The Metaverse offers broad opportunities for trade associations to expand their reach and enhance member experiences like never before. These new and exciting possibilities, however, come with unique challenges. This alert gives a brief overview of the Metaverse and highlights a few key benefits and hurdles trade associations may consider before leaping into the Metaverse.

**What Is the Metaverse?**
In its essence, the Metaverse is built on decentralized, blockchain technology instead of centralized servers. It is best explained as the next generation of the internet, allowing users access to vibrant digital marketplaces, traceable digital assets, and strong social connections through immersive, three-dimensional experiences. With all the excitement and potential surrounding the dynamic landscape that is the Metaverse, businesses and consumers alike have begun flocking to various Metaverse platforms.

Business Opportunities for Trade Associations

Trade associations are uniquely positioned to benefit from all the Metaverse offers. A core value for trade associations is their place as professional hubs for member development, networking, education, and product ideation. Most importantly, trade associations serve as sounding boards establishing industry best practices. The Metaverse creates an opportunity for further reach, stronger collaboration, and more effective evolution by trade associations within a space where the typical physical limitations are largely removed.

With this in mind, we have identified the following ways by which trade associations may be able to leverage the Metaverse:

**Education.** Within Metaverse spaces, trade associations can curate environments that allow their leaders and members to engage in interactive problem-solving sessions that mimic in-person experiences. Associations may communicate new or established practices more effectively with members who can join virtual conferences, presentations, and other educational events from anywhere in an immersive environment. The best part of the Metaverse is that ideas can be exchanged and developed in ways that less interactive mediums like webinars or simple, mass emails cannot achieve.

**Trade Shows.** Trade associations have learned to pivot to more virtual environments throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. The Metaverse, however, is an enhanced, virtual experience that combines the best parts of virtual and in-person environments. With these capabilities, trade associations may consider moving trade shows to the Metaverse to create augmented experiences for attendees where participants can showcase product prototypes, share resources, and continue connecting organically. Further, trade associations might find new incentives exist for participating member businesses aiming to gain new customers at trade shows. Members could unleash greater reach and revenue potential when the usual limits of space and access are removed from the Metaverse experience.

**Member Connection and Mentoring.** Perhaps the most exciting aspect of the Metaverse is the ability for member connections to be strengthened, surpassing even pre-pandemic levels. Membership and mentoring can occur across borders, and connections as meaningful as those developed in-person may form, as 3-D simulations offer association members the space to foster and nourish relationships on a far-reaching, consistent basis.

Potential Business and Legal Issues
Trade associations should also be mindful of the following business and legal considerations:

**Select the Right Platform for Your Organization.** Metaverse platforms have varying tradeoffs. Some, such as Roblox and Fortnite, offer access to more consumers but generally allow less control over program content. Others, such as Decentraland and the Sandbox, provide businesses with greater control but smaller audiences and higher barriers to entry. Trade associations should consider their target audience and their long-term Metaverse strategy before committing to a particular platform.

**Make Governance Adjustments.** Trade associations may consider adopting new membership models that include a separate tier for virtual engagement. For businesses that were previously unable to commit to trade association membership, new opportunities for engagement and increased access are likely to follow. Trade associations should prepare a plan for what to do with all of their global reach, their newfound members, and how they will create a member experience that mirrors traditional membership in the Metaverse. Associations should be mindful of how they will maintain control over their short-term and long-term strategic direction.

**Revise Contracts for the Virtual Environment.** Trade associations entering into long-term event contracts with hotels and other venues should assess how their needs have changed and revise contracts accordingly. For example, associations might now require heightened Wi-Fi capabilities for supporting technologies. Associations may also need to negotiate provisions that consider the balance between fewer, in-person attendees in exchange for more virtual attendees for an overall, well-integrated experience.

**Secure and Manage Your IP.** Trade associations should consider filing trademark applications covering core Metaverse goods, services, or promotional materials. Additionally, associations should secure any available blockchain domains, which can be used to facilitate Metaverse payments and to direct users to blockchain content, such as websites and decentralized applications. And for any trade associations that license their IP, especially based on geographic and territorial lines, licensing rights should be revisited to properly allocate or address any Metaverse-related matters for which licensees may have rights.

**Ready To Enter?**

The Metaverse is, undoubtedly, a new frontier that warrants both enthusiasm and in-depth deliberation for trade associations that want in on the action.