Policing
Pixels

As the metaverse and its occupants continue to expand, *forward-thinking* game developers are reasling how intrinsic *content moderation* is to the metaverse's success – here's how ForeVR Games is at the *forefront of metaverse moderation,* with WebPurify

The ability to transport people from their homes to Honolulu; from bedrooms to a bowling alley: *the power of VR and AR to improve people's lives is clear*, and developers at ForeVR Games are *on a mission* to make that power a reality.

Meet Lauren Koester
Former Amazon, Microsoft, Xbox, & Unity Technologies. Lauren is a VP of Marketing at ForeVR, building passionate gaming communities and creating the playbook for successful VR marketing.

"We take the best of real world experiences and elevate them 120%, like bowling on the moon or shooting pool in a Texas saloon," says Lauren Koester, VP of Marketing at ForeVR. "Our key focus is connecting people in play, to make it accessible for everyone – that includes providing players a safe and positive place to play." It's the final focus that led ForeVR to partner with WebPurify and pioneer the shape of safety in the metaverse.

Like any online communities, gaming harbors a subset of disruptive and negative players – "there's always going to be a level of moderation required in video games," says Lauren – but as the metaverse has expanded, a difference has emerged that distinguishes it from it 2D counterparts.

The difference stems from the fact that virtual reality plunges people into an all-encompassing digital environment where slights don't come in words rendered in pixels on your screen – but in a direct verbal and/or seemingly physical form. Your sensory experience is heightened.

"I've worked in video games for a good chunk of my career and I've been a gamer for most of my life. I've seen and heard it all in public lobbies. I've experienced that as a gamer," says Lauren, but she has also experienced first-hand how abuse in the metaverse differs.

ABOUT FOREVR
ForeVR's games are developed from the ground-up for platforms that offer social connection between players and a next-level sense of presence only possible in VR. ForeVR Bowl, ForeVR Darts, ForeVR Cornhole and ForeVR Pool are available now on Oculus Quest and Oculus Quest 2.

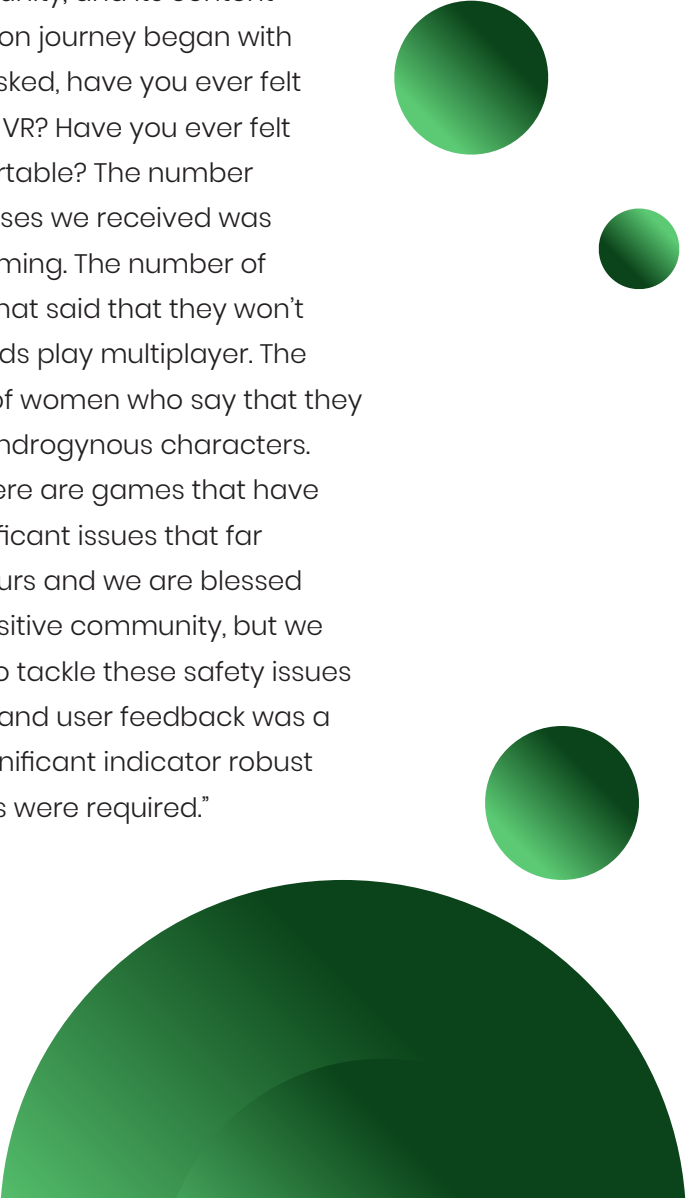"Your avatar is an extension of your physical self. In VR it's not just the standard moderation of bad words, toxicity – it's a question of solving this "physical" abuse that can make you feel violated."

Stories of women choosing to play with non-gendered avatars, and stories of negative experiences in the gaming industry and beyond are increasingly surfacing in the media. ForeVR works closely with its community, and its content moderation journey began with them. "I asked, have you ever felt unsafe in VR? Have you ever felt uncomfortable? The number of responses we received was overwhelming. The number of parents that said that they won't let their kids play multiplayer. The number of women who say that they play as androgynous characters. I know there are games that have had significant issues that far exceed ours and we are blessed with a positive community, but we wanted to tackle these safety issues head on, and user feedback was a pretty significant indicator robust measures were required."

"Having moderation tools and ensuring we provide *a safe place for everyone to play* is our responsibility as game developers."

LAUREN KOESTER, VP OF MARKETING, FOREVR GAMES

The challenge? To find a solution that would protect users from physical attacks, as well as verbal – and there was no precedent for an existing, or singular solution. "We're actively building up detection tools on our side. For example, if a person is repeatedly being blocked or made invisible. We've discussed the feasibility of tracking if a player's avatar mesh frequently collides with other players' avatar meshes, as it's a potential red flag." But there is no easy way to spot the behavior with technology. "Sure, AI could detect text or voice, but being able to detect someone invading your personal space or someone verbally harassing – it's a nuance that you can't capture just by looking at reports."

The Solution

ForeVR's developers were able to introduce blocking and reporting functionalities into their games – "we've made these player facing tools easily accessible and more robust this past quarter" – with the ability to mute other players' voices, and make the offender's avatars invisible. But they wanted a solution that went beyond this: moderation in-game.

"It feels incredibly daunting to consider bringing it in-house – it's just too much," Lauren says on finding a moderation solution. "It's such a nuanced role that I think the only way to really have it done effectively would be to work with someone who is an expert in this space, which is what we're doing with WebPurify."

Working with ForeVR and other game developers , WebPurify has created a responsive and bespoke solution for metaverse moderation.

WEBPURIFY OFFERED

• Human moderation
• 24/7 moderation
• Bespoke training and approaches
• VR specific mental health support
• 17+ years' Industry expertise

1. 24/7 HUMAN MODERATION

WebPurify has expertise in both AI and human moderation. "VR is such a physical experience, human moderation is the only option that you have," says Lauren. WebPurify's moderators are specially trained on ForeVR's specific community guidelines and UX challenges, with a dedicated team working full-time with ForeVR. "Having that layer of human moderation is crucial, from helping us find things that we don't know to look for, to verifying things that we couldn't if we just looked at raw data."

2. A BESPOKE APPROACH

With no precedent for how to approach moderation in the metaverse, WebPurify worked in collaboration with ForeVR to build a model that's still constantly evolving. But leaning on experience, WebPurify built the right team of moderators: "I don't remember us discussing who the perfect person was to be the moderator, but it's – unfortunately – about finding tempting targets," says Lauren. WebPurify knew from experience that a female team with a east asian accent would be a magnet for bad actors, resulting in them revealing themselves quickly and surfacing bad behavior – from unwanted verbal overtures to invading personal space.

Mental health

Mental health is very important to ForeVR, including what resources are provided by its partners. "That was something I asked about when initially talking to WebPurify. I know how emotionally taxing game moderation and unpleasant interactions can be. The level of investment that the WebPurify team has made into the mental health of their employees is something that I don't think you can just spin-up out of the gate, and it's not common across other providers in the market. I could offer mental health resources, but if they're not actively using them and it's not something that's proactively and natively a part of their work experience, employees would remain at risk."

3. REPORTING

The team needed a mechanism to track and report on moderation – and WebPurify offered a structured report that highlighted everything from historical behavior triggers to occurrence numbers and the type of violation. "They give us a report, and this has evolved as we've been working with them. When we first started working together we knew this was a problem, but we didn't know how to track it. They'll report weekly on things that they think are problematic. For example, we track when we think someone's underage or if someone's using bad language or if someone's harassing, or making racial slurs. This is all articulated in accessible charts, and helps tease out trends that show us where the priority problems are in the case of user behavior. We see the prominent issues, and focus on how to solve them."

About WebPurify

WebPurify empowers communities to be their best with scalable hybrid AI and human content moderation solutions for the world's leading brands. Ensuring positive user experiences for millions of customers, from marketplaces to the metaverse, with multimedia content seamlessly filtered to any brand's specifications.

"What's unique about Lauren and her team is it's not just plug and forget. It's a true partnership, which really creates the best moderation program possible, with synergistic communication and evolution," says Josh Buxbaum, co-founder, WebPurify. "We had an initial plan for keeping their community safe, but organically started providing additional value, like our moderators acting as ambassadors for new players. They're lovely people, our moderators, and they naturally started helping new players get up to speed with games that were new to them, although that wasn't part of their initial assignment. This of course reduces new player frustration, helps put a best foot forward when someone first starts out with a game, and consequently increases adoption and retention. We're excited to be partnered with ForeVR, forming what will be the best practices for keeping people safe in this new space."

The results

"We've decreased the reports of uncomfortable experiences from players outside of a handful of unfortunate experiences reported by WebPurify's team," reports Lauren.

But for Lauren, the results go beyond numbers. "The partnership with WebPurify has helped us create the first attempt at scalable tools to solve some of these moderation issues, and really make our games a safe place. This partnership has helped us to establish what we need to do, both to provide feedback and influence the tools we build, moving forward and maturing our Trust and Safety offering."

Lauren's advice for developers
Listen to your community

"It's important to understand your community and actively communicate with players directly. As a developer you are always going to have your assumptions about how things are, often influenced by personal preferences and experiences. The best thing you can do is communicate and work with the community and use that as a starting point. VR is still growing. There are no tried and true best practices yet. There are practices that we can leverage from gaming in general, but there's so much that you can learn from your playerbase to really help shape the decisions you make.

Partially as a consequence of the measures ForeVR has taken, it's listed in Meta's 'Best Family Friendly' lists. "While we can't track this data directly, we believe it provides a boost in reach and retention , since people have positive and comfortable experiences in our games," she concludes. "But more to the point, it's the right thing for us to do as a business. We need to have these moderation tools in place to make our game a safe place to play for everyone."

Finally, in addition to creating a safer place to play, the moderators are providing feedback on bugs, and user experience. "The moderators who play our games provide invaluable feedback. They know the VR spaces, communities, norms and quirks inside and out. Our partnership has an unexpected benefit: product experience feedback. The team has helped us with early bug detection as well as community and player sentiment and qualitative behavior."

Lauren's advice for developers

Consider moderation early

Player experiences will continue to evolve as new features and devices go live. As developers we will adjust and respond, but it will be slow and it will be a learning process. . If I had one takeaway for developers, it would be: plan for moderation early and think of it as a step in feature design process so that it's not a last minute or after thought to create a solid moderation tool; it should be something that instead is happening integrally with development."