

# EPISODE 10: SHIFTING TO A CAREER IN USER EXPERIENCE

## AUDIO TRANSCRIPT

**[00:00:00] Renee:** Hey everyone. This is Renee from Accenture in the Philippines. Welcome to the 10th episode of Pinays Talk Tech Podcast, the podcast for future forward Filipinas. Join us as we have inspiring conversations with Pinays in Tech from young innovators, to industry leaders, this podcast will show you how Pinays in Tech are leading through change. This is Pinays Talk Tech Podcast.

**[00:00:29] Renee:** What does it take to be part of this journey? Today, we're talking to Marya Alcantara, who is part of the Philippine Hub for Innovation at Accenture in the Philippines as a user experience designer. She is leading the way in building experiences in virtual reality.

**[00:00:50] Renee:** Hi Marya, it's nice to see you today and I know it's my first time really meeting you and speaking to you. And with our listeners as well, can you share with us a little bit about yourself?

**[00:01:02] Marya:** Thank you so much for having me today, Renee. I feel very excited for today. So I'm Marya, but my real name is Maria Arlene Alcantara. I got married during

the pandemic with only 20 guests allowed to attend, and I'm a paw-rent with two Shih Tzus, Yuda and Kobe who demands time and attention just like any other kid. I have a bachelor's degree in Fine Arts with a Major in Advertising from St. Scholastica's College in Manila, and I've been in the design industry for so many years.

**[00:01:34] Marya:** Currently, I'm with Accenture for 10 years. I started as a Senior Creative Design Analyst, and this year I got promoted as a User Experience Specialist.

**[00:01:47] Renee:** Wonderful. So we have two things in common. I also have a Shih Tzu named Cocobel and also Ora et Labora. I'm also a Scholastican!

**[00:01:57] Marya:** Wow! Nice to know that.

**[00:02:59] Renee:** Nice to meet you. So Marya, your background is user experience.

**[00:02:03] Marya:** Yes, I have. Currently, I have this project wherein as a UI/UX resource. I am there to provide better user experience in terms of creating them like user flow or narrative flow on how they interact with the Metaverse world.

**[00:02:19] Renee:** Oh, that's interesting 'cause when people think about Metaverse, right now, it's the highest level technology out there and people don't really know what it is. So I'm surprised that your background really is in fine arts and yet you are in the Metaverse. 'Cause when I think about Metaverse, I think about, you know, that movie Ready Player 1? Have you seen that? Where they're just in their houses and they just have an Oculus? Is that really what Metaverse is about? Is it just yourself having an avatar in a virtual world or what do you think, what's your understanding of the Metaverse?

**[00:02:52] Marya:** Personally, Renee, Metaverse is just as simple as a digital space, a space where people can come together to collaborate, exchange value through shared virtual experiences, and interact virtually to accomplish a goal. So, technically speaking, Metaverse, AR and VR are closely related to each other, and most often than not, are intertwined. So VR or virtual reality is a technology, where you are allowed to experience virtual worlds such as in games. So it provides simulation and it is limited to individual experiences. So whereas Metaverse is a platform that is constantly evolving with endless possibilities so it allows interaction with different types of virtual spaces or having complete ownership. A full fledged digital world in which it can control and may develop.

**[00:03:47] Renee:** Okay, so not a lot of people understand what VR is, what is AR, what is XR, what is NFT, what is blockchain? And I think all those are part of the Metaverse right?

**[00:03:58] Marya:** Yes.

**[00:03:59] Renee:** So do you have a kind of an understanding of, for example, and again, you know, if there are students listening to this, they don't really understand what is augmented reality is, which is AR versus virtual reality versus XR. So what are the different areas of Metaverse?

**[00:04:19] Marya:** Okay. Basically when we talk about VR, it's more on the virtual reality. It's like merging the real world into the digital world. So it's more on, you're like merging the actual environment into a digital space. So it's more interacting with this kind of element from that Metaverse world and then once you're inside a real world or a real environment, you'd be able to interact with this kind of realities.

**[00:04:49] Renee:** Okay. So, I would imagine augmented reality, you know, cause I love designing, interior design even though I'm not an actual interior designer. So in augmented reality, I can place a chair and I would have the image of the chair on my phone and I would use my phone to place it inside my house. Right? And that can kind of tell me, does it look good in that space? That's augmented? Is that right?

**[00:05:15] Marya:** Yes

**[00:05:16] Renee:** Okay. So is there a better example of augmented reality? That's the one that I think I personally use the most.

**[00:05:24] Marya:** Actually, Metaverse is having a great impact in our daily life. So right now, for example, we take in like some medical field,



this new world can be helpful for both physicians and patients. Like going virtual can help doctors assist people from far away. So like improving their accessibility. So when they use metaverse for example, digital payment. Simpler medical record storage and improved online care. And then another thing, I can give an example is like Metaverse also using in retailers wherein it allows the user to try on clothes without actually going to the physical storage.

**[00:06:00] Renee:** Ah, Yes.

**[00:06:00] Marya:** It's like an app with that. But yes, you've mentioned that you're just using your phone, so it's providing convenience at the click of your finger. And then another one is during the pandemic, Metaverse had a huge impact on the workplace. So as employers started to tap on digital workplaces or workspaces, the concept of work from home can actually be traced to Metaverse, so actually employees to get to the office without commuting. So having these new immersive forms of team collaboration, initial workspaces as 3D avatars, enable people to interact, socialize, and be productive even with a restriction of the pandemic. And then to have a better user experience with a Metaverse, they can use their keyboards or what we call the Oculus headsets.

**[00:06:49] Renee:** Yeah. So I think, well, I know for a fact in Accenture when we have new joiners, they're invited to join AltSpace. And I know you've been here for about 10 years now, but I work kind of in that area as well, in the Metaverse as well. So we actually have a space for taking care of people where they can come in and play games. Have you seen our AltSpace?

**[00:07:09] Marya:** Yes.

**[00:08:50] Marya:** Okay. So technology has always been interesting. So in this day and age, no one can live without it, right? So, like, who doesn't use a phone, a computer, and there are many apps coming out that would suit everyone's needs. So, yes, technology has been and will always be interesting. But I developed a special interest in technology when I became part of PHI or the Philippine Hub for Innovation design team. Previous years I learned UI/UX, which was a hot skill at that moment. So this shifted my career before I created marketing collaterals, conceptualization of the look and feel for the events. But now, I started to explore the possibilities in tech industry. So as I said, being with PHI, I started translating design concepts to prototype solutions. Like, or for better understanding, I started designing apps and also providing users a better immersive digital experience in the Metaverse.

**[00:09:47] Renee:** Okay. Did you take any special training for UX?

**[00:09:53] Marya:** It's more on self-study and because of my team, they are also open to share their knowledge with me. And then also I having a good relationship with my team, talking to different kinds of designers. I have the programmers, what are the programs or the latest programs we could use for the Metaverse.

**[00:10:10] Renee:** What is interesting to me is all the new types of roles, 'cause UX has been with us. I've had a UX team for a few years now, but I think it's still fairly new. and what's interesting about new roles that are created out of necessity is you can't go to school for it, 'no?

**[00:10:28] Marya:** Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. (affirmative)

**[00:10:29] Renee:** What did you learn in your actual school and in your background that actually helped you in user experience that maybe we can inspire somebody also in fine arts and say, "Hey, you know what? You can have a career in tech."

**[00:10:40] Marya:** Okay, so maybe when I took a Bachelor of Fine Arts major in advertising, I developed my skill in terms of creating design assets, conceptualization, and then more on graphic design. But in terms of the UI/UX, it's more on your giving or you're trying to provide a user or a better user experience with the client by using your apps on how they navigate it, how they access it. So it's kind of different, but the advantage for me is that maybe because I have the knowledge already in designing or creating design assets, which is also related with a UI, it's more on the user interface of an app. So an advantage of UI/UX is that I'm putting myself into it when I'm using the app to have the empathy of my users as well.

**[00:11:28] Renee:** Yeah. And I think people are very spoiled at the moment. That if the user experience is not as simple and good as all our favorite apps on our phone right now, it used to be, to me ha, it used to be a nice to have that the UI is pretty, the colors are great, but now UX is a necessity. The color doesn't matter as long as the experience is pretty good. You were, you know, in fine arts, now you found your way through tech. Within the metaverse itself, what are the other areas that you have personally explored?

**[00:12:03] Marya:** Basically it's more on the programs that I've learned from my current project wherein right now you've mentioned earlier about the AltspaceVR,

so I learned that. And then the other thing I'm learning right now is the Microsoft Mesh. So it is a collaboration and communication platform for Metaverse so that allows also the user to enter virtual or extended words to see or share and collaborate on persistent 3D content. So as I mentioned earlier, our PHI programmers also, they have this program, they call it Unity or Unreal Engines. These are the engines or programs they use to create these realistic virtual worlds. So I personally am trying to learn and understand at least a couple of top program languages such as C sharp, C++ 'cause I believe, along with the creative mindset I have right now, it'll help me to step deeper into the world of Metaverse in technology.

**[00:13:04] Renee:** Oh, I love that. Yes. Yay for coding. Oh my God. C# and C++, that was there 20 years ago. So I'm thrilled that I can probably get a job, with you guys if C#, that's really cool, and I appreciate that you're expanding yourself to that area as well, and not just focusing on UX.

**[00:13:27] Marya:** Right now in my current project, I created an illustrated storyboard. This storyboard showcases a series of moments and experiences of different users, so that are part of the Metaverse journey. So, besides that, I also conceptualize and illustrate my ideas. We have to conceptualize or create an idea for 3D characters, immersive virtual environment and create design assets, which will give or merge the real world and digital experiences for different users.

**[00:14:00] Renee:** So what tools do you use? Because I love that you're illustrating something whenever somebody tells me that I think of a painting, or maybe like a large paper, but because it's virtual, what tools do you use?



**[00:14:12] Marya:** Basically I use Figma. So from there, you can import images, you can create vectors, and at the same time, the good thing with that program is it's an online program where your clients can also view it and they can provide feedback on the spot.

**[00:14:29] Renee:** Right, because it's a collaboration design, collaboration tool. Yes. So I love Figma. I've used it previously, not as the designer, but as the person who's commenting.

**[00:14:41] Marya:** Okay.

**[00:14:42] Renee:** I do love Figma. So how do you translate them... Walk me through the journey when you have created the illustrations, and the flow and the client signs it off, what happens after? How does it become a reality in the Metaverse?

**[00:14:55] Marya:** Okay, before that, really, I just want to share, when I was in the design industry, I mastered the design apps or programs like Photoshop, Illustrator, In Design. And then when I joined the tech industry, that moment, personally, I studied the Figma since it was the client's requirements or programmers requirements. So I really pushed myself to study that program. And then after that, creating the visuals or the narrative flow through Figma. Once the client approves the concept, the overall flow of the journey in their Metaverse, we have in our team, we have our own 3D designers, so they're the one who make my design into a reality or a 3D content, something like that. They create the 3D version of that. So plus, and then after that, I think they connect with the developers to add the code or something for the Altspace we are, or the Microsoft Mesh. And then that's it. The world will be developed.

**[00:15:55] Renee:** Wow. It takes a village 'no. So you have a UX designer and then you have a 3D designer that translates

**[00:16:03] Marya:** Yes.

**[00:16:04] Renee:** And then you give it to the programmers to make things move, I guess.

**[00:16:08] Marya:** Yes. Yes. Definitely.

**[00:16:10] Renee:** Ah, amazing. And then the client starts to use it. You know, I appreciate you walking me through that journey. What can you share about the challenges that you see about using, you know, the Metaverse in day-to-day lives, is there a challenge? Is there a huge, a better benefit? What do you think?

**[00:16:30] Marya:** For challenge, maybe for me, I think of the way how they could access the Metaverse like not all of us are know how to install the app or how can I navigate it? How to use the controllers? Do I have to buy the Oculus? Something like that. So maybe that I consider it as a challenge, but as us in the PHI, we also created or a way wherein we introduce it to the user, the basic guidelines for them to follow, to have a better user experience when they're using a Metaverse that we created.

**[00:17:03] Renee:** And I think that's very interesting because a lot of people struggle with the concept of can we really make Metaverse a reality? And I think you hit on that, that the gateway to making it reality for everybody is if you democratize access to it, because right now it's not, you know, not everybody could access because I need a very expensive gadget. Yes, there is Google Cardboard. Are you familiar with Google





Cardboard? They just have this little cardboard with a glass. And then if you look at an image in, let's say in YouTube, you can see it in 3D no. But I agree with you. I think that's a big challenge that the industry has to resolve. How do you democratize access to the Metaverse? I think for me, Altspace is the beginning of that. Because you can just access it, just within your computer. You don't need an Oculus when you're in Altspace. So I think that's a great start. And I, you know, look forward to seeing how the industry evolves, that it's really on day-to-day. Because you know, some people, some of the arguments on the Metaverse would be why would I need to go to the Metaverse to read news, for example? You know, I'll just read the news straight, right? So the use cases for day-to-day life, I think at the Metaverse, I would be interested to see. But the other side of it, like the benefits especially of augmented reality, as we had discussed, whether you're designing a house or putting clothes on yourself—I think is significant already.

**[00:18:30] Renee:** What else do you think about, how do we bring, for example, Metaverse to students? What do you think would be an entryway for them to start understanding what the Metaverse is. If I'm a student just getting into technology, where should they look?

**[00:18:44] Marya:** Okay. maybe for the students who want to pursue a career in tech, I think, and they want to taste the flavor of success in their career in the tech industry, I think they just have to be passionate in everything they do. Personally, there's a lot of numerous opportunities to put that passion and integrate technology into it. So they just have to push themselves outside their comfort zone.

There's limitless opportunities right here in Accenture. And then for them, they just have to work with their passion and at the same time work in the field of technology. I always tell my friends that Tech is not just for programmers cause when I was studying, I think, "Oh no, technology, I just have to understand coding, everything." It's different. When I studied fine arts, but no, tech is more than that.

**[00:19:31] Marya:** So maybe I just have to provide some tips for our listeners. Like be assertive, be assertive in challenging yourself to take different kinds of roles and responsibilities and be brave to explore opportunities in the field of technology, and allow yourself to learn new skills, expand your network, and grow professionally out of your comfort zone.

**[00:19:56] Marya:** And then I personally face many challenges for my professional life, Renee. And to overcome these challenges, it's either from work or from school, or there are barriers in both sides, you just have to remain positive and then, which help you to be motivated, productive and focused on positive outlooks in the workplace or in your school or in your project. But positive thinking isn't magic. And it won't make all of your problems disappear. So what it'll do, it make problems seem more manageable and help you approach hardships in a more positive and productive way.

**[00:20:35] Renee:** Yes. It's not. Just thinking positive is not magic, but you stand up and just move forward. I really like that, Marya. I would love to hear more about you and your journey in



the future, but this is, I think, such a great entry to what does it take to be part of developing the Metaverse? Because I really feel like whenever people think about Metaverse, it's, ooh, these, you know, very difficult technology and yet you are here, you are helping develop the Metaverse because I think you're right, the Metaverse is not gonna work if the experience inside is not great. So I love that this is our entry to understanding what it takes to make the Metaverse work.

**[00:21:20] Marya:** To those who want to explore careers related to the metaverse and tech is keep motivating and continue challenging yourself to explore and start or learn something new. In today's world of constantly changing skills, learning is essential, very essential. So you have to start somewhere. It's hard because it's new. You just have to keep doing it. That way it becomes easier, constantly practicing, constantly growing.

**[00:21:46] Renee:** I love that. Thank you so much, Marya, and I think that's words to live by for all our listeners. Thank you so much for joining us today.

**[00:21:55] Marya:** Again, thank you so much, Renee, and I really enjoyed our conversation.

**[00:22:04] VO:** Thank you for listening to Pinays Talk Tech Podcast brought to you by Accenture. Don't forget to hit subscribe on all major podcast platforms.

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