

By Mike Doherty Friday, Dec. 30, 2011



Gamification: A Fad Or The Future

There is lots of evidence that brands see loyalty increases when they invite consumers to participate in an experience. Even Facebook "likes" increase with the smallest gesture of asking people for their opinion in a survey. People collect experiences and they value the involvement that an experience offers. For that reason "gamification" or the application of game mechanics to other types of experiences is interesting because it increases involvement and it's been shown to create consumer loyalty. And as we all know, loyalty has real business value.

While we've seen success applying gaming principles to experiences we've built for Millennials, there seems to be an emerging debate as to whether or not gamification is here to stay or if it's currently at the tail end of what Gartner Research deems a [hype cycle](#).

This marketer for one thinks gamification will continue to grow for the foreseeable future. There sure doesn't seem to be a slow down in gaming. Fifty-seven million Americans have played games in a social network (the highest percentage of which are 18 - 34) and according to Research by Pop Cap Games, the number of people spending 6+ hours a week playing social games has doubled since January 2010.

But beyond the rise of gaming, here are a few reasons why the relevance of gamification might continue to be applied to other types of experiences.

1. **People want it.** In a recent study by Latitude Research on the Future of Gaming, they found that more than 50% of smartphone users who identify as casual gamers would like to see game dynamics applied to issues outside of traditional games including learning and education, healthcare, and financial planning.
1. **The principles of game thinking are very aligned with Millennial values:** competition, community, self-expression and reward are all things Millennials value and they are core to a great game experience. These principles are being applied to everything from sport participation (Nike+) to loyalty programs (Starbucks) and health management. I am currently using a new app called [The Eatery by Massive Health](#) that helps people improve their health through better eating habits using a game like interface.
1. **Entertainment and work have collided.** With increased mobility today, there is little separation between the two and as Gartner Group predicts, gamification is something that every CIO, IT Planner and Enterprise Architect must be aware of. As Millennials look for gratifying work experiences, gamification in work can improve results and satisfaction. Salesforce.com has already adopted a [Bunchball](#) plugin called Nitro that uses game-like progress tracking, team standings and rewards to increase motivation, engagement and performance.
1. **Millennials and Gen Z have grown up as gamers:** As such they are very familiar with gaming interfaces in a variety of user experience scenarios. Who hasn't given their kid their iPhone to keep them busy while in line at Starbucks? What Windows was to baby boomers, gaming interface is to these generations. Ford recognized that and has brought gaming principles into its new Ford Fusion dashboard display. Drivers compete to add leaves to a digital tree by driving more efficiently.
1. **Gaming principles have been proven effective for problem solving.** In fact, in a study published in the journal [Natural Structural & Molecular Biology](#), players without backgrounds in biochemistry used a game called Foldit to help scientists predict the structure of the retroviral protease, which plays a critical role in the way HIV multiplies. According to Seth Cooper, the game designer, using Foldit to turn a scientific problem into a competitive game "provides a framework for bringing together the strengths of computers and humans." Computers don't have great special reasoning skills whereas humans do.

If gamification is here to stay, how do we as marketers use that to our advantage? Successfully applying game mechanics to create engaging experiences that increase loyalty requires recognizing that just as all people are not the same, neither are all gamers. Before designing any game driven brand experience, marketers need to understand who their target is and what they favor as an interaction mode. Are they competitive and strive for status (Foursquare), community and sharing oriented (Turntable.fm), curatorial (Digg), or creative (SETIquest).

And finally, gamification requires that brand experiences support people on their journey from novice to expert because they will have different needs to stay engaged as they progress:

1. Make it easy to learn so on-boarding is fast and engaging.
2. To be involving, show them the way to mastery so there is a path to accomplishment.
3. Increase challenge and reward along the way with fresh content, activities and access.

Whether or not you believe gamification is here to stay, at least for Millennials, bringing game mechanics to a brand experience can help add familiarity and fun, deepen involvement, increase performance, and most of all, build loyalty. I for one say game on.

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