

Ok, so maybe a serious blog this week.

Prompts are important, we use them all the time, but we probably don't think much about them. Do you set yourself reminders on your phone or in Outlook? Meeting requests, messages on your pin board at home to remind you what to buy at the shops, Post It notes on the fridge? All of these are prompts, they are also all calls to action.

My daughter has a lot of toys. For the most part they all make noise as well. One of the things that scares the hell out of me is when one decides to make noise, five minutes after she has stopped playing with them. She has one called Alfie Bear. When you put him down, just before he switches off properly, he suddenly laughs and says "Come play with me". Creepy, but a very good call to action. There is no ambiguity about what you need to do next - go play with him! Lots of her toys do similar, in much the same way as arcade machines of my youth had an attract mode. This would show you some of the cool things in the game and shout things out from the machine, to attract you to play.

These days we are bombarded with such prompts. But, not all of them are calls to actions and are really a waste of time. A Happy Birthday message from a forum you have not visited for years is a great example. The idea is, you get the email and then you are tempted to visit the forum again. The trouble is, there is no call to action, there is no reason to visit. Nothing has changed since you last went, so why bother now. The more often this happens, the more numb you become.

Why am I talking about all of this? Well, LinkedIn has done just this. It seems that every other person in their network of 200,000,000 has had an email thanking them for their contribution and telling them they are in the top 10%, 5% or 1% of profiles visited (I was in the top 5% apparently). On the surface of it this is great, another little step into the world of gamification actually. It thanks me, it has a call to action "Read More" and I did indeed click the link. The thing is, that is all it does. It takes you to a page that thanks you again, offers you the chance to view an infographic, share your ranking via social media or visit LinkedIn.



There is nothing new to see, because I am already very active on LinkedIn - the same as anyone who would have got the email. To have a profile that is viewed lots of times, you have to be fairly active - so a call to action to visit the site is a little wasted. Yes, it has probably created a little more traffic in the short term and it has prompted a few conversations - on rival social networks (I notice sharing your status with Google+ is not an option), but it is all very short term like so many of their other gamified ideas.

A prompt, or a call to action, should remind you to do something beneficial. It should remind you that you need to run tonight to keep up with your goals, it should remind you to go to the online grocery store and spend money (preferably with a cheeky money off voucher), it should remind you to go and play with Alfie Bear once again. It shouldn't just show you something you already see on a regular basis or that has not changed since the last time you went there. That is just considered spam!

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