

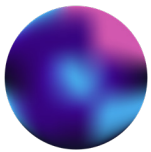


Content moderation & CX in the age of the metaverse

As the global economy makes an extraordinary shift toward the virtual universe, the user experience will become a primary driver of – or obstacle to – success.



Think Human



INTRODUCTION

The evolution of the internet to Web 3.0 has begun, offering hints about what the world can expect: a shift toward a creator economy that offers infinite economic opportunities for individuals, rich social interactions and deeply immersive experiences. And we can expect something else, too: an extraordinary shift in spending from physical objects and experiences to virtual ones.

There's early momentum for the metaverse becoming the focal point of this economic opportunity.

McKinsey characterized the metaverse's "potential to be the next iteration of the internet," and over \$120 billion has already flowed into it in the first half of 2022.

This will usher in disruption. The metaverse will create opportunities for both new kinds of businesses and traditional ones to carve out a bigger piece of the virtual pie. Retail businesses have already begun the seamless blending of worlds in new experiences consumers will increasingly demand. Virtually try on clothes using your proportionally correct avatar? Go ahead.

The coronavirus pandemic accelerated this progress as people became more comfortable with digital platforms and developed bigger appetites for immersive social experiences online.

And the peer-to-peer transactions that will characterize the metaverse are also happening now: for instance, the most popular video game in the US is essentially a community built around user-generated experiences and content. Roblox is a platform for video game creators to build and sell game modifications to other players.

While forward-thinking brands are thinking about how to create innovative experiences to drive new revenue streams in the metaverse, they're mostly overlooking the primary – or even only – driver of revenue: customer experience. And customer safety is a big part of that experience. After all, customers won't participate in and creators won't build for worlds that feel unsafe.

And customer expectations for the metaverse will be high: with the blend of virtual and reality, they're expecting incredibly intuitive experiences – ones that strip away another layer of technology to feel more like the real world, only cooler. Quality won't be the only measure of incredible metaverse experiences. Moderation, curation and community management will become core capabilities for brands building places people want to spend time and money in.

The brands that create safe and intuitive experiences will engage users – and earn the opportunity to sell virtual things for real money.

PRECURSOR BEHAVIORS SHOW DAWNING ACCEPTANCE FOR THE METAVERSE

Some video gaming behaviors preview how the metaverse will act – and how companies will need to react.

In popular multiplayer game Roblox, for instance, users can generate their own content – mods – and allow other gamers to play in these new game experiences. The next step will be allowing creators to monetize that work by selling it to peers within the game.

The creation of new worlds and experiences highlights just how steep the challenge is to create safe experiences: brands have barely begun protecting the walled garden of their experience, where content and user identity are actually relatively simple variables. In the metaverse, where independent creators are building their own experiences within a platform and users are themselves actors in those experiences, brands have to monitor a lot more complexity.

BRANDS MUST THINK AHEAD TO MASS ADOPTION

Micro-communities are already starting to coalesce around the metaverse. These groups of early adopters, who come together over a shared passion for a niche facet of the metaverse, will help build excitement for the technology.

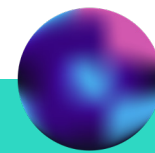
Brands can't count on this enthusiasm to build mass adoption: the majority of users will be less excited about the technology and learning how to use it. They'll take a wait-and-see approach until new experiences are proven to be safe, simple and rewarding, and then flock to the experiences with the best reputations. History shows early critical mass can have lasting impact on success. A very secure and intuitive experience – say Facebook around 2010 – pulls in more than its fair share of traffic.

Companies will need to fulfill a dual function here: creating a user experience that lowers the considerable technical barriers to entry in the metaverse, and policing a theoretically infinite number of user-created spaces – and how people conduct themselves in those spaces.

The very scale of the content and conduct moderation – and AI's lack of readiness to assist in moderating conduct – create an inherently risky situation for brands. People in virtual reality will be represented by avatars in a real-feeling space, and any inappropriate actions will feel more visceral and upsetting.

And it all happens in real time, making it impossible to rely on traditional systems of moderation brands currently employ, like queuing and user flagging.

All these factors will challenge brands trying to create a smooth, safe and pleasant experience that brings customers to their offering.



While the challenges are steep, the metaverse is both a huge opportunity and an inevitable reality staring at brands who don't want to be left behind. If history is a predictor, the brands that get the user experience right will reap outsized rewards.

METaverse OPPORTUNITY IS HUGE IF YOU GET THE CX RIGHT

The sheer newness of the metaverse means adoption is a huge barrier to entry – especially as you try to move past the early loyalists into mass adoption. And you'll be serving both consumer users and creators, who have an entirely different set of complicated needs.

CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE FOR USERS

For most users, the barriers to entry are high. For instance, beyond requiring people to navigate a whole new experience, some spaces require them to have a crypto wallet – something few people have or know how to get.

The old user experience principles still work – removing friction, testing and refining interfaces, providing helpful support – but the metaverse means the expectations for intuitive experiences are higher. People will need to learn both new technologies and new ways of interacting, and consciously or not, they'll be drawn to experiences that replicate aspects of the physical world they're used to.

Early on, users will require support onboarding into your platform and setting up their avatars, for instance, customizing them to look like their real person.

This will require human support. In addition to the normal communication mechanisms like chat, in-person (in-experience) ambassadors will be key to supporting users.

CREATOR EXPERIENCE

Creators, or people or companies that buy land and/or create experiences in the metaverse, have an entirely different set of needs. You need to earn trust that they will be paid for their contributions and their experience will be reasonably easy and positive.

Creators will need

- Experience creating models in 3D environments for both augmented and virtual reality (AR and VR)
- An understanding of NFTs for the creation of virtual objects people can purchase
- Help understanding your consumer users – how to appeal to them with your content and what they will expect from you and how they're likely to act in the new environment

SUCCESS IN THE METaverse WILL HINGE ON TRUST AND SAFETY



The rabid enthusiasts will flock to the metaverse early, willing to take chances in a Wild West experience. But the mass of people will wait for a compelling trigger point – maybe a killer new app with social buzz – and they’ll bounce out and become much harder to engage if the experience isn’t positive. Creators will be more enthusiastic in the face of unknowns but also have more to lose as they’re investing more energy into creating. Right now, most companies are building for the early adopters – not the bread-and-butter consumers or the value-adding creators.

Trust and safety will be key to driving profitable adoption. Users and creators need to trust they’re safe from fraud, theft and other harms, and feel **safe** from hate speech, illegal pornography, harassment and other violations.

Creators have special trust needs:

- Protection for their work product
- NFT copyright protection
- Support for safe transactions as “Play 2 Earn” increases

Users have their own needs:

- Trust in doing business with peers
- Freedom from exposure to inappropriate content
- Protection from harassment and other violating behaviors

MODERATING CONTENT AND CONDUCT

The up-close-and-personal nature of the metaverse demands a higher degree of safety, and providing that is more complicated than just moderating content – it will require a rethinking of the role of content moderators and methods used to augment them. As virtual experiences become more central to our lives

and spending habits, the role of content moderation will become increasingly important to supporting them. Brands with high volumes of user-generated content already struggle to prevent hate speech, child pornography exposure, harassment, misinformation campaigns, fraud and other violations of trust and safety.

Companies haven’t figured out how to stamp out all trust and safety issues without hobbling speed and scale, and there have already been repercussions. Social media brands – whose whole business model is user-generated content – have become the face of moderation failures. That has led to embarrassing political inquiries, the threat of more regulation and consumer boycotts, all of which can impact revenue.

SCALE AND QUALITY CREATE MODERATION CHALLENGES

The volume of content produced is the main issue. AI shows great promise in managing that scale, but it is yet incapable of making the more complex decisions. Many AI and machine learning models have been trained with highly imperfect data, either cheaply crowd-sourced (as inexpertly as you’d expect barely

paid people to perform) or through large data sets mined from places like Reddit and social media. This leads to AI that exhibits low emotional intelligence at best and is hugely biased at worst.

Most companies fill in the AI gaps with large teams of content moderators who review content flagged by AI or users, but even this isn't perfect. Companies tend to focus on the scale of the team needed – how many humans – rather than the quality and fit of the humans and how they're managed. Because people see a high volume of upsetting content, the job is emotionally stressful. The burnout pace and mental health issues that plague moderators create high attrition and lower performance.

Many behavioral science techniques have proven to be helpful in managing mental health, including frequent breaks, showing potentially upsetting video in black and white to create mental distance, and imbuing the job with a sense of purpose. The best moderators think of themselves as first responders creating a safer online world for children and other vulnerable people.

BUILDING FOR THE FUTURE

Gaps in how companies select and manage moderators don't just affect day-to-day operations. The decisions content moderators make are used to train AI and machine learning models. Failing to invest in the right people, especially early on, can be a short-sighted move: better people create better AI, which will be needed to manage the rapid scaling of content to review. The function of content moderation is essential to the revenue engine of the metaverse: consumers. If consumers don't feel safe, they won't come and spend money on the products sold or advertised in the metaverse. **Given the outsized importance the metaverse will play in our lives and economy, it's time to elevate the role of the content moderator.**

First, the role of the content moderator requires a cultural match with the context of the content. For instance, moderators in more religious cultures may not be a good match for moderating dating site content in many Western regions due to deeply ingrained societal norms. There are also traits specific that matter more to different contexts, for instance, the balance of empathy vs. mental toughness. Second, as described above, managing the mental health of moderators is key to optimizing performance.

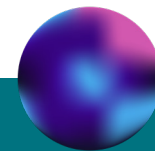
CONDUCT MODERATION POSES THE LARGER CHALLENGE

For all the problems companies have today in keeping up with content moderation today, it's relatively simple compared to conduct moderation: monitoring how people interact with each other.

First, conduct is much more nuanced and less clear-cut than words – and AI models are essentially starting from scratch. Is a person following someone and making animated hand gestures being friendly or harassing? AI has few tools to know right now. It will require data sets and training to build and refine models that can parse conduct. AI models will need good data from trained people who are culturally familiar with a population and an experience (e.g., gaming culture standards), and cultural perceptiveness to train and manage these teams.

Second, the creator economy means there will be so much more conduct (as well as content) to moderate. This will mean massive scaling of resources.

Right now, companies should be focusing on building capacity for the massive surge in humans needed to moderate conduct and how they'll use those surges to train AI to handle ever more nuanced conduct and content review.



PR concerns

Given media interest in the topic, sensational metaverse conduct failures are likely to attract big attention. To mitigate the potential for negative press, brands must build not just capacity, but robust strategies for managing conduct.

Publishing sound standards for conduct and how you'll manage it helps:

- Establish community norms instead of leaving people to decide in a vacuum
- Head off fairness complaints
- Mitigate public failures by providing transparency into standards and management tactics

THE HUMAN PART OF CONTENT AND CONDUCT MODERATION IS DECEPTIVELY COMPLEX

As with content moderation, the scale of moderators needed masks the fact that this is a hard and important job. Think of the role more like customer service: it's high-volume but you must still be selective in the people you hire and how you manage them.

Conduct moderation roles

Conduct moderation ambassadors have different ideal hiring profiles than content moderators – and you need more of them. Why?

- Events like concerts will necessitate surges of ambassador support, as opposed to traditional content moderation, which can spread out over time
- You also need a much higher ratio of humans: closer to 35 to 1
- Conduct moderators – or experience ambassadors – aren't just police; users will expect them to help them navigate the experience

The most mature companies are actually outsourcing most of their content and conduct moderation needs as they invest in grabbing first-in-market benefits. They also understand there's a whole new set of needs that are not yet well understood. BPOs with serious content and conduct moderation offerings are a little ahead of the curve by virtue of a scientific focus on content moderation management and being able to test new ideas across a variety of situations and customers.

Essentially, the mature brands are playing the long game: Elevating the role of conduct moderators is key to creating safe and trustworthy experiences for users, and for training AI to take on more of the work over time.



Happening now: The Sandbox and Snoop Dogg profit in the metaverse

Megastar Snoop Dogg is using the metaverse to extend and profit from his brand. He bought land in The Sandbox, a leading multiverse platform, to create a Snoopverse virtual world using the platform's free tools. The space brings fan engagement to a new level, and the Snoop Dogg brand has already sold out 10,000 computer-personalized NFT Doggies avatars. The experience also sells premium experiences like early access and admission to Snoop's private party.

Snoop Dogg has announced a VR concert experience that will take place in The Sandbox. Fans will be able to participate virtually, show off their Doggies avatars and interact in a fun social experience. With tens of thousands of fans expected to participate, The Sandbox has asked Webhelp to provide conduct moderation services for the concert. Webhelp is building a plan to recruit and engage some super fans already familiar with the universe to serve as content moderators and experience ambassadors, in addition to hiring paid help.

The metaverse is almost here

It's almost impossible to imagine how much – and how quickly – the metaverse will change our lives and economies. It has vast potential to disrupt existing digital monopolies, contribute huge revenue to economies, and help companies test new ideas.

The experience economy has given us hints that companies must invest in consumer experience – and that trust and safety will be huge drivers of that. As money flows toward experiences and away from physical products, companies will recognize experience as a revenue driver. Success will hinge on creating a smooth, positive and fraud-free experience for creators and users.

Content moderation is a big part of that job, with greater scale and more complexity than most companies realize – and conduct moderation will hugely increase that complexity in the real-time metaverse.


Companies building for this future must elevate the role of human moderators who are culturally familiar with audiences and experiences being monitored – not just to create excellent experiences today, but to train AI models to flag content and conduct in preparation for massive scaling in the future.

And it's an exciting future – full of uncertainty and promise and thrilling experiences.

**We're here to help you
on that journey.**

**FIND OUT MORE ABOUT OUR
DIGITAL CONTENT SERVICES HERE.**





Webhelp designs, delivers, and optimizes unforgettable human experiences for today's digital world – creating game-changing customer journeys.

From sales to service, content moderation to credit management, Webhelp is an end-to-end partner across all B2C and B2B customer journeys.

Its 100,000 passionate gamechangers across more than 55 countries thrive on making a difference for the world's most exciting brands.

Webhelp is currently owned by its management and Groupe Bruxelles Lambert (Euronext: GBLB), a leading global investment holding, as of November 2019.



Think Human