

[In part 1](#), we spent some time discussing what gamification is and isn't. In Part 2, we are going to take a look at something that was introduced previously, but not explored; Game Based Solutions. My definition of Game Based Solutions is as follows:

The use of games and game-like approaches to solve problems and create better experiences.

This expands upon gamification by including games as part of the toolkit for solving problems. This opens up a whole new dimension of possibilities when you are looking at solutions to client challenges. Gamification may be ideal for one product, but a training issue may be best solved with a serious game, which I will explain in a moment!

Gamification, Serious Games and More

I view game based solutions as a spectrum of tools. They all have their place, but those spaces can overlap depending on the situation. So a solution may require gamification, with a game as a distraction, or a serious game may require some level of gamified platform to deliver it. It is not black and white! However, for ease, I break it down into five types of solution or intervention.

Playful Design, Gamification, Simulations, [Serious Games](#) and Games. Each one will have a blog dedicated to it as we move forward in this series, however, for now, let's just define each one within the context of Game Based Solutions.

Playful Design

Playful design is normally just a cosmetic or aesthetic layer added to something, that is there to add fun or playfulness to the experience. It has no [game mechanics](#) and does not affect the functionality or structure of the solution.

For example, on the Toca Boca website, when you scrolled down the page a balloon appeared. When you clicked the balloon, it floated back to the top of the website, dragging the scroll bar with it. Most websites just have an arrow appear at the bottom of the page. It doesn't change the functionality, just makes it more playful. Snapchat has something similar. When you pull down to refresh, a little ghost flies up with a rainbow trail.

Other examples of playful design can be seen when a website is designed to emulate the

look and feel of a game, without including any game mechanics. This could see the website being designed to look like an H.U.D from a spaceship, or the mouse cursor changing into a gun crosshair.

Another is the narrative tone. This is the difference between “Do A then B” vs “Once upon a time, A did something then B did something”. It is how you convey information, telling a linear story. If you start to add choices to that story, you start to head towards gamification and games □

Gamification

This was discussed at length in Part 1, the use of game design, game elements and play for non-entertainment purposes. Examples of this can be seen when Leaderboards are used in a sales team, or points and badges applied to a learning platform. Of course, much better things can be done than that, for instance, creating full narrative experiences that don't trip over into games but are far more interesting than just adding points and badges. Using goal setting, progress markers and much much more are all options. We will explore this much more in time!

Simulations

Within the context of game based solutions, they can be described as an accurate virtual representation of something from the real world. They can span many forms, from simple recreations of software to moving life-like flight simulators. They may look like a game just like gamification, their purpose is not to entertain. They offer a safe way to experience something, experiment and learn from failure. What separates simulations from serious games is gameplay. A pure simulation will not include elements such as narratives, game-like challenges, boss battles and the like. You may have a challenge that says “Land the plane in high winds”, but you would not likely have “Land the plane whilst aliens are shooting at you from the ground then battle the mother ship”. Again, context is everything!

Serious Games

Serious games are games that have been designed to fulfil a purpose other than entertainment. A great example is Reverse The Odds from Cancer Research UK. The game saw you playing as little magical creatures rebuilding their world. by completing challenges and puzzles you could earn rewards to help. The challenges were to recognise certain shapes and patterns in images. These images were slides of biopsies taken from patients suffering from bladder cancer. A job that was normally done by 3 people, suddenly had

hundreds of thousands of people contributing!
















There are many categories of serious games, from educational to purposeful, but these will be discussed more in future blogs.

Games

Without going into the definition of games and play, which we will do later, in this context the word “game” is being used to describe a game that has been designed to be entertainment of some sort. This does not mean that it can’t teach people, or help people, but those are not the main design intentions.

Highlighting the Differences

This chart shows a simple set of differences between the various elements of game based solutions.

Game Based Solutions Matrix					
	Game Aesthetics	Game Elements	Virtual World	Game Play	Non Purposeful
Playful Design					
Gamification					
Simulation					
Serious Game					
Game					

Game Based Solutions Matrix

As you move towards being a game, you can see that more and more features are included, culminating in full entertainment.

Game Based Solutions Model

Finally, I offer a model that brings all of this together in a simple way. I think it is fairly self-explanatory, however, the spectrum on the left may need a note. This spectrum shows some of how the solutions all differ from each other.

Aesthetic

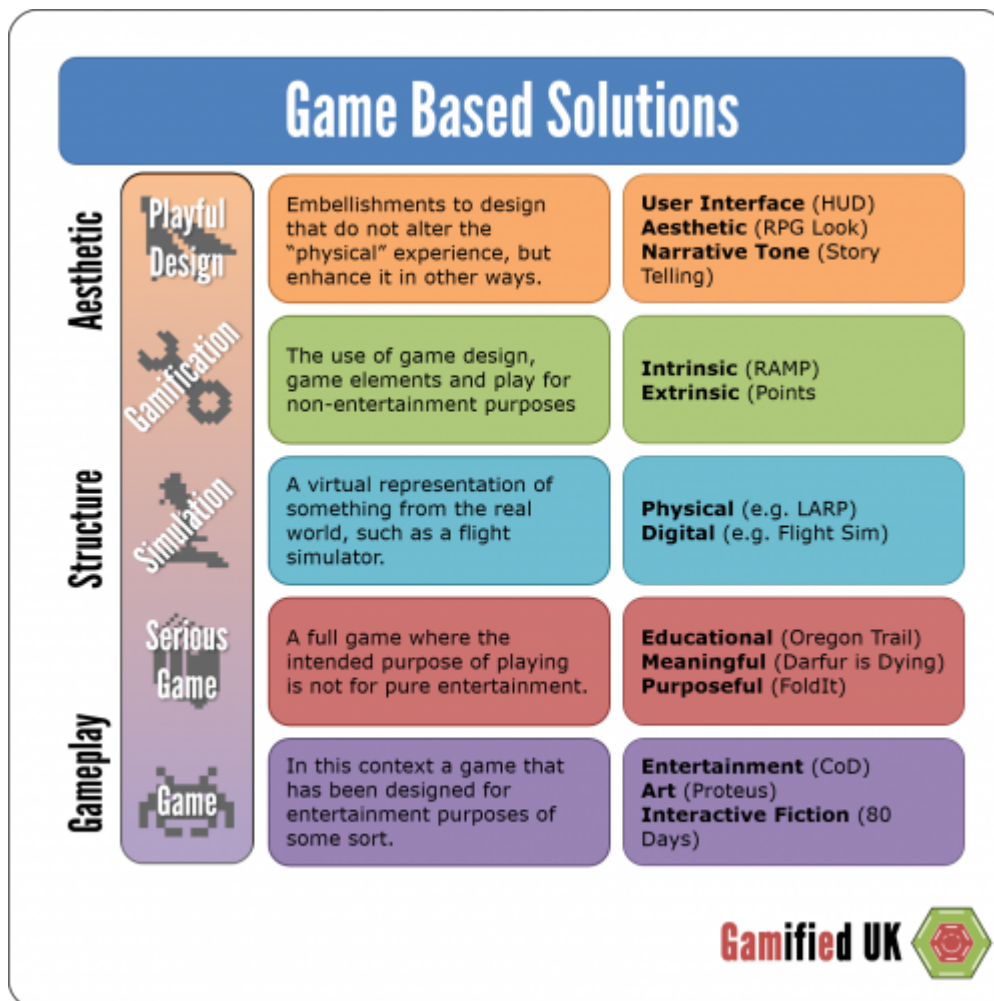
At this end of the spectrum, the solutions share the look and at times the feel of games, they are more “game-like” than they are game.

Structure

Around the mid-point, the solution will not only have the look of a game, but they will also share structural comparisons. Challenges, narratives, scoring systems, RPG elements, feedback, progress etc.

Gameplay

As we move to the gameplay end of the spectrum, the solutions are more game than game-like. They have true gameplay and all of the trappings one would expect with a true game, whether it is for more serious purposes or for pure entertainment.



Game Based Solution Model

Key Learning Points:

- Game Based Solutions use games and game-like experiences to solve problems
- Each category of solution has its pros and cons
- They exist on a spectrum and can be mixed and matched at will if that is what is needed to solve the problem
- It's not black and white!

Also published on [Medium](#).

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