

A South African's guide to moving to and making it in Malta: When Daphne met Dropbox

By  Marcus 'The Maltese Falcon' Brewster

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For a nation-state marked in the recent past by the assassination of journalist Daphne Caruana Galizia on an island that is positioning itself as the future blockchain capital of the world, it was inevitable that both these strands would come together at some point. This month the news broke that a 22-year-old Maltese techie has pioneered a secure platform to help journalists and human rights activists keep their work safe from the authorities.



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A year ago, Max Thake was at a company bootcamp when he heard that Caruana Galizia had been killed in a brutal car bombing.



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Marcus 'The Maltese Falcon' Brewster 20 Apr 2018



"That day, everyone dropped what they were doing to discuss how we could somehow fuse the technology we were working on with what Daphne fought for, to the benefit of investigative journalism and freedom of speech.

"Talks went on into the night, but by the next morning we had a fairly clear idea of what we were going to do. A 'Dropbox on the blockchain'.



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Marcus 'The Maltese Falcon' Brewster 8 Jun 2018



"A secure, anonymous, decentralised storage platform that would make it possible for journalists to safely store their data without ever needing to directly trust friends, relatives, colleagues, institutions or centralised servers," he told *The Sunday*

Onion Router

The initial blockchain idea later evolved into a cloud-based system using the anonymous Tor network, also known as the Onion Router.

This platform, known as Onion Routed Cloud, or ORC, will allow journalists and other organisations to establish a trusted grid of storage points within the wider network.



Max Thake. Image supplied.

Mr Thake said that once a trusted grid is established, the participants may upload and download files using a simple web application with a familiar interface.

“The users that compose a trusted grid each share the responsibility of storing incomplete pieces of each other’s encrypted files with zero knowledge of how many other parts there are, which peers are storing them, or how to read their contents,” Mr Thake said.

The team behind the project has already spoken to journalists and media organisations all over the world.

Mr Thake says the next step is to perform a third-party audit of the system to guarantee its integrity.

“Once tested we can work with journalists to implement the tech and give these heroes another layer of security, another tool to help them do their work”.

EU funds investigative journalism

In further good news for Malta and the EU’s media workers - the European Parliament’s Civil Liberties Committee has decided to allocate European funding specifically to support investigative journalism in the European Union.

The decision was taken in the wake of the assassinations of Caruana Galizia and fellow scribe Jan Kuciak, the Slovakian journalist who was murdered in February.

“Journalists are the gatekeepers of any democratic society and they are under pressure. We need journalists to separate fact from fiction - a strong press leads to a strong democracy, where the values of truth and accountability persist,” says Nationalist MEP Roberta Metsola, who is a member of the committee.

“Funding is particularly important for smaller media houses who are often faced with SLAPP lawsuits and vexatious claims designed to shut them down” observed Metsola.

Pilot project

The funds will implement a pilot project across the EU with two main objectives: financially supporting investigative journalism and the direct support and protection of exposed journalists.

A permanent fund will be created to support independent investigative journalists, with the aim of helping the journalists face potential legal proceedings, move between borders and maintain financial independence.

Additionally, the support and protection of investigative journalists will be addressed by the creation of a pan-European rapid response mechanism. Through direct collaboration with European, regional and local stakeholders, this mechanism will provide direct support such as advice, legal aid and shelter to journalists under threat.

The funds will now have to be confirmed by a vote from all MEPs in the coming weeks.

ABOUT MARCUS 'THE MALTESE FALCON' BREWSTER

marcusbrewster is a brand synonymous with PR excellence in SA. An industry innovator, leader, and inspiration, Brewster affiliated his multi-award winning boutique firm with larger Level 1 BBBEE marketing/comms agency MediaRevolution for scale in 2016 and went on to launch Marcus Brewster International in Europe the following year. Marcus currently lives on - and actively promotes - the Mediterranean island of Malta. For African, S. African and European PR enquiries, contact marcus@marcusbrewster.com or WhatsApp on (+356) 9931 3322

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