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Intro to the Metaverse: How will it change real estate? - by Daniel Calano

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Meta..what? Metaverse, as in universe. Have you even heard the word? In its simplest form, the metaverse is an extension of the Internet we already have. More specifically, it is a concept of blending real world activities in life with a digital world. It's already here, and you have already been exploring it. Think Zoom: You are in one place, but you join a big group of people in real settings somewhere else, without moving from your living room.

In its futuristic form, Metaverse will be a seamless blended world of real and digital activity. Much of its current activity is being generated in the gaming and sports betting area, but its creative future is far surpassing that. Along Zoom lines, in the futuristic extreme you might have your own avatar or hologram, branded with your own personality and intelligence, sitting in a room with other avatars similarly created. Add in artificial intelligence, and the avatars might be having a meeting that you would have otherwise been to.

Okay, it's crazy, for now. But, does it impact our profession. You bet. Once again, the concept is already impacting real estate, and we have simply not focused on it. It already impacts architecture, engineering, planning, development and building. Architectural drawings are already replaced by three-dimensional design. Building engineering can easily be improved if not replaced by artificial intelligence. Construction has been changed by robotics. Brokerage has been changed through virtual touring.

The way buildings are utilized is changing with the science. Retail has had early change in obvious ways, starting with Amazon, followed by algorithms creating their own images (avatars) of yourself, predicting your every need. Brick and mortar retail is focusing on experiences, sometimes virtual, rather than "stores." Warehousing is replacing store shelves.

Office life is the most obvious change, with remote work easily being perfected from Zoom to new products being developed by Facebook and Microsoft such as "Horizon workrooms."

Travel, resorts, and hotels can be virtually visited for a quick stay. Obviously while not nearly as good as being there, they can be a good quick refresher from a stressful week, or a preview to the real thing.

Will this trend be unfettered? No, there will be the same issues we already have on our online existence: Hacking, harassment, bullying, misinformation and so on. According to Mark Zuckerberg, who has recently changed the name of Facebook to Meta, it will take a minimum of a decade to see significant change, and it will mostly be a younger generation that will adapt. That said, even older real estate guys like myself can understand its potential. I am beginning to drink the Kool-Aid. Have a sip yourself. Be questioning, skeptical, but open, inquisitive, adaptive. This trend is not going away. I'll be back next month with some more specifics.

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