

Into the *Metaverse:* *the Augmented Life.*

ALEGREDESIGN

Introduction

A new digital era is on the horizon as the Metaverse evolves from a sci-fi concept into a reality.

2022 is set to be a big year for digital assets and avatar-first launches, with pandemic-induced isolation suddenly redefining our interactions.

The metaverse is disrupting the physical world, forming ethereal and immaterial spaces, and augmented reality is becoming the chosen medium for advertisers. Virtual worlds where people can gather, create, buy and sell, socialize, live and work are becoming the new hangouts. Technology that allows for advanced avatars and virtual teleportation is revolutionizing virtual engagement and the rise of digital possessions and ownership brings about a new direct-to-avatar retail model.

Join us on a journey into the near future, where daily life takes place in the Metaverse.

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The metaverse will cover many aspects of our livelihoods and experiences. Discover the key trends to watch out for in the year ahead.

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Metasociety

Over the next years we'll have the ability to tune our sensory experiences, connect in new ways, and choose which realities to spend our time in.

Digital worlds will become more realistic and fluid, to the point that lives can be lived digitally first if desired. Phygital technologies will bridge the gap between real and virtual, enabling distanced communication and compelling new shared experiences. Brain-computer interfaces will move from lab to early commercialisation, with advances in neurotech and wearable enabling products that add sensory inputs.

#digitalfirstidentities #sensoryaugmentation #phygitalconnections

The MetaHuman by US company Epic Games





IMVU Together Labs

The Augmented 'self'

The next 10 years will see tech companies using their power to facilitate awe-inspiring next-generation experiences and products, enabling new modes of self-expression and community action.

The 2020s will see the rise of the Augmented 'self'. As digital and physical technologies merge, it will be possible to inhabit entirely digital worlds, and supplement physical experiences with new senses and synthetic tactility.

Radical new choices for self-expression will emerge, with digital-first identities allowing people to present themselves exactly as they want to, and opening up a new design and aesthetic playground. The Metaverse bring the possibility to redesign every experience from the ground up, from shopping to creative culture. Advances in phygital tech will bring major benefits for inclusion, enabling digital freedom for people whose physical independence is limited. Skills will be able to be shared digitally, to benefit all.

A Digital Reality that reflects the values of our Physical Lives

The metaverse is offering a chance to create a world that is inclusive, ethical and accessible. The new social platforms are designed to foster social presence and authentic connections.

Today 88% of global consumers believe tech can make the world a better place, and 78% agree it can help create a more equitable society. The race to create virtual worlds that nurture connections, collaborations and discovery is on. *Nowhere* is a new social networking platform that places people in 3D environment ranging from forests to an island in the sky. Jon Morris, CEO, describes the platform as 'the first online event space where you can truly be present, whether feeling the raw energy of a virtual performance or serendipitously vibing with a stranger you just met'.

Meta's *Horizon Worlds* aims to be a 'VR social experience' where explorers play, build and create together and *Microsoft Mesh* uses mixed reality to create interconnected worlds that allow people in different physical locations to be together in real-time via holographic experiences.



Nowhere Platform



Meta's Horizon Worlds

D2A: Direct-to-avatar commerce

The direct-to-avatar commerce, or **D2A**, is an emerging retail model that will unlock new opportunities for brands entering the metaverse, forging deeper connections in digital environments. By designing and selling items that don't exist IRL directly to avatars, D2A commerce allows brands to sidestep supply chains, opening them up to new revenue streams. This evolving, potentially more sustainable format is set to bring in business: by 2022, the in-game skins market will soar to \$50bn.

Powered by companies such as *Bitmoji* and *Genies*, which allow users to create and customise their virtual identities, D2A commerce means brands can debut exclusive digital products via in-game products or collections on platforms like *Roblox* and *Fortnite*. We'll also see an emerging creator economy form, as custom content creators take avatar customisation into their own hands, creating high-demand, digital clothing and accessories to sell to other players across social platforms.



Ready Player Me VR Avatar Hub



Case study

Epic Games' Unreal Engine believes '*digital humans are the future*'. In April 2021, Unreal Engine started offering early access to the **MetaHuman Creator**, which allows real-time creation of photorealistic avatars in minutes. The cloud-based app can replicate intricate details of a person's features, from complexion and wrinkles to broken capillaries and scars.

Why it's interesting

- 🌀 New-age avatars will not only seem hyper-realistic, but also reflect the world's diversity.
- 🌀 Companies are extending safety and anti-harassment policies into the virtual realm, debuting features that will protect avatars' personal space in the metaverse.
- 🌀 With more time spent working, playing and socialising online, how we present and identify ourselves in virtual realms will naturally reflect our social values and beliefs.

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Metatainment

The interaction and digitisation of entertainment will grow, woven into the fabric of our physical environment and providing us with greater access to people and places than ever before.

As we step closer to a new reality of real-world socialising, Gen Alpha is already a step ahead. For young people, the metaverse is a digital playground where they can interact, socialise and build entire worlds.

#digitalexperience #virtualsocialclub #hapticfeedbacks

VOMA The Virtual Online Museum of Arts



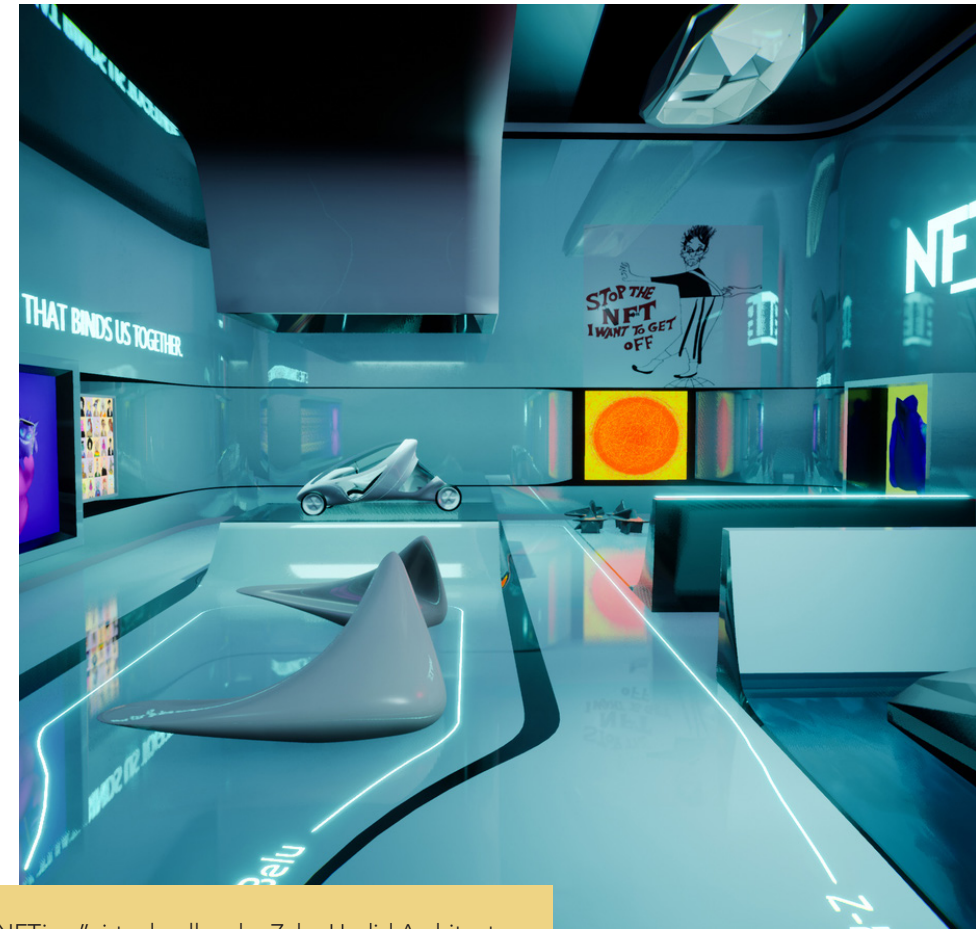
Virtual spaces for limitless interactions

Alongside the rise of fully virtual venues and spaces, extended reality is informing physical spaces, elevating events to limitless interactions and experiences.

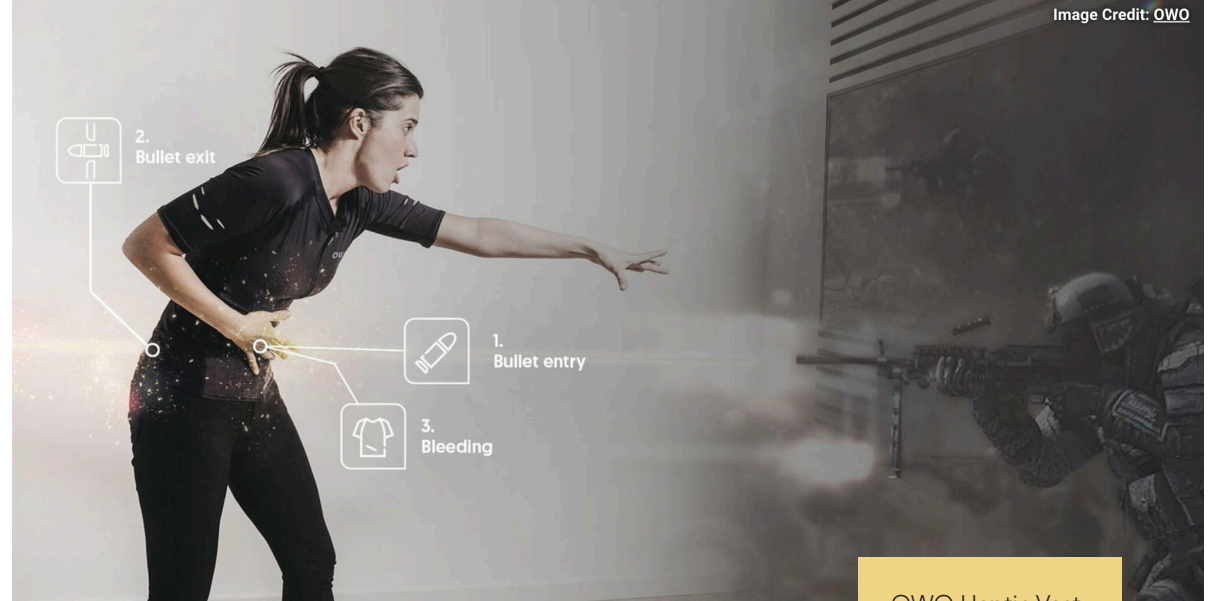
Independent host *Surreal* launches in March 2021 a platform for hybrid events that combines virtual experiences in physical spaces. The platform offers endless possibilities. Acting as a 'digital twin' to the physical environment, *Surreal* allows hosts and audiences to reimagine experiences by integrating liminal interactions and incorporate hyper realistic 3D avatars through a partnership with DNABlock.

In New York City, *High Line Art* and westside cultural institution *The Shed* collaborated to create *The Looking Glass*, an augmented reality installation of virtual sculptures located in the High Line park in July and August 2021. Visitors could use the app to view hidden interactive artwork.

For socialites looking to mingle between realities, digital platform *Dezeen* opened a virtual social club in April 2021 - leading creatives met in the virtual rooftop bar for a panel discussion themed around the metaverse and design.



"NFTism" virtual gallery by Zaha Hadid Architects



OWO Haptic Vest

Physical touch into the virtual realm

Introducing the physical dimension of touch into the virtual gaming world, garments and wearable devices use software, hardware, and sensors to recreate physical sensations.

The OWO Vest uses haptic feedback to allow players to feel the sensations encountered during gameplay. With over 30 different physical perceptions in its current library – including wind, a gunshot, a dagger wound, and a hug – the wearable garment lets players feel the game on the surface of their skin. In addition, to maintain full control of the technology, players can use the OWO app to regulate and personalise the intensity of the experience.

Available in six sizes, all weighing less than 800grams, the OWO vest is aiming to capture the imagination of gamers. As companies set up shop in the Metaverse Market, new technologies will help brands create more captivating activations in the digital realm.



Royal Shakespeare company Virtual Show

Creative customization for the gaming experience

Creativity is increasingly informed and powered by technology, setting the stage for the next era of digital platforms and creative influence. **Digital tools have activated an entirely new world of creativity, where creations can transcend physical limitations.** For generation Alpha and generation Z, customization and creation are intricate parts of their gaming experience.

IMVU is a 'next-generation social network' that revolves around creativity.

The platform calls creativity 'the new status symbol' for the next digital era - dethroning influence and income. When users come onto the network, making money is not the most important thing for them. It's about being recognized for their original creations. **Online habits are evolving. In this new digital landscape people are not passive consumers, but creative agents crafting their self-expression and curating their virtual identity.**



IMVU social network



Case study

The *Kid A Mnesia Exhibition* is a virtual world from British band Radiohead, created to promote the joint reissue of its albums *Kid A* and *Amnesiac*. The platform and experience sits somewhere between gaming and a virtual art show. *Kid A Mnesia* is inhabited by strange, unworldly creatures. Users can navigate this realm, experiencing art, visuals and music derived from the band's archive of original artwork and album motifs.

Why it's interesting



Virtual socialising is not a temporary stop-gap until real-life socialising is possible again. For the next generation, the metaverse is the future of connections and brands must think of these spaces as integral as real-worlds regions.



Brand managers should see gaming worlds as an untapped resource instead of a new frontier to be conquered. Gamification and digital twins allow consumers to interact with your brand in an omnipresent space.

01

Metaretail

The beauty of the metaverse is combining virtual worlds and physical stores together through a constant interaction between spaces.

The metaverse is currently valued as a trillion-dollar opportunity, despite its lack of virtual infrastructure. But disruptor and established brands alike are already using VR, XR and AR solutions to drive sales, redefine products and create space for novel marketing, brand education and alternative investments.

#metaeconomy #virtualstores #retailgaming



The Burberry Ginza Virtual Pop-up

A blend between brands and customers in a proprietary digital space

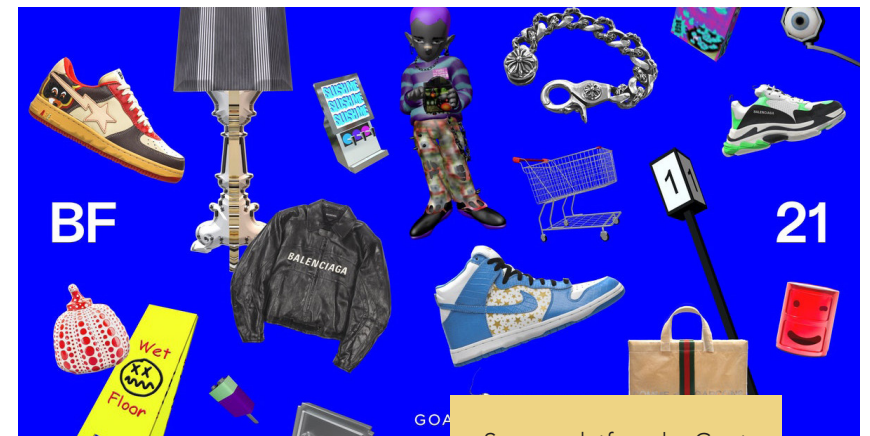
Two-way conversations and interactions between brands and their customers are helping to inform and improve not just customer service, but also product development and marketing campaigns.

For Goat, a retailer of cult fashion, sneakers, jewellery and home furnishings, the creation of a proprietary digital space for Black Friday offered instant insight into which items, design cues or trends are resonating with shoppers.

Called *Spaces*, Goat encouraged Black Friday shoppers to curate digital moodboards of their favourite or most wanted items on the platform, within three purpose-built virtual realms – a Convenience Store, an Outlandish Garden and a Gothic Cathedral. Based on their curated digital spaces, Goat awarded a number of shoppers with their dream edit or credit to spend on the platform, but the curation provided by its own customers is likely to have been valuable to Goat buyers and merchandisers in understanding the motivations of its audience.



Vault concept store for NFTs by Gucci



Spaces platform by Goat

Virtual stores promote familiarity and efficiency



Virtual store by Burberry



In the future, every single factory and every single building will have a digital twin that simulate and track the physical version of it.

The beauty of the metaverse lies in this combination between virtual worlds and physical stores.

Tech companies are making it easier to create digital twins.

In November 2021, Amazon unveiled the *AWS IoT TwinMaker*, a service that conveniently and speedily generates digital duplicates of real-world systems for businesses. Microsoft's Azure Digital Twins allows for the creation of buildings, infrastructure, and even entire cities, with the aim of driving 'better products, optimized operations, reduced costs and breakthrough customer experiences'.

Retailers are also opening digital twins of existing stores to promote familiarity and more natural navigation for shoppers. In March 2021, *Burberry* launched a digital replica of its flagship store in Ginza, Tokyo.

The digital showroom enables wholesale buyers to experience new collections each season without having to fly in to see products in person, reducing the carbon footprint of the business and speeding the buying process.

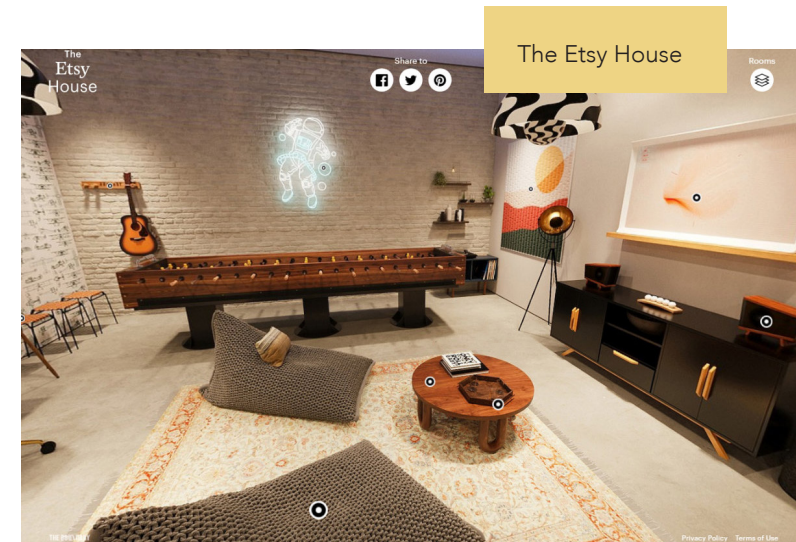
The retail-gaming opportunity

Retailers are rewriting the industry playbook with engaging digital storefronts in the metaverse.

With game spaces such as *Fortnite* and *Roblox* thriving, disruptors brands are exploring how to enter the metaverse, recognising the benefits that will come from engaging and nurturing a next-generation tribe of digital-first fans.

Tuning into the retail-gaming opportunity, *Vans* has launched a new immersive 3D environment within video game *Roblox*. The skatepark-inspired space will live indefinitely within the *Roblox* Metaverse, allowing players to continuously interact with *Vans* through this virtual environment.

Also *Etsy* is moving to the metaverse. The online marketplace is enticing shoppers through an interactive augmented reality show home. Called *The Etsy House*, the digital experience allows shoppers to walk through the space virtually, explore and purchase products available on the platform.





Case study

Recently rolled out on Roblox, sports company Nike has created a free-to-access digital HQ inspired by its real-life working environments to give its fans a more informative experience and understanding of its operations. *Nikeland's* wider ambition is to democratise access to the world of sport and turn sport and play into a lifestyle. Through its metaverse setting, Nike shows how game play and experiences can inspire real-life physical activity.

Why it's interesting



Metaverse is not different reality, but a meta-economy. It breaks the rules of retail and sell into something that can come in many different ways.



Digital twin stores are innovating the retail sector, with the promise to solve logistical issues for the real-world and replicate the in-person shopping experience.



Brands are redesigning their online experiences to be less damaging to the environment. Sustainable practices in the virtual realm will be more important than ever.

01

Metawork

With teleportation, holograms and roaming avatars the future of work has arrived.

Metaverse technology promises to produce imaginative and creative new ways for people to collaborate and work online.

Hybrid working will no longer be about the home-workplace split but about achieving equilibrium between the virtual and the physical world. Those organisations which will flourish in the future will be those which are able to engage a new generation of talented transdisciplinary metaverse professionals by focusing on the human dimension as much as the technological, building purposeful innovation cultures based on a more humanised and conscious approach to work.

#virtualoffice #hybridworkplace #metaverseworkforce



Arthur, immersive platform for the world's top enterprises

Building branded virtual workspaces

By connecting through virtual reality, coworkers can collaborate and create together in the same virtual workspace. A worker can meet teammates across the table and transform his/her home office into a remote meeting room.

Microsoft is set to launch Mesh for Microsoft Teams in 2022, enabling mixed reality for users, with the option to attend meetings as customized avatars and collaborate on projects through shared holographic experiences. The platform also gives companies the option to build immersive virtual environments and Microsoft describes the feature as a 'gateway to the metaverse'.



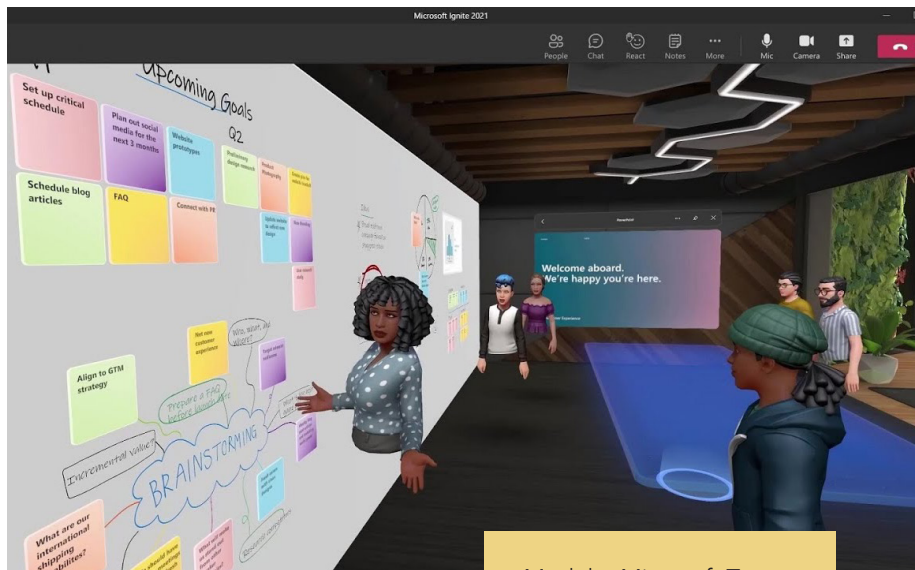
Horizon Workrooms by Meta



Less need for hardware

Space is not an issue in the metaverse.

Virtual workspaces can be expanded easily and there's less need for hardware. Working in the metaverse will require only digital whiteboards and digital workstations, and 3D avatars are free and able to meet "face to face" without the need of conferencing equipment.



Mesh by Microsoft Teams

Technology has advanced faster than most realize, and it's going to play a big role in the metaverse. For example, the use of augmented and artificial intelligence in meeting rooms. When a worker join the meeting, for example, he would be able to see all the profiles involved, his past interactions with them, and information about everyone joining the call.

Metaverse recruits

Jobs that previously required in-person interaction will suddenly have virtual options, meaning that freelancing and remote work will expand. Partnering with external tech and games companies has been the trend of the past year; now brands are seeking out talent of their own to accelerate the technological offerings of the metaverse.

From virtual material designers to creatives across the board, companies are hiring for a metaverse workforce. The metaverse virtually recreates pretty much all aspects of life, and recruitment is not different.

In the coming years, companies of all kinds are increasingly going to be re-orienting towards a hybrid model of virtual and physical work, production, commerce and communications. The dual forces of converging technologies and emerging consumer behaviors in virtual places makes the cultivation of a 'virtual pillar' critical for many, if not all, businesses.





Case study

Accenture collaborated with Microsoft and Altspace VR to create the *Nth Floor*. The Nth Floor is a mixed reality experience that can be used to bring a geographically distributed workforce together for coffee meetups, meetings, training sessions and everything in between. Workers can literally (or virtually) enter the space by putting on virtual reality (VR) headsets. Within this virtual space, they can play videos or even conduct presentations.

Why it's interesting



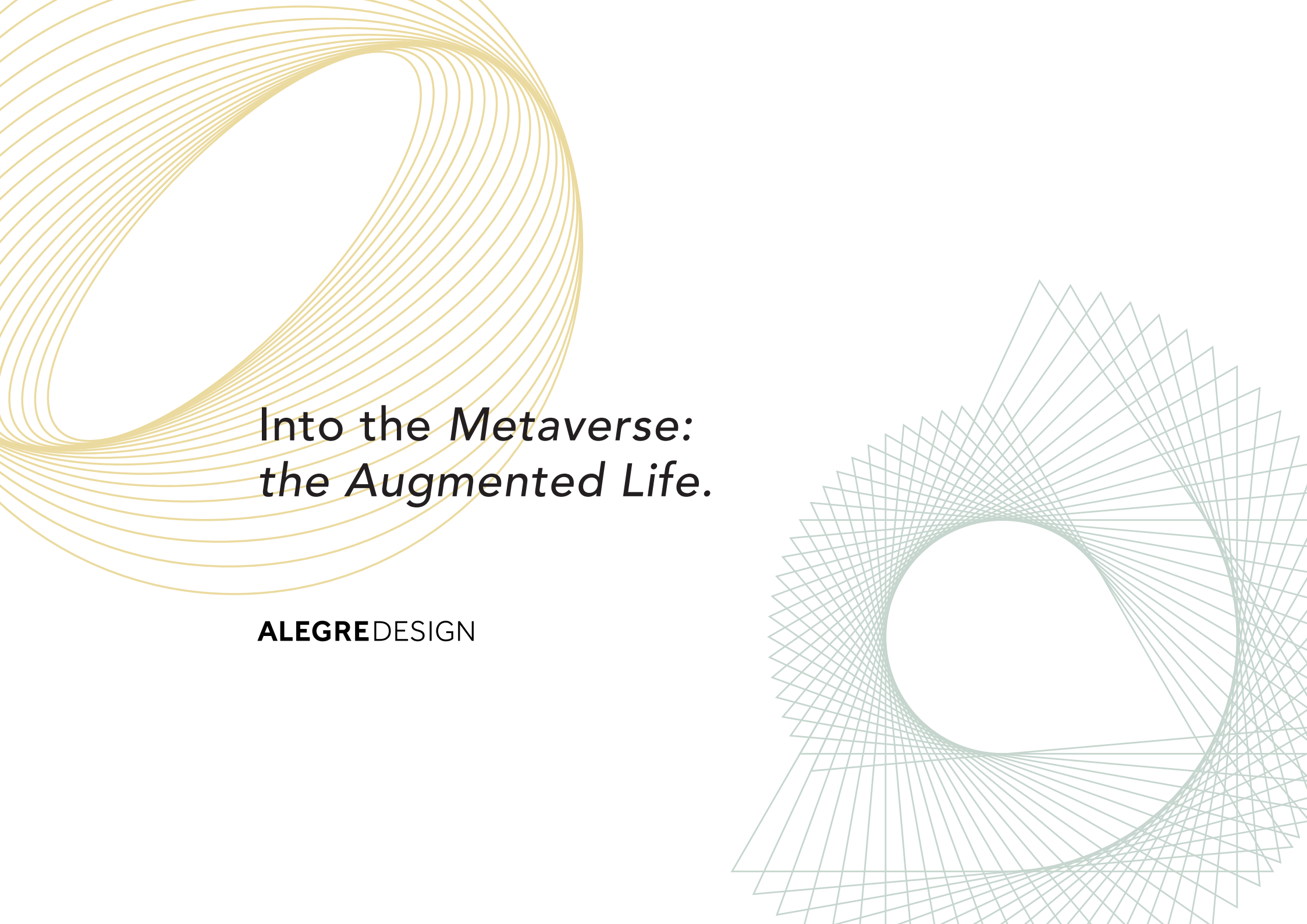
The future of work will foster a hybrid setup for many, leading with virtual workspaces that generate new forms of creativity, collaboration and immersion.



Big enterprises will shift more of their business operations into these metaverses, maintaining internal virtual environments that allow employees to collaborate with one another from anywhere in the world.



Companies are starting to use platforms in the metaverse to hire hyper-specialized people and find new talent for niche projects, without geographical limits.



Into the *Metaverse:* *the Augmented Life.*

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