

HOW THE METAVERSE WILL SUPERCHARGE FASHION E-SKILLS TRADING

BY MERILEE KERN, MBA

The term "metaverse" is not only finding its way into everyday exchanges across the web, pop culture and mainstream news media discourse, but it's also finding its way into closed-door corporate discussions, as all sectors of the fashion industry ruminate on if and how to be early adopters of this modality.

Broadly encompassing several areas, the term "metaverse" carries a variety of definitions that are largely based on the intended application. One prime description includes 3D virtual worlds that are focused on social connection, which are linked together to further the perception of a virtual universe. It is widely regarded as the next iteration of the world wide web, as well as a term of reference for the digital spaces made more realistic and relatable by the use of augmented reality (AR), virtual reality (VR) and extended reality (XR). While the fashion trade — and global industry at large — is still in the learning, planning and development stage of the metaverse technology life cycle, these immersive technologies, along with artificial intelligence (AI), are already notably impacting one business area in particular: staff e-skills training and development.

The economic impact driven by this particular application cannot be overstated. In fact, forecasts indicate that 23 million jobs will be impacted by VR and AR by 2030, potentially boosting the global economy by \$1.92 trillion. Why? One simple reason revolves around the idea that immersive technologies like these, applied in the metaverse environment, minimize the disconnect between theory and practice.

"Metaverse, mixed-reality learning experiences represent disruptive innovation that can significantly optimize fashion industry training, development and real learning," said Ed Beltran, CEO of Fierce Conversations, a global leadership development company that's pioneering new e-training and communication paradigms. "Especially in the post-pandemic marketplace, fashion trade-related companies are increasingly appreciating the need — and are wholeheartedly embracing — for new approaches to train, sustain and develop their teams in order to stay agile and competitive."

According to Beltran, the metaverse's mixed-reality learning modalities can supercharge fashion industry e-skill training in several key ways. Below,

Beltran shares his thoughts on those he considers most significant.

How do you see the metaverse's applicability for improving internal staff conversations? Can it lead to demonstrable operational improvements for fashion-related companies in areas like corporate culture and productivity?

The answer to this begins with the understanding that conversations are universal. The appropriate words can be translatable to all situations, creating a successful engagement between two or more people that allows them to learn. So, the goal with training and development lies with creating customized solutions that foster a rich human connection. This can be achieved through the development of metaverse techniques that allow teams to engage in any environment, any situation. It could be giving feedback or requesting it, confronting a problem or asking a question to learn more. Developing the solutions needed to improve conversations and corporate culture and enhance productivity must include teaching teams how to deal with issues as they arise, while keeping stress levels at a minimum. Remember that lower stress equals better conversations, happier employees

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and better returns.

Can the metaverse replace traditional fashion industry staff training and development and better appeal to an ever-changing workforce?

The metaverse provides fresh, interactive engagement methods vis-a-vis 3D VR, AR and XR training, which allows people to learn faster, retain information better and actually enjoy the process. One study showed that employees who trained in VR simulations learned four times faster than classroom learners and twice as fast as e-learners. Instead of simply teaching theory, teams get genuine people-practice with customized solutions that can be readily scaled for companies of any size — assuring the training remains in synch with company growth or shifts.

In the infinite metaverse, varied modalities can be created to simulate real-life scenarios that teams experience in their unique and exacting roles, allowing them to develop and design outcomes as they learn. People learn in unique ways, and mixed reality offers evoking workforces numerous opportunities to learn, sustain and change the way they work — all without going off-line for hours at a

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time and with greater impact. In addition to a significantly quicker pace of learning, virtual reality training has also been shown to promote greater focus, giving employees better knowledge retention and improved understanding. In fact, in most instances, we've found that extended reality and immersive learning modalities increase retention by more than 75% over traditional training methods.

What about ongoing fashion trade-related training opportunities? What would you say is a key metaverse impact there?

The metaverse uniquely offers continuous, perpetual training opportunities to team members throughout the course of the year in a far more flexible and convenient manner. The application allows teams to use conversation techniques in a wholly customized environment, using situations that are unique to their workplaces. The learning mechanisms of the metaverse are also easily sustainable for fashion-related companies over the long term. Metaverse learning solutions can be designed for a variety of employee types within any organization to ensure everyone receives critical e-skills training suited for individual needs and "bandwidth." This is particularly helpful for those staffers who can't

be offline or indisposed for days or even hours at a time for training.

Given the significant extent to which metaverse, mixed-reality learning modalities can enhance staff and leadership development and the extreme fiscal upside for the fashion industry related. There to, it's no wonder that the corporate e-skills sector is leading the technology shift charge. In the global fashion and style sector, remote e-learning will be a key catalyst ushering in the brave new virtual world.

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