Josh's gamification guide:

How to get the most from game-based learning in your organisation

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Gamification is the most talked about topic in L&D right now, and with good reason.

Done well, it's proven to motivate, engage and transform the learner experience, injecting energy and enthusiasm into any learning programme. Mobile devices and tablets have taken the gaming world by storm, and with media rich content and immersive, interactive designs, gamified e-learning is here to stay.

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Hello, my name is Josh...

I've been an instructional designer for 5 years and I've always felt inspired by the impact that games have on the power of learning. Having discovered gamification very early in my career, I've worked closely with clients across the globe, delivering gamified solutions for not only training purposes, but to increase staff engagement.

Read on for my guide to getting the most from game-based learning in your organisation.

What is gamification?

Simply put, gamification is the concept of applying game mechanics and game design techniques to e-learning to engage and motivate people to achieve their goals. Gamification taps into the basic desires and needs of the user's impulses that revolve around core ideas of status and achievement.

Why use gamification as a learning tool?

Gamification initiatives in learning acknowledge that the demographic of 'gamers' is growing and isn't as isolated as it previously was. The world of gaming used to be skewed heavily towards male players, whereas now this isn't the case. The average age of gamers in the UK is 35, and women now represent around 49% of the gaming population. Research has even found that playing games is twice as engaging as any other media[1]. Casual games available through apps or social media have helped to increase these statistics dramatically in recent years. It's become obvious that games play a big role in people's lives and this has created a culture where expectations about engagement have been raised. Google and IPSOS ran a survey that found 77% of people (in a study of 8,000) used a second screen whilst watching TV. This statistic shows how far we've come in recent times; engagement levels have reached a new high and so has our need for information, meaning we're always looking for the next thing to focus on.

But with so much attention-grabbing information out there, how does organisational learning fit in? It is harder than ever to gain a learner's attention, and even if you do, you'll quickly realise it's even harder to keep that attention. This is where gamification can help. It takes the expectations of modern society and works towards creating an engaging outcome through clever design and application of theory. In some instances, e-learning has created a bad name for itself, with learners already thinking they know what to expect from a course. With gamification, we can remove those preconceptions and deliver a truly immersive and effective learning experience.

Is there evidence that gamification works?

Well, learners recall just 10% of what they read and 20% of what they hear. If there are visuals accompanying the oral presentation, the number rises to 30%, and if they observe someone carrying out an action whilst explaining, this improves to 50%. But gamification works by providing real-life immersive scenarios, engaging the learner and enabling them to practice the application of new skills and knowledge in a safe environment. Learners remember 90% of information when they do the job themselves, even if this is only a simulation.

Here are some statistics of what learners think about gamified content:[2]

1. Almost 80% of learners say they would be more productive if their university/institution was more game-like.

2. Leader boards and increased competition between students would motivate over 60% of learners.

3. 89% would be more engaged in their e-learning if it had a points system.

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Gamification in e-learning is still in its infancy and the results are only just starting to make their way into the community. However, what has been unveiled so far has been incredibly impressive.

What are your top tips for creating successful game-based e-learning?

1 Scenarios are your gateway into gamification. Giving the learner meaningful decisions to make whilst introducing the general principles of the theory is one of the most powerful types of application. Spend time thinking about narrative and how you can hook the learner in to a personal approach. I cannot overstate how much time you should dedicate to creating solid narrative throughout the experience, the success or failure of a module often hangs on this.

2 When you want to dive into gamification, be sure to familiarise yourself with the 'dopamine cycle' – this has become key to understanding how we can drive engagement.[3]

3 Allow the user to explore the environment, or at least improve their access to information – there is no reason to restrict the flow of the content unless you're following a process that needs to be conducted in a certain way. This creates a sense of mystery and intrigue which helps to perpetuate the dopamine cycle and create a more engaging experience (even with particularly dry content).

4 Break up your content into bite-sized chunks. This enables users to learn and practice skills, prior to having to demonstrate mastery of those skills. When designing e-learning material to minimise cognitive fatigue, we need to break up our content into short-term, medium-term, and long-term goals. This also helps to drive engagement through mystery and achievement.

5 Finally, use all of these tips in conjunction with one another. One of these tips by itself isn't enough to 'gamify' an experience. Instead, focus on weaving narrative through your mystery and intrigue aspects, with a focus on breaking down content into bite-sized chapters. By doing that, you're setting a very good foundation for creating a small adventure-based course.

Do you have any examples of great gamification projects that you've worked on recently?

The Destination Game
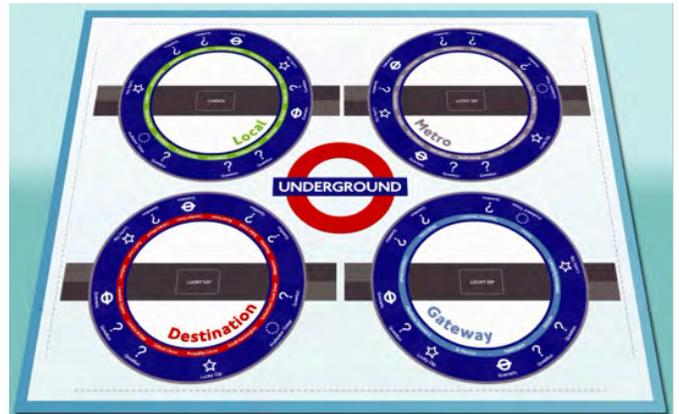
This is a full board game development that incorporates a vast array of media. The focus on this project is to reinforce all the previous learning throughout the five modules that were developed. Using combinations of point scoring systems, bonus rounds, achievements, video scenarios, computer opponents and leader boards, we have been able to create a functioning board game with a true competitive edge!

Diversity and Inclusion
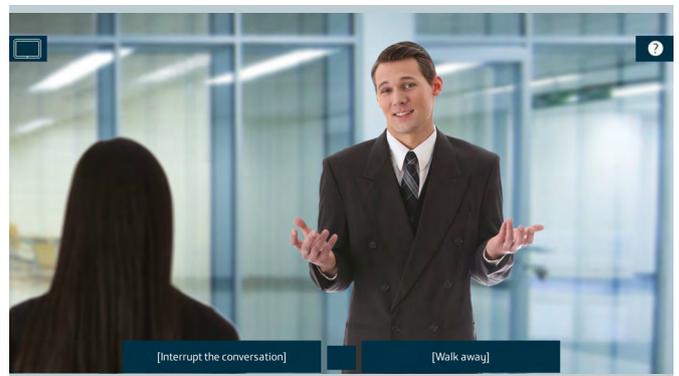
This diversity and inclusion module was designed to be different from traditional course styles in order to increase the impact of a normally 'dry' subject matter and help encourage long-term behavioural change. A first-person scenario approach was used, and the situation involved the learner being placed inside a new directorate in the business. From there they are able to explore the office and have conversations with the various staff members. Learning takes place through interacting with the environment and staff members, and challenging scenarios are also presented that force the learner to make difficult decisions and deal with the consequences of their choices. One example of a scenario used saw the

learner receive a 'Facebook notification' on their in-module tablet. The content of the message they received is not acceptable and they have to choose whether or not they would like to report the issue to a manager. Each choice has a different impact on the final ending to the module. Every decision the user makes affects the other staff members they meet, some may leave, some may complain, some may praise them. By adding in an ever-changing ending to the module, learners understand exactly what the repercussions of their actions are.

Dementia Module

This module, designed to help improve patient care, is hard-hitting from the start. It is shown from the perspective of someone with dementia, and through a first person approach, you witness yourself being taken into hospital. This is a really good example of how narrative, scenarios and perspective can all be used to great effect to produce a memorable e-learning module.

The Game Show

I really like this example of a game show based module. The brief for this project was to find an alternative to the traditional end of module assessment, as the client said that their employees were beginning to get a little tired of this approach, so it was losing its effectiveness. We turned this around and showcased the assessment as a game show style feature piece. Scoring the players and allowing them to compete against each other internally was certainly a big driver for this module, and impressively, the game achieved over 13,000 plays within the first week of going live.

I want to introduce game-based learning into my organisation. Where do I start and what do I need to consider?

Firstly, you need to know that this isn't as difficult as it sounds from a technical perspective. A lot of gamification is about techniques, theory and application rather than technical advancement or coding.

Before I start a project, I keep the following things in mind:

- Consider your objectives, how can you split these up into manageable bite-sized chunks for learners and give them a safe environment to practice that information?
- Brainstorm ideas and the creative treatment for how you can portray your overall vision.
- Understand your learners – what will engage them? Some people love fantasy games, other people will be really casual players who only use apps. Ensure that you develop something that hits the cross-section of learners.
- Games do not have to be complex or difficult; using branching scenarios is one of the best ways to begin gamifying content.
- Think about the content and the narrative and, to engage learners from the start, I always try to include some of the things that are unique to the culture of the organisation. Every workplace has a wealth of interesting facts, statistics, anecdotes and workplace stories to tell. Think about how you can incorporate them into your work. I always use this as a starting point to give me the creative spark I need!

References

1. Internet Advertising Bureau UK (2012). Gaming Britain - pull out guide and infographic. Internet Advertising Bureau UK.

2. Pappas, C. (2014). The Science and The Benefits of Gamification In eLearning. eLearning Industry.

3. Roberts, J. (2015). Dispelling the dopamine myth and powering up your e-learning. Gaming in Training blog.

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