

Gamification – the new way businesses are boosting results of all types

Gamification. It sounds like a made-up word; the truth is that it is. But don't be fooled into thinking that a word celebrating only its fourteenth birthday this year isn't starting to carry some serious clout in the world of business. "But what does it mean?!" you snarl at your computer screen. Well the truth is that definitions vary somewhat depending on who you ask, but in this piece, we are going to concentrate on those definitions most widely accepted. The designated Wikipedia page describes gamification as, "...the application of game-design elements and game principles in non-game contexts." At first glance this may seem like it advocates whipping out a game of connect 4 during your next board meeting, but it is in fact much more sophisticated than that, and studies are starting to show it is a concept that is garnering real results.

First coined in 2002 by British-born computer programmer Nick Pelling, it described the incorporation of social and reward aspects of computer games into software designed specifically for corporate and business function. Though catching up, the business world has not been ahead of the curve with this most contemporary of trends, rather it is the military and education sectors that can boast of having left the traps first. For some time now the former has been using the traditional 'first person shooter' (FPS) game format as a way of training novice soldiers in combat situations without the associated risks of using live ammunition. More recently, the US Army developed their *America's Army* online game which candidates can download and test their skills in a multi-player FPS environment. Obviously the game bears little resemblance to real life combat but it has proved to be an effective marketing and recruitment tool. For the latter gamification has enhanced the inclusion and involvement of previously hard to reach pupils in traditionally unpopular subjects. Platforms such as *Mathletics*, the flagship product of Australian education company *3P Learning* provide an online environment where participants can compete with others around the world in a series of appropriately differentiated maths based games. As of mid-August 2015, over 21.5 billion *Mathletics* questions were correctly answered by students.

For businesses gamification can be (and has been) effectively used in two different ways; internally; by encouraging employee productivity and engagement and externally; allowing current and prospective customers to engage with the company in fun and rewarding ways.

Beginning with internal gamification, an excellent example can be found with London-based global business consulting firm *Bluewolf*. In 2012 they launched a gamified *Going Social* program for its internal staff by deciding to apply gamification to different areas of employee activity with one goal in mind – to promote collaboration by bringing the 'social' into the core of business strategy. Amongst the games implemented was a program called *Nitro for Salesforce*, which counted points and gave out rewards to employees for every attempt at internal and external collaboration. Moreover, employees earned points for sharing content on their LinkedIn and Twitter accounts, or publishing posts on the company blog. They were to find that the implementation of gamification techniques increased productivity by up to 25%.

Externally examples of gamification are more obvious. In recent years many companies have been drawing customers into their products by engaging them in reward based games and challenges. When *M&M's* launched their *M&M's pretzel* in 2013 they did so with an online game where users simply had to find a pretzel hidden within a graphic design. Astonishingly, this most simple of ideas boosted user engagement with the brand, bringing over 25,000 new likes on the company's official Facebook page, as well as more than 6,000 shares and 10,000

comments. Likewise, *Autodesk*, a software provider which encourages user trials, took the decision to gamify components of a new product *Autodesk 3DS* by including missions and user leader boards. The game-like character of the trial version proved a success with 10% more users deciding to download it, and trial usage itself rising by 40%.

What gamification essentially shows us is what we already knew, that people respond to certain triggers; reward, competition, the satisfaction of task completion. The concept intelligently applied provides all of these in a unified package that, as has been demonstrated, is yielding results across industries that simply cannot be ignored. When polled over half of technology stakeholders predicted widespread use of gamification by 2020 but gamification isn't just the future, it's how businesses are succeeding now.

If your company is looking for fresh innovation, then gamification could be just what you're looking for. It really is more than just a game.