

12 Oct 2022 | **Analysis**

Doing It The Nike Way – Novartis, AstraZeneca On Making The Metaverse Work

by **Vibha Ravi**

From AstraZeneca's training program for its representatives to Pfizer's campaign to drive vaccination in Brazil, the industry is taking a leaf out of Nike's playbook in adopting the metaverse. Novartis' executive director and AZ's director of learning discussed applications and challenges at a recent event.

The metaverse represents the next big paradigm shift across industries, particularly as a way to establish a connect with a younger generation accustomed to exploring and interacting with virtual reality (VR).

The pharma industry is well aware and at a recent event, executives from [Novartis AG](#) and [AstraZeneca PLC](#) discussed applications, from building connects with healthcare providers (HCPs) to educating patients, as well as challenges and performance metrics of this new version of the internet.

As pharma companies take tentative steps, they are drawing inspiration from brands like Nike which have successfully established a presence in the world of VR.

In 2018, Nike China and creative partner Wieden+Kennedy Shanghai launched an immersive video game experience to communicate the feeling of React cushioning technology for the new Nike Epic React running shoes.

Called Reactland, it offered consumers the convenience of trialling the shoes, transporting themselves into the game as the main character and entering a virtual land populated with clouds, springs, pillows and other fun elements to metaphorically demonstrate the benefit of Nike React technology.

In 2021, the company purpose-built a metaverse space Nikeland that uses the Roblox gaming platform, allowing fans to meet, socialize, take part in promotions and engage with brand experiences.

At the Indegene Digital Summit held recently, moderator Nancy Phelan referenced Nikeland as an example of fostering community engagement and allowing users to design their own virtual experiences.

“I’ve got a youngster at home to teach me, but it’s actually really pretty cool,” remarked the senior vice president at Indegene urging industry to learn from such examples.

AstraZeneca, Pfizer Use Cases

At the virtual event, Josh Chapman, AstraZeneca’s director of US and global learning – CVRM, shared a use case where the company harnessed the potential of the metaverse to train and educate its sales representatives.

Chapman pointed to the changing environment post COVID-19, saying “folks have less time in the field in front of customers that they once did.” This means that fresh recruits are quite raw in dealing with HCPs and the metaverse presents a perfect training venue.

To convince the top management and secure a buy-in for the high-cost initiative, the team shared the concept of a three-dimensional, immersive environment with a virtual doctor’s office with a hallway “where you could stand and meet the doctor and could stand by the front desk.”

“As we shared those concepts with key leaders across the organization, everyone got really excited about the opportunity and potential. That kind of message really resonated with our senior leaders because they knew that the industry was changing, the landscape is changing.”

AstraZeneca took Indegene’s help to build a collaborative meeting environment that matched the lobby of a hotel. “If you’ve been in the pharmaceutical industry before, you know that during training, representatives spent a lot of time in the hotel lobby studying, practicing and getting to know each other. So, we wanted the landscape in the industry to match what they would do if they were live.”

Pfizer Reveals Secret Digital Sauce To Cut Trial Duration, MLR Review Times

By **Vibha Ravi**

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How do you send 90,000 employees home and still bring a COVID-19 vaccine to market in record time? Pfizer showed the way and at a recent virtual event, senior vice-president Robert Brown revealed how the “secret sauce” of digitalization continues to help cut medical legal review times, crunch clinical trial duration and reduce service interruptions.

[Read the full article here](#)

Phelan brought up *Pfizer Inc.*'s use of a virtual COVID-19 vaccination campaign as an innovative use case. Since young millennials and Gen Zs were not as eager to take the shot especially since they thought they were at lower risk of infection, Pfizer's agency Ogilvy teamed up with gaming agency Druid to create a virtual COVID-19 vaccination center within Grand Theft Auto RolePlay (GTA RP) in Cidade Alta, Latin America's biggest GTA RP server.

Players began by getting their characters vaccinated at an in-game center, then posted proof of vaccination to social media to get a full shield bar in the game, which is a difficult task to achieve otherwise. The campaign yielded the desired results.

Avoiding The Pitfalls

However, Ashish Sharma, executive director, data & platform: commercial effectiveness at Novartis, pointed out that it's important to avoid building a product or experiences that users don't need or the market is not prepared for.

In response to an audience question on the slow adoption of Google Glasses, he said "Start with the consumption behavior. And then reverse engineer to the problem statement, rather than building something cool and geeky, but not really finding adoption. So, keep it simple. Start with relevance and start with the end consumption behavior. If you have that sorted out, it will get adopted."

While doing this, it's important to also create enough champions who would be the primary adopters.

Keeping an eye on the maturity of the ecosystem is another crucial aspect. "Google glasses, or many other examples where I think those were really cool technologies, but their industrialization took its own course."

Interoperability issues and cost of adoption are also critical success factors, Sharma said quoting his own experience of having built a biometric company. Since most biometric solutions or border security control take about eight hours to run a check against a criminal database, by which time most of the passengers are off the airport, he built "a no brainer solution."

"With the technology I built, you could have the whole country on a flash drive, and you could do it in seconds. But the response from most of the developed countries was that we already have

Accenture Sees AI Solutions For IDMP Compliance, Trial Efficiency

By **Vibha Ravi**

01 Apr 2022 AI could help companies comply with regulations like GDPR and IDMP, apart from optimizing clinical trial processes, Accenture's managing director leading R&D analytics in North America says, as he lists cases where the firm drove cost savings. [Read the full article here](#)

something that works, it's going to be very expensive to change the infrastructure. So, I started my journey with countries who never had any border control systems that were highly technologically evolved," he elaborated.

The lesson he learned was that high cost of technology or interoperability issues could prevent adoption, "no matter how good the solution is and how beneficial it is, unless its ROI [return on investment] matches the change that it takes."

Having What It Takes

Apart from market maturity, the infrastructure needs to be in place, Sharma noted.

"Mayo Clinic, Johns Hopkins, or all India Institute of Medical Sciences in India, they all have started to adopt [the metaverse] as of 2021 for surgeries for diagnosis, different tools. Now we have to see how the ecosystem actually evolves and keeps up with the needs." (Also see "[Indegene CTO On Pharma And Blockchain's Promise Of Better Accountability, Trust](#)" - Scrip, 9 Sep, 2022.)

For example, for metaverse-based surgery, the entire IT infrastructure needs to be on a 5G network and "everything needs to connect - from format, data, speed, acceptance, readability of those results, everything needs to be in sync. And that's where I think keeping it simple and keeping it relevant comes into play," he added. (Also see "[Boehringer Ingelheim's Formula For Scaling Transformation, Digitization](#)" - Scrip, 27 Sep, 2022.)

Applications, Metrics

On a related note, Sharma said all the tech giants whether its Facebook or Microsoft are "jumping into this, but not in a very committed way. So, my take is that the metaverse is continuously evolving and improving with each passing day. And its potential applications in the healthcare, medical field are also likely to progress."

It's expected to simplify and democratize delivery of healthcare for example "surgeries or medical education and training or mental health or radiology or pain management. So, while there are solutions, but for some, it is not affordable, for some it's not reachable. And for some it's not standardized."

Indegene's Phelan observed that the metaverse also offers an opportunity to connect key communities ranging from opinion leaders to patients themselves.

It gives thought leaders and key opinion leaders a "fundamentally different way to share information, to talk about some of the differences and distinctions that they're seeing in the data, to come together as a community in service of better outcomes for patients."

Besides, patients could benefit. “You could decide if you truly want to have a digital twin, or if you want to go out and be somebody completely new and different. And can then start to connect to communities and to services and to information that's relevant for you. Think about what this could potentially mean and the value that this could unlock.”

While this is happening even today, the experience is not as compelling as it could be with these fully immersive 3D experiences that are possible with metaverse. “It could also make it much easier for patients to learn and to fully be a part of their diagnosis and treatment plan,” she noted giving the example of patients being trained to administer a subcutaneous injection.

At the same time, there isn't one definition for engagement and it's going to continue to evolve. “We're going to continue to learn. But I think what's important is that we've got the ability and the willingness to measure and to learn and to share learnings, both from a metrics and an insights perspective, because there'll be some qualitative learnings that come out of it,” Phelan concluded.

'Touchless Plants' To Virtually Trained Workforces - Indian Cos Share Digitalization Tips

By **Vibha Ravi**

02 Mar 2021

Despite AI and digital analytics playing an increasing role in pharma, the industry lags others globally, a recent event heard.

Meanwhile, top Indian players including Sun Pharma, Cipla and others shared what is driving their initiatives, ranging from a 'touchless factory' to virtual training and lessons learned along the way.

[Read the full article here](#)