Attitude and Staying Involved into planning for retirement.

His book "Having The Talk: The Four Keys to Your Parents' Safe Retirement", lays out the need and plan for having that necessary "talk" between retired or retiring parents, and their children and family about later life issues.

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