

WPP Metaverse and More Academy Podcast

Season 1, Episode 7

Metaverse 101 - Does it exist?

There is a lot of discussion lately about the metaverse, but does it really exist? Dale Imerman (Group Director Metaverse and Innovation at WPP) is Sara Robertson's (Global VP, Disruption at Xaxis) guest on this episode where he shares the origin of the term, the excitement around the potential, and what needs to be in place to make the metaverse a reality. This discussion puts the listener into the metaverse, explores the possibilities, the social implications, and how it can change people's lives, including an interesting overview of the virtuality continuum.

[Snow Crash by Neal Stephenson](#) [The Metaverse: And How it Will Revolutionize Everything by Matthew Ball](#) [The Virtuality Continuum - Interaction Design Foundation](#)

Thank you for listening! We hope you enjoy this episode.

#stayclassymetaverse #wpp

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00:00:04

Stephan Pretorius: Good day, everyone. My name is Stephan Pretorius, the Chief Technology Officer for WPP, and it is my pleasure today to welcome you to WPP's Metaverse and More Academy podcast, where we'll be discussing a wide range of metaverse and Web3 related topics with experts from the WPP Network and special guests from the industry at large. As we cover both established concepts and track new developments in the space, we hope this series is informational and inspirational. Thank you for coming on the journey with us. Please sit back and enjoy another exciting discussion about the metaverse and more.

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Sara Robertson: Hi, and welcome back to WPP's Metaverse and More Academy. Today we've got Dale Imerman and we are excited to dive into our first Metaverse 101 conversation. I'm Sara Robertson, your host. Dale, how's it going?

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Dale Imerman: Very good. Thank you so much for having me on the podcast, Sara.

00:01:01

Sara Robertson: Yeah, you definitely look like a professional podcaster. I know our listeners don't get the visuals, but you've got a pretty awesome studio setup there.

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Dale Imerman: Thank you. Appreciate it.

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Sara Robertson: So tell me a bit about your background in metaverse.

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Dale Imerman: Okay. Well, great. I mean, my background has always been at the

WPP Metaverse and More Academy Podcast

Season 1, Episode 7

Metaverse 101 - Does it exist?

intersection of creativity and technology, looking at emerging technologies and how they converge. And I think what's really exciting about the metaverse is the concept really comes to life as a result of the convergence of a number of different technologies. And so because I've been really close to augmented reality and 3D work, IoT, cloud computing, etc., when these things started to emerge and mature and come together, the metaverse was sort of the next logical progression or step in what I'm interested in and now in my career.

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Sara Robertson: Wow, that was quite a stack of technologies that does paint a picture leading you towards a metaverse, which is sort of a combination of many, many different technologies. What sorts of things did you do on that path? Are you a creator or are you a techie or are you a storyteller? What's your role?

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Dale Imerman: I've always sort of thought of myself as a bit of a hybrid. So I sit at the intersection of all of those things. I wouldn't call myself a technical person in the sense that I can develop and code, but I understand the fundamentals of software and coding. And so I'm able to speak that language. And at the same time, I'm able to understand strategy as well as creativity. So I've always been in a very unique position where I've almost been the glue that holds all of those different disciplines together, either in a project or an organization.

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Sara Robertson: Awesome. I'm so excited to have you on our team and taking care of this metaverse situation, which needs so much glue. So could we start with what's your take on it? We've already covered virtual worlds and blockchains and things like that, but I'd love to hear from you the hybrid. What is the metaverse?

00:03:33

Dale Imerman: Well, I think one of your previous guests, Luke Hurd, gave me what I thought was the most entertaining description of the metaverse. And it went something along the lines of it's a term that was given to us as punishment because we couldn't agree on extended reality as a term. So I've always really liked that idea. I also try not to get too caught up in a definition because I think the metaverse is really fertile ground for creative transformation at the moment. And when something is so new and I suppose mostly conceptual, trying to put a label on it or trying to shove it into an existing box never really works and doesn't really do the term much justice, right? So I've always been quite contentious around the metaverse as the only person in an organisation with over 100,000 people having the term in my title, people are often shocked when I say it doesn't exist and quite puzzled. Some people are, hooray, finally someone who gets it. But I think everybody has a different idea depending on the perspective from where they come.

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Sara Robertson: Yes. I love that anecdote you gave about extended reality. I do think the word metaverse is a bit sexier and more brand-able than ER, which would be a confusing

WPP Metaverse and More Academy Podcast

Season 1, Episode 7

Metaverse 101 - Does it exist?

acronym. But so many of these labels actually don't come from the creators or the technologists. They come from science fiction writers, right? They're the ones that invent these technologies decades before they actually exist. And you might be old enough to remember when the Internet first became a thing, everyone called it cyberspace. It was like the word and it was in every media language. And it always rubbed me the wrong way. That came from, I believe it was William Gibson, an earlier sci-fi writer, and the word has fallen out of favor by far. I'm kind of hoping metaverse goes the same route and is just like a kitschy thing. But then Mark Zuckerberg really owned it and ran with it. So, yeah, here we are.

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Dale Imerman: I do remember those early days. I remember surfing the web.

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Sara Robertson: Surfing. Nobody has said that in forever.

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Dale Imerman: Yeah. And I mean that...

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Sara Robertson: I wonder what our verb is for the metaverse. We're not surfing the metaverse. We're trolling.

00:06:19

Dale Imerman: Maybe, I think by the end of the session, I'm hoping that we can come up with a term for it. The metaverse verb.

00:06:27

Sara Robertson: Yeah. Coined here. We're metaverse-ing over here. So it exists because it's in your title but it doesn't exist because it's just an imaginary concept. What should we tell our listeners about what it is today.

00:06:45

Dale Imerman: So the way I kind of look at it is if we're going to use the term metaverse, we ought to look at where that term came from. So we know that it came from a science fiction book called Snow Crash by the author Neal Stephenson. And in that book, what he really describes and this certainly isn't verbatim, but from what I recall, it's a four mile strip similar to that of Las Vegas. And at any given point, 1000 people can be there simultaneously in realistic fidelity, indistinguishable from reality.

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Sara Robertson: The eighties are so funny, right? 1000 people at one time was like a big dream.

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Dale Imerman: Yeah, exactly. And the reality right now is that's a big dream today. You know, we see all these headlines. For example, Travis Scott has a concert in Fortnite with 28

WPP Metaverse and More Academy Podcast

Season 1, Episode 7

Metaverse 101 - Does it exist?

million people. That didn't happen exactly that way. What you had there was 28 million people watching a stream in instances made up of 100 people at a time in an extremely low fidelity. And so the reason why I say the metaverse doesn't exist is because technically we don't actually have the capabilities to deliver that simple definition that came from the book. We're unable to put 1000 people into a virtual world at this point at a high definition and have them simultaneously be there. It's just technically right now, not possible. But I think the excitement really comes from the fact that people see the possibility and the inevitability of that. My view is if I'm extremely optimistic, we might see that technical capability in five years. More realistically, in my view, ten years. And if we want to see something like that be adopted, it's probably 15 years. So that's why I kind of believe the metaverse doesn't quite yet exist tangibly. Right now it's more conceptual. But as I said, I think the buzz and the hype and the excitement exists because as we're seeing these different technologies emerge, we're seeing how that could be possible as each of these different technologies are maturing.

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Sara Robertson: So what do you think is the holdup on getting to even the Snow Crash vision? Is it purely because we have slow computers and slow Internet connections. Is it a device problem or have we just not put enough clever software engineers on the problem yet? Or something else.

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Dale Imerman: So I think right now globally, we've probably got the best software engineers and developers trying to solve all of the problems that exist or I don't really look at it as solving the problems, as I look at it as more building out what's needed to make it happen. But it's definitely a combination of a lot of things. So we know that cloud processing is a very big growing space and this idea of real time 3D rendering in the cloud is taking off. We're seeing huge progress in that space, particularly from companies like Epic and NVIDIA, etc.. So that's the first hurdle where we're seeing a lot of advancement. The second hurdle is then of course, connectivity. So 5G is by no means pervasive, definitely not globally. And arguably some people have said to me that they don't even feel 5G may be fast enough for this, which is quite scary because it's pretty fast. Then once you've had information process in the cloud and if you're able to get it at a fast enough speed, do our devices have the capability to process that information and then send back to the cloud? And the answer is no right now, in my view. And then I think the devices themselves from a hardware perspective are also in their early stages, right? Because if you want a fully immersive experience, you're talking about virtual reality. And well, right now virtual reality headsets are fantastic, but they are nowhere near the fidelity we need them to be. We're still solving things like motion sickness, we're still solving basic things like people's eyes are different distances apart from each other.

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Sara Robertson: We covered the the women's headsets problem in a previous episode.

WPP Metaverse and More Academy Podcast

Season 1, Episode 7

Metaverse 101 - Does it exist?

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Dale Imerman: Yeah, totally. And then, of course, as people, we're pretty darn demanding. So we don't want to be tethered, but we also want these things to last a long time. So battery technology also needs to advance. And so it's almost every single building block from a hardware and a software perspective has a little bit of a way to go before they all culminate in making the metaverse the reality that I think we all hope it could be.

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Sara Robertson: I love that explanation, especially in light of the fact that Facebook's metaverse went viral recently. I don't know if you saw the tweet, but someone screenshotted the graphics from Horizon Worlds and said they spent \$10 billion building this metaverse and it's just a blocky little polygon. And maybe a day or two later, Mark came back and posted some renderings of what it will look like, what they're trying to get to. And I'm sure he's feeling the same frustration. There are so many building blocks that need to improve before we can get to that vision. But everyone just looks at what's here now and kind of waves their hand and says, Well, it's not going to work.

00:13:44

Dale Imerman: Yeah, you know, there's a funny story that's told by I think it's the motivational speaker, Tony Robbins. I love him. He talks about being on the first flight that had WiFi. And if I'm not mistaken, it was a flight. It was a Qantas flight. And people get on the flight and the pilot announces, this is the first flight in the world ever with WiFi, brand new experimental. This is how you log on and everybody logged on. And 30 minutes later the Wi-Fi stopped working, which is understandable. But apparently what happened is people lost their toys and threw their toys out. And when the plane landed, people were complaining that Qantas is the worst airline ever. The Wi-Fi didn't work. And basically, within 15 minutes, we as people created this unrealistic expectation of what should be and I suppose we weren't really responsible consumers in that instance. So I do feel for Mark Zuckerberg because people give him a hell of a hard time. But in truth, we probably wouldn't be having, in a discussion or this podcast, or even discussing the topic if it weren't for perhaps a handful of people, including people like Mark Zuckerberg. I'm all for a good trolling. It's entertaining. It's fun. It's a humorous way to potentially shed light on some real issues. So I did participate in that but actually in his defense.

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Sara Robertson: Oh, wait, wait. You participated in the trolling of the graphics?

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Dale Imerman: Well, in defense of Meta because, obviously \$10 billion weren't put into that picture or into Horizon Worlds.

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Sara Robertson: Not fair representations.

WPP Metaverse and More Academy Podcast

Season 1, Episode 7

Metaverse 101 - Does it exist?

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Dale Imerman: Yeah, I'm sure they hire a lot of people. I'm sure a lot of it went into developing hardware.

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Sara Robertson: Cloud infrastructure. Like that's not free.

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Dale Imerman: Yeah, exactly. And so to give the guy a hard time; one of the people who I did kind of push back on was a guy, a CEO of a business that builds virtual worlds on other people's platforms, might I say. And he had just been given, I think, €2.5 million investment. And his comment went like "You know, you spent \$10 billion and this is what you post?". And my response to him was like, "Oh, you've just been given €2.5 million and this is what you post?". You should be focusing on building these virtual worlds instead of heckling leaders in the space. So I really do admire what Meta is doing. I would say in terms of VR, they took Oculus and have really scaled and commercialized it. I love my Oculus Quest two. Do I want it to have better definition and last longer? And could it be better? Absolutely. But when I have people over and they try it out for the first time, they're blown away. They love it and people get lost in it. And I think that's a clear sign that it is definitely immersive. And then I think if going back to what we were saying once all of those building blocks, let's call them, are established and mature and the platform exists, only then can we really unleash creative people onto that to build amazing things. And for me, that's the most exciting part about the metaverse or any aspect of it, or let's call it metaversal related technologies is, the things we don't know people are going to build or use it for. That's really where the excitement is because there is no best practice, right? Everything that's happening right now is happening for the first time ever. So arguably, how can they even be experts on it? It's all really brand new.

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Sara Robertson: We say the same thing in the NFT space. Anyone that claims to be an NFT expert is suspect because it's only been around for four years. I mean, maybe you're an expert, but it changes every single day. And I think metaverse is exactly the same. So that's a pro tip for the listeners. Be wary of people calling themselves experts, potentially. They're experts in emerging technologies. Like Dale, you strike me as someone that's got a long experience in that. But this specific technology is just way too new for anyone to wear that title.

00:18:54

Dale Imerman: Absolutely. And I mean, I'd even go as far as to say the metaverse isn't a technology. Again, it's a concept that's borne out of a group of technologies. At least that's how I see it. And I tried. I try really to still things down to the most simplified version of what they are. So when you scrape away the sizzle and the sugar coating and the PR headlines, what are you kind of left with? If you remove all the jargon words like innovative and scalable. How many companies have you seen where you get to their web page and it's like

WPP Metaverse and More Academy Podcast

Season 1, Episode 7

Metaverse 101 - Does it exist?

we build scalable, innovative, decentralized solutions for enterprise. Literally that means nothing.

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Sara Robertson: Hey, let me take notes for my new agency website. I'm launching after this.

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Dale Imerman: So, you know, saying something like that, actually it's just jargon. It doesn't actually mean anything. You're not highlighting a feature, you're not highlighting a benefit, you're not having an outcome. It's an interesting one that we do call it a technology. But again, we also have to be evangelists of what we believe in and where we believe we're going. And so we have to create a language that everybody can understand so that we can take them along that journey and get them to buy in and get them to become excited about it, get them to be interested because we're bombarded with so much stuff. Everything's fighting for our attention right now. So we do need to create simplified language and simplified examples for people so that they can grasp the concepts most do. Some struggle, and I think this is something; you talk about the early days of the Internet. I think we're we're probably sitting in a 1996 version of the Internet right now.

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Sara Robertson: That was like my favorite year of all time.

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Sara Robertson: The Internet was small. It was only mine. Nobody knew about it. I was on the bus, right. Like it was this explosion was coming and there was an electricity in the air and nobody knew. And it feels exactly the same right now.

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Dale Imerman: Absolutely. You know it. Those early days where things were slow, things were clunky, but you saw the possibility. And I think that's where we are right now. People see the possibility. The challenge is we're impatient, so we want it now and unfortunately we can't. So we're going to see a massive dropoff of people and interest. But the core industry will continue to drive forward and as they make significant endeavours along the way, they will recapture people. And I think it's also one of those things where it creeps up on you kind of like the Internet did, right? You know, one day it's like, Oh my God, it's cyberspace, it's the Internet. Have you tried this? Have you tried that? And now today it's infused in almost every single aspect of our lives and we take it for granted. So I think what's really exciting is that a lot of metaverse aspects are becoming quite pervasive without people knowing today. A lot of people use things like augmented reality unknowingly; they don't even know what AR is, but they're creating content with face filters on platforms like SNAP and Tik Tok and Instagram. And so. We're going to see that happening more and more and more. And then I think one day. We're going to kind of wake up and go, Holy moly, we're in the metaverse.

WPP Metaverse and More Academy Podcast

Season 1, Episode 7

Metaverse 101 - Does it exist?

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Sara Robertson: We're in the metaverse.

00:23:02

Dale Imerman: So I always laugh when people sort of say, Oh, you know, we built the first metaverse this or the first metaverse that or we're in the metaverse now because, well, I look at things quite literally. So it's technically; it's just not possible. But I also understand this. There's room for poetic license and that's okay. But trying to get caught up on a definition is risky because you get into this state of analysis paralysis and then you never really move forward in understanding more or discovering more or perhaps taking part and creating or building this future.

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Sara Robertson: I love it. I want to come back to something you said earlier that I really liked, which was; we're going to need to figure out a common language to be able to onboard a lot of mainstream people into this new metaverse concept, which is like a little bomb you dropped and then moved by because it's such a huge task. And I want to bring it back to that Internet analogy. Imagine trying to onboard people on the Internet. What would you have said back then? Like you can have email or you can call a taxi from your phone. There's just so many varied use cases. It's like you need many, many different messaging channels to help people understand the possibilities. And I don't think metaverse people have wrapped their heads around that yet. They're still trying to sell Snow Crash or trying to sell individual features, but nobody's really crafted a story that's compelling it, I don't think. Have you seen anything that resonates?

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Dale Imerman: I do agree with you there. I haven't seen a lot of stories that have been incredibly compelling in a silver bullet kind of way, something that everybody is going to just get and relate to and understand. There are a lot of great books out there that people are writing. And we're starting to see metaverse in the title of many books by many different authors. And what's interesting is, I suppose like the Internet, it's people will take the topic and break it away into their industry or sector. So we see books talking about augmented workforces. We see terms like the industrial metaverse.

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Sara Robertson: Or metaverse for mental health, that's an emerging sector.

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Dale Imerman: Absolutely. And a very fascinating sector which I believe is actually going to be quite a large realm, not even when the metaverse comes, but leading up to it; if we just look at AR and VR and the role that they're going to play in health and science, I think it's going to be significant as it will be in almost every facet of any industry in the same way that the Internet has done. But I think one commentator for me stands out amongst the rest, and that would be Matthew Ball, and perhaps it's because I can relate to his type of thinking,

WPP Metaverse and More Academy Podcast

Season 1, Episode 7

Metaverse 101 - Does it exist?

which I find quite logical. He looks at the actual underlying technology as opposed to having a conceptual view. And I think you need people who share those different perspectives.

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Sara Robertson: Can you give our listeners a quick summary of who Matthew Ball is?

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Dale Imerman: So Matthew Ball is, I suppose, is someone I would call a metaverse expert.

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Sara Robertson: Ding, ding, ding, ding.

00:27:34

Dale Imerman: He's recently published a book. He wrote an interesting piece of content called The Metaverse Primer, which covered some technical fundamentals that people should consider when talking about the metaverse. He's been in the media a lot recently because the title of his book, Into the Metaverse and How it Will Change Everything, was actually on the cover of Time magazine. So he's clearly got some good pull because I've never seen anyone else have the title of their book on the cover of Time magazine before, which is quite incredible. But he also runs a diversified holding company that does investments. And they have what they call a Metaverse ETF, if I'm not mistaken, which kind of pulls together a whole bunch of different listed companies that are contributing to the creation of the metaverse, whether that be Microsoft, Facebook, NVIDIA, Epic games, etc.. So he's very much in it from a quantifiable perspective as opposed to a subjective perspective. And for me, that's quite important.

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Sara Robertson: Awesome. I will follow up on him and we'll include some links in our podcast description afterwards.

00:29:05

Dale Imerman: Yeah, and hopefully we can get him on the podcast in season two when we have some external guests.

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Sara Robertson: Oh yeah. We'll tag him when we post this on Twitter. So you know he gets excited that he was a subject.

00:29:18

Dale Imerman: Yeah. Yeah.

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Sara Robertson: So we usually try to talk about what the future of our subject looks like. Where is this whole thing going? I feel like that's a loaded question with the metaverse because where we're going is where we imagine we are right now. Kind of we're just hoping to get to the real metaverse. But can you give me some predictions that you have for how

WPP Metaverse and More Academy Podcast

Season 1, Episode 7

Metaverse 101 - Does it exist?

the metaverse might fundamentally change our lives in a way similar to how the Internet did?

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Dale Imerman: Absolutely. So the way I look at it is, WPP, we try and we've tried to kind of segment different elements that we believe are playing a part in the creation of the metaverse right now. And that includes things like virtual worlds, augmented reality, NFT's, blockchain and Web3, VR, etc.. And so if we look at the theme of the metaverse there. Let's frame it in. Where do the opportunities lie? How about that? So for me, I believe there are slow burning opportunities, things that are on the distant horizon, things that are over the horizon, which I would maybe call the metaverse itself. And then there are immediate opportunities, things that we can engage with and use and do now. And whilst they may not be the metaverse, they are what I've been kind of referring to as metaverse aspects or metaverse building blocks. So if we go with an analogy of we're currently paving a road towards this emerald green metaverse, right?

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Sara Robertson: Let's call it a highway, we're paving a super highway into the metaverse.

00:31:24

Dale Imerman: So we're paving a super highway.

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Sara Robertson: I don't know if you remember that. That used to be what we call the Internet, too.

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Dale Imerman: So this is the super duper highway and we're paving a road to the super duper highway. And it's actually a 3D highway. It's not a 2D highway. But if I look down and go, okay, well, what are those? What are those pavers right below our feet now and into the next couple of years? For me, obviously, gaming is a very big space. It's not a new space either. And I think at the core of gaming, we find the core of what's needed for the metaverse. So it's the industry that is pushing real time 3D rendering further than anyone else. It's got established communities, it's got great hardware that's always really pushed the boundaries. I mean, when you look at the latest PlayStations or Xboxes and consoles and things, they typically are some of the most powerful hardware that's available for the price you pay. But for me, I think where we really start getting a taste of the metaverse is augmented reality. And this idea that it is all really powered by the camera or sensors because in order for us to augment the world, we need to be able to sense it. So we need to be able to understand or at least our computers need to be able to understand what is it that's in front of us, what are these objects? Where am I? What time of day is it? How am I engaging with it? And so immediately there, you start seeing the emergence of some of the early technologies like computer vision, machine learning that give us the ability to actually track my face so that I can vomit a rainbow on Snapchat.

WPP Metaverse and More Academy Podcast

Season 1, Episode 7

Metaverse 101 - Does it exist?

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Sara Robertson: Such an important use of so many PhD's time.

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Dale Imerman: Exactly. Or, what's the big trend on the platforms right now that, that funny crying face that, that no matter what expression you pull, you're just sobbing.

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Sara Robertson: I have that one - and applying it to Twilight.

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Dale Imerman: Yeah, exactly. So, there's a whole bunch of technologies that enable us to do that. But the interface through which we experience that currently on our phones is slowly evolving. So it's almost like if you can imagine holding your phone out at arm's length and then slowly bringing it closer to your face. The next iteration is going to be AR eyewear. And so again, not really a new concept. I think the leaders in that realm are Snap with the Snap AR spectacles. Meta is catching up a little bit there in that they launched their partnership with Ray-Ban to create their - I can't remember the actual product name; but it is effectively equal to what Snap created in 2016. Snap's new AR glasses are quite fantastic, but they still have a long way to go. The battery lasts 15 minutes, your field of view is very, very small, the processing power is limited. So the content is very simple, low poly counts or rich. You know, poly are the term for resolution in 3D, if you will. So if we keep moving towards our face and we go closer than the glasses, we start ending up with contact lenses. It's like the next evolution. So there are companies who are building out that technology. There's a company called Mojo Vision who's managed to get a single color LCD screen working on a contact lens, and their next challenges are to - inside a contact lens, have a battery and have connectivity and have sensors.

00:35:44

Sara Robertson: Oh, my God, you're blowing my mind. It's moments like this I feel bad we don't have video for the listeners, but like what? Someone has actually built a functional contact lens prototype?

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Dale Imerman: Yeah, they have. I mean, it's not commercially available. It's as I said, still one color, but it gives you a glimpse still.

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Sara Robertson: That's massive. Like that one color is all it takes to get to two colors and then three colors. But exactly. When you have zero colors, there's nowhere to go.

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Dale Imerman: I mean, in those early days of the Internet, we had 256 colors. And we had Microsoft paint if we wanted to be creative; see how far we've come. And then if you really want your mind blown, the question then is look at what Elon Musk's Neuralink is doing.

WPP Metaverse and More Academy Podcast

Season 1, Episode 7

Metaverse 101 - Does it exist?

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Sara Robertson: Put it in my brain.

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Dale Imerman: So can we just put it in my brain and I don't actually need any physical hardware. It'll just tell my brain what to see and I think this idea of pulling the wool over your eyes could literally be a thing. And that's where it really starts getting interesting. And of course, there's a lot of ethical questions around that. And people naturally go to this dystopic chain of thought. "Who would want to be in VR?". It's escapism and but I like to focus on what are the opportunities and really how can this change people's lives, how can this benefit humanity and that kind of thing. So going back to the question, I think AR is going to be the most immediate opportunity as well as virtual worlds. And virtual worlds, for all intents and purposes, are all games, right? I mean, games have been our virtual worlds for the last 20 or 30 years. They're there. They've just become environments where there's a social element and more people can participate at the same time. So there's that extra layer of engagement which makes it attractive. Kids can meet their friends. If you chat to kids these days and ask them, what is it that you love about things like Roblox or Minecraft, you'll get a whole bunch of different answers. But if you keep drilling down, at least where I have, it always seems to land at the same space. I'm able to do things that adults do that I can't do in the real world. I can drive a car, I can go skydiving or I can do this or I can do that and I can build a house. And these are things they can't do in the real world. So it really sets the imagination free. And I think that's really exciting and a lot of people will argue, oh, okay, but it's not real and kids should be outside and playing in the dirt and they absolutely should be doing that, too. But I think if they're not exposed to new technology, that actually could be a disservice because, well, everyone else is. And so you could be, dare I say, kind of left behind in some sense. We had an event in the US called Stream in May, and Cathy Hackl, who's also a sort of a metaverse expert and has written a number of books... In fact, she commonly goes by the term the godmother of the metaverse, which I love.

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Sara Robertson: She will actually be a guest on this podcast soon.

00:39:45

Dale Imerman: Oh, that's fantastic. She responded to someone in the crowd who kind of pointed those things out and said, "The thing is, when my kids go into VR, to them, that is real". And you can't argue with that. When you have a child and they're playing with their toys and their imagination is running wild, that's real. It's real to them. And so who are we to say it's not real? It's not natural, it's not this evolution. Someone told me once this is basically us trying not to make the same mistakes our parents made with us on our children. And that's just something that every single generation gets kind of passed on. And in doing so, we make our own new mistakes that they then will try and avoid if they were to have children. So I know that's kind of deviating, but I think it's important.

WPP Metaverse and More Academy Podcast

Season 1, Episode 7

Metaverse 101 - Does it exist?

00:40:55

Sara Robertson: I love it. I love it. Touch on the social aspects. It's an important part of this.

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Dale Imerman: Absolutely. I mean. Just two nights ago, I fired up my Oculus, which had been gathering dust for about a month or so because we had some friends over and their kids came and they wanted to use the goggles. And I saw a flight simulator app. And I remember playing Microsoft flight simulator on my 486 computer and it was so slow. I remember we couldn't afford a really fast computer, like a Pentium or something like that so I always I always had to turn my resolution down. The trees look just like blocks of green. My friend could see the fidelity and it was an amazing app. But you kind of sat there with your keyboard or if you were lucky, you had a joystick. And I tell you, it blew my mind. I got into a World War Two fighter plane and I could see my hands wearing leather gloves. I grabbed the wooden rudder and I was flying around shooting the competition. And it was so much fun. I've never actually been immersed in something in the same way and it was a very simple game. It was by no means technically as advanced as Microsoft's flight simulator was. And so to me, it was real and so for 30 minutes, I was a pilot without the risks associated to it. And I think summing that all up, the opportunity that this presents is for people to do things that they ordinarily couldn't or wouldn't or can't afford to. And that's seriously exciting on all levels for me, whether it be entertainment, work and productivity, socio economically, every single realm will be affected by this in different ways and forms. Do I think everybody will be sitting at home with a VR headset on eating intravenously like an episode of Black Mirror? No, I don't think so. At the end of the day, we still are humans and what keeps us human is our ability to create. Craftsmanship is what is uniquely human. It's something that even artificial intelligence can't ever replicate. Technology, for the most part, is very acute whereas our level of craft and intelligence and emotion is extremely broad, and I don't think it's something we can ever replicate digitally with software or hardware or the combination of both. So I don't think we're going off into this dystopic world, but like any tool, whether it be a hammer, it can be used productively to knock a nail into something, to build something and to create or it can be used to break a window. And I think the same goes for the Internet. You have a global society and within that society, you're going to have a blend of good and evil, if you want to call it that and everything in between. The metaverse is going to be no different, because society is going to access it. And just like we have to police the real world and establish some kind of order that we hopefully all agree on in some form of democratic way. We've had to do that on the Internet. Individual platforms going back to Meta have had to do that and so the metaverse is going to be no different, whether you're in a closed experience or whether you're in some kind of utopic, decentralized, interoperable world. At the end of the day, as much as we desire sovereignty when things go wrong, we want recourse and regulation to fix it.

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Sara Robertson: Some people do.

WPP Metaverse and More Academy Podcast

Season 1, Episode 7

Metaverse 101 - Does it exist?

00:45:45

Dale Imerman: Look, you know, I do give the guys in the crypto space a hard time because I think they're the biggest evangelists of sovereignty.

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Sara Robertson: I'm a big fan. Borderline anarchist.

00:45:59

Dale Imerman: The day you're a little overtired and you send some crypto to the wrong wallet and it vanishes into the ether, you'll be wishing you had a regulator that could reverse the transaction. Right? Speak to anyone who's accidentally or been hassled out of some cryptocurrency and lost something significant and I think they would share that view. There's no one you can call. There's no helpline for crypto. You can't call any of the marketplaces and say, "I accidentally sent this to the wrong person. Can you reverse that?". But I can do that with my bank right now. I'm definitely not pro banks and not necessarily pro capitalism or pro anything, but I'm just kind of observing how people are generally and what our needs and our desires are and that we're also human and part of being human at least is making mistakes and errors and trying to fix them.

00:47:10

Sara Robertson: I would love to go deeper on the sovereignty conversation with you at some point. I think it's a topic we haven't covered too much and there's a lot of cultural reasons that people either love or hate that area. But we've been talking for a while, and I want to say this has been such a fascinating conversation and I really appreciate so many of your insights on this. Thank you so much. I would oftentimes segue into some segments here, but I don't I don't think we need any segments like we've really run the gambit here. But I would like to give you an opportunity to maybe answer a question I haven't asked you or address something that you feel needs to be talked about that we haven't hit on yet.

00:48:11

Dale Imerman: I would probably extend some kind of advice to people and I would probably ask people to look into a concept or two to give themselves some context. And so the context would be to look at a concept called the Reality-Virtuality Continuum. Really what that is, is this long scale, let's call it that, and it's not a time based thing, but it's a scale that starts off at the point where we are now in reality. And let's just say going forward on the continuum is right, the very next thing that we hit is augmenting reality; bringing digital objects on to real objects or into the real world and allowing real objects and digital objects to interface and engage with each other. And if you move further along that continuum, you get to virtual reality and eventually, if you go all the way, you come to where I believe the metaverse sits. The really interesting thing, just as an aside, is if you go backwards on the continuum, you get a concept called diminished reality. There were papers written on this in the fifties. So everything actually speaking about right now has been conceptualized by people for many, many years, decades in fact, and arguably longer. And this idea of diminished reality, just for interest's sake, is the ability to say, wear a pair of glasses that are

WPP Metaverse and More Academy Podcast

Season 1, Episode 7

Metaverse 101 - Does it exist?

able to remove real objects from your field of view. So I actually saw an app recently that I would define as diminished reality. It was a solution.

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Sara Robertson: Color Blind app!

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Dale Imerman: It was an app that allowed you to point your camera into a room and it would pick up your walls and your floors. But then what it would do is through your field of view on your device, remove all of your furniture so that your room was empty so that you could actually place other digital furniture in to see it without your furniture there. And so it diminished the reality in order to augment it. And for me, it was just wonderful. It's really, really cool.

00:50:58

Sara Robertson: And what was the experience? As you were talking about The Reality-Virtuality Continuum I was reminded of the term the "uncanny valley". You remember when everyone started talking about that? It's the idea where a human generated or an AI generated face feels a little bit weird because we can sense when something's not quite real. I kind of feel like it's this same thing. Wouldn't you get that uncanny valley feeling looking at your room? Like just the juxtaposition between the two has got to be hard for our brains.

00:51:34

Dale Imerman: Absolutely. And I think when you do it on your mobile device, you obviously see all your things in your peripheral vision. So I suppose people would immerse themselves in it to different degrees, but certainly uncanny, right? I mean, on the Oculus, they recently created an update that allows for something called pass through, so while you're wearing your headset, the camera on the outside of the headset can actually show you your environment, which allows you to move around your real world without walking into things while you're wearing your headset. In the past you've always had to create a little guardian area in which you experience your VR and now your entire home effectively becomes a guardian area, right? You add all your couches and your furniture into this 3D-like map, if you will and you can start putting virtual objects in and around this and within that would be your guardian zone. But you could put up a big screen.

00:52:38

Sara Robertson: So I haven't updated my Oculus yet. This is out right now for everyone that has an Oculus?

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Dale Imerman: Yeah, it is. It is a beta function but definitely worth exploring.

00:52:50

Sara Robertson: Okay. So I still have to paint a little circle in my living room if I want to play Beat Saber?

WPP Metaverse and More Academy Podcast

Season 1, Episode 7

Metaverse 101 - Does it exist?

00:52:54

Dale Imerman: Yeah, you're definitely going to have to do that. The Reality-Virtuality Continuum for me is the best sort of model that exists in my view, that can help us predict, at the very least, the order of how things are going to unfold as we move from a reality to a fully immersed metaverse experience. The advice that I would give to people is probably the same advice I would give to people on any ordinary day when looking at a new opportunity; it's just be human. And what that really means is just be open minded. See how you can harness what is available now and today; what you believe is coming. Understand you have the freedom to create and play a role in how this is shaped going forwards and have fun. Just have fun with it because this is a lot of fun. And I don't mean that in a vomiting rainbows kind of way. I mean, this is fun in that it can help colorblind people see color. It can help children ease their nerves before having a medical procedure. It can help real estate agents do a better job and allow people to experience homes without being there. It can help brands convey information and benefits about their products. It's going to change the way we engage with sport and sporting events and... Something a Snap creator actually said; I'd probably need to dig this up because I love to try and get those things verbatim. She said something like this isn't an opportunity to share your message. What the metaverse is really doing is it's an opportunity - this is from a branding perspective or a marketing perspective. We are, after all, a communications marketing and technology business. And what this really presents is the opportunity to let people experience and tell your story for you in their own ways. And that really stuck with me in a big way.

00:56:09

Sara Robertson: Yeah, it gave me goosebumps just now. It's a wonderful model to look at. I don't have to craft a story. I have to craft an experience and let others tell the story.

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Dale Imerman: Yeah, absolutely. So those would be my two things: understand the Reality-Virtuality Continuum and try and just remain as human as possible. That would be it.

00:56:41

Sara Robertson: I mean, that's great. I'm thrilled you dropped some hot academic alpha on us at the end here with a model we can all go research and read up on. And I have never heard of it before, so thank you so much for sharing that. We'll link it in the podcast description as well for others that are curious and I'm excited to try to wrap my head around the implications of reality being a spectrum.

00:57:09

Dale Imerman: Yeah, yeah, absolutely. We've all had that discussion as kids or teenagers, right? What if we're in a simulation?

00:57:19

Sara Robertson: Oh my God. My six year old asked me that two days ago, and I was like, "Who are you? How could you even conceptualize this?". And then I realized Netflix has a series called The Hollow, animated series about kids that get trapped in virtual reality, but it

WPP Metaverse and More Academy Podcast

Season 1, Episode 7

Metaverse 101 - Does it exist?

feels like real reality. So she's super familiar with the idea of we're all living in a simulation and how far we've come as a society that we could tell stories that complex to humans that small.

00:57:49

Dale Imerman: Yeah, absolutely. It's similar to the discussions we have of, "How do I know my red isn't your blue?"

00:57:58

Sara Robertson: I know. I love that one. Nobody's ever convinced me that I'm not seeing things totally wild.

00:58:04

Dale Imerman: Absolutely. And there are scientific reasons that teach us why that's not possible. But that's a topic for another podcast on color.

00:58:15

Sara Robertson: Well, Dale, you have been such a fun guest. I've loved this conversation. I definitely think we should talk again and go deeper on some of these and if you think of anything afterwards that you think we should share with the listeners, please send it over and we can include it in the links.

00:58:35

Dale Imerman: Yeah, absolutely. I will do that. And if there are any listeners who want to chat to me about any of these topics, they can of course find me on LinkedIn where I'm probably most active.

00:58:47

Sara Robertson: Oh yeah. And I'm also going to follow you on Twitter now that I know you're trolling metaverse CEOs for fun over there.

00:58:56

Dale Imerman: Fantastic. Well, I will give you a follow back. It's been an absolute pleasure.

00:59:00

Sara Robertson: All right. Thank you, everyone, for tuning in. This has been another really fun episode of WPP's Metaverse and More Academy. And remember, stay classy metaverse.

00:59:20

Stephan Pretorius: Thank you for listening to the WPP's Metaverse and More Academy podcast. Don't forget to subscribe so you don't miss out on future episodes. If you'd like to learn more about WPP, the Creative Transformation Company, find us at wpp.com or send us a note to newbusiness@wpp.com. That's it for today. We look forward to seeing you in the metaverse.