

DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

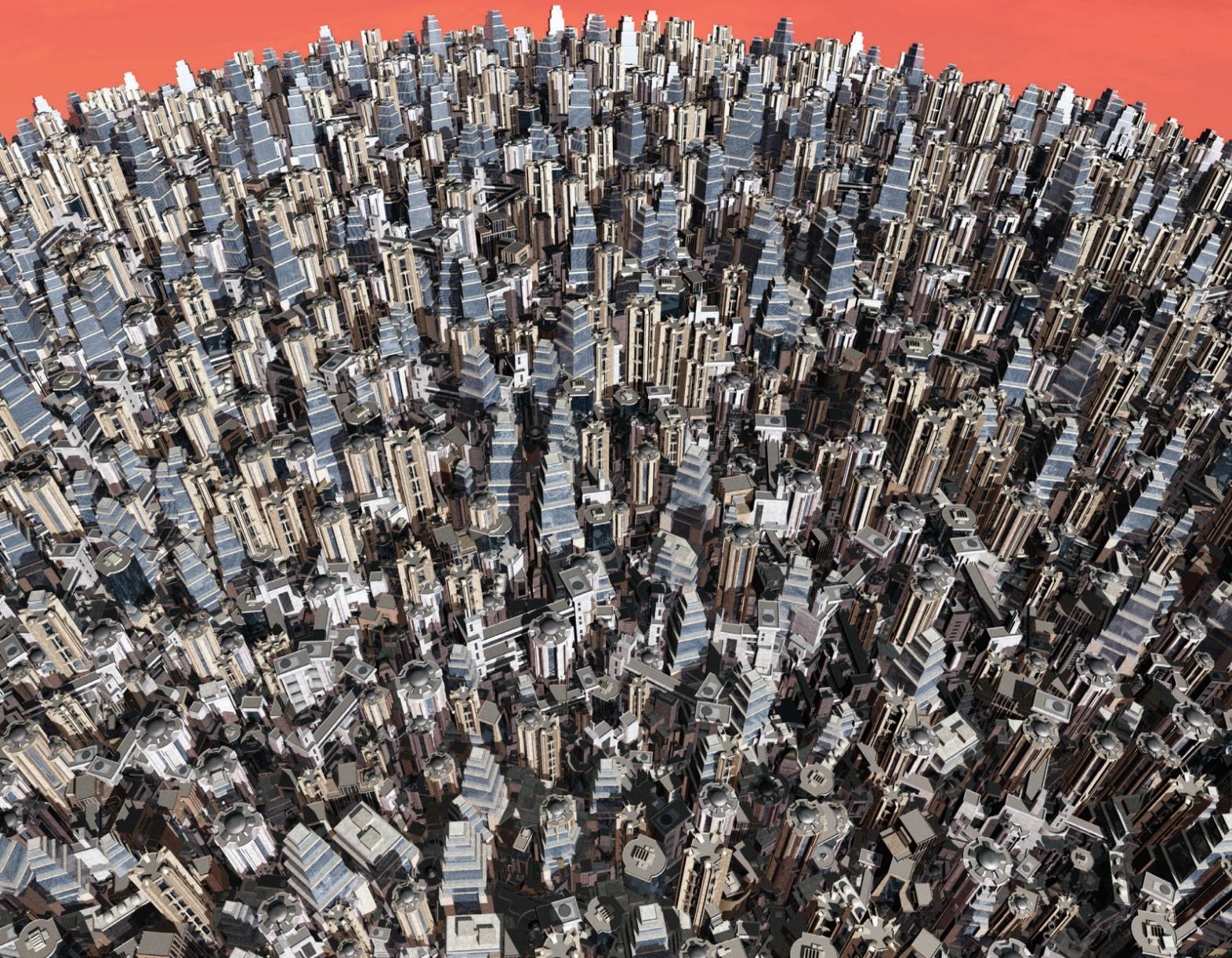
BY ARIANNE COHEN

# Meta-What? Making Sense Out of the Metaverse

**TECH COMPANIES. TRADITIONAL COMPANIES.** Retail companies. All are beginning to dabble in the metaverse, from major players making multibillion-dollar deals to A-list accounting firms snatching up virtual space for \$35,000. The only question: Does everyone understand this new frontier?

All of this budding interest, experts say, is yet one more consequence of the pandemic, which forced one firm after another to

confront a host of technology issues when employees went remote and supply chains flopped. “The pandemic up-leveled the entire globe in digital capacity,” says Leila Lance, senior client partner and advisory leader in Korn Ferry’s Global Technology Market practice, who believes firms that have set foot in this space could be in trouble. “If your company doesn’t have the talent and strategy, and you haven’t made investments to keep up with just the



## THE TAKEAWAY

*Getting the big picture on this technology, as with any, is critical.*

last two years, it will get exponentially harder. It’s going to move fast.”

New technology brings a scramble for talent. But there are no veterans in this emerging field, and the pool of qualified consultants, designers, and engineers is very small. Ask Andy LaPointe—a metaverse advisor who has written a book on Bitcoin—whether most companies have the proper talent in place, and he will offer a three-word answer: “Not so much.”

And companies have to ask themselves what, exactly, they’re staffing. The outlines of the metaverse are still fuzzy; users have one foot in virtual space and the other in the real world. Right now, it’s all reminiscent of the internet circa 1996. Remember how companies snapped up URLs by the bushel in the late 1990s and early aughts? A similar land grab is happening now, except in a three-dimensional, multilayered environment. Its foot traffic—mostly millennials and younger—may wear unsupportive shoes, but they will age and become tech-savvy middle-aged consumers, just like the early users of the internet did.

LaPointe says that **the first step is to define what the metaverse means for your company.** For example, a specialty retailer might use the metaverse in place of a physical retail location in every city, to reduce costs. A couple of flagship stores will suffice instead, plus a metaverse store where customers can make purchases with cryptocurrency. Other companies may simply want to create a presence, or host events, or build infrastructure for relationship building.

What does this mean for the customer? Metaverse experiences are likely to be incredibly rich and engaging, with high levels of texture and intimacy. “You can add value in ways you can’t even imagine, and be with your customers 24-7,” says Chris Cantarella, a senior client partner with Korn Ferry’s Global Technology Market practice.

At many companies, one person is given responsibility for metaverse strategy, typically under the chief strategy or growth officer. However it is handled, most agree the metaverse is a long game, with a long tail and a long payback horizon. Cantarella cautions leaders not to get too caught up in the current technologies swirling around this new field. “Things that are hot today might not even exist tomorrow,” he says. “You just need to stay in the game.”

PHOTO: Klaus Verelst

LEADERSHIP

BY MEGHAN WALSH

# The Trust Recession



**THERE IS ONE COMMODITY** that underpins all others, and—like many goods and products these days—it’s in short supply: trust. At the start of the pandemic, even in the days when buying toilet paper was a cutthroat endeavor, trust was easier to come by. In the face of extraordinary circumstances, people were willing to afford one another a measure of grace. But as the pandemic drags into a third year, the evidence suggests that a lot of that goodwill is wearing thin.

Consumers no longer feel they can rely on customer service to resolve complaints. Air travelers don’t have faith their flights will arrive on time, or