

The Power of Gamification to Drive User Behavior and Engagement

What is gamification?

Gamification is an emerging trend that employs the use of game techniques, mechanics, and psychology to create well-defined, online applications that analyze and influence user engagement and behaviors. The engagement mechanics of enterprise gamification allows organizations to build strong online customer communities that engage deeply with target audiences, drive sales, and nurture brand loyalty. Organizations and businesses across all industries can utilize engagement mechanics to increase user-driven goals and objectives by analyzing and driving high-value user behaviors. A key component within engagement mechanics is an analytics engine that tracks and analyzes what users are doing across a community. The analysis of what users are doing allows businesses to architect and build engagement models that support interactions that users like and want, influence their behaviors, and ultimately allow a business to achieve its objectives.

The basic premise of gamification is that it uses game mechanics for non-game applications. It employs the use of game elements to leverage a participant's sense of challenge, competition, and reward. In order for something to be perceived as rewarding, it typically has to evoke positive emotion. Engagement mechanics taps into the human emotions and needs to compete, achieve, gain recognition, and connect socially. Gamification is gaining momentum as a viable technology to increase user engagement, create a sense of brand loyalty, drive sales and user satisfaction, and foster innovation.



The Elements of Gamification

Gamification is an iterative process that continually tracks, analyzes, and influences user interactions and the specific effects that various behavior modifications have on defined business objectives. There are three primary aspects to creating gaming applications: game design, game mechanics and game dynamics. Gamification offers different types of game mechanics that allow applications to cater to various user needs, customer experiences, and outcomes.

Game design defines how and why gaming is created. It is the architectural framework that clearly defines the business objectives of the application, and the associated content, game mechanics, and game dynamics that embody that application. Game mechanics defines how the gaming application will work. It defines the rules/actions and processes of the application and how users will interact and be rewarded in order to achieve business results, while making the application engaging and enjoyable.

Common types of gaming mechanics include collections of points or badges, progress levels, challenges, ratings such as progress bars or leader boards, virtual goods such as currency, and feedback. Gaming dynamics tap into human emotions that ideally change a user's behavior patterns. Gaming dynamics works to motivate a user to perform simple to complicated tasks towards a specified goal. Gaming mechanics defines a series of actions and visuals that make progress visible to a user.

Gaming Mechanics

Collections (Points/Badges)

Levels

Challenges/Quest

Ratings

Virtual Goods

Gaming Dynamics

Reward, Feedback

Status

Achievement

Competition

Reward

Human Emotion/Need

Accomplishment

Progress

Control Over Actions

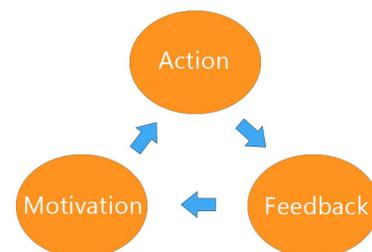
Recognition

Accomplishment

Using Gamification to Increase User Engagement and Loyalty

Gamification is not about creating a game. It is an iterative process that leverages the concept and elements of gaming so that business applications can track and analyze online user online activity in an effort to influence user behaviors and achieve specific business results. This emerging trend of gamification has been successfully implemented across a wide array of industries to increase user engagement, cultivate vibrant communities, encourage brand loyalty, provide peer support, and facilitate collaboration to share information and solve problems.

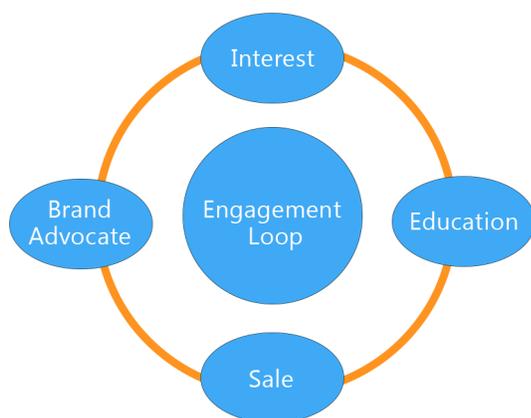
Just like games, well-defined gaming applications use activity loops to facilitate activity and to keep the user progressing through the game. Engagement loops, which target individual user actions, are used to give users the motivation to perform an action. If a motivation doesn't result in an action, another motivator will be dispensed, until the user performs the action. Feedback is provided as soon as a user takes an action. Feedback (points or badges) shows a user their level of achievement, which in turn, becomes a motivator. In the engagement loop, an action results in feedback, the feedback is a form of motivation, which leads to more actions.



Progression loops, which target broader structures of game activity, define the steps that move a user from start to finish. Progression loops breaks large scale challenges into smaller challenges. They represent the user's evolution in a gaming application.

Well-designed gamification applications keep the game process moving so that each action reinforces the other actions. Engagement loops use feedback to motivate users to perform additional actions. Progression loops help users navigate through various stages and levels of mastery via a series of processes that progress the user through the application.

The engagement loop that is pictured below exemplifies how gamification can be used to keep online communities vibrant. In this engagement loop a user expresses initial interest in some type of "brand". The user is educated about the "brand" during a sales cycle. Once a sale is made, gamification engagement mechanics is used to cultivate a "brand" advocate. The repetitive engagement loop is used to connect user interests and motivations to the various actions of each stage.



When designing gaming applications, it is important to create well-defined gaming applications that target specific business objectives and incorporate rewards that are meaningful to the users.

Gaming applications should focus on specific, desired outcomes and behaviors that will determine the application's level of success. In order to do this, gamification designers and developers need to understand who their target audience is, how they like to engage, what they find valuable, and what the business objectives are.

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