

5 WAYS BRANDS ARE EMBRACING THE METaverse MOMENT

It's hard to go online and not find the word "metaverse" splashed on a news headline, research study or press release. But do brands and retailers know what the metaverse truly encompasses and how it will impact the future of customer engagement and community building?

While there are varying definitions, most experts agree on the broad strokes of **what the metaverse is**: "one, it is a successor state to today's global internet, and two, it's about shared virtual experiences that happen both in virtual spaces but also in the physical world."



Brands and retailers across categories are staying true to these definitions in myriad ways, whether through virtual events, gaming communities, NFT launches or digital twins and product customization that help consumers express themselves in new ways. This is a time of testing, learning and exploring, and despite there being no clear "best-practice approach," the following brands are standing out for their creative approaches.

Read on to get the details and **get inspired**.

01

NYFW THE SHOWS

PRESENTED BY **afterpay**

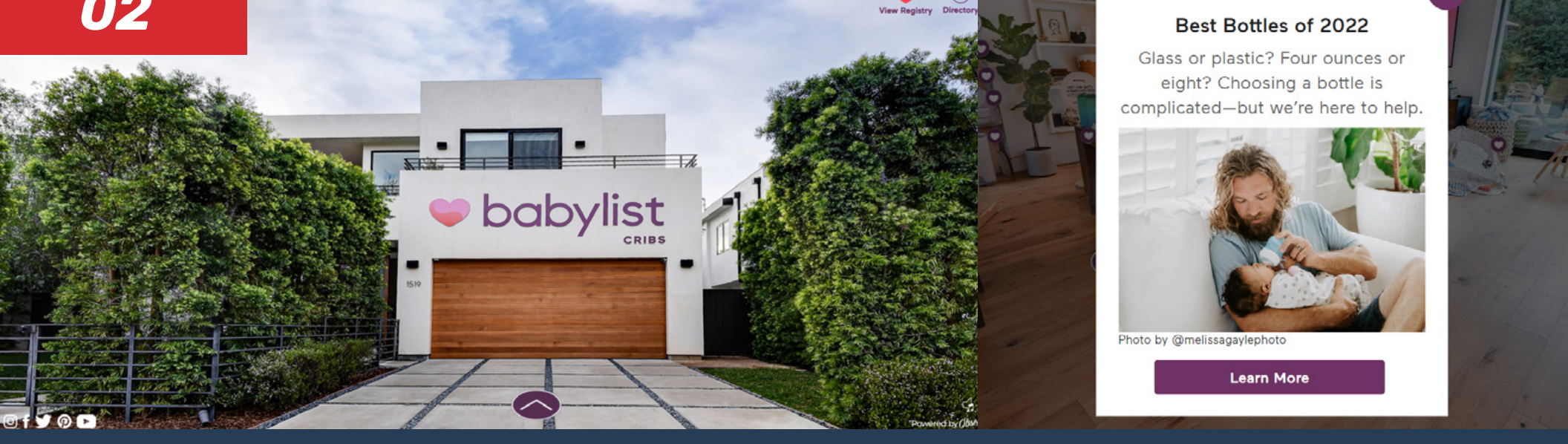
The Project: As the official presenting partner of **New York Fashion Week: The Shows**, Afterpay launched its NFT collection to give consumers exclusive access to the experience. By partnering with five designers — ALTU by Joseph Altuzarra, AnOnlyChild, Jonathan Simkhai, Kim Shui and The Blonds — Afterpay offered these (now sold out) limited-edition NFTs for consumers to mint. Each NFT is a unique digital collectible that was designed to also offer consumers "IRL" access to New York Fashion Week.

Why It Works: The NFTs were crafted by designers who drew inspiration from their Spring/Summer 2023 collections and coincided with unique NYFW products and experiences. For example, consumers who purchased an NFT from AnOnlyChild received an exclusive invite to the NYFW after party or a limited-edition belt bag. NFTs retailed for a mere \$100, but Afterpay also allowed consumers to purchase them by splitting payments into four interest-free installments. All proceeds from the NFT Keys were donated to **Free Arts NYC**.



This initiative seems to bring the best elements of an NFT project together: **ownership, exclusivity and community**. The fact that Afterpay also was able to incorporate its services and allow consumers to "test drive" the tech is a big bonus.

02



♥ babylist

The Project: On the heels of a successful in-person pop-up in Venice, Calif., **Babylist** wanted to recapture the discovery magic for digital shoppers. **The Cribs Virtual Showroom** was developed in partnership with **Obsess** and is a virtual re-creation of the experience. In many cases, virtual environments shine when they push creative limits. However, for Babylist, it's critical that consumers feel empowered with accurate and contextual information.

The virtual showroom integrates seamlessly with Babylist's content strategy. The space is laid out like a home and there are a series of vignettes with curated product groupings. This allows visitors to see how products look in context and get more content and details on specific items so they can make better decisions.

Why It Works: This is a powerful example of a virtual experience that has product discovery and commerce at the center of the strategy. However, it is the branded content and educational resources that truly bring the virtual store to the next level, supporting the overall brand promise and helping customers meet their unique needs.

03

BALMAIN PARIS

The Project: **Balmain Paris** is tapping into the power of nostalgia with the launch of its Balmain x Pokémon collaboration. Beyond the products comes an immersive brand experience with extensions into the metaverse.

The experience was developed in partnership with **SharpEnd**, giving consumers the chance to find one of 10 Balmain x Pokémon limited-edition jackets, which are available to purchase at nine Balmain boutiques across the U.S, Europe and Asia. Each jacket features 15 patches embedded with NFC tags. If consumers are lucky enough to find and purchase a jacket, they can tap their smartphones onto patches and unlock digital content and unique prizes, such as VIP tickets to the Balmain Festival in Paris, or get early access to the Balmain Fashion set in Pokémon UNITE.

Why It Works: Pokémon UNITE is a free, multiplayer online battle arena video game developed by TiMi Studio Group and published by The Pokémon Company for Android and iOS and by Nintendo for the Nintendo Switch. This is a powerful example of a brand that is connecting physical goods to a virtual world, because the products give fans the opportunity to enjoy a hyper-personalized in-game experience. At the same time, passionate brand fans have access to exclusive products and experiences.



04



The Project: **PUMA** has leaned into community and authentic entertainment with a new sports-based experience on Roblox called "**PUMA and the Land of Games**." Developed in partnership with Wonder Works studio, the game allows gamers to become athletes, connecting and competing in activities such as weightlifting, track running and three mini games: Endless Runner, Football Rush and Dodgeball Showdown.

Although many debates are emerging about the tangible impact of these game-based environments, the brand is focusing on visits and engagement metrics to gauge success. But make no mistake, there is a connection to product: players can dress their avatars in PUMA gear using Roblox's Layered Clothing technology. They can customize characters with hyper-realistic PUMA clothing that fits any avatar body type, and these designs are digital twins of existing items released by the brand.



Why It Works: "PUMA and the Land of Games" stays true to the heart of Roblox and similar environments. They have no creative limits and truly thrive when players can express themselves and interact with each other openly. PUMA simultaneously stays true to its own brand promise and has built an experience around athleticism and achievement.

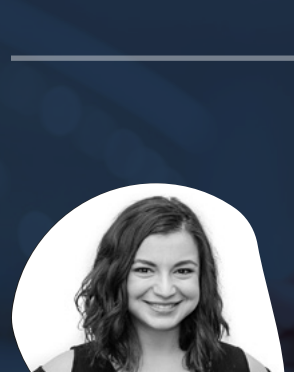
05

REBECCA MINKOFF

The Project: **Rebecca Minkoff** and her namesake brand have always been at the forefront of emerging tech and communities — and the metaverse is no exception. In spring 2022, the brand launched an NFT collection during Crypto Fashion Week to provide digital "fantastical" looks that are tied closely to the brand DNA.

One piece from the NFT collection was unveiled during a Crypto Fashion Week digital runway show, while the others were available via **The Dematerialised**, a marketplace for fashion NFTs. Consumers can go to The Dematerialised to browse a multitude of items, which they can use to style their avatars.

Why It Works: As a brand, Rebecca Minkoff has always been big on creating high fashion and cool NYC vibes together. The NFT line stayed true to the essence of the brand but isn't limited to the "physics" of fashion design, which means the team could use an endless range of materials and styles to create looks. With the metaverse being so focused on self-expression, this was a great way for Rebecca Minkoff to stretch her creative muscles as Chief Creative Officer and give brand fans the ability to own exclusive items.



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Alicia is an editor-turned-content marketer, with a passion for all things focused on digital-powered experiential retail.

