

Gamification is often thought about as a digital realm, but that is not the case at all! Some of the best gamification I have seen has been “analogue”, or not digital. I myself have written about simple gamification experiments with eh kids that were entirely paper-based.

Just like games, gamification can be just as effective in the non-digital world as it can in the digital world. Think about it, games have existed since history began, with games like Senet being dated back to 3000BC in Egypt and evidence of dice like objects as far back as 5000BC.

The Rise of Digital

The question arises then, why is gamification often thought of as digital only?

Well, mostly because of when the word started to be used, by whom and in what context. Whilst there is some discussion about its the exact origin (I still stand by Nick Pelling in 2002, but others may disagree now), its game to prominence around 2010 with companies like Bunchball and Badgeville offering digital platforms that allowed you to connect online systems and reward user actions with points and badges. That sealed its fate to be forever considered a digital-only medium.

The Resurrection of the Non-Digital

However, over the last few years, I have been seeing more and more people turning to the origins of games to create gamification solutions, with board games, card games, live action role play (LARP), escape rooms and more.

I think there are a few reasons for this.

- The resurgence of interest in boardgames generally in society now. We are blessed with hundreds of great board games that take the medium way beyond the games I played as a kid and that are often butchered for online gamification purposes (Monopoly and Ludo especially!).
- Cost. It can be very expensive to invest in a platform, create content and then maintain it. If you want to use gamification as a way to train 20 people once a year, investing thousands in a platform on a rolling contract seems wasteful when you could build or buy a board game that you can just be reused when needed.
- Creating a board game is not as technically challenging as creating a digital game, they can be made from just about anything that comes to hand, from dice to post it

notes. You don't need a 3D designers, programmers etc.

- Time, again, it can be much quicker to create a board game than a digital game.
- Real people. A physical game, especially a live action role play, requires people to be in the same place as each other. However good technology is, I am a firm believer that nothing beats being truly face to face with people!

It's Not All Analogue Rainbows

It may seem that non-digital gamification is actually a better option than digital. Whilst that may be true in some cases, in many it may not be practical.

- Flexibility and game design. Whilst non-digital games require less technically skilled people, they still require a good understanding of game design. In fact, probably a better understanding that would be needed to create a digital solution. The reason is that you have less to work with. Consider a board game. The board doesn't change, you have to create change with [cards](#), powerup tokens, different dice etc. In a game, you can have multiple levels where everything can constantly change. You have a much larger canvas to work with.
- Board games (and non-digital games in general) don't scale well. If you need to deliver the same experience to 5000 people, it just isn't as practical. They are great in small groups for closed contexts, but if you want to deliver to a broader audience, you need to go digital and online.
- Maintenance. Boardgames are fixed experiences. If you want to add more content, whilst you can create add-on packs, you have to get them printed, packaged and delivered. If you are running a LARP this may be easier, but anything that requires physical "props", it is more difficult. Simply correcting a date or a spelling error could be very difficult!

There is No Right or Wrong, Just Needs and Context

When it comes down to it, there is not better or worse or right or wrong when it comes to analogue vs digital gamification. It all pivots on what your needs are, your means and the context in which you are going to use it. If you are a teacher wanting to build a game to help kids with their times tables, a card game is probably a good starting point. If you are a multinational looking to create a consistent set of training experiences across 4000 offices worldwide, you probably want to take it online!

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