



Relatedness: The Often Ignored Glue of Gamification

Description

Another great conversation with my friend [Scott Sinclair](#) and another batch of inspiration for a blog. This time about why social is really the key to gamification.

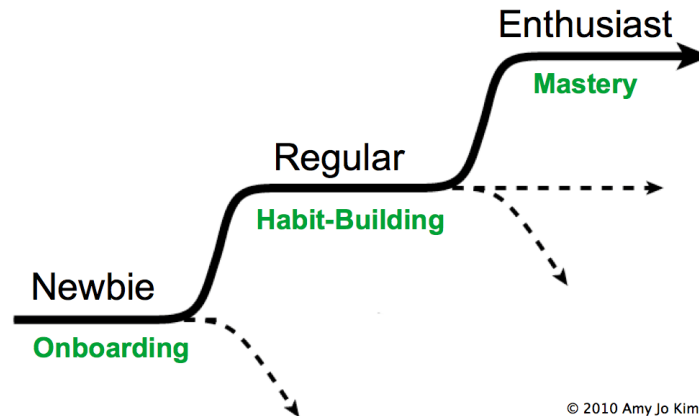
Let us look at one of my favourite video games of all time, [Batman: Arkham City](#). Without going into too much detail, you are Batman and you have to uncover a plot to take over Gotham. For me, this is one of the most complete single player experiences I have ever had.

How Does a Game Progress?

The way the game works is exactly what you would expect from a player journey. You start with very little in the way of skills and abilities. You are taught how to play the game with “on the job” nudges, hints and tutorials. Once you have the basics nailed, you are thrown into your first “boss battle”. This gives you a chance to test your new skills against a proper challenge. Once this is over, you start up the path again. New skills are added, abilities are enhanced, the story progresses and it steadily gets harder and harder. This pattern repeats – learn skills, master them, boss fight, and repeat. This continues until you have achieved a high level of mastery in the game. Then it is all about the narrative, using your new mastery to get to the end of the game and defeat the final boss.

So let's break this down a little. [Amy Jo Kim](#) in her blog wrote about [player journey](#) a while back. Amy used the following image to describe the basic journey.

The Player Journey



As you can see, it has a distinct pattern. On-boarding, Habit building, Mastery. Each of these is an upward journey of learning. Imagine the peak of each step is a boss battle and that on-boarding and habit building loop a bit more and you have the basic journey of a player through Arkham City.

How Does the Game Motivate the Player?

Now let's look at some of the basics of motivation that I keep talking about. Starting with Dan Pinks Autonomy, Mastery and Purpose model. In Arkham City, whilst there is a linear narrative, to complete the game there is a set path you must take, there are plenty of side missions and secrets to be found. These give you a little bit of choice about how you play the game. If you just want to fly around the city beating up thugs, that's your choice. Want to find all the secrets? Go for it. **Autonomy** – check.

We have already seen that there is a level of mastery in the game, you get more skills, master them, get more skills and abilities, master them etc. **Mastery** – check.

The basic idea of the game is to defeat hundreds lesser bad guys and bosses, building up to a single final battle that will take down the dark overlord of the game – sounds like **purpose** to me!

So all of Dan Pinks motivational requirements checked. So why is Arkham City now sat in my draw whilst I am still playing Battlefield 3 – a game I bought long before Arkham City?

What Now?

What happens when the final boss is dead in Arkham City, when you have completed all of the side missions, found all of the secrets and got all the trophies? What does the game give you that will make you want to come back? Well, to keep things going a little longer, add on packs can be released. In Arkham City, they did just that. This added an extra couple of hours or so to the game. The problem is, that is short term and expensive to keep doing at that level. There is still something missing for true longevity.

Let's Get Social

Let us turn to my other favourite people to reference, Edward Deci and Richard Ryan. In the 80's they gave us Self Determination Theory. This revolved around three intrinsic needs. Competency, Autonomy and Relatedness. We have already seen two of these, competency (mastery) and autonomy, but it is the third need that seems new. Relatedness. What is relatedness? At its most basic, it can be described as social connections.

This need for social interaction is what keeps Arkham City in my desk draw and keeps Battlefield 3 in my Xbox. Whilst the single player campaign is much less engaging than that of Arkham city, the multiplayer aspect is where the true joy can be found. From a gamification perspective, it covers quite a lot of familiar ground. You have points and badges and ladders. You have new items that can be unlocked as you become more skilful, new things to master and play with. Whilst the on-boarding can be a little steep – i.e. it is kill or be killed, you do learn fast and it does reward your efforts very quickly. You get purpose as well; there are things you have to do. You have to keep you and your teammates alive. You have missions to do together.

What really makes it so sticky though, is the ability to play with friends. Like most things, it is more fun with friends. Social communities and clans pop up all the time. Friendships are formed that can last for a lifetime – all through a joint love of a game. Just look at World of Warcraft. Over a decade old and still people who played from day one are involved – not because they have anything left to master, but because they have strong social connections to others in the game.

With this in mind, we need to always consider this fourth motivator when we are looking at any kind of gamification – if we want to be more than a quick fix. Autonomy, Mastery, Purpose and **Relatedness**. Forget relatedness and you can kiss longevity goodbye – unless you are willing to spend serious time and money on constant updates to the system.

Autonomy – Mastery – Purpose – Relatedness

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1. Gamification
2. Gaming
3. Technology

Tags

1. arkham
2. city
3. Game
4. journey
5. little
6. master
7. mastery
8. relatedne
9. skills

10. time

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Author

andrzej-marczewski

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