



The Death of Gamification

Description

Ok, so that may have just been one of those attention-seeking headlines. However, what I want to explore briefly is what will kill gamification if people keep heading the route they are now.

The short answer to this is, misguided over complication. As more people jump on the gamification bandwagon, people's definitions and ideas seem to be getting ever more complex. They seem to miss the core point about gamification.

Recently at gSummitX, [Gabe Zichermann](#) was discussing the key reason games work. Just as I have described games simply as Task and Reward, he added a key final stage. Ahhhhh. Task, Reward, Ahhhhh. As he explained, that Ahhhh is the release of Dopamine – a feel good drug the body creates when you achieve something. In video games this is happening constantly. Within your workday, under normal circumstances, it probably never happens.

So, back to complexity. In general the more **unnecessarily** complex something is, the less enjoyable the majority will find it. Take Space Invaders. A game that is some 30 years old, yet still people are striving to get three letter representations of their names onto a leader board to hold the high score. Same with Pac Man and many other "classic" games. These days, for the most part (I will explain), I can't think of many games that people will still be playing in 30 years time. My exception to this has to be RPGs. As a friend pointed out, these can span many years of activity with little more than content updates. This also works around a more social dynamic as well. People form communities and keep each other going. However, they still tend to need updates. When was the last time Space Invaders was given a content update? The reason for all of this is that these games contain the absolute minimum of mechanics. Shoot, dodge, shoot, dodge. That's it. Pac Man is a little more complex. Run, Eat, Avoid, Chase – but we are hardly talking 100 keys and a million things happening at once. There are of course other motivates for constant refresh. The current generation of gamers can handle much more information and complexity than previous generations. They need constant updates to stay interested. In addition, it makes the games companies more money!

Now, you can agree or disagree with that – doesn't matter to me. The next bit is what is important anyway!

With gamification, you tend to be trying to influence behaviour in a simple and fast way. Score boards, badges, loyalty point cards etc. These are all very simple and easy for the end user to understand. What is beginning to happen is over complication of these simple ideas. Multiple levels of loyalty, almost RPG like quests in areas that need nothing more than a simple leader board. That is not to say that the more complex ideas won't work. It is more about not using them just because you can, but because they fit the needs of the problem.

There are many ways to implement gamification. What you have to keep in mind is what best suits the needs of the users, clients, task or whatever. If all that is needed is a badge or two, then use them. If you can see that the best way to drive engagement is to introduce a full RPG style quest, reward system then use that. Just keep it simple if you can.

Oh and that core point that people seem to miss – fun.

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