

Tomorrow, Today 4: In reality, is the metaverse relevant to business?

Oli Barrett

The Metaverse is the buzzword of the moment. But what exactly is it? And what does it mean for business? Today, I am joined by Accenture's Katie Burke and Nick Rosa to find out. Welcome back to Tomorrow, Today.

Katie, Nick, thank you for joining us.

Nick Rosa & Katie Burke

Thank you for having us.

Thank you.

Oli Barrett

Now Katie, how should we start to think about the Metaverse?

Katie Burke

The Metaverse is a massive topic at the moment and it's a big word that probably means a lot of different things. For us, there's a blending of physical and digital that are creating new sources of value and to potentially impact what we do with consumers, how products and services are made and delivered, as well as from an enterprise standpoint, it could actually completely revamp the way you operate your business.

Oli Barrett

Right, what if I said it was an extension of the internet? Is that way off? Is that somewhere in how you think about it?

Katie Burke

For us, it's just an evolution of how the Internet is being used. There's introduction of place. So, this is where a lot of the virtual worlds are coming in, world building and

that kind of stuff. As well as just a sense of ownership that's coming into the Internet, where the digital assets are now something that individuals can own. And I think that's opening up new ways that the Internet is being used and reshaped at the moment.

Oli Barrett

So, the promise is there that this could sort of reconfigure how we all connect with each other. Nick, where are we on this journey? Are we in the foothills? Can we start to point towards real examples?

Nick Rosa

Yeah, there are some very clear examples, valuable examples, for the enterprise right now in the Metaverse. For example, at Accenture, we are using the Metaverse to do onboarding of our new employees. We onboarded more than 150,000 people using a Metaverse platform. And we are also using it to provide effective training like soft skills training on how to provide feedback or how to sell better at Accenture using these kinds of technologies.

Oli Barrett

- So, this is in an immersive environment?

Nick Rosa

- Correct.

Oli Barrett

Potentially remote?

Nick Rosa

Correct. So, we are able not only to connect people and employees that haven't met before because obviously during the pandemic, we've been very disconnected and just staring at 2D screens, but also, we are able to provide effective training that usually normally is done in person on specific location. So not only are we saving time of going to the location, but also saving for example, fuel so it's also sustainable.

Oli Barrett

It's a brilliant example. So, Katie, tell me more about ownership because I'd love your examples of how the Metaverse is helping brands, companies, connect in different ways with their customers.

Katie Burke

I mean ownership is an interesting thing where what we're seeing is the creator economy thriving on top of the NFT layer. And what's so fascinating to me is how brands are actually collaborating with creators, not influencers but creators themselves, to create extensions of their brands in ways that the brand probably would not have done on their own.

Oli Barrett

So, by the way, the NFT, that's the non-fungible token.

Katie Burke

It's a non-fungible token. It's a complicated concept and I do just highly recommend people to really dive in to really understand it, but it is a new world of value that's happening where people are finding value in the creation of new services, new products, they're part of that. And brands are now figuring out how to engage them in new ways in this space, and the creators are owning it and they're making money off of this in addition to the brand making money.

Oli Barrett

So is there a risk there Nick, when a brand dances, if you like, with its customer in a new way, there's some giving up of power there, it is empowering. Any watch outs there?

Nick Rosa

Well, every NFT usually comes with some terms and conditions attached, so you can potentially use it according to the terms and conditions, otherwise it can be revoked. The great thing about this technology is that the issuer of the NFT itself can control the use of the NFT, if the NFT is not used according to the terms and conditions. So, if anybody is going to use an NFT that has been issued, for

example, by one of the biggest brands in luxury in the wrong way, that brand can revoke the use of that NFT, and then the brand is safe.

Oli Barrett

I get very drawn into this Katie so, let's have one more 'for example' of how a brand might start to engage with the Metaverse, something either you've seen, or you think we are about to see.

Katie Burke

I mean as a tangible example, I think that brands are really trying to understand how their physical products transition to this new space. Now sometimes they're testing and learning, and I think that that's exactly where we should all be at the moment, is in this experimentation phase. But I've seen some brands who have put their physical products and given them an NFT to issue authenticity for a luxury handbag, for example. But then I've also seen the flip side of that is digital products created for digital purposes and things like Roblox or games like that, those can actually end up transitioning to real products in the real world.

So, it's convert the convergence, and that's where brands are experimenting and playing. They're going to get some things wrong, but they're going to get some things right and I think learning is where we are in this moment.

Nick Rosa

Just to build on top of that, there are some also interesting use cases that can open up untapped markets for many verticals. Like for example, if you think about Automotive. Right now, the Automotive companies are not taking any money and not making any money from second and third hand markets. But the market is huge. It's massive. So now connecting a physical product with an NFT, for example, an electronic car key that is activated just by an NFT, makes that car connected just to that specific key. So, the next person that is going to buy the car second hand will have to buy the NFT itself. And what you can do is to split a percentage of the revenues of that NFT that will always go to the car manufacturer.

Oli Barrett

Is there a benefit there Nick, to the car owner?

Katie Burke

I think that it just allows you to have more transparency into the history of your car. You don't know the history or trust the history as well. And this allows you to have those transactions.

Oli Barrett

And it plays, doesn't it Katie, to a wider demand for transparency, for understanding where things come from.

Katie Burke

Quality.

Oli Barrett

Right so, is this expensive to participate in for customers, for companies? Is it about VR headsets? Because, are we in danger of creating, you're both shaking your heads now, so I will be corrected. Tell me.

Nick Rosa

Well, the Metaverse is not VR. The Metaverse is not AR. The Metaverse is not just 3D worlds. The Metaverse is a combination of things. It's like a layer of digital content that connects the 3D virtual world with the real world. Okay. And should be accessible from any kind of device. In an ideal world, it should be accessible from mobile phones, from laptops, from VR headset, from AR headsets. This is the ambition.

Oli Barrett

Tell me something. We were told this, weren't we? I'm remembering about Google Glass before our very eyes. It got filed under being a bit too creepy. What's going to be different this time? Nick and Katie.

Katie Burke

Personally, there's still a chance that this is creepy. I think we are still on the hunt

for desirability of all of this. So that is on the big players investing in these spaces to really understand human behaviour.

Nick Rosa

And just to build on top of that. I believe that we are in a very exciting moment in history. It's for the first time that, once this reality of the Metaverse will become available for everybody around the world, it's going to be the first moment in history of humanity that the potential of a career and making eventually some money, will be completely independent by your birthplace. And people will be able to create businesses and products, from where ever they are, and selling them without the need of any manufacturing or supply chain and making a business out of it.

Oli Barrett

And that has big implications for economic inclusion, Katie.

Katie Burke

It does. I mean economic inclusion, I think that we are with some of this technology, especially some of the blockchain technologies, or even the virtual world, we're losing the sense of boundaries. When you take down boundaries, inclusion happens in a bit of a newer way.

Oli Barrett

So how should we think about or rethink about design in the Metaverse? Any watch outs, any other flags that we should be thinking about?

Nick Rosa

The most important thing in the Metaverse is the experience. And the experience provides the value of you being in that specific virtual place. Okay. So, designing with an intent and creating the value of the experience for the users that will go to that specific place is key, because otherwise nobody is going to go there.

Oli Barrett

Got it.

Nick Rosa

And the second thing, obviously, you need to think about the business model and the engagement for the users. Because the Metaverse is a very communal place and a very tribal place. So, you need to understand how to create a mechanics behind the Metaverse, in order to get always footfall and people engaged into that specific place.

Oli Barrett

I definitely want to come back to that. But Katie, what about who is doing the designing? Because we've seen the errors when it's one type of person.

Katie Burke

I mean, I think that we need to look at what's happened in the web up to this day and learn. We do know that it needs to be built by a diverse group of people. And I'm not saying even just in conversations, but it's conversations with us talking about it, but it's those people that are actually creating the products, trying to understand the experiences that people are having.

If you don't have a diverse team, you're not going to have an experience that's meant for a diverse audience. And it's just such an important point that this is where we need to do better. And it's almost part of every conversation that we have. And I think most brands are really excited about the concept of doing this in a new way and starting from a better spot.

Oli Barrett

So, who do you both think is well placed to disrupt the Metaverse? Who are to be the change makers in this space? Is it just going to be the 'Tech Titans' that continue to stride across the face of the Earth?

Nick Rosa

I think that the most fascinating concept of the Metaverse is the fact that it empowers the users. So, if you see some of the most important platforms right now that are that are on the market, they're owned by the people, they're DAO. Which means decentralised

autonomous organisations. They're not governed by a board of directors or by a CEO, but they're governed by the actual people that own the platform, that purchased the piece of land on the platform, and they have voting rights that are equal by the amount of land that they purchase.

Oli Barrett

So Katie, that feels disruptive. What does that mean for the incumbents? For the large organisations?

Katie Burke

It means change. And I mean that in an exciting and obviously it's disruptive as well. But holding the power and the way that they made the money until this point is now going to be something different. When you have the creators and money going towards creator first groups that are going to empower this and that disrupts the business models of the big ones. So, I don't know what they do at the moment other than they have to adjust to the new ways. And I think that they'll do that. I have full confidence that they will.

Oli Barrett

So let me ask you a question. Someone's tuned in, they see the potential to reform to reimagine relationships between their organisation and their clients. What about practical advice? What should they be thinking?

Nick Rosa

It's important to start small. It is important to do the first steps. I mean, we are all exploring. Right now, we are in that phase of the digital primitives I like to say. So, we are at the first stage of the technology where the technology is not 100% mature, but it's important to start experimenting because the transformational use cases will emerge so the companies that will start now will have a tactical and strategic advantage when those transformational use cases will be discovered

because they will have the technical know-how, they will have the strategic know-how, they will have the business know-how, to implement them in the best

way possible. So, start small, start experimenting, gather the know-how and explore this new technology.

Oli Barrett

That is an excellent list. Katie, what should we add?

Katie Burke

I think that there's something around the playfulness of how this is evolving, and we can learn from our kids. That's one piece of advice and then the second is from the blockchain space, go open a crypto wallet, you'll see how advanced it is at the moment, but you'll also see what it unlocks. And when these breakthroughs start to happen and the more adoption goes up from consumer standpoints, I think as a brand if you can understand the space, I think that that's going to give you a bit of a leg up.

Oli Barrett

Yeah and try it.

Katie Burke

Try it.

Oli Barrett

Would be the message I'm hearing loud and clear. I am more than intrigued.

Katie, Nick, thank you so much for joining us.

Nick Rosa & Katie Burke

Thank you.

Thank you for having us.