



HOW VR FITS INTO THE DIGITAL EXPERIENCE

AUDIO TRANSCRIPT

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Penelope: Welcome to this CIO 24-7 podcast. I'm Penelope Prett, Accenture's chief information officer, and I'm happy to welcome my guests today, Allison Horn and Jason Warnke. They're going to be talking about how virtual reality fits into the digital employee experience.

Allison Horn is our global head of talent, and she's helping to reimagine how our people learn and collaborate through VR. She's working hand in hand with Jason, who leads our digital experience in the global IT organization and is leading the technology effort to bring VR to all people at Accenture. Jason and Allison, I'm thrilled to have you here today.

Allison: Thanks, Penelope. Super happy to be here.

Jason: And hey, as always, we love talking about this topic and really appreciate you having Allison and I on.

Penelope: OK, Jason, well, let's jump right in then.

We're hearing a ton about virtual reality, mixed reality and the metaverse. Jason, it sounds to me a little bit like science fiction Ready Player one, right? So, can you set the stage here? What is this really all about and how is this fitting into today's enterprise?

Jason: Yeah, I love that reference, I love that book, and I love the movie, but it certainly can sound super sci fi and in many ways, if you read or saw that sort of negative connotations of what that future looks like, you might not understand it.

When you think about the disruptive technology that is in and around, extended reality and a mixture of virtual reality where you go into a virtual world with other people as avatars and you do various activities with them or augmented reality where you are wearing some sort of glasses that let you see virtual things layered over the real world that you're in, whether you're wearing a headset, you're using a mobile device or somewhere in between. And then that metaverse concept, which is essentially thinking about this virtual world or set of worlds that you can gather with your colleagues and friends and family.

That metaverse concept, there's a whole other set of layers to it. But for our use case, what we're really talking about is a place where Accenture people can go to do activities together.



What we love and what Allison's going to talk about is the business value for an enterprise that can take advantage of that and strip that technology is really amazing.

Allison: Jason, I couldn't agree more. And you know, when you say that we're finally there, right? There's there's so much truth to that because, you know, you and I have been talking about this for years, right?

We have always known that this technology was coming. We have always known that there's going to be a real enterprise play here, and we've always kind of used the language of this is not an if situation. This is a win situation, and it's just so exciting to know that that when is finally here and that we're in the world of leveraging these incredible environments and this incredible technology for learning, for collaboration, even, you know, human to human connection. You know, we started off with the business case here that was very much about onboarding, right?

Welcoming our new joiners to Accenture with a very quick play over to learning a very quick play and transfer over to collaboration. And all three of those things are happening and we are seeing a fourth piece wring right in which is about that connection, about whether I am there for onboarding or there for learning, or there for a meeting, et cetera, et cetera. That ability to just connect with people again in a way that is different than we've done in the past is really starting to gather a lot of attention and a lot of energy with all of the people that are participating in our programs right now. It's super exciting.

Penelope: Well, based on what I've seen from the two of you so far and what we're talking about here, it's really opening up a whole new virtual world supporting the future of Accenture's hybrid work experience. So, Jason, maybe in that vein, you can talk a little bit about Accenture strategy and approach in this area.

Jason: When you think about this strategy, it boils down to three components.

one is hardware, and we have made a decision and a strategic objective to get headsets deployed to a large portion of our population and really get ahead of how and what it looks like in an IT organization, in an enterprise like ours to actually support a new type of hardware.

If you relate back to early days of mobile, think back to the BlackBerry as the first mobile device that we're deployed to executives and enterprises. It was a whole new thing that IT needed to learn how to support at scale. Then mobile devices came on board. Whether you're talking about phones or tablets, and there are whole new challenges.

Allison and I like to talk about. This is kind of like that, but so much more disruptive in so many different ways. There are all kinds of implications with supporting a device like a VR headset, and I'm sure we'll talk more about that. But that's the first component is its hardware. And do all of your employees need to have a VR headset to participate in the experiences that we're building?

No. And that's actually one of the reasons we chose Altspace is because it allows for people to use a desktop version of the application or a VR version of the application with a headset. And so that hardware is one key component.

The next is the application layer, and we talked about AltspaceVR as one of the applications that we're enabling our people to use for onboarding and learning and collaboration experiences. And that's a really key thing is to with your strategy for choosing applications and what and how you support that. Getting good guidance and steer from your enterprise architecture group, choosing an application or applications that support your principles in IT. And in this case, one of the key principles was a safe and secure way to authenticate using that application and the



applications that we bring on board for learning and other experiences, even fitness, which I'm sure we'll talk about.

We need to make sure that they meet our same sort of requirements and principles that any application in our shop needs to abide by. And then the last one is, at the end of the day after you get through those things, it's all about content.

It's all about the experiences that you create with the content. You put people in really great environments, you give them content and you give them the capabilities to do different interactions together. And so that is where I think there's going to be some really fascinating developments over the course of time in the enterprise space.

There certainly has been in the consumer space with all the games and activities that you can do in VR. But I think what will happen in the enterprise is just this massive shift towards creating content that is really immersive and in a level that you couldn't achieve in with other technology.

So hardware, application and content are the three layers that we think about.

Penelope: And selling some of that up Jason and reflecting on other podcasts of this type that you and I have been on together. I think one of the key differentiators here in the space in how you and Accenture and Allison are approaching this issue is speed.

We want to deploy to a large group and get some learning out there so that we can advance the cause more rapidly than we would if we look for perfection in planning up front. I think that's an important aspect of experimental technology in today's market.

So maybe, Allison, we can switch directions now a little bit and talk specifically about the talent and HR space at Accenture and how we're using this technology to further your agenda there.

Allison: Yeah, I'd be. I'd be happy to.

So let me start with learning. Well, before the pandemic, we were on a course here at Accenture that we would roughly call how do we bring the learning to our people as opposed to having to bring people to our learning?

Right. Fast forward to today, a lot of the learning that we're doing today is happening through virtual channels, right? We are starting to bring some in-person learning back, but certainly not at the scale that we once did. VR opens up a whole new opportunity for us to be able to deliver those more experiential, those more immersive learning opportunities for our people at a scale that, quite frankly, we couldn't even do, even if we weren't in this COVID pandemic world. It's like, take away all of those barriers that we've had in the past. VR allows us to be able to provide safe spaces for people to test and try new skills in ways that just no other technology can right now.

And you know, for us in a professional services context, we're going big on learning around what's sometimes called soft skills, what I tend to refer to more often as power skills, but skills like empathy and inclusion and providing feedback and communication and all of those skills that are, quite frankly, multipliers for other skills and capabilities that you have.

So that's a hugely important place for us to be able to invest. You know, Jason was just mentioning the several different layers against which we're thinking about this right hardware, application, and content. This is squarely in that content space.

Now one thing that I'll say, which is true regardless of what platform you're talking about from a learning standpoint, doesn't matter. It's VR or not. Content and quality of that content is still going to reign supreme.

So even though we are figuring out how to deliver truly powerful, truly immersive content today, we will continue to learn and build on those learnings because it's not as though you



can just put on a headset or go into Altspace in VR, and all of a sudden you will be enticed by meh or low-quality content. You're still going to expect that content to be there. It's just being delivered in a different way.

Another piece that I think is really important to mention, and it's really the spark for a lot of our investment here is in onboarding. We are onboarding people all over the world. And even when we come back to a world where people will be going, going into offices for their new joiner orientation and so forth. As part of a big global company, we still want people to be able to connect with people all over the world.

We want them to be able to connect with people in their local cities, but also in other states, also in other countries. And this just provides a fantastic opportunity to do that. It also allows us to be able to pace content in a way that is much, much more conducive to learning, as opposed to me sitting in a one day to day session and having a PowerPoint presentation after a PowerPoint presentation thrown my way. If I am brought into a virtual world and I can go and explore different content areas and learn at my own pace what this is, what that is and so forth, that's just going to be a much more rewarding opportunity for me, and I'm going to remember a lot more about this. Again, because I've experienced it as opposed to just observing it. So, the whole bit about onboarding and making sure that we can introduce information at the pace that is appropriate for the learner is a really important aspect for this as well.

And then we got all the other kinds of opportunities for this with respect to cybersecurity training, we're bringing in sales training negotiations, training lots, lots more to come in the future.

Penelope: Allison, it's just an exciting and frankly entertaining new way for employees to come on board and to learn, right? And it really puts Accenture's innovation at the forefront of everything.

Jason Allison, you each talked about concepts a little bit.

I want to tease those out a bit more. Jason, can I ask you to comment first about the Nth Floor that we've developed Accenture and then Allison, maybe you can talk a little bit about one Accenture Park?

Jason: Yeah, so the Nth Floor term was born out of a conversation we have. This is now three or so years ago with our colleagues at Microsoft and Altspace, where we said Accenture has never really had one major campus, like a lot of large enterprises, to have one primary large campus where everyone comes or gathers from time to time. And they actually get that experience of walking around on campus and bumping into people and meeting new folks, almost every day. So what we said was, Hey, when this finally takes off, this is like several years ago when, you know, well before the term metaverse was used as often as it is.

We said it would be really cool if there was a virtual place where Accenture folks from around the world could go up into the Nth Floor, right, which we were saying at the time of going up into the Accenture Metaverse and meeting each other in an environment where they can just bump into someone. It was not a scheduled discussion, it was just walking around in a virtual space. And so, we termed that the Nth Floor. Little did we know the evolution of the term and the excitement around this concept of going to a virtual place and interacting with your colleagues and having those chance meetups where similar to a talking point in an office, you are there. You see someone, Hey, what are you working on? Where are you from? And you have this really great network building opportunity just by those happenstance encounters.

So, with a company is distributed as we are, we never really have the ability to do that at scale until now. And that's what the Nth Floor has really been that big inspiration for. If and when we do this, which is now we're doing it, it would be amazing to actually build, create networks in



a virtual place that we call the Nth Floor, all based on Altspace, of course.

And what was announced recently at Microsoft Ignite was this meshing of the experience we have in Microsoft Teams as we interact with our colleagues from around the world in the 2D world, the ability to sort of freely flow into a VR world in Altspace.

And that's amazing. The idea that not all meetings need to be in VR, not all meetings should be in just 2D. There will be instances where you start a meeting this way and you say, Hey, you know what?

It would be easier if we just popped into this virtual room and walked around and sort of did a design thinking session where we could break into groups and have some dimensionality to that discussion. If you haven't been in one of those environments before, it doesn't take too long to realize it's a really different experience.

And there are amazing sets of use cases where it is definitely enhanced in a augmentation of what you could do in a 2D environment, fully remote to what you can do in VR. And what's cool is where it's headed, where there will be another mix in this experience, where someone in a physical office or potentially several have augmented reality headsets. They're interacting with counterparts that have VR headsets or. And, you know, in the 2D version and all remote participating with some combination of these realities' virtual reality, augmented reality and 2D. So amazing things to come.

I think this is going to be where the imagination and ingenuity of our people will take us to 100 places we didn't imagine would be the case when we started this whole thing.

Allison: And Jason, if we connect now the Nth floor to one Accenture Park, I like to think of it as I'm up on the Nth Floor and I have the ability to just zip over to one of our other virtual worlds and one of those other virtual worlds that we have within our own Accenture Metaverse is one Accenture Park and one Accenture Park is our onboarding campus.

So this is our place in space where our new joiners show up. This is where they play some interactive games to learn a little bit more about how Accenture operates, how the multiple parts of our business come together as one to deliver for our clients.

It's where they can, as I mentioned earlier, kind of wander around at their own pace to learn about the different aspects of our culture and different opportunities and things that are available to them. And one of the things that I absolutely love about not just one Accenture Park, but the opportunities we have in VR for environments like this is the creativity that you can bring to life here.

The team that has developed one Accenture Park has done so across this series of metaphors. So, every time you're going into a different place in one Accenture Park where you're going to learn about, for example, our leadership essentials, you find yourself at the bottom of a virtual mountain that you can climb as you're learning more and more about what it takes to be a leader at Accenture.

When you step into a space to learn more about our code of Business Ethics. You're surrounded by tools that actually help to protect you and make sure that we are all understanding how we do business at Accenture.

And I think one of my favorites are we have a really significant learning program at Accenture called Technology Quotient or TQ as it's more frequently called and in the virtual world in one Accenture Park, TQ is this huge abstract sculpture that as you learn about TQ and the different technologies that you're teaching, you see different parts of the sculpture light up. So, you see the symbols for cloud and the symbols for 5G and the symbols for AI, and you're reinforcing the fact that all of these technologies live and play together. So, you're not only again teaching people about programs, but you're just



able to bring these concepts to life and such more entertaining and engaging and immersive ways in environments like this.

Jason: Allison, you're reminding me of the one Accenture Park and the Nth Floor being these places that connect. We were Allison and I were hosting a group. We were in the Nth Floor. We were showing the people around to these different teleporters that can take you to different places.

And we were going to have it a very guided experience. We were going to go from place to place and in an order. Well, all of a sudden one of the individuals that was in the session with us disappeared, and it turns out they had jumped into the wrong teleporter.

They had gone to one Accenture Park and they came back apologizing that they had jumped in there. But then they said it was so cool. I met this new group that was going through an experience together, and Allison and I were like, That's amazing.

That's what happened when we would send people to a large conference, centers, training centers. They would be there for a particular class and other groups would be there for different purposes, whether they were meetings or they were other classes.

And people between classes would bump into each other, meet each other, and then realize the company is that much bigger. And so for us, I think that set of opportunities just multiplies like crazy because we have the ability to have these places where people can easily just jump in and meet folks unscheduled.

Penelope: We talk a lot about these spaces and how they are meant for all people to connect. But one thing we should specifically touch on Allison. Jason, while we're here, is fostering inclusion and accessibility in the entire technology landscape of Accenture.

Allison, with all of these new experiences we're talking about here, can all of our people participate in this?

Allison: So the answer is yes and yes. And what I mean by yes and yes is in some aspects, this technology allows us to do amazing things at scale, providing more access to more people than we ever would have been able to reach before at this level.

However, we know as of right now there are people who cannot use the more immersive headset version of this technology due to accessibility issues. Jason had mentioned before that that's one of the reasons why we chose to use Altspace as our primary environment, right? Kind of our platform here, because for our people who cannot use the headsets, whether it's because of an accessibility issue, some people are still finding a level of motion sickness with this technology. So we have committed that anything we are developing that will be in this 3D immersive world that can be experienced on a headset can also be experienced in 2D.

And again, that's just another learning for us. And as we figure this out, as we go forward, always ensuring we have parallel development tracks so that at the end of the day, whether you're coming in through a 2D experience or you're coming in through the much more immersive headset experience, you are still able to access these experiences in VR.

Penelope: And across all our people as CIO, one area particular attention to is the distribution of our technology and its uptake from an adoption perspective. So Jason, maybe you can comment a little bit on those aspects, given the work we do together in the IT organization.

Jason: Yeah. And I think as I mentioned, disruption that's happening in the space comes at so many different levels. The thing that you'll realize with VR is it's still very early days of VR in that it's a pretty clunky process to go from grabbing a VR headset off the shelf, putting it on your head and getting into the environment that



you want to participate in. And then you compound that with, if you're in an enterprise, you've got to do these other things to secure the applications and get people into the right, secure locations to do their stuff.

So what that then entails, as you're implying, is a great deal of change in adoption support. When we host a meeting, if we're going to host a meeting in the environment and in groups are going to do this for the first time, we will do a series of three sessions with them to teach.

We'll say, hey, if you've never used VR before, this is your first time in Oculus device. Come to this session. We're going to do an open door training session to get you familiar with that. But before we take you into the actual meeting and it's a great opportunity for people to experience it first and ask all the questions they might be embarrassed to ask in the big setting in the event. But what we've learned is, whatever we thought it would take, change in adoption wise to support this double triple that it's a whole disruptive thing, which means the rule books in the guidebooks and the resources aren't all cooked. You've got to create a lot of that ourselves.

Penelope: This is just a really crystal-clear example to me of Accenture living its mission, bringing together technology and human ingenuity to inspire change across organizations. So maybe Allison, you can close out our podcast with just a few lessons learned for other organizations who will be entering a similar journey as us in the Metaverse.

Allison: I'd be happy to. You know, I think my first one is just get started, get started. Because the sooner you start, the sooner you'll start to experience this. You'll experience your own learnings, and this will all of a sudden start to feel perhaps a little bit less intimidating than it might today.

But a couple of lessons we've already learned in just our relative short period of time of being at this. The importance of having leadership and key stakeholders identified and really called out

in terms of the support that we're going to need, the patients that we're going to need.

Jason and I spoke many, many times before we jumped in on this and we said to our leaders, if we're going to be the front runners here, we need to be clear about the fact that there are going to be bumps and bruises that we're going to experience along the way.

So as long as we're ready for those bumps and bruises, right, let's get going. So setting clear expectations, having leaders who are super enthusiastic and engaged, right? Really, really critical. Second piece, sort of like as you're hearing and experiencing today, this is a cross functional initiative and will not survive without it.

Just about every single aspect, every single function across six Accenture has been touched by this in some way, shape or form, whether it's been procurement to get the devices or legal teams to help us from a data privacy standpoint, obviously our CIO or IT organizations, HR organizations, our marketing communications organizations, not to mention our client facing businesses in these spaces as well. I've almost even lost track of the overall matrix of all the different people that are involved here, but this is very, very much a cross-functional initiative and it needs to be in order to succeed.

Jason already mentioned that change management piece, but I'm going to mention it again because it's hard. We do talk a lot about there being a bit of an analogy of like, remember when we brought mobile phones into the environment. From a user perspective, I use a slightly different analogy, and I say this is the equivalent of transitioning someone from a piece of graph paper into Excel. That is the jump that we are taking here. Like there is no intermediate place and space from an end user perspective.



So don't underestimate the change management aspect of it. As a matter of fact, I tell people I plan on being in these environments a minimum of four to six times before you start to feel like you really know how to operate in there.

And then finally, make sure that you are setting this up in such a way that you have feedback coming from every single possible channel from the people who are experiencing it for the first time from some of your more expert users, the people who are creating content for you. Just keep those channels open and find every, every aspect that you possibly can in order to learn more and more about the experiences so we can continue to improve it.

Penelope: Well, Allison and Jason, we've touched on a lot of areas today, but I feel like we've only brushed the surface right and I'm sure there'll be a ton more to come, and I look forward to hearing about the next phase of what you're doing. I want to thank you for joining me today. And stay tuned for a future conversation about exactly where we're headed in the metaverse.

Allison: Great. Thanks so much, Penelope.

Jason: Thanks, Penelope and Allison. Look forward to more conversations.

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