Benefits of visualizing gamification for business productivity.
INTRODUCTION – BENEFITS OF GAMIFICATION FOR BUSINESSES

Over the past few years, there has been a measurable amount of hype (as evidenced by Gartner’s coverage of it) and to a lesser degree adoption (although still significant) by businesses of gamification in the workplace. According to Gartner’s hype cycle, in 2012 gamification was entering the “Peak of Inflated Expectations” and on the way towards the “Trough of Disillusionment”. Nonetheless, by 2015 it is estimated that approximately 40% of Global 1000 companies will be using some elements of gamification in their technology stack to get employees to be more productive. So what is it about gamification that businesses find so alluring?

To summarize gamification researcher, futurist and author of Reality is Broken Jane McGonigal, games provide us with “real positive emotions, real positive experiences and real social connections” during a challenging time [work]. She goes on to state that the real world is at once too easy, depressing, unproductive, hopeless, isolating, disconnected, trivial… the list goes on. But reality is our destiny, she goes on to say, and our mission is to engage as fully as possible with reality. Games help us better engage with our realities and have the by-product of making work more productive and fun. Additionally, the alternate realities created in games help fulfill four essential human cravings:

- More satisfying work
- Better hope for success
- Stronger social connectivity
- Epic meaning - Chance to be part of something bigger than ourselves

Before we discuss game design, let’s first agree upon a definition of a game. According to McGonigal, there are four primary traits to any game:

- A goal – The specific outcome a player is working towards.
- Rules – Constraints on how a player or players can achieve the goal.
- A feedback system – A system that reports a player’s progress towards a goal.
- Voluntary participation – The idea that everyone playing the game is a willing participant who accepts the goal, rules and method of feedback.
By taking elements of game mechanics (goals, rules, feedback) and carefully applying them in the workplace, companies (and their employees) realize benefits including motivating players to achieve higher levels of productivity and fostering stronger social connections amongst game participants – both of which are good for businesses.

According to Gartner, gamification in business helps businesses achieve three broad objectives: 1) change behavior; 2) develop skills; 3) enable innovation. We submit there is a fourth objective that gamification helps businesses achieve, and that is increasing productivity. Particularly for supply chain or manufacturing businesses, game elements and competitions can be introduced into the production processes in order to motivate performance. Many businesses already do this as part of their day-to-day operations. By integrating these production “games” with technology like Intelligent Digital Signage (IDS) systems, game elements such as levels, alerts, teams and leaderboards can be made more visual for greater impact. IDS systems include the software, hardware and applications for collecting and organizing data (and other content) from a variety of sources into impactful and engaging visualizations for display on public LED/LCD displays inside businesses.

It’s natural to think of digital signage as one medium for communicating and displaying elements of gamification to a workforce. But if the display is the end node, what’s the starting point?

GAME DESIGN MATTERS

Gamification industry expert Yu-kai Chou advises that successful gamification design starts with asking the question, “how do I want my employees/players/users to feel?” instead of jumping straight into the game elements.

Companies employ gamification in their operations for a variety of reasons – but primarily to motivate better performance. But games can only be effective and generate the positive individual results (like increased social interaction and positive emotional response) when they are adopted. If games are introduced and forced down the ranks of employees, companies may experience backlash at the perceived “Big Brother” heavy-handedness or patronizing nature of forcing game-play on work. However, when designed correctly and collaboratively with the employees, games create true emotional activation among the participants and help foster stronger social connectivity amongst employees.

Games also help motivate us to participate more fully in whatever it is we’re supposed to be doing. Even with the carrot of a salary, hourly wage or threat of a production quota, often times motivating oneself to perform wholeheartedly is difficult. Putting games around work helps provide the emotional benefits associated with self-motivated participation.
Game design should focus on helping players realize intrinsic awards as much as external (material) rewards like bonuses. For example, progressing to the next level and realizing the intrinsic reward associated with mastering a new skill or passing a benchmark is inherently more rewarding than just earning a new badge or “leveling up”. As such, game designers should consider making notifications of “leveling up” in the form of employee recognition of the new skill acquired. Game design should also focus on the collaborative benefits associated with grouping employees into teams, encouraging intra-company competitions and the stronger social connectivity that results.

Gartner analyst and Gamify author Brian Burke at Gartner stresses the importance of designing games that focus on the “sweet spot” of shared goals. If a business can determine which goals or objectives are jointly shared by the organization and an individual, then the individual will be more motivated to achieve those goals as opposed to goals solely focused on the organization. Many companies already practice a form of this by letting employees contribute personal work goals when setting quarterly performance objectives used in quarterly or semi-annual reviews.

Businesses who have deployed gamification to increase productivity should look to Intelligent Digital Signage as a next step in providing critical feedback to their employees. Game related messaging including standings and scores can be broadcast to employees on digital signs and mobile devices throughout an organization, helping promote game adoption, encouraging employees (players) to focus on the game (work), and fostering a healthy level of internal competition.
IDS systems are capable of hooking into a business’s data sources for the game metrics. For example, assume a human resources department responsible for overseeing a company’s quarterly objective setting program is tasked with “gamifying” the process. They design a game that measures each department’s achievement against their departmental goals and ranks them compared with the other departments. Each department’s goals are set up as tasks in the company’s ERP system. As a department completes a task, the task is marked complete in the ERP system. Using a programmatic API call, the company’s IDS system collects and tallies task data from the ERP system. The digital signage system then displays the tallied results on screens around the office at scheduled times and delivers alerts to mobile devices when a department moves ahead of another in the standings. This all happens automatically.

Another opportunity is within a company’s distribution center. A distribution center manager let his team organize themselves into groups of pickers. The teams all pick product based on instructions sent from the distribution center’s warehouse management system (WMS) down to mobile devices and to large LEDs positioned throughout the picking zones. When an item is picked, the WMS records the event and at the same time sends the picking data (the score) to the company’s IDS system. The digital signage system tallies the picking data and assigns it to the picking teams’ avatars for display on the digital signage displays once every ten minutes, providing the pickers with real-time performance information – a “gamified” scenario. The company reaps the benefits of increased productivity and enhanced teamwork.

![Figure 2: Innovative gamification feedback systems routinely use avatars as a way to represent a player’s or group’s performance.](image-url)
GETTING STARTED

When designing gamification around a business process, there are several things to consider. First, decide on what behavior you need to reinforce and what you need to measure in order to recognize or reward that behavior.

Set up the game’s rules, taking into account your normal business operations, production quotas, operating procedures, existing reward structures and any other factors you feel could be incorporated into a game. Consider time frames - games can be ongoing or short-lived. Consider who to include or exclude from the game.

Introduce unnecessary obstacles. According to McGonigal, compared with games, reality is often too easy. “Games challenge us with voluntary obstacles and help us put our personal strengths to better use.” One obstacle might be to voluntarily change the rate of performing a set task for a specific length of time; for example, reward packing employees who perform at 125% of their average production levels in a 30 minute window with a “Packing Master” badge. Process improvement officers will cringe and say that employees should always strive to perform at peak levels, but reality is far from ideal in many cases.

Carefully design your game’s levels and rewards with a focus on intrinsic over extrinsic rewards. As stated earlier, the intrinsic reward gained from achieving a new skill or having accomplished a key objective is often more rewarding when presented correctly than simply beating an opponent or moving to the next level. Additionally, the most effective deployments allow game players to create their own games including selecting their own avatars and nicknames and organize into teams.

Provide easy to access feedback for players. Take into consideration your existing data sources. Do they contain production data that could be leveraged as game data? How will you get the data from your systems into a format ready for gamification? Where will you display the game feedback?

RMG Networks provides best practices and consulting services to customers looking to integrate Intelligent Digital Signage and gamification into their business processes. Please contact us for more information.

ABOUT RMG NETWORKS

RMG NETWORKS (NASDAQ:RMGN) helps brands and organizations communicate more effectively using location-based video networks. The company connects brands with target audiences using video advertising networks comprised of over 200,000 display screens, reaching over 100 million consumers each month. The company also builds enterprise video networks that empower organizations to visualize critical data to better run their business. RMG Networks works with over 70% of the Fortune 100. The company is headquartered in Dallas, Texas, with offices in the United States, United Kingdom, China, India, Singapore, Brazil and the UAE.

For more information on how your business can benefit from Intelligent Digital Signage and gamification, contact RMG Networks today.

info@rmgnetworks.com | 877-796-6634 | www.rmgnetworks.com