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Betrus

The Gamification of Society

Free your mind. Relax. Now read the following four words and think of the first thing that pops into your mind: points, rewards, challenges, badges. Got it? Did you think *games*, or perhaps even *video games*? Of course these are the good choices, and you are correct if you thought of these first. On the other hand you would have been equally correct if you chose *marketing*. In recent years there has been an increasing trend by businesses or corporations to develop clever systems with these and other game-like elements to help promote their product and services. There is even a new catch-all term that has been coined to describe this trend: "Gamification."

Gamification is a term first used in 2008, although the practices and techniques have been going on for much longer, in albeit a less formal manner. You are likely familiar with various customer loyalty programs loosely based on these principles. The basic idea is that as you consume products and use services you are treated better as a customer and given perks that other customers do not have. Frequent flier programs, points earned on credit cards, or even reductions in gas prices based on purchases at the supermarket are all examples of this trend. Recently, there has been a push to formalize these systems to better mirror the incentive system found in games. So rather than just earning points, there are typically "tiers" that you achieve as you spend more (10 cents off a gallon of gas at your next fill-up after you spend $100, 20 cents off after you spend $200, etc…). Some of you may log in to mycokerewards.com, where a consumer is presented with a variety of choices for using their earned points. These and other systems are becoming more sophisticated in their design, yet easy to understand and simple to use. To sum it up, the devices and techniques that have over the past thirty years been refined by the games industry are now being used to 'motivate' consumers.

Yet, while the term is only a few years old, there is already a backlash against both the term "Gamification," as well as the concepts it has come to embody. While attending the recent Game Developers Conference in San Francisco, there was a full day of talks, discussions, and debates about the proper role of games and game elements in society. After attending those sessions, I came away with the feeling and understanding that some game designers do not appreciate this trend. They feel that marketers are now exploiting their expertise and experience, which was developed slowly and gradually over decades. They see this as cheapening both the games industry and society. The counter-term that was offered by game designer and *Reality is Broken* author Dr. Jane McGonigal was "Gameful Design." Her message was that designers should be striving for four things: Positive Emotion, Relationships, Meaning, and Accomplishment (PERMA).

So what does this all mean to local musicians and businesses? There are methods and techniques that you could be using right now, but probably aren't. And these "Gamification" or "Gameful Design" techniques do not need to cheapen what you do. Rather, when used responsibly and properly, they can actually enhance your product,

service, or experience. For example, have you considered adding "*Letterboxing*" or "*Geocaching*" to bring people to your business or event? How about Foursquare? Do you know who the mayor of your establishment is (hint: it is probably not you). If these terms are unfamiliar, it is likely because you are stuck in a 20th century business mindset. Gabe Zichermann and Joselin Linder recently published, "Game-Based Marketing," which is a good place to start if you are interested in learning more. On the other hand, if you'd prefer some local help, just drop me an e-mail, I would be happy to help get you started.