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## Three corporations show how to use extended reality for business growth

*Many people mistakenly believe that extended reality is simply a tool for online games. They may be underestimating the business potential of this technology, which can allow companies to cut costs and improve engagement with customers and employees. Mary Lacity, Jeffrey Mullins and Remko Van Hoek researched corporations that are experimenting with extended reality applications.*

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Extended reality (XR) is a digital three-dimensional space where people can interact. Many business leaders may think that it is primarily still a consumer product used for personal entertainment, but our research finds that innovative companies use it to enrich employee and customer engagement.

Among our case studies, KLM Royal Dutch Airlines, Walmart and Accenture stand out as success stories from which others can learn. These companies illustrate different XR uses: KLM builds immersive training and wellness applications for its pilots and cabin crew. Walmart creates “immersive commerce” experiences to connect with the next generation of shoppers. Accenture uses the technology to make a more engaging, globally consistent onboarding experience for new hires.

Each case aligns with the respective company’s strategic priorities, but they differ in design choices. Executives considering XR as part of a business solution must decide on user interface (virtual reality headsets, web-based access, or both), platform (single vs multiple, adapt vs build) and measurable objectives.

Here’s what each company does with the technology.

## Training and wellness

KLM Royal Dutch Airlines, the Netherlands' flagship carrier, employs over 36,000 people. It began its XR journey around 2018, when a small team started experimenting with the technology. Early use cases included virtual cockpit training for pilots, followed by the development of a virtual slide raft training program for cabin crews.

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These early initiatives evolved into fully industrialised solutions —some of which are certified—when the COVID pandemic forced the company to train employees without in-person interaction. These early successes paved the way for more XR applications in areas like fire safety, cabin communication, and virtual meetings. Currently, KLM is building employee wellness apps. For example, cabin crew on sick leave use XR to gradually rebuild confidence and reacquaint themselves with the aircraft environment.

Today, the airline has an XR centre of excellence (XRCOE) with 19 full-time employees devoted to developing and operating proprietary applications. Jae Grant Maloney, senior researcher, told us, "We create products that meet the business's needs, have a clear vision and timeline and are academically assessed, ensuring they are grounded in sound research given the novelty of these technologies".

## Immersive commerce

Walmart, the world's largest retailer, uses what it calls "[immersive commerce](#)" to connect with the next generation of shoppers. Today, the typical US Walmart shopper is late middle-aged and purchases products primarily through the company's more than 4,600 retail stores. Walmart is looking ahead to tomorrow's shopper, who will likely buy products in a different manner. The company has created XR experiences on the Roblox, Spatial, Zepeto and Minecraft platforms, and launched its own immersive commerce platform called [Walmart Realm](#).

The company works with community members at every stage of an experience, from ideation to expansion. For Walmart Realm, it collaborates with Pinterest social media influencers to design virtual storefronts featuring curated products for online purchase. Walmart Realm began with three virtual stores in 2024 and has expanded to 38 in just over a year.

Walmart is constantly innovating on each platform. In February 2025, for example, the company launched a completely new type of experience on the Spatial platform, called Walmart Unlimited. According to Justin Breton, head of brand marketing innovation, "It's a fully developed gaming experience that combines character-driven narratives, challenging gameplay and real-world commerce into a seamless journey. We had nearly 75 thousand plays in just one week and the

average playtime is 37 minutes, proving consumers are engaging with our brand in a meaningful way.”

## Immersive onboarding

Accenture is a global consulting firm with over 700,000 employees. The company adopted XR to enhance its **onboarding process** by creating a more engaging, globally consistent experience. The journey began in 2020 with small-scale experiments, such as a VR experience for new employees in Ireland and the UK, which received overwhelmingly positive feedback.

When Accenture designed its new joiner experience (NJX) in 2021, it featured One Accenture Park, a virtual campus where new hires collaborate, explore the company’s culture and develop essential skills. Jason Warnke, senior managing director for Accenture Experiences told us: “The scores of the onboarding experience now, compared to when we onboarded without any sort of immersive experience, are considerably better.” So far, over 400,000 employees have participated in NJX.

From these case briefings, we see that KLM, Walmart and Accenture had different use cases that drove their XR design decisions. They provide insights to help executives answer design questions such as:

## VR headsets or web-based?

Organisations must choose how immersive experiences will be accessed, through web browsers for cheaper and quicker access or through VR headsets for greater immersion.

KLM uses VR headsets for all XR applications. Although studies vary widely, showing that **30–80 per cent** of users experience some headset-induced motion sickness, Maloney explained how KLM addresses this in their apps: “We invest heavily in the quality of our VR applications. By using highly detailed programming and minimising **polygon counts**, we create environments that are smooth and immersive, which significantly reduces the chances of disorientation or dizziness. As a result, almost no one complains about feeling sick or dizzy while using our VR solutions”. (Anecdotally, the first author, who is prone to vertigo, visited KLM’s apps in VR headsets and confirms the comfort and naturalness of the movements.).

Walmart chooses web-based immersive platforms to ensure broad accessibility and reduce barriers to entry, enabling more users to engage seamlessly. The company emphasised that its current web-based approach is about meeting users where they are—not about technical limitations.

Accenture initially chose VR headsets to deliver a highly immersive onboarding experience and shipped 30,000 units to new employees as part of its welcome kits. However, as the NJX scaled globally, the company transitioned to web-based access to reduce costs and improve accessibility.

# Platform-build or piggyback?

Organisations must choose whether to use existing platforms or to build their own. The former option offers lower costs and established user bases, but it can also lead to vendor lock-in.

KLM develops XR applications in-house on its own platform to maintain full control over the quality and customisation of their products.

Walmart has built on third-party platforms to reach large existing user bases while also experimenting with its own platform.

While Accenture customised the immersive experience, it leveraged Microsoft's XR development platforms, initially using AltspaceVR (now decommissioned) and later transitioning to **Microsoft Mesh**.

## How do you measure success?

The answer depends on the strategic intent.

KLM needs a solid business case before progressing an XR application from a proof of concept (POC) to an industrialised product. The XRCOE team partners with academic institutions to quantitatively measure the outcomes of XR POCs. For the staff reintegration app, TU Delft University faculty found promising outcomes, with participants reporting increased confidence, reduced anxiety, and faster return-to-work readiness.

XR apps must also generate savings. For example, the slide raft training app has delivered significant savings. Instead of setting up physical aircraft for each type of plane in the fleet, KLM's XR app allows trainers to switch between different aircraft models in seconds.

In these early days, Walmart prioritises metrics that reflect quality of experience, like time spent in the environment, repeat visits and number of user interactions. For example, visitors of Walmart's "No Boundaries" brand shop on the **Zepeto** platform virtually tried on 69 million pieces of clothes and bought over 3.4 million virtual items between October 2024 and June 2025. Walmart uses these insights from metrics to refine and expand its virtual offerings.

Accenture measures XR onboarding success through a combination of employee feedback, participation rates and cost savings. Employees consistently rate the experience over 4.6 on a five-point scale. Business value is justified by cost reductions, especially from decreased travel expenses, and by the program's alignment with broader onboarding goals like cultural integration and digital competency.

Most vitally, KLM, Walmart and Accenture are building immersive capabilities today that will position them well for the future. The integration of AI-powered avatars is already happening at these companies.

XR is not a tech play, it's a strategy for engaging the next generation of talent and consumers.

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