



Why does Gamification Fail?

Description

A question I get asked a lot is, “Why does gamification fail?”. Gartner said that by 2014, 80% of gamified systems will fail due to poor design. My question is, what is poor design? I had thought that it was really just implementing “thin layer” points, badges and leader boards to a system that was already not working. Whilst that is true, it actually misses out on some important extra factors.

So, with that in mind, here are some reasons that I feel will contribute to gamification not working.

Sticking Plasters

Of course I have to start with thin layer gamification. I’ve said it many times, you can’t polish a turd. If you stick a thin layer of gamification on a broken system, it will have no long term effect. If your expenses system is so hard to use that people are often late, or don’t bother using it – consider why before you consider gamification. Is it because you need 40 video tutorials to understand how it works? If that is the case, the system probably needs to be simplified. If that is not possible, how about gamifying the tutorials, so at least people watch them and know how to use the system!

Bad Game, Bad Game

Another big reason gamification doesn’t work, no matter how well thought out the technicalities of it are, is that it just isn’t engaging. I’m not a rocket scientist. I can read up on the subject and understand the principles, but at the end of the day, I’m not going to try and build a space rocket in my back garden. That being the case, why are so many non game designers trying to build games? Often the things being built that in the designers own words are “meant to be fun”, just aren’t. It is hard to make a good game, it is also hard to take game elements and make an engaging experience.

No Rules

Sometimes it can all go wrong because you don’t set the boundaries clearly enough. If there is a way

to cheat in a system, someone will find it. You either have to include that “emergent” game play into your system – or you have to make sure that it is not possible. Clearly define the rules up front and if possible enforce them automatically so that there can be no question in peoples mind of what the rules are!

The Wrong Type of Gamification

If you design a system that really encourages a structured learning process, where people have to achieve certain levels of expertise before moving on, then [achievers](#) will love it (using my [user types](#)), but other users such as [free spirits](#) and [philanthropists](#) will be far less interested. You have to cover more bases than that, unless you are trying to get only one type of user to use the system. If it is a learning system, allow the philanthropists to answer peoples questions, give the [socialisers](#) a way to communicate. Let the free spirits create their own modules and explore the content in their own way. Finally, let the [players](#) (remembering that players are [a group of users](#) in their own right in my user types) earn points and badges.

The Wrong Type of User

The final one I want to look at is the actual user. You may have a wonderful system that is designed to cover every user type there is. You may have perfectly balanced your user journey and your reward systems with intrinsic motivation. So why is it not working? Possibly because you are trying to gamify someone who just isn't interested? You have to consider the people involved. Are they disengaged because there is a bit of their role that is not very interesting. For instance, do they not bother to enter sales calls, even though the system is easy to use? Then maybe you can gamify that. However, what if there is a person who just isn't into sales. What if they are the wrong person in the wrong job? Gamification is never going to engage them in a role they just plain don't like. It could actually make it worse. But, game thinking still has the answer. Allow them to evolve beyond their [current role](#). A boss rules people, a leader encourages and nurtures them. They are not afraid to help people achieve everything they can. Gamification may not be the way, but a simple understanding of what makes people tick can.

Contrary to popular belief, gamification and game thinking is not [bullshit](#). Sadly, many of the implementations we have seen and some of the people who are talking about it, do have the faint odour of manure about them.

Gamification is not always the answer. Sometimes it is much easier than that. Look really hard at why you want to gamify something in the first place. You may be able to solve your engagement problem far more quickly and cost effectively if you just improve the foundations of what you are building first. You have to have good foundations and a solid structure before you start painting the walls.

Category

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Tags

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