

Gamifying the World

PATTERNS
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Bringing elements of play to routine tasks can make the activities more tolerable — even fun.

If you think e-mail is too time consuming, how about online games? A 2010 Nielsen survey of US consumers shows that Americans now spend more Internet hours playing games like Farmville than they do corresponding with other people.

Games attract human beings because we are wired for play. Designers can harness our desire to entertain ourselves by embedding game mechanics into all sorts of products and services. Play can transform arduous

or mundane tasks, such as exercising and conserving energy, into less taxing, more enjoyable activities. In fact, the power of play is often most potent when gaming elements meld so completely into an experience that people do not interpret their activities as a game.

TAKE ACTION *Designing for gamifying the world*

1.

Lead with fun.

Focus on “fun raising.” You don’t need an elaborate Farmville offering, but harnessing the power of play engages people. Embedding simple game mechanics into products and services can go a long way in creating fans for your offering.

2.

Reward success in progression.

As with most good games, winning point by point offers a thrilling lead-up to a hard-earned victory. The longer the wait, the sweeter the victory.

3.

Link small steps to solve whole problems.

Show people that seemingly minor actions can truly add up and lead to big change.

4.

Make successes visible to others.

Who doesn’t want to see his or her name among the top scorers? Visible success can be a real motivator for people.

5.

Inspire collective action to infuse epic meaning.

One is the loneliest number — and the quietist voice. But taken together, these voices lead to a meaningful story.

Charitable giving: A million drops fill a bucket

Albert Einstein is often credited with saying, “Compound interest is the eighth wonder of the world.” It must have been the physicist’s interest in big numbers that led him to observe our tendency to underestimate how quickly lots of little gains add up. People save less, vote less, and donate less as a result of this bias. Even folks who care deeply about worthy causes often forgo charitable giving because they believe their donation will be too small to matter. “Why bother?” they ask. “A measly twenty bucks is only a drop in the bucket!”

Savvy donation-based organizations are now trading routine pleas for donations for simple game dynamics to elicit micro-payments. The best-known example is the American Red Cross, which immediately after devastating earthquakes struck Haiti in early 2010 launched a relief campaign using mobile-phone texting — and raised \$32 million in one month. The Red Cross eliminated the uncertainty and self-consciousness associated with small donations by issuing the clear and simple instruction: “Text ‘HAITI’ to 90999 to donate \$10.” (The \$10 was tacked onto donors’ wireless bills.) The nonprofit has since begun using the strategy to solicit larger donations to support other causes.



PATTERNS is a collection of shared thoughts, insights, and observations gathered from our work and the world around us. We invite you to join the conversation, so we can raise the bar and collectively develop richer design-thinking experiences.



Loose change buys environmental change

How many quarters does it take to transform urban blight? Fewer than you might think. CommonStudio, a design practice with an “urban social ecology” bent, is populating local bars, businesses, schools, and parks across the US with Greenaid vending machines. The machines dispense *seedbombs*, or gumball-sized orbs made of nutrient clay, compost, and seeds. For a couple of quarters, consumers can transform side yards, median strips, and vacant lots in their community from forgotten gray spaces into places to admire. Within days (weather permitting), green shoots color the landscape.

Greenaid is the brainchild of Daniel Phillips and Kim Karlsrud, who started the business after inheriting a collection of old gumball machines from Kim’s father. They originally filled them with candy, but no one was interested. After they started dispensing *seedbombs*, their vending business boomed.

Be a pattern spotter: Now that you’ve been exposed to a few different examples, don’t be surprised if you start seeing *Gamifying the World* patterns all around you. Keep your eyes open and let us know what you find, especially if it’s the next new pattern.

Students turn garbage into greenbacks

During lunchtime at the Foundation Academy in Winter Garden, Florida, many schoolkids are more excited about gathering trash than they are about eating. The students are in particularly hot pursuit of empty Capri Sun juice pouches. “They’ve collected 10,020 so far. The winning class gets an ice cream party,” an organizer of the three-month-long competition says.

The Foundation Academy is one of more than 36,000 grade schools in the US with an active “trash brigade.” The brigades are coordinated by TerraCycle, a manufacturer of eco-friendly products that connects the student garbage collectors with its partners, who buy and “upcycle” trash that’s otherwise un-recyclable. The schools get to keep the money, and the materials purchased get turned into new products, from backpacks to fencing gear, which are sold by Walmart, Target, Home Depot, and other major retailers.

To date, TerraCycle’s supply chain has channeled nearly 2 billion units of trash to 186 distinct product lines. By turning an onerous chore into a game, the company is helping to harness a new generation of eco-friendly citizens while driving its revenue above \$50 million in 2010.



Guest author: David Fetherstonhaugh



Points make medicine, chores more attractive

Ask everyone in a given household what percentage of the chores they do, and the sum of their estimates will invariably add up to more than 100 percent.

ChoreWars.com corrects everyone’s math — and prompts people to pick up after themselves — by awarding each member of the household points for doing chores. Players adopt an avatar and compete for “treasure” by participating in “adventures.”

One happy mom who used the website says, “I sat down with the kids, showed them their characters and the adventures, and they literally jumped up and ran off to complete their chosen tasks. I’ve never seen my 8-year-old son make his bed [before]!”

Similarly, Health Honors uses the science of motivation to encourage healthy behaviors in medical patients. One of its medication-adherence programs taps into people’s desires to earn rewards and give back: Participants with diabetes receive points for taking their medication or learning more about their disease.

Health Honors pools the points earned by all patients in the program and donates matching funds — a dollar per point — from pharmaceutical companies to charities like the American Diabetes Association or the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation.

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