

# GAMIFICATION. USING TECHNOLOGY TO MOTIVATE.

A PAPER BY DIGIT

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**DIGIT**  
SIMPLE  
HUMAN  
INTERACTION

# THE LATEST BUZZ IN MARKETING

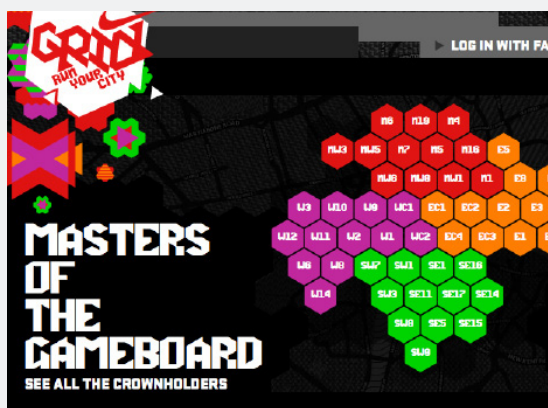
## OLD PSYCHOLOGY, NEW TECHNOLOGY

Gamification is generating a lot of interest, not just from marketers but psychologists, sociologists and just about anyone who has a vested interest in understanding or influencing the behaviour of others. The term itself emerged as a way of categorising a growing trend of (mostly digital) marketing initiatives that take their inspiration directly from the world of gaming.

Essentially it's about applying traditional game mechanics like points, leaderboards and badges to otherwise uninspiring tasks, in order to make them more compelling. Fiat Eco-Drive is an early example, Nike plus (and more recently Nike Grid) are others, using points and scoreboards to steer you through the process and get you spending more time with the brand.

At the heart of it is an idea touched on a few years ago by VW and their 'Fun Theory'. Recycling is a chore because it makes throwing rubbish away more time consuming. If you turn it into a competitive game, then people are more inclined to take time out to do it - increased productivity through gaming.

As a proposition for business it's attractive for obvious reasons. If you can turn the interactions you have with your customers into something more exciting, then you stand to hold much more of their attention, and if you can somehow get them addicted, then that's even better. Games are an obvious source of inspiration for that kind of compulsion because they are designed to create addiction whilst evoking a sense of achievement. (see figures 1, 2 & 3)



Games motivate us by offering constant rewards. They reassure us that what we are doing is right, and that we're moving in the right direction.

Nike Grid made amateur runners run further and faster for a whole month just by providing a context for their performance – either against each other or against themselves.

Games draw you in. Once you've invested time in something, you become inevitably more reluctant to give it up. Game design works by getting you to gradually invest more and more. Facebook games like Farmville have perfected the balance of being immediately accessible, yet infinite in scope.

Paying \$10 for virtual farming products may seem ridiculous at first but becomes all the more rational once you've spent 30 hours building your farm



What makes this all the more appealing for business is that there's a little bit of this compulsion in all of us, not just the stereotypical gaming market of teenage males. The rise of social gaming whose target is broad, has surprised a lot of people. According to a recent Nielsen survey, 10% of all time spent online is now spent playing games (overtaking time using email) and by far the fastest expanding online habit. The average Facebook gamer spends 45 minutes actively playing each day. Any brand that counts online engagement with their customers among their key performance measures should have an interest in an idea that generates that kind of devotion.

Games feed our obsession with our own behaviour. They give us feedback, scoreboards, laptimes, weapon selections, stats.

The more we understand about our own behaviour, the more we want to know and the more we want to change it. Fiat Eco-Drive made previously indifferent drivers want to change their driving style just by giving them feedback on everything from gear changes to tyre pressure to acceleration.



## A SOLUTION FOR SOCIAL MARKETING

The level of devotion is one of the reasons gamification is so exciting for the industry - it overcomes some of social marketing's biggest problems. The emphasis placed on "social" and the shift from messaging to 'engagement' has been criticised (sometimes quite rightly) for being either a) too high an investment for the audience to bother with or b) pointless to the business.

Some social campaigns require input that their audience don't have the time or inclination to provide. User-generated content is difficult enough to get out of consumers even before advertisers get on to the question of whether it delivers anything to the bottom line. Just because technology allows something to happen doesn't mean people will automatically start doing it. This sentiment was summed up nicely in an open letter to the advertising industry from a consumer who posed the question; why would I want to have a 'conversation' with a sausage company?

Then of course it's hard to measure the financial value of a social conversation anyway, or indeed a large number of Facebook friends, or Twitter followers.

Not only are games inherently addictive but game mechanics lend themselves to being monetised quite easily. Level progression in a loyalty scheme or buying more items to collect more points and snapping up deals before they're gone, are all processes that can be easily 'gamified'. If it's done well then gamification doesn't just increase engagement but turns it into a strategy that is more financially viable.

## OLD PSYCHOLOGY, NEW TECHNOLOGY

Despite all the industry hype around gamification, tactics that reward and motivate in marketing aren't all new. Clever marketers have always understood the motivations they need to harness in order to increase their 'productivity'. You could argue that 'Happy Hour' at the local pub has a game mechanic behind it. Loyalty schemes are also a form of level progression whereby your status is defined by how much you've achieved compared to where you could be, thus constantly encouraging self-improvement. Price-drop TV has a game like quality to it, being a fun way of auctioning off items for a fraction of their retail value.

The motivations that make these tactics work haven't changed but what's exciting is that technology is opening up new ways of tapping into them. We're seeing amped up versions of all these things, as well as other examples of interactions that are made more responsive, more personalised and more rewarding.

Social media is probably the largest influencer. Expedia recently created a promotional giveaway that used game mechanics to get broader reach. Users had to create a virtual aeroplane on Facebook and fill the seats by inviting friends. Once the plane is full, it flies off to your selected destination and then you create another. Your chances of winning an all expenses trip grows with your increasing point score and the number of people you can get involved in the game. It's a bit like a 'friend-get-friend' recruitment idea but with an online profile to give you feedback and a social network to spread it. Its ability to reach huge audiences and suck you in is subsequently amplified.

The convergence of technologies is also really important. Starbucks loyalty – a rewards programme based on your purchase history, takes the age-old idea of a coffee loyalty card but enriches the experience. Once your card is registered, each time it is swiped, a computer records all of your purchases, feeds information back to your online profile and allocates you ‘stars’ and a ‘progress bar’ based on what you buy. Rewards and offers then become infinitely more personalised and relevant.

A similar tactic was used by Campusfood.com in the states - an online delivery service that aggregates take away food companies in New York. They recently posted a 20% uplift in return users after giving their customers virtual badges for loyalty and repeat purchases.

## A ‘GAMIFIED’ FUTURE?

These examples are broad, crossing sectors and audiences, whilst innovative use of technology has shown impressive results. But from a creative perspective they are remarkably similar. In fact some of the principles of the ‘gamification’ trend seem to be almost insulting in their simplicity – just add a ‘scoreboard’ or some ‘badges’ to your customer interaction portal and it doesn’t matter if you’re selling coffee or transatlantic flights, you’re going to increase productivity.

Gamification’s strongest advocates would lead you to believe that we are starting to see an invasion of the real world by games and game designers – where brands will track our every move, rewarding and coercing the decisions we make with points and scoreboards. Jesse Schell, a game designer speaking at TED made a prediction about the future impact of point systems on our daily behaviour.

‘You’ll get up in the morning and brush your teeth and your toothbrush will know that you’re brushing your teeth and good job for you, you get 10 points! And if you do it every day of the week you get extra points for doing well... Who cares? The toothbrush company, the toothpaste company.’

This vision of brands coercing us may hold some truth, but how we get there is another question. It seems unlikely that it will be as simple as offering points and badges. Points are only useful to brands so long as they remain compelling, whilst there will come a time when getting such simple external rewards for being loyal are no longer a motivating factor.

## GAMIFICATION MAY JUST BE THE BEGINNING

Perhaps 'gaming' is a misleading (and limiting) comparison for what we're seeing at the moment. It is true that games use points and scoreboards to motivate, and these types of mechanics have had an interesting impact on productivity. It is in this sense that brands are being gamified. But the world of gaming has other connotations too. Games are about the process not just the reward. They are played for playing sake and not just chasing points. They will always be a popular pastime for people of all ages, whilst the most successful games, (social, branded or otherwise) will always provide a form of escapism from the real world.

Rather than a 'gaming invasion', it might be more useful to see it as the start of a new approach to digital marketing, where the emphasis is on behaviour shaping and pulling the right triggers, rather than expecting too much attention from any given audience. What we are seeing as the 'gamification trend' are essentially a bunch of tactics that motivate people, made better through technology.

Game mechanics are one way of doing this but unlikely to be the only one. There will be many ways to motivate that don't borrow the cues and language of games or use points and scoreboards. The industry will explore and innovate in this area until it is barely recognisable to the average consumer.

For now at least, the 'points' trend will continue to spread. Even the government has started using point systems to increase productivity. The Department for Work and Pensions recently started allocating DWPeas (points for making suggestions on how the department could run better) and predicts that it will save more than £20 million through the 60 actionable suggestions they have received as a result.

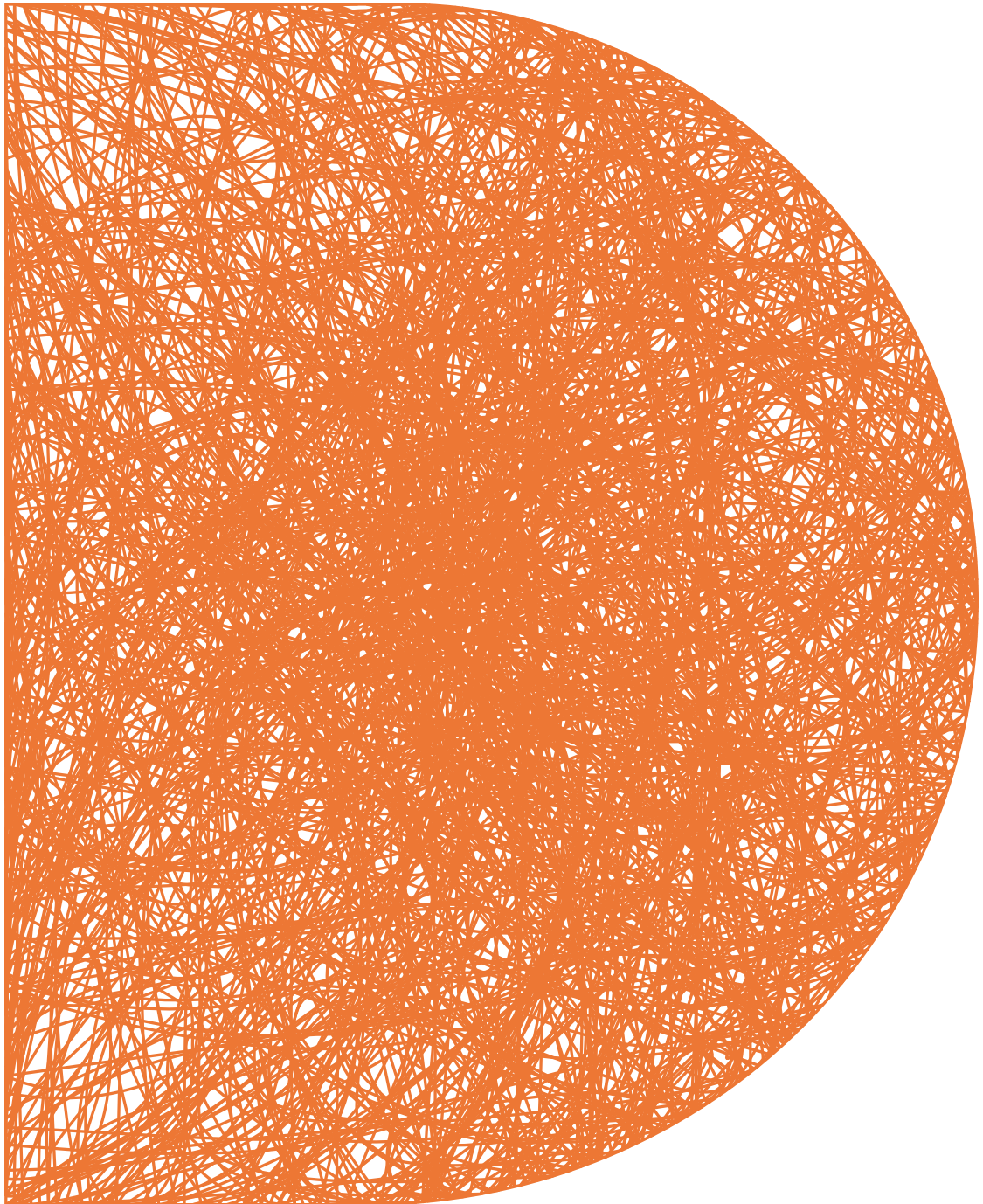
## MARKETING AS BEHAVIOUR SHAPING

If this is a taste of things to come then it's a positive one. The future of the industry lies in understanding human motivation as deeply as possible. It could be a benefit to us all, with some of the most innovative behaviour-shaping ideas appearing in areas that have nothing to do with brands and consumers, but more with productivity in a societal sense.

Aside from the government getting in on the action, some innovative products have sprung up that tap into a whole wealth of predictable human instincts. Shower Calendar is an ingenious invention that makes it obvious to you and your housemates who is using the most water by having a sensitive screen on the shower door that displays this information. By feeding back to individuals and making the information public there are all kinds of motivations this could work on: Competition, pride and self-betterment to name but a few.

BinCam is a recent initiative developed at Newcastle University and trialled by local students. The BinCam takes a snapshot of each of your bin visits and uploads a photo to Facebook, leaving a permanent and public record of your recycling habits. There are no prizes for doing it well, but the information is stored and represented by an image of a flourishing (or wilting) tree, depending on how 'well-behaved' you are. Early results have shown a huge increase in recycling and the desire to avoid public shame is no doubt what is driving its success.

Whether either of these behavioural changes result in a genuine change of heart is another matter, but they are good examples of what creative technology can do to cajole us into making productive decisions. Marketing will also continue to benefit from this approach if the industry looks beyond point systems and starts thinking more broadly about human motivation. Games are a good source of inspiration, but we have to look at ourselves if we want to keep coming up with the answers.



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