

Points /
Experience
Points (XP)



Points and XP are feedback mechanics. Can track progress, as well as be used as a way to unlock new things. Award based on achievement or desired behaviour.

Badges /
Achievements



Badges and achievements are a form of feedback. Award them to people for accomplishments. Use them wisely and in a meaningful way to make them more appreciated.



Points and Badges in Gamification – Not totally evil.

Description

Over the last few days, the conversation about the use of points and badges has come up several times with several different people.

The stock answer in gamification these days is that points and badges are bad gamification. They are meaningless and we should be looking at intrinsic motivation more – yet almost every implementation you see of gamification will have some form of points system and probably badges. They may be called experience points and achievements, or gami-dollars and pictograms – who knows – but they still seem to be there.

We, as gamifiers, understand why these things can be bad for motivation. We all swear by the work of Deci and Ryan on Self Determination Theory. We quote Dan Pink's Drive like students used to quote Star Wars. Most of us have given Over-justification Effect a large amount of consideration. All of these things say that extrinsic rewards can reduce intrinsic motivation. So why are points and badges still in use?

One reason is what types of activities we are trying to encourage with the use of gamification. It is important to consider that most of those activities have very little to do with intrinsic motivation. Take a standard task of asking people to click like on a website. There is very little intrinsic reason to do this. However, if there is a points system and it is a bit of fun, for a while people may click like more than they would have done without the system in place. Deci and Ryan are very clear about what will reduce intrinsic motivation.

“Careful consideration of reward effects reported in 128 experiments leads to the conclusion that tangible rewards tend to have a substantially negative effect on intrinsic motivation, with the limiting conditions we have specified. Even when tangible rewards are offered as indicators of good performance, they typically decrease intrinsic motivation for interesting activities” *Deci, Koestner, Ryan 1999*

Interesting activities. The effects on un-interesting or dull tasks is totally different. In there words from Intrinsic Motivation and Self Determination in Human Behaviour

When money is endogenous to the activity, when the activity is dull and boring, or when the activity is one for which there are norms for payment, the activity is an extrinsic or instrumental activity, and subjects are more satisfied when they are rewarded for an extrinsic activity than when they are not.

This does not mean that paying people to do dull tasks is going to make them intrinsically enjoyable or rewarding, but it makes that more acceptable.

The same should be true when using points and badges to reward people for dull activities in your gamified system. Now, that does lead us onto a deeper conversation about why these activities are dull and how to make them less dull – but that is a topic for another day.

If you are using points and badges though, try to follow some simple rules – where possible.

- Points are a method of feedback for most people. They show them how they are progressing – but they normally have no value beyond that, unless it is a loyalty scheme!
- Badges and trophies should be looked at as a way to recognise an achievement. Where possible they should not be used as the reason to do something- they should not be the achievement. If you have to work for something, then it will be more valued and meaningful. If it is a badge for clicking like 20 times, it will at best be appreciated – at worst despised for being cynical and pointless!
- If you are using points and badges to encourage people to engage in dull tasks, at least make them fun and interesting to earn. Give people a break from the mundane by throwing in funny badges for unexpected reasons. Add a few that require you to explore a little, or do less dull tasks.

Don't get me wrong. I am not saying that this is how you should do gamification. Points and badges are not the best use of gamification. However, I am realistic and understand that if they are all you have – you need to make the most of them. Many do not have the time, experience or budget to create massive intrinsically engaging gamified systems. Follow what I have written here and understand why people are so against so called PBL systems and you stand a fighting chance of holding your ground and the interest of your users, even if it is potentially short term!

Category

1. Gamification
2. Loyalty

Tags

1. business
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- 5. motivation
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