



# Through the Looking Glass: Touchscreen Access to the Metaverse

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The recent expansion of the metaverse has sparked innovators' imaginations. This virtual 3D world is well known to gamers who don their VR goggles and play, totally immersed in the environment created from a developer's imagination. And now, Facebook's recent evolution into Meta will offer people the ability to socialize, collaborate and interact in other ways inside a virtual world.

Advancing technology, increased investments and consumer adoption are all aligning to drive the expansion of the metaverse. However, it begs the question: how could a retail metaverse become a new channel for doing business?:

## Imagining the Retail Metaverse

For years, tech visionaries have proposed virtual experiences for consumers that could help to drive revenues. A prime example is the virtual dressing room in apparel retail. Consumers wouldn't have to go to a brick-and-mortar store to try on clothes. Instead, they could enter the metaverse and their avatar, representing their height, weight and dimensions, could browse a catalog of available items, try them on and see how they look. Moreover, advanced solutions could even allow consumers to "feel" the fabric and interact with a virtual sales assistant if they need more assistance.

Other retailers could find the advantages of allowing consumers to see, feel and try products virtually. For example, athletes could try sports equipment, commuters could virtually test drive vehicles and engaged couples could virtually design their rings. Additionally, pure-play ecommerce businesses could bring their products to consumers in “tangible” ways. Moreover, most brick-and-mortar retailers only have about one-quarter of their available inventory in stores at any given time. However, in the metaverse, consumers can browse and try any item in stock.

The metaverse also has the potential to allow other types of businesses to create new revenue streams, such as virtual trips hosted by travel agency tour guides or museum tours presented by a virtual docent.

## How to Bring the Retail Metaverse to Life

A major hurdle to cross is how to make the retail metaverse practical for all consumers. While some people will embrace using the headset, controllers and sensors to access the virtual world, others won't. However, nearly anyone would be willing to use a touchscreen.

A large touchscreen can allow people to simply touch or scroll to see the merchandise they are interested in, swipe to ignore items, and zoom in or out depending on the level of detail they want. Their avatar can still interact with items in the metaverse, and handheld controllers and haptics can allow consumers to feel or experience items virtually. Additionally, if the screen is large enough, it can nearly match the experience of wearing VR goggles as the rest of the world seems to fall away.

This strategy has advantages for stores that may be reluctant to go all in with investments into the metaverse — and it would continue to give consumers the choice between the physical and virtual. It can also solidify brick-and-mortar businesses' continued relevance in an increasingly digital world. Consumers can use a touchscreen interface to “go through the looking glass” into the metaverse from within a physical store, and still have the assistance of an actual sales associate to help optimize their shopping journeys.

## The Final Piece of the Puzzle

One more element is necessary to bring the retail metaverse to life: talented and creative software developers. Whether envisioning a retail metaverse that requires consumers to wear goggles or interact with a touchscreen, developers must build the functionality, features and user experiences of the virtual world.

The hardware, computing power, cloud services, edge AI and other necessary elements of a retail metaverse solution are available to leverage today. The hardware canvas is prepared, waiting for artists with development skills to translate physical retail into virtual shopping experiences.

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