Hello all and a very happy Monday to you. As ever, I am blown away by your reactions to my blogs. The Gamification Framework and Resources posts seemed to go down very well. As such, I have added them as menu options with the Evangelist page! I would really plead with you to get into the gamification forums. I would love to be a bit of a place to go to get answers from the community to questions the Gamification world may ask!

On to today's post though. I was in a toy store with my daughter this weekend and was witness to a pretty neat little game / gamification example in the shop. However, I was also forced to question the ethics of what was being done.

The first bit was a sort of treasure hunt. As we went in to the shop a lovely assistant gave me a form. On it was a few pictures that she explained are hidden around the store. I was told that we needed to find all of the pictures, write down on the form where we had seen them and then add a few personal details (email etc.) and hand the form in at the till. Not only would this get me entered into a prize draw, but I would also get some free sweets (well, she aimed that bit straight at my daughter).

On the surface, this is a great little game like experience. Hunt around the shop, find things and win a prize. From the shops point of view, it gets people to take their children around bits of the shop that they probably had not planned to go to. As any parent will know, this is a hell of dangerous thing to do. Things your children never knew even existed suddenly become must haves. Clever idea from the shop though. I will come to my ethical issue in a moment though.

The second part of the games this shop were playing came at the exit. They were offering free photographs of your children with a massive mascot that was hugging anything that got near and waving to the rest. Of course my little girl went mad for this. Please daddy, please. It is free. Please, please... etc. Free does sound pretty good, all I had to do was give a few personal details and of course an email address for them to send my free photograph to. Simple.

So, where is my ethical issue. What was it that stopped me being the greatest Dad of the day by letting my daughter get involved (other than time issues)?

Each activity required me to hand over details such as my name, email address, postal address, phone number and more. These are things that I try very hard not to give to people who I know will find a way to spam me every week. Whilst I am sure there was an opt out somewhere on the forms, I am still not all that willing to give these kinds of details to people.

The bigger issue for me was the method used to solicit this information. They were basically using games and activities they knew would attract children. They also knew that these children would badger their parents into joining in, effectively using children to get personal details out of their parents.

I have said before that gamification is not your chance to be evil. I may not have been all that clear though. Gamification, as with any marketing, should be approached with an ethical mindset. Ask yourself the question "Would I be happy to do xyz that I am asking others to do?". If the answer is no, you should probably not try to coerce others to do it. Oh, and using children to get information out of their parents is a pretty big no no for me (and I am aware this is not a new trick… I just suddenly realised what was happening this time as it was a little more blatant than normal!)

Please wait…