eLearning Industry

Metaverse And L&D: The Next Frontier In eLearning Or Just Another Fad?

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outline some Metaverse-enabled real-world L&D applications and crystal-ball some futuristic use cases.

What Is the Metaverse?

Just as the term "cyberspace" connotes a concept of an online, interconnected digital world, separate and distinct from the real world, the Metaverse, too, is a digital construct. However, the Metaverse is a "hybrid" digital paradigm in which digital objects are used to represent real people, personas, places, concepts, and situations.

At a very basic level, avid video gamers already experience a version of the Metaverse as they explore their 3D gaming environments using avatars and holographic representations of themselves (their gaming personas/characters). Extending that use case further and into the realm of Learning and Development (L&D) isn't such a stretch of the imagination.

How Will The Metaverse Impact L&D?

L&D is all about opening one's mind to new thoughts and ideas. When combined, the Metaverse and learning make it possible for people to push the boundaries of their physical limitations and immerse themselves in new paradigms of learning.

Without the Metaverse, we'd be restricted to learning only what we can imagine. The Metaverse can help combine the currently practiced–physical classroom, digital self-paced learning, and virtual learning–and bring this into a single platform. Metaverse learners can then experience the real in a digital world, which results in bridging the gap between a virtual and real experience.

Thanks to advances in enabling technologies, such as 5G, Virtual Reality (VR), Augmented Reality (AR), and 3D, we can escape beyond the realm of dragons and goblins. It's now possible to escape into a virtual universe (the Metaverse) and get a better–more immersive and interactive–understanding of real people, places, and events. From science and the arts to medicine and history, the Metaverse takes learning to a whole new level.

enthusiasts who wanted to learn more about the great masters and their masterpieces relied on traditional approaches to glean that knowledge.

The merger of the Metaverse and learning, conjoined with holographic technologies, now allow learners to experience a subject matter as it comes to life. They can even interact with artists and SMEs directly—even though many passed on long ago.

What Will Drive The Adoption Of The Metaverse In L&D?

One of the key drivers of Metaverse-based L&D is likely to be virtual, immersive learning. There's ample evidence that points to the fact that Virtual Reality training is one of the most impactful training modalities in today's learning environment. The world is now a global workplace, where employees cross geographical boundaries (virtually) several times a day to interact with colleagues. Metaverse-based L&D opportunities will, therefore, drive how employers universally train global workforces through seamless experiences.

Another driver is the post-pandemic popularity of hybrid workplaces. Now, with the hybrid workforce more entrenched than before, where learners and trainers aren't colocated, virtual immersive learning has acquired greater importance. Even though time and distance separate hybrid workforces, the joining of the Metaverse and learning will help make real-life, interactive, hands-on, and face-to-face education more accessible to all participants.

Another driver is the need for trainers to deliver better training experiences. In an endeavor to keep remote employees engaged and motivated to training, L&D teams will leverage the Metaverse to deliver greater real-life-like training. And as major tech companies embed the Metaverse into their offerings, that'll further drive learning-centric organizations to adopt it.

What Are The Advantages Of The Metaverse In L&D?

Because it brings virtual, simulated experiences closer to real-life experiences, combining and leveraging the power of the Metaverse and learning holds tremendous potential for L&D.

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2. It offers a safe and more cost-effective alternative for learners to practice and fail while learning.

3. For hybrid learners, the Metaverse will act as a meeting point for people, processes, and situations—across geographies and time zones. Metaverse interactions will help bridge those divides.

4. The intermingling of learning and play will help learners embrace Metaverse-enabled eLearning more readily than they do with VR- or AR-based training.

5. Higher-quality visualization, more immersive content, and better interactivity in the Metaverse will make hybrid employees benefit from learning on demand and learning in the flow of work (LIFOW).

Studies have proven that VR-based training works four times faster, with learners 275% more confident in learning application [1]. With the Metaverse and its related collaborative and immersive training delivery modalities, the advantages to L&D are unlimited. Almost every aspect of L&D will benefit from the Metaverse—from instructional delivery to testing and evaluation, to feedback, and other forms of learner-trainer interaction.

Where Is The eLearning Industry At?

On a comparative scale, today's Metaverse is still at an exploratory stage of what its eLearning capabilities will look like in the next several years. It's likely at a similar level where email was to the internet—compared to today's IM and texting capabilities. However, large technology companies have already launched tools and products, like Microsoft Mesh, that are delivering real-world business applications and are poised to change the eLearning industry.

In the near to short term, we expect organizations to take a "wait, watch, and learn" approach to Metaverse-based eLearning. Some business schools have already launched 100% digital campuses. There'll be trial and error as corporations develop their own Metaverse-enabled responses to learner experiences and expectations. Eventually, over the next few years, as learning and collaboration technologies like Facebook's Oculus and its Horizon Workrooms mature, Metaverse-enabled eLearning will become mainstream.

While there may be other, yet-to-evolve eLearning strategies coming to the foreground, here are some that are immediately set to become mainstream in the Metaverse:

Immersive Learning

- **VR/AR:** Learners will move away from video, audio, and static PPT-based eLearning into more immersive AR/VR-based content.

- **Gamification:** The "engagement" challenge with hybrid learners will be better addressed through Metaverse-based gamified content. Gamified VR and gamified microlearning will be a mainstay.

- **Simulations:** Higher-quality digital and virtualization will lead L&D teams to make greater use of real-life-like simulated content.

- **Interactive learning strategies (SBL/IVBL):** Developers will leverage next-gen learning strategies, including scenario-based learning, interactive videos, and gamified mobile apps.

Social Learning

Social media platforms already have a foothold as an effective eLearning modality. Expect the Metaverse to accentuate and transform social learning by integrating more immersive content and greater interactivity into peer learning platforms.

Learning Ecosystems

By combining the Metaverse and learning, we'll see more adoption of learning hubs, learning and performance support tools, and personalized learning pathways. These approaches will firmly anchor continuous L&D as a bedrock strategy for all learning-centric organizations.

A Futuristic Example Of Training In The Metaverse

Since the Metaverse is in its infancy, the real world is still adapting to it. However, consider an induction program within an organization operating in a hybrid model, with distributed teams across the globe.

- New hires are asked to log in to the Metaverse platform.

- They create their own avatars or holograms.

- The induction program is divided into a daily schedule, with each day offering its own experiences that map to a similar induction initiative conducted in person.

- The platform has options to interact with peers in real time, in a virtual environment that is a representation of the office and its various sections.

- They can go to a room which consists of various resources that they can go through, as part of the self-paced training aspects.

- They can go to breakout rooms and interact, chat, and have discussions—all in a virtual environment with the ability to leave and enter.

- They can use their phones to scan image codes and QR codes to get into virtual tours of the office. They'll do so while consistently maintaining the same profile throughout their interactions with the platforms and associated digital assets.

- They can perform group activities and practice in scenarios that they may face in the actual job and, in the process, they receive feedback from managers.

Other real-world L&D applications from combining the Metaverse and learning might involve virtual project de-briefings so geographically dispersed teams may participate in life-like teachable moments and lessons learned. Other opportunities also present themselves in certification/recertification and continuous upskilling.

Parting Thoughts

Though it has moved way past the "fad" stage, L&D teams are watching the evolution of Metaverse-enabled eLearning closely. The incorporation of cutting-edge technologies such as AR and VR to simulate real-life-like immersive training scenarios in the Metaverse provide a compelling business case for its adoption. And while Metaverse-based eLearning is still in its formative stage, learning-centric organizations must start evaluating its use now, especially for remote and hybrid workforces.

I hope the real-world L&D applications and futuristic use cases mentioned in this article provide you with the requisite insights to consider Metaverse in your eLearning programs and create a new paradigm of learning.

Reference:

[1] How virtual reality is redefining soft skills training

Read More:

- 9 Strategies to Deliver Great Learner Experiences and Learning Experiences in Your L&D Programs
- How to Combat the Learner Engagement Challenge by Creating Immersive Learning Experiences
- 8 Strategies to Integrate Experiential Learning in Workplace Training Programs
- eLearning Strategies to Drive Deliberate Practice and Improve Skills
- Power Triad – Using mLearning, Microlearning, and Gamification to Create Immersive Learning Experiences

Additional Resources:

- How to Engage Your Learners in the Remote Workplace Through Immersive Learning Strategies
- eLearning Trends in 2022 - A Guide for Designing High-Impact L&D Programs for the Hybrid Workforce

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