



The Marriott Metaverse Story

By Barton Goldenberg

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Based in my hometown of Bethesda, Marriott International is the largest hotel chain in the world. It currently has 31 brands, 8,194 hotels, and over one and a half million rooms in 138 countries. Marriott employes 377,000 employees and in 2022 had annual revenues of \$20.8B.

The company began in 1927 when J. Willard and Alice S. Marriott started an AW root beer stand in Washington, D.C. They moved from that into the restaurant business and then into the hotel business, and the company has only grown from there. Although the company is concerned primarily with lodging, it has its origins as a food business, and food and drink continue to be a mainstay of the operation contributing 70% of the company's revenues.

While Marriott has been a public company since 1953, it is unique in that it has always been led by a Marriott – first the founder, J. Willard Marriott, and since 1964, his son J.W. Marriott Jr.

Marriott's has 31 brands, most of which are well know that include:

- Luxury brands such as Ritz-Carlton, St. Regis, JW Marriott, The Luxury Collection, and W Hotels.
- Premium brands such as Marriott, Sheraton, Marriott Vacation Club, Delta Hotels, Le Meridien, Westin, Autograph Collection Hotels, Renaissance Hotels, and Gaylord Hotels.
- Select brands such as Courtyard, Four Points by Sheraton, Springhill Suites, Protea Hotels, Fairfield, AC Hotels, Aloft Hotels, and Moxy Hotels.

- Long-stay brands such as Marriott Executive Apartments, Residence Inn, Townplace Suites, Element, and Home & Villas.

Prior to sharing the Marriott Metaverse story, I wanted to talk about four offerings hotels – including Marriott – are using to entice travelers into the Metaverse:

- **Digital Business Meeting and Celebrations**

There will always be people who want to participate in a business meeting or a big celebration that are able to travel. Or people facing issues related to illness, accidents, or simply age that make it hard to attend business meetings or celebrations in-person. A Metaverse hotel can solve these issues by inviting guests to attend a business meeting or a digital celebration whereby the guests put on an AR/VR/XR headset and join the business meeting or digital celebrations virtually. Some hotels now even offer these headsets as a part of the meeting or digital celebration fee.

- **Upselling**

Hotels are leveraging the Metaverse to upsell the hotel's offerings by showing guests what they can experience at the hotel. It's one thing to tell a guest how wonderful a luxurious suite is or how beautiful the spa experience is at the hotel. It's a more rewarding experience to offer the guest a VR/AR/XR headset to view these offerings live within a 3D environment. Some hotels have even created 'digital twins' to replicate for viewers every aspect of their beautiful hotel in the Metaverse.

- **Virtual Tours**

Virtual hotel tours are a popular way to help drive the booking process. Metaverse hotels are inviting guests to jump into a Metaverse avatar and walk through a Metaverse hotel that looks exactly like a physical hotel in some exotic location. Guests can wander the hotel to get a feel for room size, general atmosphere, features, and potential upgrades. Guests can also configure conference and related rooms for an upcoming event at the hotel.

- **NFT Integration**

Metaverse hotels are enticing GenZ and Millennials by incorporating NFTs into their operations to drive booking and to secure benefits like loyalty programs, tickets to on-site events, and more.

Let's now look at how Marriott leverages these and related offerings to entice their guests.

The Marriott Metaverse Adventure

The Marriott Metaverse adventure began in 2020 and has grown ever since. Here are four chronological examples of how Marriott became and maintains its leadership position in the Metaverse.

1) Marriott Entered the Gaming World In 2020

Marriott Bonvoy is Marriott's loyalty program. As a result of COVID restrictions, Marriott Bonvoy's audience grew to include youthful leisure travelers that required Marriott to market differently to these Marriott loyal members. Marriott identified gaming as a key passion for this target audience and began to engage this audience and fuel their travel inspiration through their joy of gaming.

Marriott Bonvoy's in-game ads were brought to life in a way that was designed to deliver high levels of attention and brand awareness while respecting the gamer's playing experience. Marriott's in-game branding was featured across 23 games, covering stadium and racetrack takeovers, custom vehicle wraps, unique character skins and social media amplification from some of the world's biggest gaming franchises.

Marriott delivered ads into gaming titles such as Tennis Clash, Football Manager 2021, Dirt 5, Rezzil Player 21 and Top Eleven. Marriott Bonvoy's strategy was to develop a strategy designed to win over their new gaming audience while increasing brand affinity and awareness. And the strategy worked!

Marriott Bonvoy became the world's first major hotel brand to engage their target audience in the Metaverse across VR, PC, Console, Cloud Gaming and Mobile devices. Their in-game campaign delivered:

- More than 46m impressions to 1.3m unique users over 153 days.
- >26 minutes of time spent in front of Marriott Bonvoy's ads per unique user.
- In-game ads were noticed by 85% of people, which is 1.4x higher than the standard display norm of 61%.
- Users had longer dwell times (1.7 seconds vs 1.4 seconds) compared to traditional display channels.

2. Marriott Created its Own NFTs in 2021

Non-fungible tokens or NFTs, which are non-reproducible stamps to verify ownership of a particular asset. Marriott saw NFTs as a gateway into the world of blockchain-based technologies. In December 2021, Marriott launched its first branded NFT drop – becoming the first hospitality brand to create its own NFTs.

Unveiled at Art Basel in Miami Beach, the drop included three tokens, each of which was designed by a separate artist. The artwork for the NFTs was inspired by Marriott's 'Power of Travel' campaign. The NFTs were awarded to three individuals and came with a significant number of loyalty points, which recipients redeem for travel experiences including hotel stays, car rentals and flights.

In addition to inspiring those three winners to start traveling again, NFTs were a strong marketing tool to entice GenZ and Millennial generations to Marriott hotels..

3. Marriott Leveraged VR Technology in 2022

About a year ago, Marriott Hotels launched “VRoom Service” – a first-of-its-kind guest service that allows guests to order inspiring virtual reality experiences for their hotel rooms. The experience was a first in the travel industry and represents innovation that is still changing how people travel.

Guests are invited to call a dedicated VRoom Service extension or use Marriott’s Mobile Request app to request a VR headset and accompanying headphones. The headsets get delivered to the guest room along with easy-to-use instructions and remain on loan to the guest for up to 24 hours.

In 2022, Marriott also launched another VR innovation called ‘VR Postcards’. VR Postcards are travel stories users can immerse themselves in using a 3D VR headset that feature journeys to unique worldwide destinations. Users can follow a traveler during the experience, take in the astounding landscapes, and listen to personal stories about the trip. The first three VR Postcards were shot in the Andes Mountains in Chile, an ice cream shop in Rwanda, and the bustling streets of Beijing.

Also in 2022, Marriott constructed a digital twin of its Madrid Marriott Auditorium Hotel & Conference Centre, which is the largest self-contained hotel and meeting facility in Europe with nearly 900 rooms and an auditorium that seats 2,000 people. Visitors to this digital twin ‘virtual space’ can configure their space for an upcoming event by rearranging conference rooms set-ups and creating unique environments and experiences.

4. Marriott Leveraged AR Technology

In July 2022, Marriott began experimenting with AR technology that superimposes computer-generated images on a user's view of the real world. The AR experience was launched for Moxy Hotels – a Marriott brand that markets itself as ‘stylish and playful,’ and which is geared toward younger travelers – in the Asia-Pacific market. Marriott’s goal was to break the rules by providing an unconventional hotel stay. The AR experience allows guests, for example, to create and dress up virtual avatars. It was also launched in conjunction with a major regional gaming competition that included an esports component. This is yet another example of Marriott experimenting with how best to entice its GenZ and Millennial guests.

Closing Comment

While many hotels are experimenting in the Metaverse – including several that now have a physical presence in the Decentraland Metaverse and in the Sandbox Metaverse – Marriott International continues to push the boundaries of innovation in technology and travel to create spaces and experiences that inspire and foster its guests’ best thinking. Listen to how Marriott’s senior VP of Brand, Loyalty, and Marketing summarized Marriott’s entry into the Metaverse: “Innovation is always at the core of our marketing strategies, including revolutionizing the way we connect with the next generation of travelers. The Gen Z population is already comfortable and familiar with the thriving virtual world; they are a community of creators and digital nomads

searching for alternate ways to enjoy real-life experiences. As one of the first hospitality brands to enter the digital world, it's up to us to leverage the power of our loyalty program called Marriott Bonvoy and create ways for our members to virtually experience the wonders of travel. By helping to further ignite our belief in the vital importance of travel, we hope to help inspire curiosity in the next generation of our community.”

Quite a healthy vision for a company that began in the food business 96 years ago!

My Metaverse business partner, Tim Bjarin, and I are keen to assist institutions at each step of the way to ensure their successful entry into the Metaverse. To read about other aerospace and defense industry Metaverse use cases, I strongly recommend you visit ISM's award-winning [Metaverse Resource Center](http://www.ismguid.com/metaverse-resource-center) – www.ismguid.com/metaverse-resource-center – where in addition to hundreds of Metaverse use cases, articles and videos, you can also download ISM's new “8 Steps to Do Business Successfully in the Metaverse” White Paper, and where you can also learn about and sign up for ISM's complimentary, 2-hour [Metaverse Bootcamp](#), which is targeted for a company's executive team.

Barton Goldenberg (bgoldenberg@ismguide.com) is president of [ISM, Inc.](#) Since 1985, ISM has established itself as the premier strategic advisor leveraging leading edge technologies – the Metaverse, Digital Communities, and CRM – to create and implement customer strategy with a focus on sales, marketing and customer service. His [thought leadership](#) including creator of the [‘Business Success in a Virtual World’](#) podcast, creator of the award winning [Metaverse Resource Center](#), and author of three business books including [The Definitive Guide to Social CRM](#). He is also in high demand as a keynote speaker (www.bartongoldenberg.com).