

# HERO OR HYPE?

How new technology  
improves storytelling

Shelton Fleming's  
guide to the TSUNAMI  
OF NEW TECH in the  
events industry

futurehack

| *Shelton Fleming*



New tech comes at marketers on a daily basis, constantly challenging our assumptions and perceptions on effective audience engagement. In this maelstrom of possibilities, how do you work out what's just hype? And how do you identify the golden opportunities, really worth your investment? For example, consider the fact that Meta has spent \$36 billion building the metaverse and plans to invest many more billions in it. So far, it has little to show for the investment. As a marketer, will you follow suit and invest in the metaverse? Or is there another next big thing, just around the corner?



At Shelton Fleming, we constantly explore and evaluate the latest innovations that will impact on the creative use of tech in events. And the practical implications those innovations have. Because for us, new tech is all about the art of storytelling that involves the audience. It's never about tech for techs sake. It's always about exploring how new tech can enrich the story and experiences you deliver. It's about imbuing those experiences with unprecedented nuance, meaning, and significance. And it's about sharing how new tech can inspire and engage your audiences in unexpected and enthralling ways.

## New tech is all about the art of storytelling that involves the audience

The main obstruction to embracing new tech is fear. Or more often, apprehension and confusion. The current popular perception of the metaverse is a perfect example. How do we enter it? And if we do, will we get out? Joking aside, first forays into new tech can seem daunting and fraught with danger. Our job is to guide you through the creative use of new tech in events, helping to sort the hero tech from the hype and the hearsay. To show that with the right knowledge and expertise, you can make informed decisions that will take your experiences, and your outcomes, to a new level.



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# Orchestrating and amplifying the power of new tech

Timing is critical. Once you've identified new tech that seems right for you, you'll need to make sure you implement it at the right time. Embrace it too early, and you could be left high and dry without a supporting ecosystem or invested audience.

When we distilled our thoughts on the best time to take the plunge, we hit on the theory of fusionomics. Fusionomics identifies the optimum circumstance in which to launch new tech. It tells us that assessing the viability and relevance of new tech in an experiential context is all about the triangulation or 'fusion' of the three forces of availability, creativity, and cultural acceptance.

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## Fusionomics diagram



In this scenario, the metaverse will need to deliver user-friendly experiences that have widespread availability. The market will need to harness creativity to develop the tools, resources, and skills to nurture amazing experiences. And there will need to be an appetite for changes in behaviour, with the existential forces driving behavioural shifts fully in play.

We know that social virtual reality and the metaverse can seem like confused and confusing places. But we're convinced that they have endless possibilities. We believe that social virtual reality and the metaverse will continue to become more available, more creative, more acceptable, and more desirable. They'll follow the basics of fusionomics to change the way we live, work, and play. Because the metaverse won't – and can't – be a digital re-creation of normal social interaction. Rather it must augment and lift expectations to deliver genuinely original and valuable experiences.



## The metaverse and social virtual reality

In futurism and science fiction, the classic definition of the metaverse is “a hypothetical iteration of the Internet as a single, universal, and immersive virtual world that is facilitated by the use of virtual reality and augmented reality headsets”. In colloquial use, a metaverse is a network of 3D virtual worlds focused on social connection.

Social virtual reality (Social VR) is a simulated environment where VR users can meet, interact, and participate in shared activities like watching movies, playing games, attending concerts, or collaborating at work.



# The first foundation of fusionomics is widespread availability



To enable mass adoption, the delights of the metaverse need to be available to your desired audience. And that means the essentials of hardware and software must be reasonably priced and easy to purchase and service.

Basic access to the metaverse doesn't require a huge amount of technical equipment. You can access the metaverse with a smartphone, although you may have limited features. For a more holistic, immersive experience, you'll probably decide to use more sophisticated equipment. A computer with advanced graphics and extended memory will enhance your experience. Of course, it's best to check the specific requirements of the metaverse worlds you want to enter.

Your PC, Mac, gaming console or smartphone will provide an interactive experience in real time with avatars in a 3D world. For a more immersive experience in the three-dimensional metaverse world, you'll need a virtual reality headset and hand operated controllers. The newer headsets don't even need the controllers. Simple hand gestures can navigate you through these 3D worlds.

## Tell your stories in new ways, with a fresh perspective

Alongside Microsoft and META, Superbright showcases technology that's making social VR and the metaverse accessible to both B2C and B2B brands. As audience engagement moves towards the twin worlds of the physical and virtual, Superbright's hyper-real 3D spaces open a new era in live engagement.



While you don't need more than a computer, or even just a smartphone to enter the metaverse, the additional, immersive equipment, like headsets, will enhance your virtual experience. Of course, as the metaverse expands, new, more sophisticated equipment will become available.

## The metaverse is open for business, and soon we'll all start to feel the real opportunities and benefits of our investment in new tech.

In B2B markets, the availability of headsets has boomed. Broadband is near ubiquitous, and cheap, the world over, as are cloud and edge computing. This makes it increasingly easy to do things, like scan your face with your smartphone to create and import lifelike avatars. At the same time, headsets are becoming cheaper. They have better controls. Higher-definition environments. And the high levels of computing power needed to store 3D virtual environments in the headset. This puts less pressure on WiFi, 4G, and 5G connections.

### Enterprise-ready, holographic solutions

It's always reassuring if the new tech you're about to invest in has already proven its value in industrial applications. Microsoft HoloLens has exactly that proven track record. For example, enabling technicians carrying out maintenance on complex machinery to see animated diagrams of how to replace components. It's the ultimate productivity tool. HoloLens gen-two is an ergonomic, untethered, self-contained holographic device. It offers a more intuitive user-interface, improved holographic processing, more RAM, better motion gesture control, and enhanced eye tracking. In the B2B events world its applications are limitless. It enables you to demo products that are difficult to display, whilst still having eye contact with the customer to establish true empathy.



# The second foundation of fusionomics is creativity

Nurturing creativity in social VR is critical. For new experiences to gain traction, there needs to be a shift and critical mass in creativity. In the case of social VR and the metaverse, we've seen gaming software become more democratised and ubiquitous. Increasingly, people with the skills to leverage the software are choosing careers in corporate and retail applications development, where their creativity can be unleashed and valued. Toolkits have emerged to create 3D virtual environments and avatars, while image libraries now have off the shelf 3D virtual environments.

**Just as web analytics helped businesses optimise engagement based on page views and clicks, emotion analytics provide new insights for the era of augmented reality and the spatial 3D web.**

Emotion analytics is an emerging field that uses data from multiple sensors within head mounted displays. By combining this data with cutting-edge machine learning techniques, it's possible to understand people's behaviour and emotional responses.

Pairing biometric sensors with VR, it's possible to measure emotional responses in conditions that simulate real-world environments. Sensors within head mounted displays monitor things like heart rate, facial electromyography, skin conductance, and eye movements. This determines levels of arousal. That is, how activated or excited the person is, and whether their reaction is positive, negative, or neutral.

The possibilities for precision marketing have never been more forensic. Unprecedented creativity delivers unique and highly desirable 3D environments and avatars, while emotion analytics enable brands to measure nuanced responses to the smallest details of sales and marketing strategies.

Of course, these new worlds are easily primed for learning, bringing together experts who might

not be able to travel to a group setting. Through the metaverse, the world can be amplified and explored in bold, imaginative ways.

It's not only the social VR worlds where this democratisation of creative tools and talent applies. The tools, off-the-shelf digital assets, data analytics plug-ins, and talent are booming in augmented reality and screen based applications.

## Measure how virtual environments make you feel

Data is the gold of today's technology landscape, creating qualitative and quantitative insights to empower. The instrumentation of the world, using sensors and computer vision, is opening up new ways to observe, analyse, and predict today's complex systems. Innovation consultancies like Parallel help clients to navigate this terrain and develop the products, services and ventures that will define it.



# The third foundation of fusionomics is cultural acceptance

Shifting mindsets to bring about widespread acceptability will always determine the fate of any new tech. The metaverse and augmented reality are no exception. People's acceptance of remote digital experiences, like video meetings, has certainly been accelerated by the pandemic. However, as people get fed up with Teams and Zoom, their disconnect creates a yearning for personal, social experiences. We believe that social VR and the metaverse will start to satisfy that yearning for social interaction. And augmented

reality will bring a new dimension to the two-dimensional world of Teams and Zoom, traditional screen and print based media.

The COVID-19 pandemic helped to create a boom in the uptake of online digital experiences. In turn, this created a huge demand for extended reality applications. And the need for technical expertise for broadcasts and streaming experiences from digitally engineered studios. Lockdown saw an unprecedented, exponential growth in people working, shopping, and playing online. This triggered a demand for cloud computing and storage. Meanwhile, fledgling novelties like digital payments in the transactional metaverse, cryptocurrencies, blockchain, and NFTs for guaranteeing ownership of digital assets in the metaverse, fast became mainstream. Whilst some of these concepts - like crypto - seem like dark arts, attracting negative publicity, the principles of payments and the credible and legal ownership of digital assets in these virtual worlds are certainly building blocks.

## Keep in mind how new crypto is

Despite recent troubles in crypto paradise, big hitter commentators seem broadly supportive of the future of cryptocurrencies. Recent implosions and high profile court cases seem to be considered as blips and aberrations in their ongoing establishment. As Forbes Magazine points out, "The first bitcoin transaction took place only 14 years ago in 2009. From then until the final week of 2022, the capitalization of the crypto market has grown to over a trillion dollars. Fortune Magazine predicts the global cryptocurrency market will grow to \$1.9 trillion by 2028. Daily online transactions in bitcoin are about \$6 billion, a payment method surpassed only by Visa and Mastercard with daily transaction volumes of \$30.3 billion and \$16.2 billion respectively. Although daily crypto trading volume was down in 2022 from its highs in 2020 and 2021, it still fluctuated between \$20 and \$70 billion, an enormous market by any measure. And these transactions are taking place on more than 300 crypto platforms or exchanges."

*Forbes Magazine, January 24, 2023*



# Everyone's brain waves are unique, and so compelling use cases like security, identification, personalisation, and unique brand loyalty become less science fiction and more science fact.

Multi-generational workforces and B2B client bases are also a challenge. It's interesting that, for now at least, many companies and organisations have four generations of employees in one workplace. They often need to harness a unique, multi-generational workforce, and appeal to the same sets of B2B customers.

There could be some late Baby Boomers, born in the 1950s, along with Gen X, from the 1960s and 1970s. Add to these Gen Z and the Millennials, and you have a diverse audience, unique to current times.

Of course, Gen Alpha is also growing up as the next generation to enter the workplace in the next decade. Brought up with gaming culture that brings together people across far-flung geographies, Gen Alpha is the first generation

that expects seamless, effortless digital experiences. This means tech that entertains and immerses is a natural requirement.

AR apps like the Thor Hammer and Light Sabre experience from Myndplay are certainly entertaining. These explore the merger between human and machine, showcasing hardware that build bridges between the mind and the interactive. The result is engaging, consumer-oriented content that users can control through thought alone.

[Take a look here](#)



## Use your brains

Myndplay is a UK based company with a passion for exploring and optimising the relationship between the mind and tech. They are the creators of the revolutionary VR ready MyndBand EEG Brainwave headset, and the MyndPlayer interactive mind controlled video platform. These allow users to control, influence, and interact with video games, apps, and movies using only their mind and emotions. The MyndPlay platform is grounded in brain research. It was created to empower users to train their brains to improve attention, meditation skills, and the ability to overcome mental obstacles. All through entertainment, simulations, and guided training applications. To browse the latest consumer EEG Brainwave Technology headsets, software, and applications, visit the MyndPlay Shop.

# GHG solutions for the digital world are critical. Because there's no Planet B

Every organisation needs to start the transition towards a net zero future in the digital world. Starting the net zero journey can seem daunting but taking the first baby steps is probably the hardest part.

A fulsome existence online, whether commercial, social, or both became crucial to many millions of us during the pandemic. However, there has also been a growing realisation that the planet can't cope with the GHG emissions impact of travel. Particularly air travel, the impact of which is an easy concept to understand. The more you fly, the more aviation fuel you burn. These existential forces continue to encourage people to embrace novel ways to engage, do business, transact, and socialise online, emphasising the opportunities offered by social VR and the metaverse.

However, the more we live online, the greater our data storage needs become. As our demand for data continues to increase, the data storage

industry is expanding rapidly. While these data storage units are the backbone of our digital economic, commercial, and social lives, they're also one of the planet's biggest consumers of power.

In fact, the emissions impact of data storage is immense. It's estimated to account for 2% of the world's energy consumption. Amazingly, that's roughly equivalent to the energy consumption of the aviation industry. Right now, designing, developing, and operating sustainable data storage units is one of the biggest challenges facing the tech industry.

## Watch your charitable donations flourish in the Betterverse metaverse

In an environment where digital currency transactions are the norm and social anxieties grow, Betterverse is a charity working to be a force for good. The platform is set up to connect your donations with your beneficiary, whilst also enabling you to track the progress of the donation and the impact it's having. Your donations are converted into NFTs, or non-fungible tokens, which are digital assets based on blockchain technology. As a bonus, Betterverse will award you with a unique NFT Tree that you can plant within the Betterverse metaverse, and watch grow from a sapling into an ancient arboreal colossus.





# Creating mind blowing spaces

New virtual spaces can be designed to enable dialogue, arbitrate conflict, and stimulate collaboration. They can take B2B customers and employees to places they could never visit, or see inside, in real life. For example, a pharma company could share a new treatment or medication by transporting the physician inside a cancer cell, or through a patient's daily life experience. The applications are endless.

Mood lighting, avatars, background music, and even avatar fashion and personal grooming, can all be channelled to create a more conducive social VR experience. Toolkits are emerging that enable avatars to be created with mannerisms that replicate the quirks, ticks, and movements unique to every individual. Of course, this raises questions around deep fakes and where these virtual worlds and digital content can transgress, as well as inspire and engage, emotionally.

And when biometric data is captured in a headset, analysed, and played back through the metaverse, a whole pandora's box of potential opens up.

For example, Parallel is capturing vast quantities of biometric data, using headsets that monitor eye movements, pupil dilation, and sweating. The capability exists for biometric tech to analyse levels of arousal, concentration, sadness, frustration, or happiness, using neuro-sensory data of the type Myndplay can capture.



## We need to talk about avatars

The creation of avatars was once the stuff of science fiction. Now fiction becomes reality. Avatars are developing from cartoon-like representations of our real selves to lifelike creations that are indistinguishable from the living, breathing reality. While this delivers positive opportunities, not necessarily all is well in the virtual **Garden of Eden**.

The metamorphosis of ever more lifelike avatars brings new challenges to our online lives, in the form of deep fakes. A deep fake is defined as "a video of a person in which their face or body has been digitally altered so that they appear to be someone else, typically used maliciously or to spread false information". The threat of deep fakes, and the very real risks of impersonation, highlights the possibility of illegal and manipulative behaviour.

There is also the danger of trolling and abuse which may be amplified in the metaverse, or in a social VR environment, where interactions seem more real. While an abusive exchange of words on social media can be disturbing, it is probably less invasive than an abusive rant or aggressive posture from a lifelike avatar.

Indeed, will lifelike avatars be a positive development? In some ways, a more cartoon-like avatar is a more honest, less duplicitous concept and experience. At least it is clear that you're talking and interacting with a digital self. The more lifelike avatars become, the less comfortable the experience can feel. As looks and mannerisms become more convincing, so our sense of unease can increase. However, equally these could be teething problems in a transitory phase of our perception.

# Our future together

New tech will soon make the existence of twin worlds a reality. This is fusionomics in action, where diverse factors converge to make possible something breathtakingly new. The availability and ease of use of technology, the unleashing of creativity, and the cultural shifts and familiarisation with virtual worlds are coming together in a perfect storm. The enthusiastic uptake of gaming, video conferencing, remote working, and a desire to reduce emissions, predicts a bright future for social VR and the metaverse.

Many of these new worlds are primed for learning, bringing together time poor experts, and allowing diverse worlds to be amplified and explored in bold, imaginative ways. Perfect for the world of

live events and experiences. As Amelia Kallman, Futurist, said, “We are at a pivotal place in our relationship with technology. We are the ones who are deciding how the future is going to unfold.”

At Shelton Fleming we believe that, together, we have nothing to fear from embracing a future empowered by the opportunities of new tech. The future is now, and we need put ourselves at the heart of the action. Together, we need to embrace new tech for the good of our customers, our businesses, and our balance sheets, as well as for people and planet. Get in contact with us, to find out how we can take the headache out of the tech and bring your events to life!



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