COUNTERMARKETS

Trends & Strategies for Maximum Freedom

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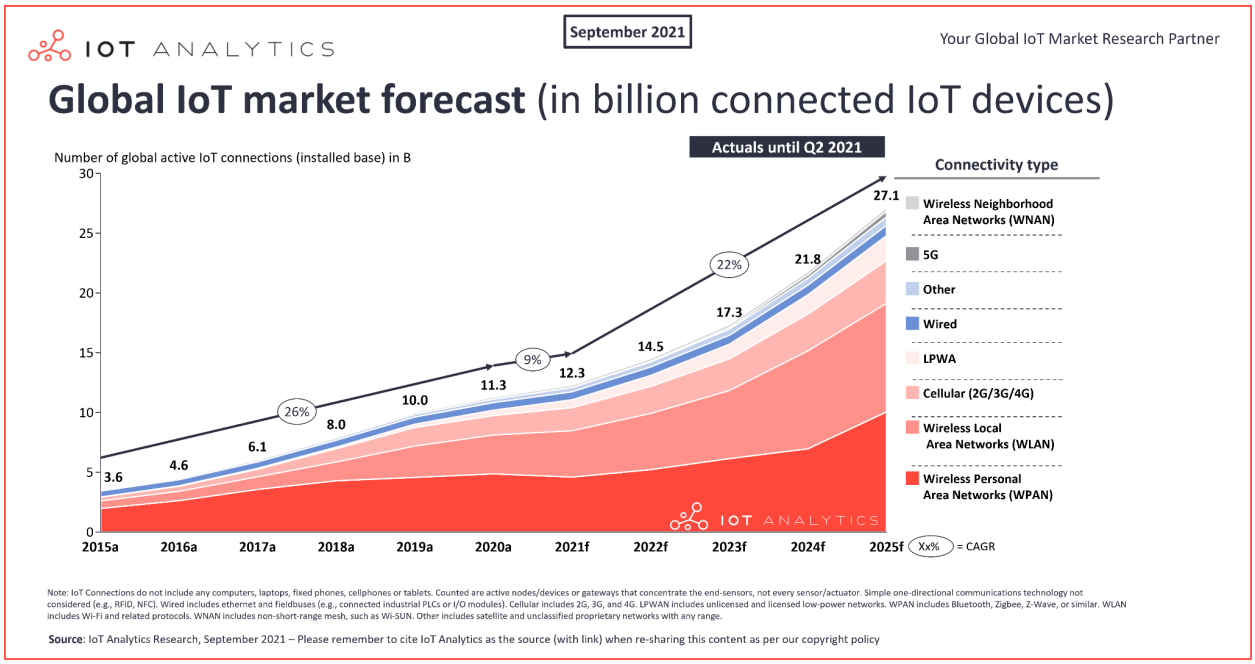
Trends & Strategies for Maximum Freedom

TRENDS & FORECASTING

The 6G Metaverse Is Already Being Built

By Nicholas West

As I recounted way back in Issue 14 from April, 2018, Big Tech bet heavily on 5G to supercharge the Internet of Things. At the time, 5G wireless was just being rolled out in major cities. We now can see a lot more of what that investment has produced.

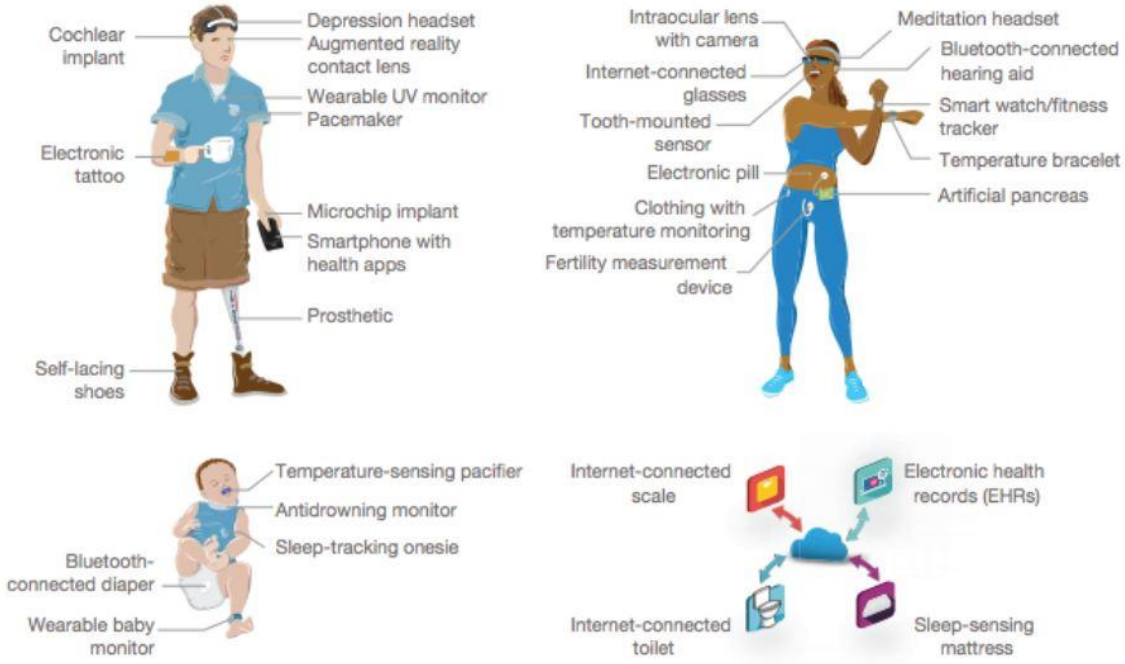


Source: IOT Analytics

The caption states that the current *12 billion devices* only comprise nodes and gateways of end-sensors, excluding computers, cellphones, tablets, etc. When all of *that* is accounted for, some estimates indicate that our interconnected world of smart devices, gadgets, wearables and sensors with the ability to connect to the internet stands near 46 billion (other staggering numbers and projections can be found here).

5G has indeed been the driving force it was projected to be when I first covered this trend in 2018, and we are on pace toward achieving an Internet of Everything ... including the human body.

FIGURE 1
IoB Examples



As we'll see, the "Internet of Bodies" is a likely precursor to the next stage already in development where we can be fully merged into a new physical-virtual-economic system that has only been teased at by our current rudimentary virtual reality and augmented reality wearables and applications.

In fact, environmental, health and privacy activists have barely finished filing their complaints and grievances about the dangers of 5G before the global technocracy has steamrolled ahead with building out a 6G architecture that promises to be far more advanced and pervasive.

However, as with nearly every technology, it is multi-faceted and will likely come in more colors and flavors than those who divide themselves along the strict lines of "for" or "against." Similar to 5G,

it also might not be smooth sailing the whole way and will probably be filled with typical government-corporate grift through failed promises, endemic corruption, potentially catastrophic cybersecurity gaps, and an ever-increasing supply chain collapse with computing not left immune.

Are We Finally Ready for The Metaverse?

If you are even a casual science fiction reader or viewer, you are certainly familiar with the concepts of a truly immersive virtual world. My first exposure to these ideas came from William Gibson's 1984 book *Neuromancer*. There were other more subtle iterations before, with more overt examples taking shape a bit later. Neal Stephenson's book *Snow Crash* appears to be the first to have coined the actual term "metaverse" in 1992, but never achieved the popular acclaim of similar ideas presented by *The Matrix* series. We can also look to the 1992 film version of *The Lawnmower Man* and the 1998 book by Tad Williams, *Otherland,* as other pivotal depictions of virtual reality – often gone awry.

Yet, none of the above were in my opinion quite as relatable to our own time and place as the 2011 book *Ready Player One*. Ernest Cline's tale envisioned a 2045 global economic and environmental meltdown that was post-apocalyptic in scope and impact upon the average individual, but which still retained a corporate-technology overlay that only grew in magnitude and sophistication as much of the rest of society was relegated to living in high-rise trailer parks. Instead of the planet being plunged fully back to the Stone Age, or linearly advancing, we see both extremes occur simultaneously.

What results is a world so physically bleak that it lends itself to the search for escape by any means, and a simple way to do it was

available via plugging into the virtual “OASIS.” Once there, we witness a literal gamification of all possible activities, which are also surveilled both by corporate overlords as well as other “players.” It is also still portrayed as a world of haves and have nots, but this time through one’s ability to obtain XP (experience points) in order to travel larger distances and level-up – in effect, a type of tokenized social credit score. The OASIS by extension becomes a more ingrained version of reality populated by A.I., mechanized warfare and fully digitalized “immortal” humans projected into it, all while reflecting itself back into reality.

In our world of late 2021, the economy has been contracted to a near standstill, people are locked down for prolonged periods with smart devices as their closest company, and Big Tech has similarly become exponentially more influential. Social credit scores and health passports have rolled out; and a climate change economy is continuously promoted which aims to shrink all human activity even further while increasing central management via technology.

We do appear to finally be ready to make the next technological expansion at the same moment that the individual is collapsing inward. Is a ramp-up of coverage about “The Metaverse,” as well as 6G, such a coincidence?

Towards the end of October we witnessed nothing short of an onslaught of metaverse news as Facebook rebranded itself with the name Meta to reflect its future direction. It also served to usher in the word *metaverse* as a household term. We even have our friends at the World Economic Forum (of Great Reset fame) chiming in that it’s “the next evolution of the internet.”

If the concept can be actualized, it is expected to be as transformative to society and industry as the mobile phone.

The internet today is often the main entry point for millions of us to access information and services, communicate and socialize with each other, sell goods, and entertain ourselves. The metaverse is predicted to replicate this value proposition – with the main difference being that distinction between being offline and online will be much harder to delineate.

This could manifest itself in several ways, but many experts believe that "extended reality" (XR) – the combination of augmented, virtual and mixed reality – will play an important role. Central to the concept of the metaverse is the idea that virtual, 3D environments that are accessible and interactive in real time will become the transformative medium for social and business engagement. If they are to become practical, these environments will be dependent on widespread adoption of extended reality.

Until now, XR technologies have mostly been limited to a subset of video games and niche enterprise applications. However, as games increasingly become platforms for social experiences, the likelihood increases that their characteristics – discoverable and continuous virtual worlds, mediums for open and creative expression, and conduits for pop culture – can and will be applied to other contexts.

But I thought the government was going to take a stand against Facebook’s horrific practices which have corrupted youth,

promoted hatred and undermined democracy, particularly after recent “whistleblower” revelations? The WEF’s tweet about this wonderful new Facebook metaverse shows a toddler with VR strapped to her head. #SavingKids.

Meanwhile, in the cryptosphere, the concept of creating a digital representation of oneself (avatar) and trading within a tokenized economy also can be seen in the rise of NFTs and blockchain gaming, previously discussed in Issue 55. Of course, NFTs as

instruments containing unique property rights is a valid use-case, but the “metaverse” is clearly taking shape there with the creation of virtual gamified properties and avatars that now rival financial valuations that can even exceed those in the real world. It’s a trend that had been building long before Facebook’s announcement, but has now reached frankly insane levels with virtual property leader Decentraland exploding along with The Sandbox, Enjin and a host of other key players. Here is the 7-day chart for Decentraland following the arrival of Meta:

This shows that on both sides of the metaverse aisle, there is rising awareness and interest. Moreover, as these numbers shoot up, it is bound to encourage the arrival of many more projects intent to capitalize upon the trend.

However, in both cases, we are still a long way from what a true metaverse would be. We are still at a place where these are

clearly third-person interactions and projections, regardless of whether we are attempting to simulate a first-person perspective with the latest clunky Oculus VR or Ray-Ban smart glasses. But social acceptance of this potential future is growing.

Vin retweeted this recently:

The rising need for remote work collaboration and education also lends itself to promoting a desire for more interactive networking.

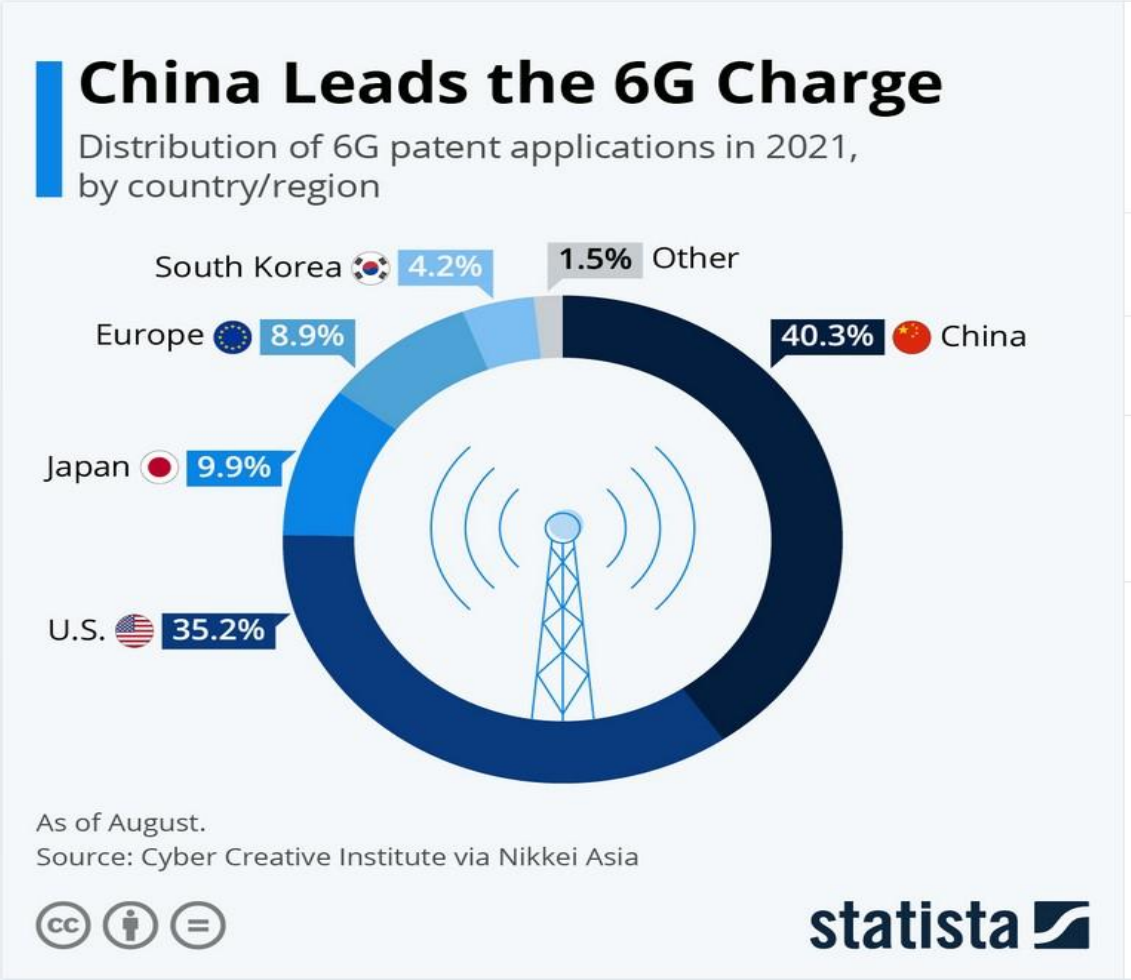
For the next level to be reached, however, we need far more seamless immersion, which will demand exponentially more speed. This is where 6G comes into play.

If we think that 5G has been fast and transformative, how about traveling at "the speed of thought" while receiving every type of physical stimulus offered in the real world?

How Close Is A 6G Metaverse?

While the lead-in for both 5G and 6G immediately promotes content download speeds – I mean, who doesn't need 6G to "download 142 hours of Netflix films in one second"? – it's about far more than that. It's about taking the existing Internet of Things and ramping it up to real-time data transmission and interoperability. This will remove the latency barrier that keeps us lagging behind full immersion into a pure metaverse.

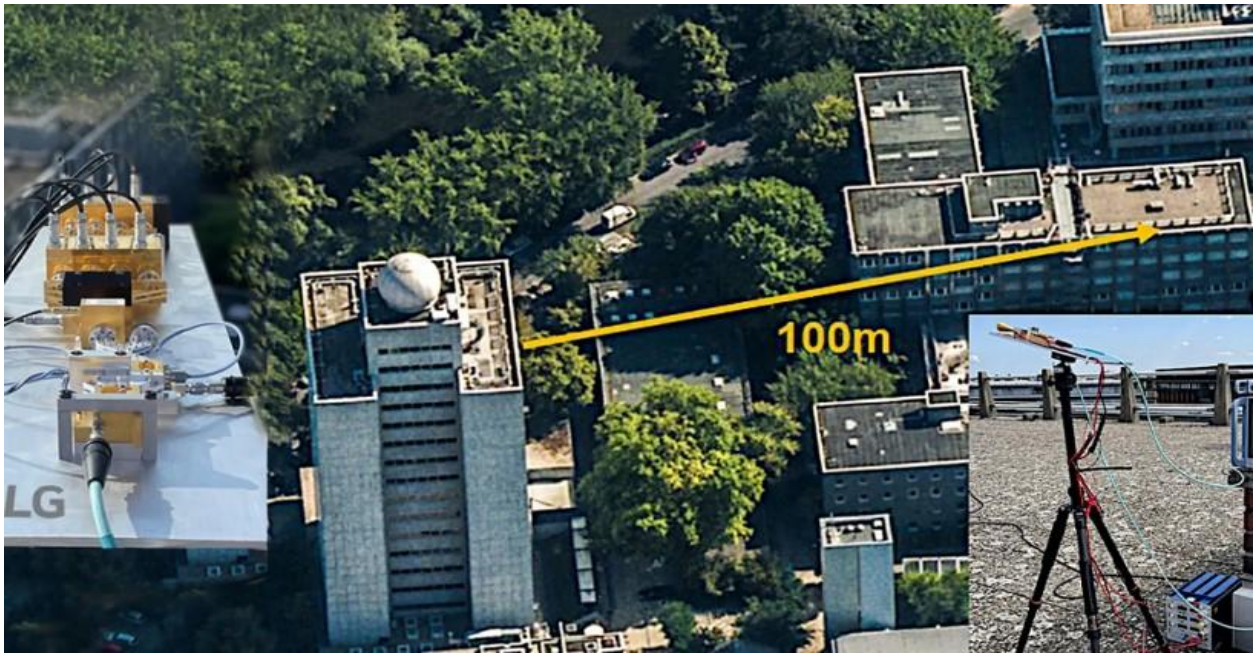
According to Statista, China is leading the charge, which is no comfort to those of us who have seen the current social credit dystopia take root there. The U.S. is a close second.



One major limitation with 5G has been its short transmission range, requiring the dense placement of small cells to bounce the data. 6G so far appears to be suffering from the same limitation, but new tests are being conducted.

In August, LG became the first to complete a successful outdoor 6G test using an amplifier to reduce power loss during broadband transmission:

> This experiment involved transmitting 6G data across a range of 100 metres between the rooftops of the Fraunhofer Heinrich Hertz Institute and the Berlin Institute of Technology.
>
> "The success of this test demonstrates that we are ever closer to the successful application of terahertz radio communication spectrum in the upcoming 6G era," said president and CTO of LG, Dr I P Park.



Other industry leaders – Samsung, AT&T and Qualcomm – along with a large group of affiliates recently launched a research center at the University of Texas, indicating their commitment to a 6G future.

But as we've also seen with 5G, it's not only ground-based, it's moving into space. As *Popular Mechanics* covered in late-2020, before the public even knew what 6G was, China already launched a payload of 13 6G satellites. On a slight side note, in addition to the obvious global coverage these satellites would provide for telecom companies rolling out 6G services, we also have seen global militaries staking their claim in space and increasingly working with 5G to interconnect their weapons into the "Battlefield of Things." It's just more evidence that everything that can be connected will be connected (and projected) into a future metaverse.

Haptic holograms are likely the next stage of connectivity and immersion where not only can you "see" your new reality, you can feel it and even smell it as well. Hologram technology has already come a long way and is in current use within the medical and military fields predominantly. But imagine how this would apply to all that we have covered above, as well as how easy it would be to convince people about how necessary and enjoyable these new possibilities would be for health, education, work and play. *The Conversation* explicitly lays out these possibilities and new research to make it happen.

> My colleagues and I working in the University of Glasgow's bendable electronics and sensing technologies research group have now developed a system of holograms of people

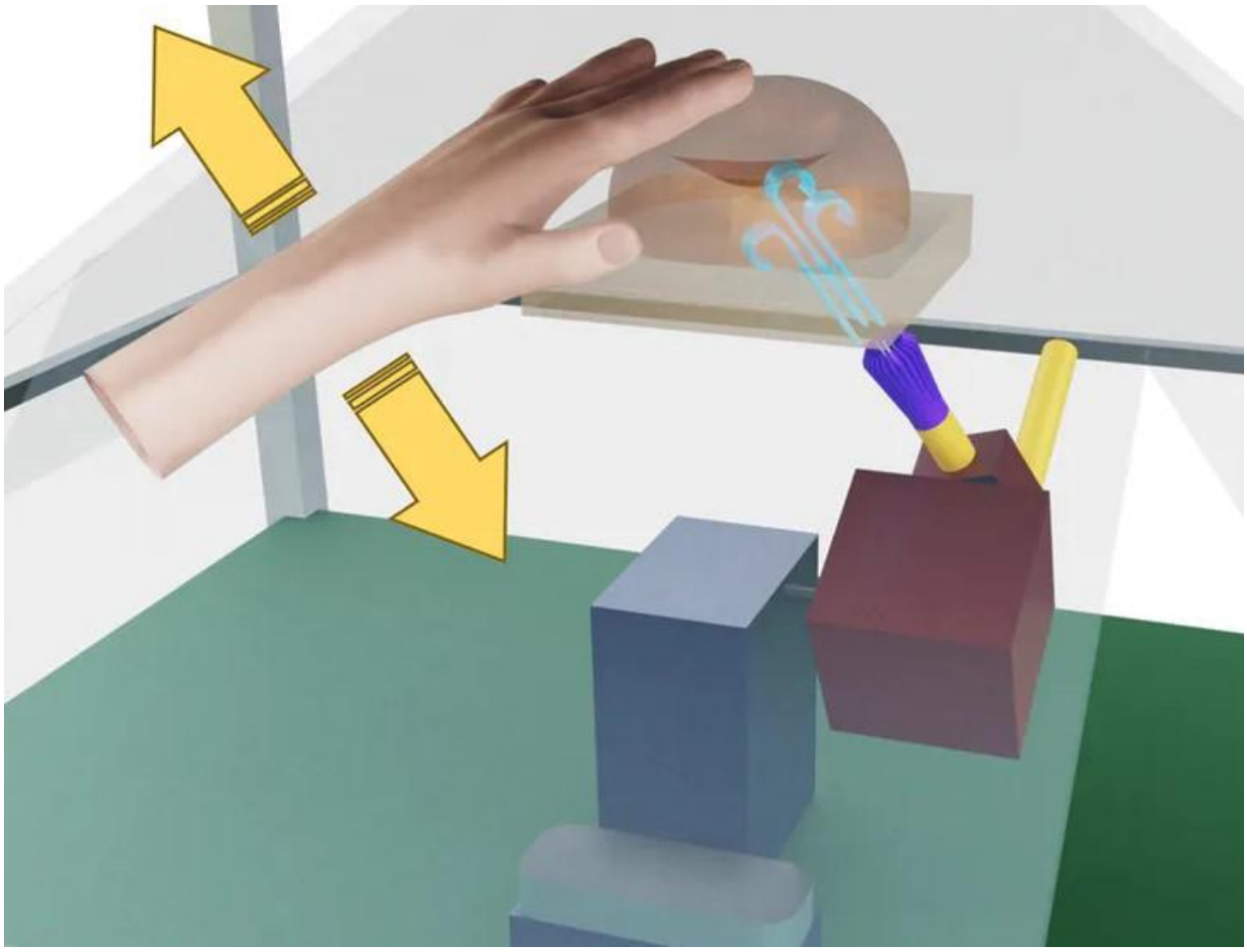
using “aerohaptics”, creating feelings of touch with jets of air. Those jets of air deliver a sensation of touch on people’s fingers, hands and wrists.

In time, this could be developed to allow you to meet a virtual avatar of a colleague on the other side of the world and really feel their handshake. It could even be the first steps towards building something like a holodeck.

To create this feeling of touch we use affordable, commercially available parts to pair computer-generated graphics with carefully directed and controlled jets of air.

In some ways, it’s a step beyond the current generation of virtual reality, which usually requires a headset to deliver 3D graphics and smart gloves or handheld controllers to provide haptic feedback, a stimulation that feels like touch. Most of the wearable gadgets-based approaches are limited to controlling the virtual object that is being displayed.

Controlling a virtual object doesn’t give the feeling that you would experience when two people touch. The addition of an artificial touch sensation can deliver the additional dimension without having to wear gloves to feel objects, and so feels much more natural….



Pushing a button allows the user to feel pressure which feels like touch. University of Glasgow, Author provided

One of the ways we've demonstrated the capabilities of the "aerohaptic" system is with an interactive projection of a basketball, which can be convincingly touched, rolled and bounced. The touch feedback from air jets from the system is also modulated based on the virtual surface of the basketball, allowing users to feel the rounded shape of the ball as it rolls from their fingertips when they bounce it and the slap in their palm when it returns.

Users can even push the virtual ball with varying force and sense the resulting difference in how a hard bounce or a soft bounce feels in their palm. Even something as apparently simple as bouncing a basketball required us to work hard to model the physics of the action and how we could replicate that familiar sensation with jets of air.

Smells of the future

While we don't expect to be delivering a full Star Trek holodeck experience in the near future, we're already boldly going in new directions to add additional functions to the system. Soon, we expect to be able to modify the temperature of the airflow to allow users to feel hot or cold surfaces. We're also exploring the possibility of adding scents to the airflow, deepening the illusion of virtual objects by allowing users to smell as well as touch them.

As the system expands and develops, we expect that it may find uses in a wide range of sectors. Delivering more absorbing video game experiences without having to wear cumbersome equipment is an obvious one, but it could also allow more convincing teleconferencing too. You could even take turns to add components to a virtual circuit board as you collaborate on a project.

It could also help clinicians to collaborate on treatments for patients, and make patients feel more involved and informed in the process. Doctors could view, feel and discuss the features of tumour cells, and show patients plans for a medical procedure.

So how long will it really be for this to become (virtual) reality? Most estimates currently place the earliest date at around 2030, which just so happens to culminate with the conclusion of "The Decade of Action" sought by the 2030 Agenda and Great Reset designers. In my view, that date is very wishful thinking, but this is *the future they want*, which tells me all I need to know.

Concluding Thought

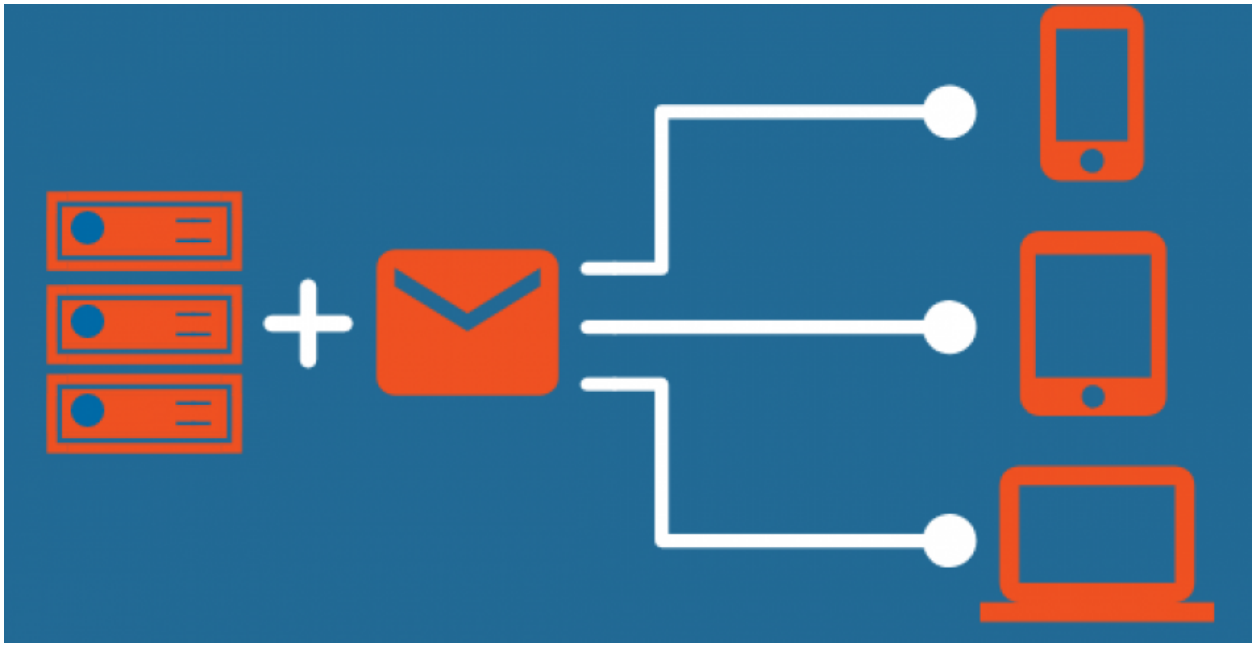
Many pundits are currently focusing on the battle between a centralized Big Tech metaverse filled with advertising and data collection, and a decentralized crypto-based version to determine whether this all will be beneficial or fully destructive for humankind. However, I'm more concerned about the level of immersion regardless of the source. I don't think it's a scandal to want to play video games and receive joy from character creation and virtual property building and trading, for example, but if a decentralized system also will eventually enable the complete merger of our external reality – socially, economically and cognitively – with a virtual landscape, then the future is trending toward the escapist, sterile, and far less human experience that has been the fodder of dystopian science fiction for decades.

Here toward the end of 2021, we often celebrate George Orwell's *1984* as an accurate vision of our current surveillance-police state's mission of becoming "a boot stamping on a human face forever." However, if a majority of people choose to plug into this trend toward a metaverse comprising all human activity and feeling, I agree with Vin that the future will look a lot more similar to this:

I sincerely hope that our community will not be among those who can be found there.

ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Business Models for Protocols, Not Platforms



By Vin Armani

Regarding my own approach to business, as of late, my mantra has been “Protocols Not Platforms.” I have explored the concept in several different forums over the last few months, but one aspect of this concept that I have not explored in detail during this time has been how an entrepreneur can approach this change in orientation. This is an especially crucial topic for readers of this publication, since even entrepreneurs who are in an ostensibly “traditional” sector – horticulture for example – still need to

interact with suppliers, partners, and customers using digital tools within the digital domain.

In this article I will explore some basic business models for those of us who want to move our gaze off of the platforms and onto protocols.

What does “Protocols Not Platforms” mean?

We live in a world of platforms. In our modern world, when we need to acquire some necessity, we “go” somewhere, either physically or in a digital sense (such as “visiting a website”), and pay for goods or services. This interaction, in almost all cases, consists of interactions with platforms.

A platform is a structure (physical infrastructure and human organization structure) that handles all of the necessary labor in order to deliver, “into our hands,” some desired good or service… for a price. Walmart is a retail platform. Amazon is also a retail platform, just one with a much larger digital component. Amazon is also a platform for other retailers to sell their products. So Amazon is both a store in the town marketplace and the landlord of the lot of land on which the town marketplace is situated.

When I make payment to Walmart or Amazon, using my credit card, I am interacting with another platform, in the form of the Visa and Mastercard network and the network of member banks (which themselves are financial services platforms). The various utility companies servicing the individual Walmart store (water, electric, telephone and internet) are also platforms. The HMO that provides healthcare for the workers and Amazon is a platform. The list goes on and on.

In this publication, and in publications of our friends, such as the excellent *Homestead Journal*, we place a heavy emphasis on protocols. Protocols are the techniques with which individuals and groups (and the platforms) manufacture or provide the goods or services themselves. Platforms use protocols, at scale.

The simplest example would be producing tomatoes. For beginning gardeners, the tomato is often their entree. Someone wanting to grow a tomato plant will go looking for some instruction on the best method for doing so. We might buy a book, read an article, or watch an instructional video online. The instructions themselves are the protocol. We then follow that protocol: buying the correct pot and seeds; getting the right soil and nutrients; planting the seeds and placing the pot in the right location in our yard; watering at the proper intervals. In time, if we have followed the protocol correctly, we will have some tomatoes that we can put in our dinner salad. A tomato farm is a platform that follows the tomato-growing protocol at scale and for the purpose of selling the tomatoes produced.

When platforms first begin, they are generally not “self-sufficient.” A company will contract with other companies – other platforms – to provide the necessary products and services (raw materials, merchandise, etc.) that constitute the product and/or service that company is actually selling. Over time, as platforms grow and have more success, they tend toward what is called “vertical integration.” In this process, companies begin directly engaging with protocols as opposed to engaging other platforms to supply their needs.

The most basic and obvious example of this would be moving from outsourcing the design of your marketing materials to someone on a platform like Fiverr to hiring a full-time designer "in house." For truly successful companies it gets as far as building your own power plants so that you no longer have to engage with the platform that is the electrical utility company. Just such a scenario occurred with Wynn Resort in Las Vegas, which built a solar farm to supply almost all of its extraordinary electrical power needs, much to the dismay of the power company. The biggest and most profitable platforms in the world are constantly seeking ways to orient toward protocols and not platforms to supply their needs. Why aren't we?

One of the main reasons that platforms grow to become behemoths like Amazon and Walmart is that they actually do, in important ways, improve the quality of our lives. However, as Thomas Sowell famously says, "There are no solutions, only trade-offs." Platforms make our lives easier. Access to platforms that deliver the instant gratification of needs and desires necessarily means we spend relatively less time on acquiring the knowledge of the protocols that the platforms themselves use to generate that good or service. "Why should I spend all that time and effort growing a tomato plant when I can just drive 2 minutes to the store and buy all the tomatoes I can eat at a reasonable price? Why buy the cow when I can get the milk for free?"

Dependency and self-sufficiency are mutually exclusive. As a whole, we have lost the kind of protocol-level competence that was common with even our own great-grandparents. We are dependent on the platforms for our every need. The great risk this

great forgetting has created is now becoming evident as the prospect of denial of access to the platforms, based on medical status (and that's just the beginning), has become a reality. This newsletter is not just about surviving, it's about thriving. So, as you start exploring a protocol-centric approach to your life, let's look at some business models you can introduce into your business. In particular I want to focus on the important high-level concepts we, as entrepreneurs, need to keep in mind as we enter this new cultural environment.

Communication is a paramount concern for every business. We call it "marketing," but at its core it is making other human beings aware that you have something for sale and what that something is. The more humans you can make aware, and the more engaging your communication with those potential customers is, the more likely you are to make a sale. The platforms have become a prime focus of marketing efforts. Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram have become invaluable platforms for so many businesses. Many businesses would simply cease to exist if they lost the ability to communicate on these platforms. See the immense risk in that to you and your family?

The killer app of the internet is email. Although you probably use an email platform like Gmail, email is fundamentally a protocol. If you aren't building an email list of potential and past customers, you are blowing the most valuable opportunity to remove platform risk and leverage protocols. Even if, for some reason, you lost the ability to access email and mailing list platforms, you could, with some effort, build your own mail server, run it off of a machine connected to your home internet (or some other connection you had access to), and serve emails to an existing list. This seems

like simple advice and you've probably even heard it before. But have you taken heed and been fastidious about making sure that every single person who engages with your business leaves you with a means of contacting them, digitally and outside of platforms? If not, take heed now.

Platforms like eBay, Amazon and Etsy have simplified distribution and payment processing. There are plenty of businesses that have never built their own infrastructure or systems for taking payment from and delivering their products to the end consumer. I can personally vouch for the fact that abandoning Amazon to sell my books and selling my last two works completely on my own infrastructure and exclusively for cryptocurrency has been a move that led to a great increase in profitability.

At the end of the day, you have to market your own product. It is you driving your customers to Amazon. Then Amazon takes a huge cut for handling fulfillment. If you are selling so much product that you simply can't fulfill orders, that's a "champagne problem." That problem never arises if your fulfillment is through Amazon's pipeline. Every problem is an opportunity. In the case of the fulfillment problem, it is an opportunity to employ like-minded individuals – individuals who might otherwise have to go work for Amazon.

While you might not decide to go exclusively crypto with your business, I can't imagine why you wouldn't do everything in your power to add it as a payment option. Believe me, there are customers out there who will be your product for no other reason than you are selling it for cryptocurrency. The freedom and sovereignty you get with those sales is cash-like; and, if you set

up your payment infrastructure oriented toward protocols (even if you use a payment processor like CoinPayments, who I wholeheartedly endorse), you don't have to worry about eviction from the establishment financial industry (read “banking”) platform(s).

One of the most valuable results of becoming proficient with the underlying protocols that platforms use is the ability to leverage those skills as a consultant and contractor. Amazon’s most profitable vertical is Amazon Web Services (AWS). Their primary offering is hosted, open source software solutions. Amazon doesn’t own the software they are offering their customers, but they don’t have to own it. The software is open source. Most of the services that major businesses purchase from AWS could (and were/are) built in house using the exact same software and hardware. Amazon just provides the service of giving you such a server (for instance) “built right.”

I can tell you from experience that if you are someone who is highly competent with any valuable protocol, from open source database administration to offshore drilling, you will be sought out at some point and offered money to help someone who is less competent “do it right.” It is completely reasonable to charge for this service. The best way to advertise your competence and, by extension, your consulting business, is to use the protocols with success in your own business. Those who have done this know what a massive and valuable “secret” this is.

Because the use of protocols has primarily been the domain of large platforms for the past several decades, there has been relatively little exploration of new platform-centric business

models. It does appear that we are ripe for a renaissance across many sectors. Look at how the resurgence of farmer's markets and the "local food" craze coincided with a public recognition of the corruption of the agribusiness platforms' ability to deliver healthy food. We should expect that there are similar opportunities in nearly every industry, including things like municipal power generation and provision of internet access. The tools and materials for addressing these issues at the protocol level are more available than they have ever been and interest in "new solutions" is at an all-time high. For better or worse, there will soon be a captive market who will be forced to adopt these solutions. I am hopeful that those of us who are of a mind to do so will have products and services waiting for this group of platform refugees when they need them the most.

WEALTH

Highest Paying Professions With Short Certificate Courses

By Jeff Paul

They were unschooled their entire lives. They had never taken a test prior to scuba certification and drivers licenses in their teens. And they never desired going to college. My two oldest boys are now 22 and 18 years old. They've had odd jobs and some entrepreneurial gigs, but now they're interested in making consistent money.

One is currently taking a course to become a certified real estate appraiser, and the other is taking a course to become a licensed home inspector. These are high-paying professions with surprisingly short course work. And, as with many certification professions, they're ideal for self-employment – which may be essential to avoid encroaching vaccine mandates.

Since large corporations are pushing vaccine mandates with or without legislation, I thought it would be valuable to identify the best certificate professions that 1) pay very well, 2) require short courses, and 3) enable self-employment.

Why College Is A Poor Choice For Most People

Before we dive into the best certificate professions, let's quickly examine why college is a poor choice for most people. As a two-time college dropout, I can still admit that it is useful for certain professions in the medical and engineering fields. However, college is very expensive, takes years of study before you can work in those fields, and they don't prepare you to "work for yourself." What's more, because of the response to the plandemic, most colleges now require vaccines and offer a worse in-person experience than they once did.

That said, I think in-person trade schools are worth every penny. In fact, I'd prefer my boys learn hard skills like welding or plumbing because I think they're more resilient occupations. Trade schools offer many useful 2-year Associates Degrees in fields that fit my criteria as high paying and great potential for

self-employment. However, in this article I want to explore professions that require courses less than one year long.

Here are 10 high-paying professions from short certificate courses that can be leveraged to work for yourself:

Home Inspector

In Washington state where I live, the average salary for a home inspector is around $70,000/year. And there is potential to make much more when self-employed. Not bad for an 18-year-old without college or even a formal high school diploma.

A licensed home inspector is one of the highest-paid professions on this list. Home inspectors thoroughly examine homes and write reports detailing any deficiencies. It requires a strong understanding of all of the home's systems and construction methods, materials and best practices. With some additional training, home inspectors can also become commercial building inspectors, construction inspectors and/or code inspectors.

Becoming a home inspector requires 120 hours of coursework and 40 hours of field study under a licensed inspector. Courses must be in-person or live over Zoom. They're as short as 4 weeks and they cost around $3000-$5000. Once the course is complete, you must pass a state and national exam to get your license.

Most professions on this list require some period of apprenticeship before you can open your own business, but once

the home inspection license is obtained, you are able to start your own practice right away. Other states may differ.

Property Appraiser

In Washington, the average salary for real estate appraisers is around $60,000. Like home inspectors, there is potential to make much more when self-employed. My 22-year-old is already earning money completing appraisal reports while studying for his license.

Real estate appraisers are hired by mortgage lenders to evaluate properties based on a number of factors to make sure it is worth the amount a homebuyer is looking to borrow. Appraisers perform a short home inspection and complete a market review of comparable homes to determine its value. Findings are compiled into a comprehensive report for the bank.

Coursework for entry-level appraisers can cost around $1500 and is 80-160 hours depending on which state. Appraisal courses tend to be cheaper because they can be taken online. After passing an exam, you can work for other appraisers as a “licensed appraiser trainee.”

Some resources will claim that a bachelor’s degree is required to become a “Certified Residential Real Property Appraiser,” but a licensed trainee can become a certified appraiser with 5 years of experience and additional training instead of a college degree. One could spend 5 years making good money as an appraiser or

go into debt for 4 years in college to get the same certification. Seems like any easy choice.

Note: Appraiser trainees are NOT able to open their own practice until they become “Certified Residential Real Property Appraisers.”

Real Estate Agent

Full-time real estate agents make an average of $92,669 in Washington state. That is A LOT of money for minimal education!

Residential real estate agents market and sell homes. They typically work on commission only. As such, there is almost no limit to how much an agent can make. However, it requires a lot of unpaid work in hopes of making sales.

Pre-licensing education is required. These courses range from 63 hours to 180 hours depending on which state you live in. Online pre-licensing real estate courses cost around $500. Once completed, you must take the state exam before working for a brokerage.

You must become a broker to open your own real estate office. This has additional education and experience requirements depending on your state.

Commercial Driver’s License (CDL)

The average salary for a CDL driver is well over $50,000 per year, especially now with shortages for truck drivers. And there is a very wide range of jobs for CDLs.

CDL is almost synonymous with “truck driver.” But these days a CDL is required for all sorts of jobs besides the tractor trailer drivers you see on the highway. Most local delivery jobs and Amazon drivers (who make more than $52K/year) are required to have a CDL. Hauling trailers of any kind over 10,000 lbs like large horse trailers, equipment trailers and or campers also requires a CDL.

CDLs are fairly easy to get. They require a short 3-6 week in-person course with on-road training. Courses seem to cost around $5000, so it is one of the more expensive trainings on this list. After the course, you must pass an exam at DMV to receive your CDL.

You can work independently in many capacities as soon as you have your CDL.

Heavy Equipment Operator

Heavy equipment operators make a median salary of $65,000 per year in the United States. The ones I know make much more than that.

Operating heavy equipment is a hard skill (as opposed to selling or writing reports). An experienced equipment operator can do the

work of many man hours in a fraction of the time. It's a highly valuable skill in good times or bad, with a license or without.

There are 6-8 week training courses and apprenticeships available to become a heavy equipment operator. Courses are in-person and can cost up to $10,000, making it the most expensive training on this list. Under apprenticeships, training can be paid for as part of a work or union arrangement. Apprenticeships seem to last around 3-4 years.

However, in most states you can simply buy a machine and offer your services with minimal licensing. Yet if you're transporting heavy equipment to a job site, you'll also need a CDL.

Electrical Technician

Entry level electrical technicians can make more than $50,000 while learning a hard skill.

Becoming an electrician is a long process with multiple stages of expertise along the way. All must start as an apprentice, trainee or electrical technician. They all basically mean the same thing – beginner – with varying degrees of certification based on state laws.

For example, Washington state requires 96 classroom hours and 8000 hours (about 4 years) working as an "electrical trainee" under a licensed electrician. 75% of the work by technicians or trainees must be monitored by a licensed electrician during that period.

As a technician or trainee, you can move on to become a journeyman electrician or specialist electrician and then to a master electrician. Once you're an "electrician" you can open your own business.

HVAC Technician

Heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) technicians make around $30/hour or around $60,000 per year.

In most states, HVAC technicians are similar to electrical technicians in that they have a short course, exam and then long field training or apprenticeship. HVAC technicians assist with the installation or repair of all aspects of heating and air conditioning systems.

To become an HVAC Technician in Washington state, one must simply be an "electrical trainee" (as above) working toward a specialty. In other states it requires specific coursework and separate training.

Software Programmer

Learn to code. Software programmers and engineers make a median salary in excess of $100,000 per year. Average salary for entry level developers is more than $70,000 per year.

These days, nearly every business needs software developers. All major corporations require multiple positions. Demand is so

high that working as an independent contractor is viable. And the skills enable you to build software projects on your own.

There are a handful of highly respected 12-32 week coding bootcamps that will all but guarantee that you get an entry level position. For example, MIT offers a 32-week full stack development program with a coding certificate for $6,950. There are language-specific courses available for much less as well.

Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN)

There are LPNs who make more than $40/hour at long-term care facilities that my wife manages. This amounts to over $80,000 per year, not including extra shifts and bonuses.

Most hospitals do not employ LPNs, but at long-term care buildings they perform nearly the exact same duties as a registered nurse and can even become nurse managers. In fact, due to shortages, Washington state is providing a path for LPNs with over 5 years experience to become registered nurses (RN) without additional schooling.

LPN training courses can be completed in as little as 6 months. Schooling or training courses can cost from $5000 to $15000 depending on the program. After completing the course, students must pass the NCLEX-PN exam before they can begin working.

Although it is nearly impossible to work for yourself as an LPN, there are more independent positions like home visit nurses that allow for some autonomy.

Personal Trainer and/or Diet Coach

On average, personal trainers or diet coaches make around $50,000 per year. However, there is no limit to the amount a coach can make. If they're very good and highly sought after, they can charge a premium.

Trainers work at gyms, schools, sports teams, or make house calls or Zoom consultations with clients to help them get physically fit. Diet coaches or nutritionists work with clients to create and maintain an eating plan to achieve their desired results. This, too, can be done in person or over Zoom.

There are 6-month certification courses that can prepare you to be a professional personal trainer and/or diet coach. Training courses can cost between $1000-$3000 depending on the depth of learning.

This is an ideal profession to work for yourself.

Conclusion

These are just some professions that pay well, don't require extensive training, and allow you to work for yourself. However, they depend on government licensing which could be a challenge if the state forces vaccine mandates or other demands to maintain them. If that becomes a genuine concern for sole proprietors, hard skills are preferable because they are also in demand in informal markets. In other words, nobody will be looking to hire a

gray market property appraiser, but they may hire an unlicensed electrician to install solar panels or an unlicensed excavator to clear their land.

BITCOIN & SILVER REPORTS

Bitcoin prices moved up steadily last month, hitting a new all-time high of about $66,500. Prices started off around the $45K level at the beginning of October, and marched steadily higher. The new all-time high was hit on October 20. Afterward, prices pulled back a little and began to consolidate. We saw prices bounce between $58K on the low end, and $63K on the high end, which is a pretty tight trading range for Bitcoin. Any dips beneath $60K last month were short lived, and price action lately has been incredibly bullish in the entire crypto ecosystem. Given the tight consolidation near the all-time highs, prices were ready to break out to the upside and that is indeed what we got with the price at the time of writing near $67,500.

In the news, we finally have approval of the first Bitcoin ETF. The Proshares BITO exchange traded fund began trading last month, offering everyday investors an easy way to gain exposure to Bitcoin. The ETF itself doesn't accumulate physical Bitcoin, it instead relies upon managed exposure to Bitcoin futures contracts. While this is undesirable compared to holding physical Bitcoin, for everyday traders looking for a simple way to get exposure, this BITO fund offers that solution. In many cases investing here will be step 1 for the average Joe looking to buy some Bitcoin. And as they learn more about crypto and owning Bitcoin in a wallet they control, they might gradually migrate to better self-custody solutions.

In addition, we also are now seeing the USA emerge as a significant player in the Bitcoin mining field. Just 1 year ago, China accounted for roughly 70% of the Bitcoin mining market. In one fell swoop, they dropped the axe on that industry, and the Bitcoin hash rate dropped 70% overnight, taking the BTC price right down with it. Mining operations closed up shop and we saw several people calling for the end of Bitcoin. While that happened, new mining operations began popping up all over the world, and a year later we have the USA accounting for 35% of newly mined Bitcoin, while China is at 0%. Given that financial companies are now embracing crypto with open arms, the likelihood of the USA shutting down any mining operations is quite slim.

And perhaps the most bullish news last month, we have an announcement from the FDIC chairman that banks are trying to set up a framework so they can hold Bitcoin and other

cryptocurrencies as reserve assets. Banks are concerned about the pace of development with crypto, and realize they're going to be left behind.They know if they don't rapidly adapt and start offering crypto solutions to their customers, that these solutions will be developed outside of the traditional banking industry and outside of any banking regulations as well.

Straight from the FDIC chair herself:

> *"My goal in this interagency group is to basically provide a path for banks to be able to act as a custodian of these assets, use crypto assets, digital assets as some form of collateral," McWilliams said on a conference panel.*
>
> *"At some point in time, we're going to tackle how and under what circumstances banks can hold them on their balance sheet."*

If banks start holding crypto assets in their reserves, that's going to create a huge supply crunch, as these assets won't be sitting on exchanges for traders to buy and sell, they'll be effectively hoarded by the banks, removing significant liquidity from the market.

Our advice with regards to Bitcoin remains the same: sit tight, ride out the volatility, and focus on the long-term picture. Each month we continue to get more positive developments. More banks are supporting crypto, more platforms are offering crypto to consumers, more demand is coming from financial institutions, and more large-scale corporations are embracing crypto as a

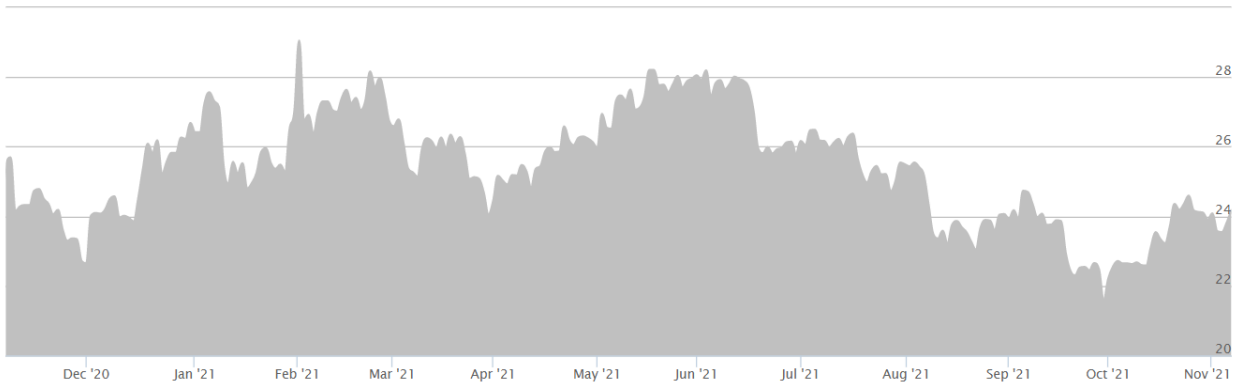
reserve asset. All of this increased demand is happening, and Bitcoin supply will not be able to keep up.

For those of you who are holding Bitcoin, just continue to sit tight and enjoy the ride. For anyone who doesn't have any Bitcoin yet, this is still a great chance to accumulate some. A consolidation just below all-time highs is an incredibly bullish setup. While there are no guarantees that we break out to the upside, it certainly looks like that's where we're headed. Should we take out this range to the upside, we wouldn't be surprised to see Bitcoin on its way to $75K, then $100K in a hurry.

For anyone interested in earning 8-10% on a USD stablecoin, or 6% on Bitcoin, please visit this link and sign up.
https://countermarkets.com/crypto

For those of you who don't own any Bitcoin, we suggest using BlockFi to take your first position. They've recently added support for ACH transfers, and they offer a nice signup bonus and interest rate in Bitcoin and several other cryptocurrencies. Be careful with your position sizing; don't invest more than you're comfortable losing. Also expect major volatility, with possible price swings of 50% or more in a matter of days.

Silver Update



After about 5 months of back-to-back declines in silver prices, we finally have a month of some upward movement here. Silver started off October at about $22.50 per ounce, and ended the month just above $24. Price action was a slow and steady climb for the most part.

Last month we covered the trading range silver has been stuck in for the past 16 months or so, which ranges from about $22 on the low end to $28 on the high end. Last month we were at the very bottom of this range, and price action looked pretty terrible as silver was trading at the lowest price level it had been at in 12 months. Despite that, buying at the bottom of the trading range is about as good of an opportunity as you'll get for a low-risk entry. The bounce we got off the recent lows wasn't anything huge, but it was enough to confirm that the lower end of the trading range is still intact for now.

The news cycle has been pretty quiet lately on precious metals, as high-flying stocks, cryptos, SPACs, and reddit short squeezes have been getting the lion's share of the media attention.

Typically, investing in an asset during a relatively quiet period of time proves to be wise. In addition to low levels of interest, we have some of the best macroeconomic conditions in decades for both gold and silver. Low interest rates, high stimulus, and a seemingly never-ending parade of free dollars. Food inflation is ramping up, as is the price for cars, hotels, and many other goods and services. Gold and silver are hedges against inflation, and should serve to protect your purchasing power as just about everything gets more and more expensive in the upcoming years.

While price action in gold and silver hasn't done much lately to offset the increased inflation we've seen, it's still very early in the cycle. These are slow-moving asset classes; they take months to consolidate, and often more months to break out to new highs. They protect purchasing power when measured in centuries, not individual years. So, yes, prices have been pretty depressing in precious metals lately, but if you check back in 10 years, chances are they'll have done a pretty good job protecting your wealth compared to holding dollars.

Gold and silver are going to continue being long-term hedges against inflation, just as they have been for thousands of years. Our view on precious metals remains the same: just sit tight and let time do the heavy lifting. Everything is in place for a great multi-year run for gold and silver, we just need to be patient and accumulate more on the dips.

The premium-to-spot price in the physical market is still quite high. Prices for American Eagle coins are going for about $12 over spot, meaning you'll pay about $36.50 for a coin with $24.50

worth of silver content. That's a 50% premium to spot, and we really can't suggest you buy at these levels. Even junk silver coins are going for premiums of $8 per ounce or about 30%, which is about 5-6X higher than average. Historically, it's always better to be a seller of precious metals when premiums are this high, as opposed to a buyer.

If you're in the market for physical silver and unwilling to wait for premiums to come back down, there are far better options if you look at non-US coins. As we mentioned last month, Australian Kangaroos and Canadian Maple Leafs are selling for about half the premium that American Eagles are, about $4-$5 per ounce instead of $12. These coins are 99.9% silver, and contain just as much silver content as the Eagles, but they cost about $9 less per coin. If you're looking to acquire physical bullion, these coins offer a far better value for the time being.

Looking at the gold/silver ratio – in our last issue it came in at 77.7. At the time of this writing, it's down to 75, so a small drop on the month. This means silver isn't as cheap as it was relative to gold a month ago. The 20-year average of gold to silver is about 60, so silver is a ways away from the long-term average. While it's not the screaming bargain it was over a year ago when the gold-to-silver ratio was near 100, a ratio of 75 does make silver more attractive than gold again. Should we get back into the 80-90 range, silver will definitely be in the strong buy range.

The stock market again hit an all-time high last week, with a full-fledged speculative mania going on. The month of October in particular, things seem to have gone parabolic, as new highs have

been taken out, and the market just continues to surge day after day. This type of price action, while euphoric for the investors and traders on the long side, is also tremendously dangerous, as the rubber band has been stretched so far here that the snap back to reality is going to be a lot more painful than most realize. Gold and silver are going to be safe haven assets when that time comes.

If you don't have any physical bullion, but still want exposure to any price moves higher, look at PHYS or PSLV – both trade just as easily on any stock exchange.

If you're in the market for physical bullion we suggest you wait until spot prices have come back to earth. For those of you who don't mind paying these high premiums, we'd encourage you to shop from a trusted supplier at Money Metals Exchange.

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