Gamification: It’s all About Processes

By defining the business objective, identifying the brand mission and paying careful attention to program design and game mechanics, organizations can use gamification to motivate behaviors that elevate business performance.

Executive Summary

As a buzzword, “gamification” has started to gain momentum over the last year or so, but it is still not a mainstream applications development and business process reengineering concept. When gamification is discussed, people immediately think in game analogies – a jazzy user interface, rewards, progressive challenge levels and multi-player components. But on deeper examination, gamification is a concept that extends beyond these elements.

Gamification is a way of using game mechanics (e.g., competitive challenges, recognition and rewards) to improve a business process, with the goal of fulfilling business objectives. This white paper explores the roadmap that must be carefully followed for any organization that wishes to excel at gamification.

Why Invest in Gamification

Organizations have invested considerable sums of money in creating IT systems that enable effective business processes. However, these systems don’t motivate people to perform at their highest levels or fulfill underlying business goals; they are aimed merely at process execution. With the use of gaming principles, an intuitive design and an environment of healthy competition, however, it’s increasingly possible for process-enabling applications to motivate user behavior in a positive way.

For example, most people are inspired by a challenge or the promise of a reward, and they feel gratified when they win something – whether it’s a few dollars in gift cards or a million-dollar jackpot. These basic human tendencies can be channeled into behaviors that are rewarding not just to the users (be they employees, customers or business partners), but also to the company, itself. For most companies, it makes business sense to invest in strategies and process enablers that reinforce behaviors that help meet corporate objectives rather than merely executing processes.

The Gamification Journey

The key elements of gamification programs include an objective, a mission, gaming components and a well-thought-out design. Let’s look at these elements in more detail.

- **Objective:** What is the business objective that the organization is trying to achieve using gamification? This is the key to business process adoption or change. Sample use cases include:
  - **Improve adoption rates:** Companies have invested in social collaboration platforms to propel customers and/or employees to work
Samsung’s Social Loyalty Program

![Samsung Nation](image)

Figure 1

more effectively and efficiently; the question is, how do they ensure these platforms lead to an overall improvement in user adoption and engagement scores?

The answer: adding gaming mechanics to an internal community that acts as a social intranet can improve collaboration across employees and identify leaders in the knowledge community. Employees can be rewarded for their contributions to the community, which helps the organization not only increase adoption rates but also meet other business objectives.

- **Improve brand awareness:** Companies spend millions of dollars every year to fulfill marketing goals of creating a strong brand image and improving awareness. More often than not, they invoke tactics such as mailers, TV commercials, webinars, etc. These all are important parts of the marketing mix, but businesses today cannot ignore the value of user-generated content (UGC). Companies of all sizes and shapes must tap into UGC to learn what makes customers tick and influence them to be brand advocates, thereby burnishing a positive image in the marketplace. This is quite doable using gamification tactics. For instance, with Samsung’s social loyalty program, called Samsung Nation, participants can unlock badges, earn points, move up levels and explore everything Samsung.com has to offer (see Figure 1). Watching videos, commenting on articles and participating in user-generated Q&As are just a few ways in which visitors are rewarded.1

- **Mission:** Establishing the brand mission is the most important element in the gamification program. Each brand can have various and simultaneous goals, whose fulfillment relies on customers performing a set of related tasks that achieve the business objective. Missions can have different levels, and companies can offer rewards for each level or mission.

If we look at LinkedIn, the professional networking and career site, for example, we see a few elements of gamification in use. The company’s mission is to have users fill in and share as much of their profiles as possible. To do so, users have different tasks to complete, and their percentage of profile completeness is displayed. Every time a user sees this percentage, he is motivated to fill in a few more details to attain the 100% completeness mark.

- **Components:** The following components form the operational part of any gamification program:

  - **Badges:** Badges are a way of recognizing users who have achieved an expert level within a specific area or leaders within a
certain geography or team. These components are very important because they help motivate users and provide them with a sense of pride. When badges are shared with a network of friends – on either an internal platform or external social network – it provides the user with positive recognition and a reward, which are motivating factors that influence desired behavior.

- **Levels**: Just as video games offer various levels of accomplishment, so should gamification programs. And as with video games, business games should also involve some degree of uncertainty as to how one moves from one level to the next. If there are no levels and no unknowns, users would become bored after a few weeks of performing the same task again and again. It’s always good to have a bit of intrigue in any gamification program to ensure users will return to learn, and achieve, more.

- **Challenges**: Users should be challenged to perform certain activities in return for earning a special badge or progressing to a new level. For example, an organization can offer a challenge in which top performers for the quarter receive a paid vacation in Hawaii; a more overt challenge would involve displaying the daily score for each team as part of a leader board. It is human nature for individuals to try harder when they see where they stand in relation to their co-workers.

- **Leader boards**: This is another key component of any gamification program. Leader boards help do two things: provide a sense of recognition for users in the leader position and create a competitive environment for others to reach the top. Since leader boards offer greater visibility than one-on-one appreciation or compliments, they encourage users to go that extra mile to achieve desired behaviors.

Consider a scenario where a customer who is enrolled in a hotel loyalty program has a status of “silver.” When the hotel informs the customer that by spending one extra night during the month he can upgrade to the “gold” level, the customer is encouraged to book the same hotel on the next visit to achieve the higher level. This achievement proves to the user that he has moved up the leader board and now has access to more valuable benefits.

- **Players**: These are the participants in the gamification program; clearly, it’s important to keep the players in mind when designing a gamification process. As described in Bartles Player Motivations theory, game players can be classified into four categories (see Figure 2). For example, “killers” are those whose only aim is to win; they hunt for the weakest link and go after it. “Explorers” are players who like to discover new things.

When designing or testing the gamification process, we advise companies to identify the explorers early on because these players thrive on finding something new or designing a new way of doing something, so they are eager to play. Badges, levels and points are important to them, but they are not everything.

- **Design**: Many organizations overlook the crucial component of effective design. If the overall design is not thought through – from the UI, to the player’s journey, to rewards and awards – the entire process can fail. It’s important to first design the entire program at a high level, including defining the mission and tasks to complete the mission, the badges for recognition, a network to enable virality, the uncertainty zone to create a meaningful challenge and, most important, the ease of use and access through an intuitive UI design.

### Classifying the Players

![Figure 2](image-url)
Applying Gamification

To succeed, organizations must embrace an end-to-end view that ties together gamification’s four components. Here’s an example of how gamification could be applied to a call center operations process.

• **Objective:** To improve customer service rep call rates.

• **Mission:** Achieve 30 calls per day; receive five positive customer feedbacks; achieve 100% first-time correct calls.

• **Components:**
  > **Badges:** Rewards are given to daily and weekly leaders and are displayed on an internal application, along with the rep’s profile. This provides a sense of pride for leading reps.
  > **Challenges:** Challenges are organized by the hour, day or week. Examples include closing the maximum number of calls or obtaining the maximum positive feedback per day.
  > **Leader board:** These could be used for either individuals or teams, such as identifying reps with the maximum number of closed calls. Rewards with some level of intrinsic value need to be provided to leaders, since virtual points are not perceived to have true value. For instance, points could later be converted to dollar amount or gift cards for a longer lasting impact and to reinforce reps’ motivation to attain the business objective.
  > **Players:** In this scenario, players are the call center reps. Their needs – including access to information to close calls more quickly – need to be kept in mind as the program is conceived and evolved.

• **Design:** Since reps are the players in this game, it’s important to emphasize ease of use. For example, an intuitive process workflow and technical integration can ensure that reps don’t have to perform extra tasks to achieve badges. Other useful features – such as easy access on mobile devices for viewing leader boards and the ability to comment and share on badges – should be designed in from the get-go.

Looking Ahead

When applied well, gamification can greatly enhance your organization’s ability to meet business objectives. By understanding your company’s multiple missions and tactics, gamification can influence desired behavior from employees, customers and business partners to achieve your business objectives, optimize employee performance and improve the customer experience. Attention to these attributes will enable organizations to focus on business objectives, identity which processes to gamify and inform investment decisions for designing a successful program before moving to implementation.

Footnotes


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