WPP Metaverse and More Academy Podcast

Season 1, Episode 11

Season Finale with Cathy Hackl - Adopt a Build Mentality

The Godmother of the Metaverse, Cathy Hackl (Founder and Chief Metaverse Officer at Journey) is our esteemed guest for our season finale hosted by Sara Robertson (Global VP, Disruption at Xaxis) and Dale Imerman (Group Director Metaverse and Innovation at WPP). Cathy encourages us to move on from trying to define the metaverse and instead adopt a builder mentality and set out to build it. We now have a great opportunity for all of us to lead and put on our builder mindset to create the future.

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

#stayclassymetaverse #metaverse #worldbuilding

[Journey](#)

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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 will 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: Hello everyone, and welcome back to another episode of WPP's Metaverse and More Academy podcast. I'm your host Sara Robertson, and my co-host for today is Dale Imerman, who you might remember from our Metaverse 101 episode. Today's episode is exciting and a little bit bittersweet. This is the final episode for season one, so I'm kind of bummed about that but at the same time I'm excited because we have an awesome guest for our grand finale. I couldn't think of a more incredible guest to wrap up the season. I'm so excited to welcome Cathy Hackl, the godmother of the metaverse and Chief Metaverse Officer at Journey.World. What's up, Cathy?

00:01:23
Cathy Hackl: Bibbidi Bobbidi. Boo. I'm here.

00:01:26
Sara Robertson: Welcome to the show. And hey Dale.

00:01:28
Dale Imerman: Hey, guys. Hope everyone is doing well today.

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00:01:32

Sara Robertson: So Cathy is here today to share with us her perspective on the metaverse. We already did a Metaverse 101. So I don't think we need to rehash the definition, but I'm super excited to dive in. Cathy, where should we start?

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Cathy Hackl: Well, you know what I think it's important to mention? I feel like we're past trying to define the metaverse. Not that we've defined it. That's not what I'm saying.

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Sara Robertson: Well, it's almost undefinable.

00:01:58

Cathy Hackl: Right? We're trying to define something that's not here yet, per se. But, you know, I think it's important for listeners to understand, at least for me personally, I am seeking not to define it, but to build it. And I think that I approach everything I'm doing with a builder mentality, and I hope that most of the people that are listening to this approach it with a builder mentality as well.

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Sara Robertson: So what is a builder mentality? How can I have one?

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Cathy Hackl: I think we all build in different ways, right? Those of us that that can code will build in code, others build in strategy, others build in many different ways. You build community. I mean, there's amazing things happening with community as well. So yeah, I think with an openness to trying to build a part of this future that we're creating and just that idea and that concept of building; in world building specifically. And it was interesting. I had a friend drop off his son at school the other day and they had a list of all the after school activities and one of them was 3D world building, digital storytelling, all these sorts of things. You know, there was also chess and other things, but that kind of mentality of you approach this as any kid that's playing Roblox and creating their games. If you approach this as anyone that's building community, that's a builder mentality. And I think we all have it right when we're little and we build with Legos. We're building stuff all the time, even with our food. Don't play with your food, right? We have that builder mentality and I think we lose it along the way. So this is a chance. I think we're at this paradigm shift. It's a chance for people to embrace that, build their mentality again and build in many different ways.

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Sara Robertson: I love that. Would you say that is similar or the same to the creator economy, or does it form part of the creative creator economy?

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Cathy Hackl: It does. I think it does. I think that not everyone sees themselves as creators per se. But I think for such a long time with Web 1.0 and Web 2.0, the idea of being part of this, of the Internet, or building in there in the Internet seemed really daunting. And then tools

got in the way. You could create your own website. You can have your own social presence then creators. And content creators started to create their own content and be their own media companies kind of popped up. And I feel like we're at this moment again where there's this apprehension about the metaverse and Web3 and what am I doing and everything. But there's this moment also of thinking about what is it that you're building, How are you going to build towards this future? And some of the tools are harder to build. I'm not saying everyone's going to go out and build a giant Roblox experience because not everyone can do that. But there's this moment of people reinventing themselves. That's almost what I'm seeing. And especially with a lot of us that work in the industry. I mean, I've seen people leave traditional media companies to go and work for a Web3 startup. There's a whole bunch of people, I call that the exodus into Web3, the Great Departure, because they're starting to leave these roles and kind of explore more of these Web3 and metaverse experiences. So I think that's why it's important for organizations like WPP to have these teams, this metaverse initiative within the organization to explore this because it's going to give the people that work in all the different parts of WPP an opportunity to explore and learn and start to really build those foundations, right? So I think it's an exciting moment and a moment of reinvention for a lot of us, too.

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Sara Robertson: I love that you've expanded the definition of builder beyond just coder. This is something we talk about a lot in the Web3 space, which is anyone can be a builder. And many of the things you listed; community building, strategy building, even artists, there's a lot of areas for people to jump in. If one of our listeners is inspired by this and decided they wanted to become a metaverse builder, but they're not a coder. Where would they start? How do you even begin figuring out what and where to build?

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Cathy Hackl: I think it's going to depend on what their interest is but let's say they don't have coding skills, but they want to build something. They can always work in partnership with someone to build an experience. I'll give you an example. Like, I know very minimal Unity. Unity is a game engine, which I'm sure you've probably mentioned at some point, but I know very minimal Unity. So it's not like I can create all these amazing scenes and experiences, but I work with teams that can create them, but I'm able to voice what I want to see and how I want things to work. So I'll give you an example. Right now I've produced (they haven't launched yet) but I've produced three concerts in Roblox. Right now I'm dressing celebrities in virtual couture, trying to create these fashion moments of impact in virtual spaces. And while I'm not the one necessarily creating all of this, I am the one spearheading what I think it should look like and how I think it should move with the limitations that there are in some of these engines. But I'm there in the trenches with the developers walking through. What can this look like? What could this do? How could it be of impact? How would the dress flow? One of the things I learned is when we did motion capture, we actually didn't really put anything on the hair. So if I was trying to make the hair bounce naturally when the artist

is dancing, I didn't do that. It did not capture that in the real. It's going to be really hard. I would need a lot more time to try to animate that in the virtual space. So we decided, okay, let's not do that. Let's just have a ponytail. It'll be easier to have her have a ponytail, than have to animate her hair. So there's a lot of things and learnings along the way. But I have these because I'm in the trenches with these teams. I'm not letting them just do everything on their own. I'm being a part of the team. So anyone out there that doesn't know how to code, choose what it is that you want to build. Is it something in world building? There's tools that allow you to build without knowing code as well. Is it community? Go out there and figure out what communities need your help. There's plenty of Web3 communities that definitely need people to help. So looking at where it is, is it within your org? Is it with a client that needs help with strategy? So yeah, I mean there's many ways to build and if you want to build, my biggest piece of advice is get in the trenches.

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Sara Robertson: How did you get in the trenches? You just decided one day you wanted to build something and recruited developers or did you fall down the crypto rabbit hole? How did you get here?

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Cathy Hackl: I've had a very long path towards the trenches. I think I've always been in the trenches. I come from a storytelling background, communications. That's where I got my start and then eventually transitioned into tech. So I think. I will be very honest here and I'll be a little personal. The fact that I am a Latina woman that has been in the technology sector for ten years and I am in a great position right now, people respect me, but I've worked hard for every inch of that respect. So I learned a lot along the way. And many times I didn't feel heard. And sometimes my struggles were some of the same struggles that maybe the developers were having being heard by leadership. So I think we both kind of like in parallel when I think about these things, we both learn to communicate and to engage and to work together to create these amazing things that then leadership would pay attention to. So I think I've always been in the trenches. That's just my natural way of being. And I've had to kind of work in the trenches but lead myself out of the trenches at times to be in leadership positions without forgetting what it is to be in the trenches. I do believe that there is something there when you have to be resolved, resourceful, when you have to be scrappy, when you have to fight to be heard, it just it lights a different type of fire in you.

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Sara Robertson: Oh, yeah. I've been a female engineer since the late nineties, so I'm catching all the subtext you're dropping right now. I know what that experience is like. And for better or for worse, you end up having to be 100 times better than all of your peers just so that you can hang in the space. So I get it. How would you recommend someone start conceptualizing the metaverse so they can decide where and how they want to build?

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Cathy Hackl: I think it's all wide open right now. The possibilities are endless in some ways. Granted, there are limitations in the graphics, as we all know. Anyone that goes into Horizon, you're limited, you probably don't have legs, all those sorts of things.

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Sara Robertson: So they left the legs out. It's not that much harder. They don't have to walk. They could just be like little sticks hanging.

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Dale Imerman: They could have given us all the same legs.

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Sara Robertson: Yeah. Or we could all be on Segways. That would have been cool.

00:11:51

Cathy Hackl: Scooters. Oh, my goodness. Scooters in the metaverse. I don't know. I can barely manage scooters in the physical world.

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Sara Robertson: Well, I mean, I'm not very good with light sabers in the real world, but I'm really good in VR.

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Cathy Hackl: There you go. Where do you start? I think you start by thinking, depending on where it is that you want to build. Is this an exploratory type of build? Do you want to play in the decentralized or the centralized space? So by that I mean like, are you going to play inside Sandbox or Decentraland, which are more on the decentralized side? Are you going to play more in the centralized? Are you going to go into Roblox or Fortnite Creative or all these other places? Deciding where do you want to play. Is this exploratory or are you trying to really get an audience? Because if you need eyeballs, then you need to go where the eyeballs are. It really depends on what your goal is. Are you going to do this in public or are you going to do this privately? There's plenty of brands that I work with that are testing privately. Not everything has to be a giant PR announcement of we did X, we were the first to do X in the metaverse. There's plenty of things you can do in private without everyone knowing that it's X brand doing this or testing this. So I think it really depends. There's no right answer. And anyone that says that they have a copy paste approach in my perspective is wrong because everyone's approaching this at a different speed. Crawl, walk, run, everyone has different appetites for risk. I think for me it's sitting down thinking through what makes the most sense and creating some type of timeline with the phases, with a clearer approach on what am I trying to test and learn. We're testing assumptions, really. So what is it that you're trying to test? I would start with that.

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Dale Imerman: Hmm. I think that's a good approach. I kind of see different people coming from very different realms entering into the space where one begins to conceptualize what

the metaverse is or is to you. So we have people coming in from the blockchain or NFT side of things or from the Web3 technology side. But then we also have people who have been working as a 3D modelers or architects who are familiar with the 3D aspects of software. And then of course, you have brands coming in who are simply seeking to engage with people and alter perceptions, etc.. So I suppose going back to this idea of conceptualizing it, I think back to when the Internet was early, a lot of people really struggled to conceptualize that idea of I could send a message, I could type it into this screen and click send and it'll be received, let alone, a video. And I think people really struggle to conceptualize, you know, having a digital twin of themselves and having that represent them in the ether. You know I'd love to hear more about how you believe. Young people perhaps, versus older people adopt this idea of conceptualizing the metaverse?

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Cathy Hackl: I always take the view of my children, I've got three Gen alphas, a 12 year old, 10 year old and a 6 year old. And then I always talk about this for them, what happens in the virtual space is real. There's no divide for them between what happens in the Roblox game, what happens in the physical world in the sense that they feel it the same, like it's the same to them. Like if they get in a fight with their friend in Roblox, they're not having a playdate with that friend for a while because they're upset, right? I think that there's this element that especially I think older generations are like, well, no what happens there is not real. It's real to them, it's very much a part of their lives. And that blurry edge between physical and virtual is getting blurrier by the day. So sometimes this is what I'll say to that, Dale, when we talk about conceptualizing it, I sometimes think that a lot of times the brands that enter the space do so with a brand driven approach. But there is an element there of that's great. I'm glad it's brand driven. It's on message. But is that really what the people that inhabit this space want to see? And the way I've worked with the brands, when we're doing anything in a virtual world especially, we are player first. What do the people that actually inhabit these spaces want to see? What do they think is fun? What is relevant? Instead of being brand driven, it has to be player driven. Because if I think about that, it has to be fun. I feel like sometimes the fun is lost along the way. When we start to think about conceptualizing these things, think about who inhabits the spaces, whether it's a virtual world, whether it's NFT's, whether whatever it is, who is inhabiting those spaces and what do they want to do, what do they find value in, right? What is what does impact mean for them and go from there? Right. Because at the end of the day, I think we're all trying to create anything and make things that have impact and are beautiful. Yes, but if it's always brand driven and I think that is part of the mindset of web, where the brands have been speaking to people from their Twitter account and their Facebook account and their Instagram account, they talk to people, but they're not having a conversation necessarily. And I think that changes when you're creating these worlds and these NFT projects. I always an NFT project is a long term commitment. This shouldn't be a one off.

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Sara Robertson: Even as a holder, it's a long term commitment

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Cathy Hackl: Yeah. So I think that there's something there. Who is that you're really engaging with and what are they like, what don't they like and what do the people that have those spaces want to see that is a value? I always go back to that idea and that concept of value creation. How are you creating value in that space?

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Sara Robertson: I love that we talk a lot about brands finding an authentic entrance into the space, and I think you just described that perfectly. It's kind of like both sides of those have to match together. You need to have a brand driven message that is really driving a player driven experience. And if you can't get those to align, it's going to have a weird connection with the people that are already in that space.

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Dale Imerman: Yeah. I really I like that approach and I like that thinking. And you know, something that came up in one of the previous episodes that we did was that while this is a new realm, it seems to be history repeating itself in a way, because a lot of these - I wouldn't even call them challenges or hurdles - just a lot of these encounters that we're having as we conceptualize the metaverse are very similar to the challenges we had when trying to conceptualize the Internet in the early days, when anything that is new, is foreign to people. So it's not really a question there. It's more so a statement.

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Cathy Hackl: Indeed. I just think that now it's more personal and the more immersive it gets, the more personal it becomes.

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Sara Robertson: It's way more visceral too, right. The internet was awesome when it came out, but it was very technical. This one is very experience driven. I mean, the moment you go into a VR world, you realize this is immersive, even though the graphics suck and it's a little bit choppy, it's totally different than the first time you pulled up a website and you had like blinking banners and things.

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Cathy Hackl: Indeed, it becomes more visceral, more personal. It happens to you. It could happen on a website, but it starts to happen to you on a personal level. So I think there's something to be said there. One of the things that my mind always goes to is the moment of history we're in, where there is something poetic in my perspective that maybe in Web 1.0 and Web 2.0, who was leading innovation? It was probably adult entertainment, right? Adult entertainment was pushing the limits of the tech.

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Sara Robertson: They were the first payment processors, I don't know if people know that, but they made e-commerce on the Internet exist. Thank you. You will go down in history.

Cathy Hackl: So there you go. But I think at this moment in time I feel like it's fashion and art and even architecture that are really pushing the limits here. And I think there's something really poetic there when it comes to thinking about where we are as creatives and the power these technologies give creatives. So I don't know, I'm excited. I'm getting ready to go to New York Fashion Week and I'm just overwhelmed with the amount of creativity and everything that I'm going to encounter there.

Dale Imerman: I mean, on that note with Fashion Week, we've seen digital apparel and the world of fashion put their stake into these different early stage metaverse related technologies. At Cannes we saw Snap team up with Vogue to create virtual try-on exhibitions. More recently I think this week in fact Vogue released a virtual world. I love it. I look at people on TikTok and Snap and even on Instagram use fashion based filters. And we're starting to see virtual try-on emerge in e-Commerce stores. And then, of course, if we look at things like Nike and Artifact, we're starting to see this idea of phygital where we have physical objects.

Sara Robertson: I hope that doesn't stick.

Dale Imerman: Yeah, I hope so too. I always think to myself, when is that going to have sort of some genuine utility. I can get going into a virtual world and dressing my avatar. I can get trying on a piece of fashion virtually in pursuit of ultimately seeing if it's something I want to have as a physical item in the real world. But this idea of having a T-shirt that has this digital layer that people could view. Are people going to be inclined to whip out their mobile phones and see what my digital layer looks like on my physical self? Or is this sort of a premature thing that is waiting for augmented reality sunglasses, for example, to become mainstream?

Sara Robertson: And that's going to be amazing. My clothes could be shooting fire out or something when people are wearing those glasses. I can't wait for that world.

Cathy Hackl: There was an article in GQ that I was quoted in, and most of the people that they interviewed all said like, Oh, your fine, your clothes can be on fire. It's like, why is everyone obsessed?

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Sara Robertson: Because of Hunger Games? It was because when she rode out on the Chariot, everyone was like, Yes, I want to live in the future.

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Cathy Hackl: But, I mean, I do think we are building towards that future where we move away from phones into some type of wearable and, you know, and a lot of the things I do is I remind people the physical world is part of the metaverse. It just hasn't been fully enabled. Right now, it's going to be through your phone and AR. I mean, having worked at Magic Leap myself, I was their enterprise strategist for almost two years and seeing some of the things that were being worked on. I mean, the promise is there. We're not there yet. And whenever Apple comes to market, many of us thought maybe there was some announcement. I know there's a little bit of a hint. I think there was an Easter egg in there but I don't know if it is an Easter egg or not. I think whatever they bring to market will create a moment of, okay, what are we doing? So when I have conversations with the brands that I work with sometimes we'll go down the rabbit hole and say, okay, well, what happens? How do you prepare for that future beyond the phone? You know, it doesn't always happen, but sometimes we'll have those very deep conversations, like if we move into this space where everything is consumed, everything is around you, someone's eyesight and someone's earshot becomes a place where you can engage with them. You should not bombard them. That's not what I'm saying. But that brings up a really interesting point, Dale and Sara, that I wanted to mention. I'm not sure if we if I brought this up during our call, but people sometimes ask me, what keeps me up at night? And many things do. But there is that concept of virtual air rights, that I think a lot of people are not thinking through and could have a massive impact on humans in how we engage with the physical world if there's this digital layer that we can control. So it might be something new for a lot of people.

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Sara Robertson: That concept hasn't been mentioned yet and I feel like it would be worth defining. What are virtual air right rights?

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Cathy Hackl: So if we do move from phones to wearables, the air around you like what you see around you, the space around you becomes a canvas because right now things are in on our TVs, on our phones, on our computers. Like that's where you consume that digital content, in our consoles and stuff like that. But when you move to wearables, the world around you becomes that.

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Sara Robertson: The whole world is a screen.

00:27:16

Cathy Hackl: So who owns the virtual air rights to Buckingham Palace or the area surrounding it? Who owns the virtual air rights to the Martin Luther King Jr memorials?

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Sara Robertson: Wouldn't that be platform dependent?

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Cathy Hackl: It could be, but we don't know yet. We don't know yet. The reason this comes to mind is because I've seen stadiums or the sorts signing off virtual air rights to third party vendors, right? Almost in perpetuity and exclusivity. And I'm like, Do you even understand what you're signing away?

00:28:01
Sara Robertson: But how is that even enforceable? That's unenforceable. Anyone could come up with a new pair of glasses and a new app and fill your stadium with all kinds of stuff and how would you stop it?

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Dale Imerman: Yeah, you can't.

00:28:14
Stephan Pretorius: It's impossible.

00:28:15
Dale Imerman: I've actually thought about this quite a lot because we do have a company here in South Africa who's going around to all the malls trying to get them to sign these agreements in perpetuity to have augmented reality rights in the mall corridors. And we kind of took a view of do we want to get involved in this and ultimately said no, because let's say you've got Nike, who has a store in a mall. How exactly is the mall or a third party going to stop them? And under what legal framework from them putting a QR code on their store window and me scanning it and having a I don't know, a virtual character jump out of the window into the corridor. I just don't think something like that can really be enforced. And then, of course, if we're talking about layers, well, we're not talking about a single layer, right? We're talking about our real world layer. But there could be multiple layers. Let's say we leaned into that concept and someone did have the rights for the New York Yankee Stadium. Is there a free virtual layer that sits there and then maybe a premium virtual layer that you've got to pay to see additional stuff in that layer? For me, it it starts getting extremely complicated. And when things get super complicated, generally they don't they don't amount to something.

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Cathy Hackl: I do think that once we have glasses, doesn't that become a really important question. What you see in front of you and what you hear is going to be of impact to how you engage. I live in D.C., so I have these conversations about what potentially could impact your constituents reality. I'm like, well, many things, including these. So how is it enforceable? I'm not sure. But I do think that companies, brands need to be very careful with these new things that are popping up. Legal teams are probably seeing these things and have absolutely no idea what they're seeing. So just like you're seeing here in the US with

the patent office, I've seen some patents that are overreaching and you're just like obviously the person that approved this had absolutely no idea what they were approving. There are certain patents, but if you're doing something related to 3D assets using augmented reality, you have to use this specific small company system - things like that are just far overreaching. I don't want to go down the rabbit hole but that does concern me. It does concern me is how is it enforceable? You know, we'll have to see.

00:31:08
Sara Robertson: I feel compelled to remind everyone that I am a hardcore decentralist. I believe very strongly in the decentralized future; the ethos of Web3 and all of this virtual air rights is just making alarm bells go off in my brain like it is such a centralized approach, such a big business approach to something that many, many people obsessed with this area see as belonging to all of us and accessible to everyone, and to even think about licensing and imaginary space. It just kind of makes me feel a little bit dirty. I don't know.

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Cathy Hackl: But it's happening. I mean, people are signing these things away and I'm just like, Why would you do that?

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Sara Robertson: Well, it's silly because, you know, I'm going to come in with my anarchist perspective and just build a new app and layer it on top of your stadium because, you know, a message needs to be sent.

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Dale Imerman: And no one would ever.

00:32:10
Sara Robertson: Except the ones that download my app. Right? So yeah try to DMCA that, people.

00:32:19
Dale Imerman: Yeah, well, we may have to just have another episode focusing on exactly this you know, the legalities and how they do impact ownership of virtual layers on the real world. I think it's a very compelling subject. It certainly wouldn't keep me up at night, but it's definitely something worth diving deep into. If you look at that through the context of centralization, through decentralized, that I think becomes something a little bit more real that we can engage around right now, because I think there is this massive drive to decentralization. And Sara, I've shared my views on it with you in the past. Everybody wants their sovereignty until something goes wrong and then they want to regulator that they can call for some kind of recourse generally. What's your stance on it, Cathy? Does the metaverse need to be decentralized? Is this a concept that the crypto, NFT, blockchain industry has kind of shoehorned into the concept of the metaverse, which from what I'm aware of, never had any mention about decentralization?

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Cathy Hackl: Yeah, So I'm of two minds here. I want to see an open, decentralized metaverse. I'm part of Outlier Ventures, and that's one of their main missions. I think that that's what I do want to see. I think it'd be a really good thing. That being said, I have to be a realist in the sense that will it all be open and decentralized? I don't know. Maybe we'll end up with a large portion that is open and decentralized, but there will be some walled gardens that need to remain walled gardens or that companies want to keep as walled gardens.

00:34:20

Sara Robertson: I think you can probably confidently say centralization will still exist in the future. Like there's no way we could destroy all of it. We could destroy much of it.

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Cathy Hackl: I mean, there are reasons. Like, you know, maybe it's medical. I mean, the intelligence community will probably need a centralized approach, right? There are certain things that probably will need to remain in walled gardens for one reason or another. Some might be corporate companies. I feel like maybe some of these corporations are going to have like an open ecosystem within their family of apps or whatever but they're not going to have a truly open and decentralized approach. That being said, I think a lot of us are working towards an open, decentralized metaverse. One question that I do get asked is, do we need to have Web3 to have the metaverse? If you're going to have an open, decentralized approach towards the metaverse, you need Web3 if that's not the case, then possibly not. But I think a lot of us are building towards an open, decentralized metaverse. So what ideals will prevail? We'll have to see. I think people are pretty fed up with a lot of things that have happened in big tech and we want to see something different. I for one would want to see a world where I own my data and I know what my data is doing and I have a choice to know what my data is doing instead of getting a quote unquote, free app in exchange for giving all my data away. So I think that there's a lot to unpack there. Definitely.

00:36:01

Sara Robertson: Cathy we often do a segment on this show called Bullshit Bingo. It's sort of like myth busting, and I want to give you an opportunity to kind of dispel any, bad ideas about the metaverse that you've heard of. Can you think of anything that's worth debunking live right now?

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Cathy Hackl: Well, I think a lot of people have probably said this. It baffles me, the people's understanding of trying to wrap their head around the metaverse. I say the metaverse is not one technology and it's not one single company. That needs to be very clear. I was just at Code Conference and if anyone gets an invitation to go to Code, go because it's an amazing event. But I was just there and Evan Spiegel, the CEO of Snap, was on stage there. He's getting interviewed about augmented reality and then got asked about the metaverse. And

he said something around, you know, we're trying to understand it, but, you know, it's virtual reality. And I'm sitting there in the audience just baffled.

00:37:08

Sara Robertson: You're the CEO of Snap. How could you say that? Sorry.

00:37:13

Cathy Hackl: Maybe there's a reason, maybe his PR team told him to say that.

00:37:17

Sara Robertson: Maybe they're trying to trivialize metaverse into just VR.

00:37:24

Cathy Hackl: If your conception of the metaverse is only VR headsets and virtual reality experiences, that's a very limited approach. That's not what the metaverse means. That's not the metaverse that we're building towards. I think that there's this misconception from all sorts of people, including the CEO of Snap, with this idea in this concept that it's only that. I remember right after Facebook changed their name to Meta. I went to a breakfast. Someone asked me, What do you do? And I said, Oh, I work with metaverse. I'm a Chief Metaverse Officer. And they're like, Oh, you work for Facebook? I'm like, No, I don't.

00:38:05

Sara Robertson: Yeah, we were unhappy about that too. Like, you can't just steal a word and make it your own.

00:38:12

Cathy Hackl: It's not one single company. And when people are like, Oh, I'm so scared that X company is going to own the metaverse. No single company can own the metaverse, just like no single company can own the Internet because it is enabled by many different technologies. There's so many different things. You have to have edge computing and cloud computing and 5G and you need to have AR and VR and all these game engines, all these sorts of layers that I don't think people are thinking of. I would say when everyone says, oh, metaverse equals VR or metaverse equals Meta, I'm like, bullshit. That's obviously not the correct interpretation, although a lot of people do think about that because they read, Ready Player One or they saw the movie.

00:38:57

Dale Imerman: If we do look at a book like Snow Crash and I believe you worked with the author Neil Stephenson at Magic Leap he does define it as an immersive world that is indistinguishable from reality with 1000 people in it and it's four miles similar to the Las Vegas Strip. And whilst he didn't necessarily mention virtual reality, he did speak about how to go into it. You do put on these goggles. So is it fair for some people to sort of interpret that VR as being the true metaverse? Because it stems from the source of the word? I personally don't. But did Evan Spiegel read Snow Crash and maybe that's why?

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Cathy Hackl: If you read Snow Crash, then read Rainbow's End, because Rainbow's End by Vernor Vinge is a completely a different approach. It's more of that real physical world metaverse. But what I will say is I was just with Neil at Code and he was doing this really interesting panel. And even he said, even the company he's built, Lamina1, which he just launched with Peter Vessenes, this is focused on creating an open metaverse. That's their main focus and having him having worked at Magic Leap, he understands that it starts in our phones and stuff and eventually moves on to a wearable and that wearable isn't necessarily VR. So you guys might want to have him on your next season because I feel like his interpretation of what the metaverse is has evolved as well. He wrote this a long time ago, so his definition at that time was a sci-fi definition of something that was in a sci fi novel, right. So that has definitely evolved now that a lot of what he calls the tools are in place to potentially create this future. Even in that conceptualization, I think he himself has evolved and has a lot to say. But Lamina1 and what Peter and Neil are building towards is an open metaverse they want to see, right? So I think that having that foundational conversation with the person that coined the term I think is really important because he himself has evolved in his definition and views of what it is. So maybe someone read Snow Crash or they read Ready Player One or saw the movie and they have a different vision of what this metaverse is.

00:41:33

Sara Robertson: I think it's a great point that decentralization and blockchain never appeared in any of the early canon building around the metaverse, and I don't know exactly when it became a big part of it. I know I believe that the decentralized Web3 world is part of the metaverse. I feel like I already live in the metaverse because I rack my NFT PFP. I hang out on Discord and Spaces and I'm checking Etherscan. So I'm in the metaverse. But how did that happen? It could be worth doing some research into that. Do you, do you know already?

00:42:11

Cathy Hackl: I don't know how it happened. I do think that there are two factions that are getting closer together. I come from an AR VR world and then I got into the crypto Web3 world and I straddle both worlds right now. And what I do have is a sense that the XR people feel like maybe the Web3 people grab the term metaverse. I think that there's a little bit of a tension there of who owns the term or what does the term mean, right? So there is a little bit of tension there. I think it's starting to dissipate a little bit, but there is some tension there with people in the XR space saying the people in the Web3 space took the term metaverse. I felt that in several conferences I went to.

00:43:01

Sara Robertson: I've heard very similar sentiments and I've never gone back to figure out when and how it happened. So I'm going to put that on my to research list and I'll let you know if I can figure out when the flip came.

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Cathy Hackl: I do know Sara, while that was happening and Web3 was thinking about the term metaverse, the XR space was still debating XR and what that means and is the X of variable or does it mean extended?

00:43:25

Sara Robertson: The term XR has not come into favor at all. Like nobody uses that term.

00:43:30

Cathy Hackl: Yeah. So like I feel like in the industry, in the XR industry, we have been debating terms ad nauseum. That's why when metaverse comes along, I'm like, let's not try to define it, seek to build it. Just put on your builder hat, go build.

00:43:47

Dale Imerman: You mentioned earlier that it's not here yet. What do you think would need to happen from your perspective for that moment for you to say the metaverse is here, it's arrived? I've got a double barrel question but that's the first shot.

00:44:13

Cathy Hackl: Well, I think for that greater vision of the metaverse, capital M, it's not here yet. We're building towards it. The rails are being created. What you see right now are proto metaverse's or metaworlds - lowercase m in my perspective. But when you have a truly fully enabled Metaverse capital M you have the physical world being a part of that. You have the virtual worlds and the physical world and they're seamlessly blending together, and you have those layers that you talked about, Dale. You actually create these layers and you can access different layers, right? I don't think that that's there yet because first we're going to need more than 5G. You're going to have to have edge computing, cloud computing levels we've never seen. I mean, the actual wearable that you're going to wear to be able to see some of these things is not here yet. People underestimate how hard it is to put a supercomputer on someone's face. Like this is a very hard task. It's not here yet because while there are many enabling technologies, they're not all working together yet, and there's a lot that needs to be in place for that promise of the Metaverse to truly be here - capital M. When the physical world and the virtual world are fully, fully blended together in that sense. So it's not here yet in that sense. Capital M, Metaverse.

00:45:37

Dale Imerman: If we go to the lowercase m or we say, if I were to ask, what do you believe for businesses, whether they be brands or just companies or anyone; what do you think the most immediate opportunity that the concept of the metaverse offers us today?

00:46:02

Cathy Hackl: It depends on the brand and it depends what they want to do. I mean, it's an opportunity to engage in new ways. It's an opportunity to better understand the newer generations, how they navigate their lives and where they spend their time and what they inhabit. Everyone's starting from a different place, so I don't have a definitive answer for

that, Dale. You know, for some people it'll be virtual worlds, For some other people it will be NFT's, it's going to depend. Sometimes it'll be both virtual worlds with NFT's.

00:46:39

Dale Imerman: My personal views is AR is the most immediate opportunity just because everyone's got a smartphone and it's enabled with AR. But I guess if everybody's got a computer or a tablet they're ready for virtual worlds as well.

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Cathy Hackl: Yeah, I mean AR definitely from a full funnel perspective. It can definitely be a full funnel technology if you're talking about commerce. So it depends.

00:47:10

Sara Robertson: So, Cathy, I'd like to give you an opportunity to maybe address anything we haven't covered today, or possibly give our listeners a little TLDR If there's only one thing they take away from this today, what could it be? Yeah, just an open invitation to give us some more of your wisdom.

00:47:32

Cathy Hackl: I'll leave folks with two things. I think that there is a great opportunity for all of us to build this future. I am not the typical face that you see when you think of technology, but I think it's important for people to hear different voices so they feel welcome and understand that they're welcome to build this future. So I do not take that lightly. And that's one of them. So go put your builder hat on and go build. And then the second one is we're going to need leaders. We're going to need new leaders that have different perspective to lead. My title is Chief Metaverse Officer. I am what's considered the world's first Chief Metaverse officer. I gave myself that title because I wanted to start a conversation about who leads this in organizations and I think we're going to continue to see more people, maybe not with the same title, even though CAA and Telefonica and many different companies now have Chief Metaverse officers but I think we're going to continue to see people that have been in the trenches for a long time rising up to lead these new roles that have an understanding that this is not just a business function, this is not just a marketing function. It includes many different things. So it is an opportunity for people that are listening to this to know that they're going to be able to lead and that we're going to need more leaders in Web3 and metaverse. It's an opportunity to build and create a new future that's more inclusive, God willing, and then also it's an opportunity to lead as well. So this is your time.

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Sara Robertson: I love it. I feel so inspired. Yeah. Thank you so much for joining us, Cathy. This has been really fun.

00:49:08

Cathy Hackl: Thank you for having me. It was a pleasure.

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Dale Imerman: Yeah, Really appreciate having you on. And thank you, Sara, for having both of us.

00:49:16

Sara Robertson: Yeah. So this wraps up this episode of the WPP Metaverse and More Academy podcast, bringing our season one to a close. Yes. Let's clap. This has been absolutely amazing. So much fun. I want to thank all of our listeners for tuning in and showing support. Special thanks to Cathy for joining us today. I hope you guys have enjoyed the episodes this season and we have some really big plans for next season, which may or may not include Neal Stephenson. Just a little bit of alpha for you guys. It's been my absolute privilege and joy to be your host. Make sure that you smash that follow button so we can get our analytics up and, you know, get more funding for season two. I want some fireworks and flamethrowers, if I can get it. And yeah, go ahead and share this podcast. Give us feedback on the Twitter community. Let us know what you think. If you've got any suggestions for cool guests next season, we're open to that too. And yeah, it's really been a ton of fun. And of course, I would like to remind everyone to stay classy metaverse.

00:50:32

Stephan Pretorius: Thank you for listening to the WPP 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.