



GSummit, Bubbles, Badges and the Future

Description

I have been catching up on the events of GSummit over the weekend. I was very heartened to hear so many people talking about moving beyond badges and xp systems. They were looking for the next phase of engagement. You just need to look at [FourSquare recently ditching its gamified elements](#) to see that we are hitting the first big dip in user interest in this kind of thing.

However, there were still quite a few talking about promoting engagement with the use of simple badging / xp systems. I must admit, at first I was a little confused. Then I realised that I was totally missing the context that these ideas were being discussed in.

Badges still have a place.

When you look at instances where people were talking about badges and the like being of some use, it tended to be related to enterprise. The thing with enterprise gamification is that you have one key thing in the back pocket before you start. An audience. Not only that, you have an audience that has already got one very important motivator. They are doing their job. This may not sound like a motivator, but let me explain.

Think back to before you heard the word gamification. People still turned up to work every day. They still did their job to the best (usually) of their ability. Why? Because that is what you, do. You get a job, you try to do it well and then you go home. At a set point in time, you are paid for doing this. This payment then allows you to do other things, like pay your mortgage and buy your wife nice things. As it happens, in just that little run through you can see game mechanics in use (though I would not call this gamification!!)

- Go to work every morning – appointment mechanic. Don't turn up, don't get paid
- Do your job everyday – Behavioural Momentum
- Do your job well – Pride

Anyway, I digress. The people who are seeing success with badges and xp are using them to try to make this daily churn a little more interesting, by setting up a little competition and fun. In this case, it

does not seem to have that negative an effect, because it is not trying to replace the intrinsic motivation of doing your job each day (if done properly). Another factor is that these are closed groups of people who are all in it together. In addition, there is nothing to be lost by joining or not joining.

There is sooo much more that people could be doing though. Gamification of a rubbish process makes it more rubbish (ish). What enterprise should be looking at is changing the processes to make them more intrinsically engaging. They should be using gamification to change the behaviour of the company as a whole, but just make it a little bit more fun. It is not all about making everything a game.

It's all about making everything a game.

So that is enterprise. In brand engagement things are a little different. Badges, points and leaderboards are proving to only improve engagement for a short period of time. What is happening (as with FourSquare), there comes a point where the "I really don't care anymore" factor kicks in, there is a sharp drop off. Where people are succeeding is where they have seen that there is a drop and offer something more. I had a great chat with Steve Bocska from PugPharm.com who are currently trying to combat this Badge Fatigue or Loyalty Backlash as they call it.

I will talk about PugPharm more at some point, but essentially their Picnic platform tries to make it all a bit more playful. Using badges and ladders to get people into the "game", they then throw more enjoyable challenges and collectables (in the form of iCards) into the mix. Finally they use those collectables to connect you with other people with similar interests in a social network. Their hope is that this will keep people engaged with the brand or anything else for far longer.

The big players (Badgeville springs to mind) are now trying to give the end user more than just the basics. They have all seen that as the general population is getting wise to the gamification that has been successful up until now, that they need to focus less on trying to influence or manipulate the customer. Now it is about giving them something that they find enjoyable and engaging.

The Bubble has to burst

We are at a crossroads, that much is sure. I can see a bubble waiting to burst with lots of people floating in it repeating the word Gamification over and over again. When it does burst, I really hope that those who are left floating in the remaining bits of the bubble are the ones who are repeating – how can we be different, what's in it for the customer. That's when we shall start to really see the more mature and focused side of Gamification that so many of us know is there.

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