
CHAPTER

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A Vision for the Metaverse in 2032

Coca-Cola lovers will have a new place to hang out starting today and...can set up a virtual alter ego known as an avatar, which can then shop and dance at the Coca-Cola diner, visit a movie theater to watch short films, and soar around on a hoverboard.

Coca-Cola's CC Metro, an online island shaped like a Coke bottle within a larger virtual world called There.com, showcases a vision of the shared Metaverse where brands give their customers a virtual playground to explore, play games, meet people, and ultimately shop. It's a vision that is shared by many corporations and has recently gained a lot of steam. However, the aforementioned announcement of CC Metro is not from 2022. It's not even from this decade. Rather, that's a quote from *The New York Times* in 2007.

Before the digital aspect of our social lives was cemented on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and LinkedIn, there was a belief that social networks could and should be in 3D, virtual worlds featuring experiences much like the real world. Second Life and Habbo Hotel were onboarding hundreds of thousands of users. Disney jumped on the trend with their Club Penguin virtual environment. MTV created almost a dozen of these virtual worlds for each of their hit shows at the time. Second Life was getting investments from Internet visionaries, including Jeff Bezos, and partnering with brands such as Sony, Sun Microsystems, and Adidas for campaigns. Virtual existence was becoming a thing.

Although not as large as Second Life or Habbo Hotel, There.com was pioneering Metaverse economies right alongside them. There.com had their own virtual currency called Therebucks, which were converted at a rate of 1,800 Tbox to \$1 USD. Tbox could be spent on houses, furnishings, and outfitting your avatar. There were ample activities ranging from training your virtual pet to racing vehicles to connecting with new friends over a game of cards. And communities were forming around special interests.

In the early part of the new millennium, it really looked like virtual existence would become a major part of our lives. That's why Coca-Cola invested in CC Metro. They even went so far as integrating the MyCokeRewards program into CC Metro, giving users a place to spend their rewards points. It didn't matter where your brand was showing up in these virtual worlds, just as long as you were there in some capacity—learning from this new behavior and testing ways to capitalize on it.

Ultimately, 2D social networks were more effective than virtual worlds at onboarding droves of users and providing instant gratification. As a result, it's Facebook, not Second Life or There.com, that is the nearly trillion-dollar social networking company.

Extended Reality Emerges

The year 2022 brought many of the same narratives we heard back in the early 2000s, except under the new moniker of “the Metaverse.” The commercial narrative hasn’t changed much. Most brands view the Metaverse as a way to disguise an advertisement within the confines of a virtual experience, except that now the tech has completely changed.

Today, virtual worlds are largely being built on the back of the blockchain. Blockchain is a digital ledger that records transactions and information maintained and duplicated across a peer-to-peer network of computers, making it nearly impossible to record, edit, and hack false transactions. This allows creators to build digital scarcity into the social experience, turning everything from the game’s land to the accessories our avatars equip into nonfungible tokens (NFTs). With blockchain as a new foundation of the Metaverse, the narrative has shifted to building a future that is user-owned, user-built, and ultimately for the user to reap the rewards. This is the rallying cry of the Metaverse today. It’s an upgraded promise from the early Metaverses that were primarily social experiences with the occasional commercial opportunity.

Now, everyone is just \$300 USD away from immersing themselves in a very impressive virtual reality experience. Consumer-ready virtual reality (VR) wasn’t an option when Coca-Cola was building CC Metro. Furthermore, augmented reality (AR)—a real-world overlay of graphics and computer-generated information experienced through devices such as smartphones and smart glasses—was still the stuff of science fiction in the CC Metro world. The immersive technologies of VR and AR that are instrumental in the experience of the Metaverse are collectively known as *extended reality* (XR).

While current Metaverses like Decentraland are still accessed through the web browser, they will eventually collide with XR. The true vision of the Metaverse promises shared virtual experiences. And that is now in the realm of possibility for all builders, brands, and individuals.

In an interview with *The Information*, John Riccitiello, the CEO of Unity Technologies, predicts that VR/AR headsets will be as common as gaming consoles by 2030. With 250 million households owning gaming consoles worldwide, he is not predicting ubiquity on the level of the 4 billion smartphones worldwide. Rather, John sees XR as shared devices, like your game system or TV, which is a sentiment we largely agree with.

XR is an innovation in communication. Of course, gaming, entertainment, and commerce are great use cases for extended reality. And these experiences will make a significant impact on enticing people to use XR platforms. But it's the social experience that XR can facilitate that will make these devices so sticky for users. It makes you wonder how things would have been different for *There.com* if Meta's Oculus Quest 2 VR headset was around back then. But that's beside the point.

Ten years from now, XR and the Metaverse will be part of most of our lives. But how do we get to the point where nearly every household owns an XR headset and is accessing the Metaverse regularly? What Metaverse apps and experiences are onboarding people into the Metaverse today that will become the pillars of the Metaverse in 2032?

To answer these questions, we'll first look at the idea of personal Metaverses or Metaverse homes.

Your Own Personalized Metaverse

Talk of the Metaverse mostly revolves around the vision of a shared universe. But the shared Metaverse is actually made up of

smaller units of personal Metaverses. The idea of your very own command center or home base in the Metaverse that you can control is what's most compelling about the Metaverse—much like how the Internet has evolved into a billion different personalized experiences where algorithms curate the content and services that reflect your views, interests, and needs.

RTFKT (pronounced “artifact”) is making strides in putting personal Metaverses into people's hands with the RTFKT Pods. The brand, which was acquired by Nike at the end of 2021, emerged on the NFT scene with its Metaverse sneakers but has since begun creating environments called RTFKT Spacepods. RTFKT excels at creating culturally significant digital objects. In other words, they know how to create hype around collectibles. These Pods are going to be collectors' home base for displaying their 3D NFTs and digital assets. While RTFKT's ultimate vision for Pods is kept secret, we can safely assume that these Pods will also double as social centers—places that Pod owners can invite friends to and host events in. In the near term, I'm doubtful that these pods will expand outside of the confines of a personal digital gallery. However, they're a part of the larger trend that will accelerate Metaverse adoption. That trend is the creation of customizable, personal Metaverse environments.

The next Zaha Hadid or Frank Lloyd Wright of the world won't ever architect a single building in the real world. Their focus will be on designing houses, offices, parks, museums, and other constructions in the Metaverse. And they'll have more than enough work to keep them occupied. Look no further than Krista Kim, the contemporary artist who made headlines for designing the Mars House and selling it as an NFT for 288 Ethereum (ETH) tokens, which were equivalent to \$514,558 USD at the time. The Mars House was designed without the constraints of the laws of physics. The result is a meditative environment that is meant to inspire and create a calm virtual atmosphere.

Most of us will never have the pleasure of a corner office overlooking Central Park. But with personal Metaverses, we can all design and occupy our own Mars Houses that help us lead more productive and social lives.

Personal Metaverse platforms are where the magic will happen. Think of them as your home page to the Metaverse or your Metaverse home, if you will. All of the cool VR apps, games, productivity tools, meeting rooms, and upcoming events will be present in your Metaverse home. It's a space you can curate to reflect what you care about. And platforms that provide the means for people to create personal Metaverses will be a major part of making the Metaverse practical by 2032.

The Rise of Bots and Digital Humans

A big part of XR and the Metaverse's promise is a better means of communication and connection. But it won't always be a human on the other end of our communication. Rather, interacting with bots and digital humans will be our primary means of social interaction in the Metaverse. This isn't to paint a bleak picture of a future where we don't engage with other people. On the contrary, these digital humans will act as our own digital workforce. They will be able to carry out tasks on our behalf, provide services to us, and curate our experiences with other people in the Metaverse.

We've been moving toward this bot-assisted life for some time. A lot of people were introduced to bots by way of e-commerce iterations like AIO bot, KodaiAIO, NikeShoeBot, and GaneshBot. Generally called sneakerbots due to their widespread use in the rare sneaker market, these bots allow people to scoop up high-demand products the moment they are released to the public online. Many websites have "bot code" programmed

into their website for quality assurance purposes. These internal bots run frequent, automated add-to-cart tests to ensure that their site is operating correctly. Sneakerbots exploit these lines of test code, allowing users to input their own billing and shipping information, as well as which products to target. The result is a hands-off, automated shopping experience for consumers to purchase high-demand products that are known to sell out in minutes, sometimes seconds. Culturally relevant brands—notably Yeezy, Nike/Air Jordan, and Supreme—that have bustling resale markets are routinely the target of these sneakerbots, which can be bought and used by anyone online. It's a widely shared view among companies like Nike and Supreme that sneakerbots have tainted these exclusive product markets, and they are always working to prevent their use. But that's a conversation for another book. Sneakerbots are an early example of having an AI-powered, digital companion that will do tasks on one's behalf.

As society started adopting all-in-one communication platforms like Slack, Teams, Workplace, and Discord, the next wave of bots began taking shape. Workplace bots are now used to track co-worker progress, seamlessly schedule meetings, collect employee spending reimbursement, and more. Bots automate a lot of the simple communication tasks in the workplace.

Discord is one of the main communication platforms for the Web3 era. It's used by nearly every NFT community and crypto-gaming-related community. With that, a new wave of utility bots emerged. MEE6 is a bot that will moderate communication and flag users who are using hateful or offensive language. Quillbot will paraphrase, summarize, and/or translate text. Apollo is a scheduling bot for coordinating events. The Dash Radio bot makes adding ad-free music streams to Discord effortless. GiveawayBot will coordinate an entire giveaway contest.

Dank Memer is a bot that suggests the right memes to share at the right time. This list could go on for pages.

Today, there is a bot for augmenting nearly any digital task you can imagine from communication to collaboration to productivity. By 2032, these bots will find a new home in the Metaverse and play a companion role in making the Metaverse professionally and personally effective. Until someone figures out a way to bring keyboards into the Metaverse, spoken language will need to be the interface. This means that bots will play a crucial role in carrying out some of our actions there.

Think of R2-D2 or C-3PO in Star Wars. While they were ultra-complex robots with personalities and critical thinking abilities, at their core they are like the bots we use today in Discord to automate tasks. Likewise, our bots will visually manifest in the Metaverse in the form of digital humans—taking them out of running in the background and bringing them into our field of view through 3D avatars.

In other words, digital humans will give our utility bots a presence in our Metaverse homes. Companies like UneeQ, Synthesia, and Soul Machines have been designing lifelike, AI-powered digital humans for years. They're an upgrade to the typical chatbots we encounter on the phone or on the Web, providing a visual interface to automated customer service calls. Notably, UneeQ designed a digital human for *UBS* (see <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/UBS>) that would deliver financial forecasts and updates to their clients at any hour of the day. Synthesia's digital humans have manifested into the first AI-led meteorology team, delivering an entirely automated weather forecast. One of Soul Machines' many use cases is the digital human named Yumi, which is a skin care consultant and ambassador for a premium Japanese beauty and cosmetic brand.

The tech that is being used to create these lifelike, AI-powered digital humans will be overlaid on the aforementioned utility bots to give them an actual presence in our

Metaverse homes. They'll inhabit our spaces, only if we invite them, of course, sitting idly in the background until we need them to carry out a task. Imagine a Metaverse bot that curates new Metaverse experiences for you—finding events, games, and communities you may like. How about a bot that manages your schedule and also learns from your productivity habits?

There may even be bots that communicate on our behalf. For example, we're reminded of a project created by Hassan S. Ali back in 2017 called the Boy Bye Bot. Women who were continuously hounded by men for their phone number could give them the phone number to the Boy Bye Bot, which would then take care of (hilariously) turning these men away. Similarly, around the same time, there was a chatbot platform that emerged called Replika. The project was created by Eugenia Kuyda in remembrance of one of her best friends who passed away unexpectedly. She designed a chatbot from her text messages with her friend and found that the chatbot learned his texting quips and nuances. It helped her cope with him not being there anymore. This eventually became the Replika platform, which is a chatbot that actually takes an interest in what you're up to and how you're feeling. Hundreds of thousands of people treat this digital companion as a close friend.

The Ubiquitous Metaverse

By 2032, each and every one of us will have the opportunity to easily build our own Metaverse homes and fill them with personal and professional tools. Bots will take shape as digital humans, helping us carry out and automate tasks. If our Metaverse homes are our own personal curated environment for productive digital work, connecting with new people, and organizing around interests, then the Metaverse bots are what will help us make these interactions happen.

Of course, there is a lot more to the Metaverse including NFTs and digital assets, gaming, collectibles, brand activations, commerce, avatars, digital identities, and much more. Throughout the book, we'll color in this vision of how the Metaverse will manifest in our lives. This is just a taste; one flavor of the Metaverse that will help bring it to ubiquity.

These personal Metaverse homes are what will help us organize our favorite parts of the Metaverse. The Metaverse bots will help us be more productive and effective. Both of these will help lay the foundation for services, brands, and products to enter the Metaverse and create mass utility.

John Riccitiello, in the previously mentioned interview with *The Information*, explained that “Apps like Instagram that rely on touch screens and games like *Grand Theft Auto* that use controllers just won't work well on headsets.” He said, “All of these things are going to have to be reinvented for that market because the user interface, the way you immerse yourself in those devices, is so radically different.”

News sites like *The New York Times* or *Washington Post* may manifest as newspapers that show up at our Metaverse homes' doorstep. Instagram may port us to the Metaverse homes of our friends. Salesforce may become a Metaverse bot that operates as your CRM (Customer Relationship Management (CRM) utilizes technology to help companies improve business relationships, stay connected to customers, streamline processes, and improve profitability) assistant in your Metaverse home office.

The Metaverse is changing how we interact with everything digital. Our relationship with all of the digital conveniences, content, services, and interests will find its way to this future landscape. Coca-Cola had the idea to show up in virtual environments as far back as 2007. Fifteen years later we can confidently say that they were on the right track. And a decade from now we may call them one of the true visionary brands of the Metaverse.