

About 2 years ago I was speaking at a Gamifiers event in London. One of the other speakers spoke about a new product called “Playbrush”. It was an add-on for a toothbrush that allowed it to interact with a mobile device like an iPad. As well as the add-on, there were a couple of games that it controlled on the mobile device. The idea was to encourage kids to brush for longer and with higher efficiency because they want to progress in the games.

It is fair to say the idea got mauled by us all. I hold my hand up as one of the maulers. I had several issues with the idea of a parent. The first was the concept of having to have my iPad in the bathroom with the kids. After that, it was the idea of getting kids to clean their teeth **because** it let them play a game. I could not see how that activity could convert into a permanent behaviour if when you took the game element away.

Fast forward to a couple of months ago and out of the blue I get an email from someone at Playbrush. They wanted to know if I would be interested in testing out their product. It came to my review site account, as it used to be a games review website (www.yars.co.uk). I was suddenly transported back to the meetup and gleefully and slightly evilly said yes!

Unboxing

I will admit, I was prejudiced against the product from the outset. However, I was pleasantly surprised by how well it was appointed. The toothbrush it came with was perfectly fine and the little Bluetooth add-on was well made. I sort of rubber cone that slides over the base of the toothbrush.

The only thing that I was not impressed with was the little pouch that was meant to keep your device safe in the bathroom. It was a flimsy plastic wallet with a couple of suction cups. Suffice to say, it has never been used!



Setup

Setup was a breeze. Install one of the games from the app store on your device. We chose the Utoothia Paint game. Register with Playbrush for a free account. Charge the add-on via micro USB then run the app. It all connected up and worked first go without any fuss.

The Game

My youngest daughter (6 years old) chose the paint game, one of the free games available from the outset. I scoffed, but she was adamant. The game counts you in and tells you that you need to brush everywhere. You are then presented with a picture and brushing your teeth. On the screen, there are 4 different circles with arrows. The arrows represent areas of your mouth. As you brush, these circles fill with colour and the picture is painted. The

better the brushing, the more of the painting is filled in. After 2 minutes the game is over and you are presented with a report on how you did, with information about how to improve next time. For instance, it might tell you to “Brush the lower righthand side more next time”

There are other games available, some with a subscription, that we did not really try.

My Thoughts

I was wrong. There I said it. First off, the kids love it. They ask every morning if they can use the app. They tell me what they need to focus on today as they missed a bit the day before. They proudly show me their reports (which actually get emailed to me as the parent each week). They whoop as they finished a picture. In 3 weeks my youngest has over doubled her coverage purely because of the feedback the app gives her.

And this is the key, the bit we all missed. Whilst there are all sorts of other gamified features, point, badges, awards etc. the main advantage of this system is feedback. The games may be simplistic, the concept may have some flaws (yes iPad pouch, I am looking at you), but the feedback is invaluable. Every day my kids understand a little better how to clean more effectively. They also now know how long two minutes is. So, even if they don't have the app they approach brushing in a similar way.

Obviously, I am hoping that when we do eventually remove the game element they will continue to brush well, but I am actually very impressed!