

2022 will be a big year for the metaverse

2022 is set to be a big year for the 'metaverse', as Meta, Apple, Microsoft and Google are all gearing up to release new products.

The big tech firms are betting that gadgets that transport users into fantasy worlds will open up the biggest new software market since Apple introduced touchscreen smartphones in 2007. If the metaverse 'takes off' wing', then perhaps everyone with a smartphone will soon own virtual reality (VR) glasses in a few years.

"The big tech platforms, which have benefited from the rise of mobile computing, are moving towards augmented reality as the next computing platform changes," wrote Goldman Sachs analyst Eric Sheridan. in a note in December 2021. He said it was the 'next logical shift in consumption patterns' and would create new leaders in the tech industry.



Technology companies are pouring billions of dollars into research and development of prototypes and underlying technologies, preparing for a virtual war when their products hit the market. According to Crunchbase, venture capitalists have poured \$10 billion into virtual world-related startups by 2021. This figure does not include the budget from Big Tech. Goldman Sachs analysts estimate about \$1,350 billion will be invested in developing virtual technologies in the coming years.

Below is CNBC's summary of the new product release plans in 2022 of the big names in the world technology industry.

Meta

In October 2021, Facebook changed its name to Meta Platforms to reflect the company's new focus on the concept of metaverse. Meta currently leads the way against other Big Tech competitors when it comes to the

virtual super universe. According to IDC, Meta is manufacturing and selling VR hardware, which will account for 75% of the global market by 2021.

Last Christmas, the most popular app on Apple's App Store in the US was the Oculus virtual reality app that required VR headsets. Quest 2. Although Meta has not announced sales for Quest, Qualcomm, the chipmaker At the heart of Quest, the company is estimated to have shipped 10 million units by November 2021.

Meta is planning to release another high-end VR device this year called Project Cambria. The device will either have better 'mixed reality' hardware, or use a camera outside of a VR headset to deliver the real world to the user. Meta says the new product also includes face and eye tracking, which makes the device more responsive to user commands.

Meta's initial foray into the market gave the company an early look at what users wanted for VR headsets. In December 2021, the US technology company launched the Horizon Worlds social platform, where people can attend comedy shows and movie screenings inside Facebook's virtual world. Meta has acquired several companies that make popular apps for Oculus, notably the VR exercise app Supernatural. However, Meta's acquisition strategy is subject to antitrust scrutiny.

Apple

Apple has never confirmed it is working on a virtual reality device, but the company has been creating prototype approaches within its Technology Development Group for years.

Apple has been laying the groundwork for a large product portfolio. Its newer iPhones are equipped with Lidar sensors that can measure the distance of a subject, which is important for location-based applications. Recent iPhones and iPads also come with ARkit software, which allows app developers to use the iPhone's sensors for accurate mapping and localization.

Those blocks of technology are creating the foundation for a completely new product, expected to be a high-end headset made by Apple, combining virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR). , which is supposed to launch in 2022.

Unlike Meta, Apple doesn't discuss new hardware products until they're ready to be revealed. Once Apple releases the VR glasses, it will likely shake up the entire market and provide a new approach to many competitors, much like what the iPhone did to the smartphone market and the Apple Watch did. do with smart watches. Apple's competitors will be watching closely to see as CEO Tim Cook showcases the biggest selling point and advantage for its VR headset.

The content and how Apple integrates its services will be critical to the appeal of the new device. There are many questions raised right now, for example Apple will introduce a new app store for virtual reality applications? Will Apple Glasses feature exclusive sports or music content stemming from the NextVR purchase? Investors and market analysts alike are beginning to wonder if future sales of VR/AR glasses, or other virtual reality-based devices, will push Apple's stock even higher, if the company released its first new product catalog in 7 years.

Google

Google started the VR glasses craze in Silicon Valley when it introduced Google Glass in 2013. The experiment was not well received at the time. Currently the company sells Google Glass for businesses and not for users.

However, there are signs that Google is getting back to augmented reality seriously, even though it doesn't have as many widely publicized products or technologies as its competitors. Since Glass first came out, new AR glasses have been introduced with more sophisticated screens, better sensors, and more powerful processors.

Google, the company with the world's most popular Android operating system, will lose the most if the metaverse-related device replaces smartphones with a new operating system. In 2020, Google acquired North, a startup specializing in the production of lightweight AR glasses, the spiritual successor in terms of functionality of Google Glass. As shared by Senior Director Mark Lucovsky in December 2021, Google now has a new team focused on operating systems for augmented reality. Before joining Google, Mr. Lucovsky worked at Meta. Google is hiring a lot of people for this team and is adding products 'to the AR category'.

Microsoft

Microsoft was the first Big Tech to introduce HoloLens full-featured AR glasses in 2016. But it may take a long time for HoloLens to be a device that users will wear regularly. Instead, Microsoft decided to focus on 'enterprise', or selling AR glasses to financially viable entities, wanting to see if the technology would make their employees more productive.

HoloLens' most famous customer is the US military. Microsoft won a \$22 billion contract in early 2021, selling 120,000 custom HoloLenses to the government so soldiers could use them for 'increased lethality' purposes. However, the US Army said it will delay the start of field testing of HoloLens to 2022. Whether the deal continues to be delayed, or whether it will benefit both parties or not will be trusted. important effect on the augmented reality market.

HoloLens is also of interest to medical companies who want to see if augmented reality can help improve operating room operations, or could even help perform surgery remotely.

Microsoft is investing heavily in cloud services to be the glue for a virtual world that is expected to be introduced more widely to the public this year. In March 2021, the company announced Mesh, allowing software makers to create apps that help different devices share the same digital reality. Microsoft laid the groundwork for this push in 2017 when it acquired AltspaceVR. Microsoft is integrating Mesh into its Teams business communication platform. Features for Xbox games are also being worked on, but no release date has been set yet.

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