Preparing students for metaverse success

By Rebecca Pretorius

Since Facebook changed its name to 'Meta' at the end of October, the concept of the metaverse has been thrust from a science fiction dream into reality. While most people are still trying to understand exactly what the metaverse is, and whether it's something they should take seriously, many young people have already adapted to virtual life. Heading into 2022, the education sector will need to review how it is preparing students for the digital future, and ensure it is keeping up with the kids.

Rebecca Pretorius, Country Manager for Crimson Education South Africa

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From Roblox to Oculus, children as young as 13 are spending an unprecedented amount of time in virtual environments, via digital avatars of themselves. By carefully monitoring their screen time, and teaching them how to spend time in the virtual world responsibly, parents and educators can help students achieve a positive balance between digital literacy and real-world participation.

Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg estimates that it could take five to 10 years before the key features of the metaverse become mainstream. This will prove to be just enough time for high school students to complete matric and pursue a degree that will set them up for success – academically, professionally, and even socially. With this in mind, the education sector is likely to see the following trends emerge:

Quality online high schools

Completely digital high schooling is a logical first step in a more immersive digital environment. While several online schools have popped up locally over the past year, spurred on by lockdown restrictions, greater emphasis will be placed on quality as a means of differentiation. As more families enter the virtual environment, they've begun to understand the importance of engaging, participatory, and collaborative learning experiences. Key considerations include class size, teachers' digital experience, and extracurricular support.

Performance monitoring tech

Covid-19 has taught us to embrace the power of technology and innovative software. Beyond video conferencing and online learning tools that deliver content to a passive audience, we'll see functional tech that supplies data on how students are progressing. For example, sentiment analysis tools review text conversations to evaluate tone and emotions, so teachers can see how students are feeling. Eye movement tracking technology monitors how students are engaging, giving teachers feedback on how best to adapt and improve their lessons.

Degree selection

International universities like New York University and Stanford are already offering metaverse-related courses, and others are likely to follow suit. At the same time, existing degrees may start to incorporate elements of virtual reality into their curricula. Here are some of the top degrees for success in the metaverse:

- **Law:** With people spending time creating digital art, buying property, and even opening businesses in the metaverse, metaverse lawyers will become indispensable in building and upholding a digital legal system.
- **Asset management:** Big companies and financial institutions have their eye on the metaverse. Universities will need to teach students how to manage and invest money in both the real world and the digital one. Digital asset advisors will need to be able to provide suggestions on investments in non-fungible tokens (NFTs), blockchains like Ethereum, or even virtual collectors' items.
- **Software engineering:** Expertise in large-scale system design, networking and data storage, as well as artificial intelligence is crucial to building a seamless virtual experience. While schools will need to start laying the foundations for this knowledge, universities are expected to dedicate an increasing number of resources to the study and development of the metaverse.
- **Art and the humanities:** While the metaverse is powered by ones and zeros, the look and feel of a virtual universe is what really draws the average person in. From metaverse avatar stylists to journalists and Chief Meme Officers, Humanities degree holders will be responsible for bringing the fun to the online world.

Over the past two years, we've seen students embracing the new learning opportunities that opened up to them as a result of increased digital integration. At Crimson, we were excited to see young people using flexible learning schedules and new technology to focus on their passions and areas of interest. Educators and educational institutions can learn from this, to ensure students are being offered the right support and curricula to succeed in the future.

ABOUT REBECCA PRETORIUS

With over 15 years industry experience in digital education and publishing, Country Manager for Crimson Education South Africa, Rebecca Pretorius, has geared her career towards using technology to help learners access their full potential. Pretorius focuses on exposing young ambitious South Africans to international study and networking opportunities, ultimately unlocking their potential in a competitive global arena.
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