

Building Internal Enthusiasm for Gamification in Your Organization

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Abstract. Gamification has become a hot topic in a variety of areas from consumer sites to enterprise software. While the concept of using game mechanics to attract and retain customers in the consumer space is now well accepted, the use of gamification in the enterprise space is still catching on. In this paper, the authors explore ways to build internal enthusiasm for gamification within an organization while maintaining good practices and processes.

Keywords: Gamification, Game Mechanics, Enterprise Software, User Experience, User-centered design, Employee Engagement.

1 Introduction

Gamification has become a hot topic in a variety of areas from consumer sites to enterprise software. While the concept of using game mechanics to attract and retain customers in the consumer space is now well accepted, the use of gamification in the enterprise space is still catching on. However, there are a number of reasons to believe that gamification will grow in the enterprise space. The most likely of these is that companies are increasingly concerned about the effect of employee engagement on productivity. Employee engagement is the degree or extent to which employees feel committed to their work and their organization. The idea is that if employees are engaged in their work, they will be more involved in things that make the company successful. Engaged employees could be reasonably expected to produce more than disengaged employees, and that idea has been born out by several studies. For example, the Hay Group [1] found that actively engaged office workers were 43% more productive. Towers Perrin [2] found that companies that have engaged workers have 6% higher net profit margins, and Kenexa's [3] research claims that companies with engaged workers have five times higher shareholder returns over five years. Lockwood [4] studied sales teams and found that there was a performance-related cost of low- versus high-engagement teams of more than 2 million dollars. Also, engaged employees are said to be less likely to switch jobs.

As a result, companies are concerned about the effects of employee engagement on their bottom lines. And these companies are trying to figure out how they can get their employees more engaged in their work.

And that's where gamification may come in. Gamification in the enterprise has a specific focus on business goals of the company, and how to keep people engaged in their work. As the Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project and Elon University [5] concluded "Playing beats working. So, if the enjoyment and challenge of playing can be embedded in learning, work, and commerce then gamification will take off."

Let's consider a few areas where gamification in the enterprise has been successful. Call centers have been one of the first places to employ successful gamification. Call centers have a huge turnover rate. Turnover is expensive. The Society of Human Resource Management [6] states that the cost of replacing one \$8 per hour employee can exceed \$3,500, so companies have a strong financial incentive to hold onto employees, even those who are not highly paid. Live Ops, a call center outsourcing firm, added gamification to their training and for their employee work tasks, rewarding employees for things like time to complete a call and customer satisfaction. They showed a 23% improvement in call metrics over employees not using the system, 9% higher customer satisfaction and training time was reduced from 4 weeks to 14 hours [7]. Other studies have suggested that you can reduce the turnover rate at a call center from every 3 months to every 6 months. Numbers like that are very compelling.

Another compelling use case is in the sales aspects of Customer Relationship Management (CRM). Companies buy CRM tools in order to better track and understand the activities of their sales force. Companies would like to know who their sales team is talking to within a company, what they talk about and what works best to close a deal. However, sales people view entering information into CRM tools as time they aren't out selling. Companies want more insight into their sales team, but the sales team does not want to take the time to enter that information. Companies can use a carrot and stick to incent their sales folks to enter information but what if you could create a way that your sales team would want to use the system? More and more, companies are turning to gamification as a way to entice sales users to enter information into the CRM system. And those methods appear to have been successful.

Based on these studies, it would seem gamification would be a natural fit for many companies. Nonetheless, it is sometimes difficult to get organizations on board with gamification, and actually push the concepts into design and product. This case study examines ways that we have worked to get gamification adopted in our organization.

2 Building Support

At Oracle, we have met resistance to gamification on several levels, but now are managing to move our groups into a more receptive space. Over the last two years, we have developed a variety of techniques to convince an internal audience that gamification is a useful and could be effective in enterprise systems.

2.1 Socialization

The first solution we have taken is to socialize the message through presentations to user experience and development teams. Although some groups see the value of gamification, we have encountered resistance to the term gamification on the basis that it is not serious enough for enterprise users. There was concern about the idea of trying to make serious software into a game. However, through presentations and socializing the research in the field, that resistance has diminished.

Presentations to Product Teams

One of the first ways we introduced gamification to our organization was to present to the Applications User Experience (Apps UX) group at Oracle. This group of 130+ individuals are the primary usability design and research support for Oracle Applications and a direct connection to the enterprise application product teams. By presenting an introduction to gamification to this group, we were able to start the conversation with both the user experience groups as well as all of the product teams.

Following this introduction to gamification, we invited this group to discuss the topic with their product teams in all enterprise areas, including CRM, Financials, Human Capital Management and Supply Chain Management and we offered to present an introduction to each of these groups.

Blog and Social Networks

We wanted to make sure that groups within Oracle could find more information on gamification and our team, so we created a blog and used social networks to connect internal teams interested in the topic. We utilize a twitter account as well as our internal Oracle Social Network to create discussions on gamification and a location for file sharing, so that others could find information on the topic and discover the various ways gamification is being implemented in Oracle.

2.2 Design Jam

Once we had introduced the topic of gamification to the teams, we decided the best way to move this forward was to conduct a large gamification exercise so that all of the members of Apps UX would be involved in gamifying an actual product flow.

Step One: Executive Support

The first step to this Design Jam was to get executive support for an offsite All Hands meeting with the entire organization. However, this could also be conducted as individual group events at separate locations if your organization doesn't allow for travel. In our event, we brought together employees from different locations in the US, Canada, India, Australia and Mexico. In addition, we invited some outside guests to attend from other Oracle groups as well as Oracle advocates.

Step Two: Scenarios and Teams

We have run this several times with different scenarios, but for the initial event, we asked for 15 different product flows (e.g. creating an opportunity record in a CRM application) from the various Apps UX product teams. For each of these, we asked for a user profile or persona of the typical user and screenshots with an explanation of the possible business goals. Each team received a thumb drive with the user profile or persona as well as a PowerPoint with all of the screenshots, an explanation of the flow and a description of the possible business goals. We also found a guru for each group who could explain the flow and answer any questions about the business goal for each team.

In order to level the playing field, we arranged the teams so that no one worked on their own product area. Everyone worked on a flow that would be novel to them.

Step Three: Gamifying the Day

To ensure that the day was fun and fit the spirit of gamification, we gamified the exercise in a number of ways. Each team had a game mascot from various video games (e.g. Mario, Arthur, Kirby, Laura Croft, etc). We began the day with a check in, in which each participant was given an envelope marked top secret. The envelope contained a pin with a picture of the game mascot for their teams and the product flow.

We started with an overview of game mechanics and how they could be used as well as an explanation of the goals of the day. When this exercise was complete, everyone opened their envelopes and ran to their assigned team table.



Fig. 1. The team tables with application monitor in the foreground

For the purposes of the day, we also had developed an app to gamify the event itself. This app allowed the event administrators to score the 15 teams on their use of game mechanics as well as to assign badges to teams. The event could be run without the app by scoring and tallying team scores. The app featured a leaderboard and an infoboard. The leaderboard showed the team with the highest number of points while the infoboard showed which badges the teams had earned. The majority of the badges were based on use of game mechanics while some of the badges were just for fun, such as the Coffee Addicts badge, granted to tables with more than 5 coffee cups.

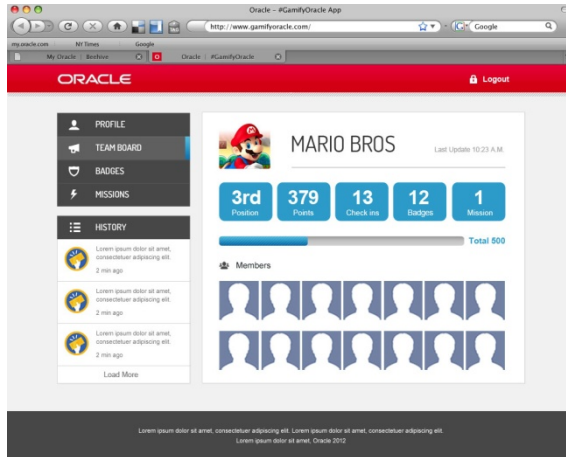


Fig. 2. An example page from the app developed for the event, showing an individual team page

Teams were scored at 3 points during the event and the winning team at each round received a small prize. At the end of the day, each team put together a PowerPoint deck and presented their design concepts to the rest of the group. At the end of that, the participants all voted on the ultimate winner of event and that team won prizes for each of the individuals.

This event did convince even skeptical participants that gamification could be used in ways they had not considered. Following the event, a number of projects to gamify enterprise flows were developed, including one based on the work of one of the teams during the event.

2.3 Research

In addition to the gamification event, we conducted research within our organization about terminology and specific game mechanics, to determine acceptance and awareness of gamification, through surveys to the larger development organization in which Apps UX is housed. This both raised the visibility of the concept while helping define which game mechanics were most useful and understandable to the organization.

A Gartner report in 2012 concluded that 80% of current gamified applications would fail to meet business objectives, primarily due to poor design [8]. Conscious of this possibility, once we started working with product teams to gamify some of our application flows, we have been careful to include research into our designs as part of our design cycle. For example, we took product designs to an Oracle User Group conference and tested them with people who met the description of a typical end user of the systems. Based on the testing, we then modified our designs prior to development. This research, in which we tested an ungamified flow against the same flow with gamification, is useful for convincing product teams that gamification would be a desirable addition to our product lines.

2.4 Individual Product Teams

And finally, we have made ourselves available to work with individual product teams to conduct specific brainstorming events to gamify a product. Working with those groups to help define the business objectives and possible methodologies has been useful both in promoting gamification as part of the user experience and for encouraging teams to consider how gamification could be used to achieve business objectives.

3 Conclusions

All of these methods are presented to help those who are also trying to build internal enthusiasm for gamification within their organization. We have found each of these efforts, coming from a user experience group, have helped to position gamification as a usability issue.

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