

Making way for the Metaverse

As more of our daily lives become intertwined with technology, today's digital-first customers have come to expect instant service, tailored digital experiences and personalisation from every business they interact with online. Consumer expectations have never been higher. The result has been a step-change in martech innovation as businesses look for new ways to make an impact and stay ahead.

But this is just the beginning. Throw into the mix the notion of the 'metaverse' – a '3D' world wide web that combines our physical space and virtual reality in one – and the future of martech looks even more interesting. This, in turn, raises all types of questions for the future-focused business. Principally – how will they be able to use the metaverse to drive new business and engage with their existing customers?

Of course, the reality is that this is just the start of the conversation. Even though Facebook's rebranding may have sparked a global frenzy around the next iteration of the web, the consensus is that it is at least ten years off, if not more. Bluntly, at this stage, we simply don't know what form the metaverse will take and how (or even if) consumers will use it.

However, that doesn't mean businesses can't begin to look at the technology,

skills and strategy they could potentially employ to make it a success. After all, many of the brands that got first-mover advantage on new channels such as social media enjoyed great levels of growth and engagement while their competitors were playing 'wait and see'. Importantly too, evaluating existing tech platforms could help businesses redefine their digital journey to better meet evolving demand as well as remain primed for the future. To begin with, it's important to consider what a new generation of marketing tools for the metaverse will look like.

CMS technology is currently geared towards a 2D world of emails, websites, apps and electronic billboards. The best new tech enables marketers to create, manage and update campaigns on multiple channels with minimal interaction from developers or IT departments. In recent years, these solutions have been expanded to take into account data-driven personalisation and more exotic channels such as IoT devices. However, no matter the channel, the core concepts of delivering copy and imagery remain essentially the same. The metaverse is a whole new kettle of fish. It will require the creation of a new generation of 3D CMS solutions that enable completely different ways for brands to interact with consumers.

The goal of 3D CMS will be to enable the creation, maintenance and modification of virtual, augmented and other immersive content. I say 'other immersive' simply because we don't really know what innovations will come out of the metaverse. It's like asking someone in the 1990s to imagine what the internet would be like now.

In practice, imagine going into virtual shops where every product and marketing message is tailored exactly to your needs. The crucial element of the 3D CMS will be that it will integrate with existing marketing channels. This means a headless 3D CMS will enable marketers to make instant changes on any channel – IoT, social, email, virtual store – without the need for longtail development projects. In essence, it will make virtual as adaptable and manageable as any other communication output. The challenge is that the only limit to the form these metaverse marketing experiences take is the imagination of a brand's communication department. Add to this the way each experience can and will be personalised and, at their best, will enable a number of different interaction scenarios and you can see just how complex it will all get.

To put it more simply, 3D CMS solutions will need to leverage a huge amount more data than current systems and they will need to enable the creation and management of a mind-boggling number of customer journeys. At the same time, they need to be easy enough to use so that companies don't have to dedicate a crazy amount of resources. They will also need to be secure, integrate (where possible) into existing systems and be able to track effectiveness and essentially do everything the best CMS systems do now.

At first glance it may seem like developing these solutions may take years, however, the reality may be very different. Outside of the amount of money that will become available to fund development, the biggest benefit of 3D systems is they potentially enable a clean break from the past. The martech industry often faces the hurdle of brands being too cautious to adopt new platforms and instead trying to adapt their existing systems. Many huge global retailers have marketing tech stacks that resemble Frankenstein's monster. In the past, this just about worked, however, in recent years it has become a problem. As consumers increasingly demand more from the digital experience, brands braced with the limitations posed by outdated systems are struggling to keep up. The result? The risk of losing out to their customer's best last online experience, not to mention the costs associated with maintaining these types of complex setups.

The metaverse changes this. If it is a success, it will allow brands to create deeper, more meaningful relationships with customers by creating virtual experiences which combine entertainment and hyper-personalisation. The result is a remarkable opportunity for brands to reinvent themselves and differentiate. To prepare for this, businesses should consider the critical evolution from legacy to 3D CMS solutions. In this way, they can seek to create customer experiences that are not only digital-first but, in time, virtual-first too.

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