



# On the Road to Gamification

By Tina Serio Saunders

**W**e've acknowledged that our industry has a deficiency of young talent. We understand that training programs are crucial to productivity and retention. We know that mobile and digital tools are revolutionizing every aspect of the business world. And, whether we like it or not, it is generally understood that games are addicting. So why do we balk at the term "gamification" when it comes to "work"? Seriously, in these modern times of change, why does WORK have to remain so much like WORK?

## Gamification Defined

In the event that the term gamification is still foreign to you, let's dive into the framework. Gamification utilizes the concepts of game design, behavioral economics, and loyalty programs to drive user engagement. Game design incorporates the use of competition, rewards, and progressive challenges. Behavioral economics is the study of "the effects of psychological, social, cognitive, and emotional factors on the economic decisions of individuals and institutions and the consequences for market prices, returns, and the resource allocation," according to "A Behavioral Framework for Securities Risk," in *Win* magazine. And loyalty programs are those that encourage clients to increase their time, attention, and spend on a specific brand, such as airline miles or coffee house or retail "punch cards."

The harnessing of game design to inspire users has been around for quite a while. Originally coined in 2002, gamification really started gaining momentum in 2011. But how much has it

caught on as of 2016? According to a recent article on Training-Industry.com, there are five reasons why gamification remains a hot training trend for 2016. "One, gear up for generation Y; two, combat information overload; three, relieve stress and encourage camaraderie; four, allow for autonomy; five, increase training return on investment."

## Addictive Behavior

In our industry, the "users"—or "gamers" if you will—are facility managers, building service contractors, in-house cleaning professionals, manufacturer reps, distributors and their sales reps, any sector that needs training. Gamification is designed when the content, delivery, and rewards are built to engage these audiences while simultaneously meeting an internal goal (retention, quality, sales, etc.).

The behavioral economics aspect is especially interesting. A key part of why gamification becomes an integral part of content delivery is basic neuroscience: dopamine. Dictionary.com defines it as "a catecholamine neurotransmitter in the central nervous system, retina, and sympathetic ganglia, acting within the brain to help regulate movement and emotion..."

And dopamine is downright addicting. When one seeks challenge, such as winning a badge or moving up a (game) level, and achieves the challenge s/he set out for, the brain secretes this pleasure neurotransmitter. This pleasure derived from the dopamine drives the user/player onto a unique focus to achieve repeatedly in order to trigger repeated dopamine release.

## Top of Your Game

In summary: Gamification is harnessing game design and custom content to capitalize on the effects of dopamine to drive improvements to profitability. Micro goals can be to increase sales/gain new customers, learn new processes and/or product lines, improve company culture, escalate technology adoption, improve employee fitness, and more. Training, specifically e-learning, is a prevalent area for gamification.

Another fact that keeps gamification at the top of leading employers' minds: Generation Y, or Millennials, were born from 1980-2000. They champion technology and as of 2015 were the biggest generation in the U.S. workforce. However, Gen Z is our next target recruitment market. Currently age 3-20, these kids are the first generation of "digital natives."

They never knew life without mobile gaming, smart phones, social media, and laptops (Bernstein, 2015).

So how does our industry capitalize on gamification to attract train and retain the Millennials and Gen Zers, as well as tech savvy Gen Xers and Baby Boomers? There are a number of ways that manufacturers in our industry now utilize gamification. For example, GOJO has ongoing contests for distributor sales reps that incentivize them to do various things, such as introduce their products to new end-customers, compete against their peers by selling the most of a certain item within the time frame, and obtain recognition. Their distributor portal allows distributor sales reps to track their progress, shop at the Rewards Mall, and see which of their peers are at the top of the leaderboard.

Distributors can also deploy gamification in a variety of ways to meet a wide range of goals. One example of such a distributor is Scoles Floorshine's use of gamification for product training. Private arenas were set up with games and content built around the products and services that Scoles wanted its sales team to focus on. Not only did the platform enable a team building exercise, it kept the products top of mind and helped the reps become more proficient and knowledgeable. The rep at the top of the leaderboard at the end of the contest won a gift card.

Another example of utilizing gamification within a distributor is Spruce industries recent "draft." The goal was to re-activate customers' that had for one reason or another, quit purchasing from the distributor. A list of inactive accounts was generated, including any accounts with zero sales or activity within the last 15 months. It was disseminated to the sales team via an Excel spreadsheet with all pertinent information. The team received this 10 days ahead of the sales meeting to

enable them time for research and strategy. (Think of a fantasy football team draft, but replace the players with inactive customers.) Prizes were established for the sales rep that reactivated the most accounts and one for the sales rep who sold the highest in dollars to reactivated accounts. On top of bragging rights, the winners received a cash bonus.

So what about facility service providers? How can gamification be useful to an in-house cleaning professional or a building service contractor? Let's use ISSA's Angry Janitors as an example. The mobile game—available as a free download on your iPhone, iPad, iPod Touch, Android phone, or Android tablet—features three stages (The School, Office, and Hospital) with 10 levels each. The game tests—and trains—users regarding proper cleaning procedures as they accumulate points for eliminating dirt and germs and earn Golden Plunger awards for high scores.

Trade shows and seminars are other great venues for implementing this competitive learning platform. Last fall, I presented a one-day workshop for the IEHA Vermont Annual Conference. We dove into the topics of multi generational workforces and technology in facilities management. Then I grouped them in teams. The teams competed live with the leaderboard projected onto the screen, and the engagement, fun, and competitive spirit thrived.

Our industry is competitive, and we have competitive natures in general. Admit it: *You want to win.* Whether it is in your March Madness brackets, a golf outing, a tennis match, or a school bid... when you are keeping score, it is important to you that you come out on top! And in fact, while the first two examples did offer fun prizes, according to Gabe Zichermann (YouTube: <https://youtu.be/UdUcLLUDxRg>) what our engaged players really want are SAPS or, in descending order, status, access, power, and stuff. Status, such as being at the top of a leaderboard, is desired more highly, than stuff—cash or free tickets or gift cards. Similarly, access, like backstage passes and the power of being a moderator, fall in the middle on the SAPS value scale. Gamification can offer all these, but especially the top one, status. 🏆

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