How Gamification Can Help Grow Community Adoption & Engagement

HIGHLIGHTS

How can gamification help organizations grow their online community adoption and engagement?

1. Gamification, in its simplest definition, is about understanding the behaviors that are necessary to drive change. It is also about knowing how to motivate an individual to engage in those behaviors. The secret behind successfully driving behavior change is to help a user to feel smart, successful, socially valued and to ensure that they feel a sense of purpose and direction.

2. It is very important to understand the data that underpins gamification. Specific behaviors may make the experience better for the end user. If the organization has the ability to understand those behaviors and is able to understand the analytics and even match it right down to a player level, it will help the company to understand which users are the most engaged. When that is understood, it can help the organization to put other users on a path to improved engagement.

3. Chris strongly recommends that gamification be viewed as a program vs. a project within an organization. It is impossible to sustain engagement over the long-haul if people are able to see the beginning and end of their level of participation. Gamification is really about ongoing engagement and frequent iteration.

SPEAKERS

Chris Lynch (Badgeville), Sam Creek (CA Technologies) & Hillary Boucher (TheCR)

COMPETENCIES

Community Management

MATURITY PHASES

CMM1, CMM2, CMM3

THECR NETWORK

BEST PRACTICES

Understand the Challenges Associated with Gamification Prior to Implementation: Chris stated that gamification should be discussed as two separate entities (employee-facing vs. customer-facing) because the challenges are unique to each entity:

- **Customer-Facing Challenges:** There are three basic challenges experienced with customer-facing gamification:

    - There is an unprecedented amount of choice (Facebook, Twitter, etc.) jockeying for a customer's attention.

    - Even if the organization is successful at attracting a customer's attention, it is fleeting; there is only a small window of opportunity to engage that customer. Chris stated that his research estimates that the average attention span of a customer is approximately eight seconds.

    - Companies presume that customers want to come to their communities. However, in reality, most customers actually come to the site to complain.

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- **Employee-Facing Challenges:** There are three basic challenges experienced with customer-facing gamification:

    - Employees are creatures of habit. Even if they objectively know that there is a better way to do something, they often simply choose the least path of resistance.

    - They need to understand the new tool's relevancy and how it will help them to do their job better before they will invest the time; it must be proven to them.

    - There is often limited recognition. In order to drive behavior change, it requires instant feedback and/or acknowledgement that the employee has done something that is valuable.

BEST PRACTICES

Use Gamification to Influence Key Behaviors that Power Community Momentum: Gamification, in its simplest definition, is about understanding the behaviors that are necessary to drive change. It is also about knowing how to motivate an individual to engage in those behaviors.

Chris listed a few important, intrinsic behaviors:

- To Feel Smart: It is important to help people feel smart. As well, help them to feel that what they are contributing has value.

- To Feel Successful: People like to feel successful and they like to win. They also like to feel that their success and wins are relative to other people.

- To Feel Socially Valued: Individuals want to feel valued. Reputation and status contribute to those feelings of value, particularly if prestige is also a part of that value. Winning a free iPad is nice at first, but its value is not sustainable. However, a person's reputation stays with them forever. A person's reputation is sustainable, particularly as that reputation grows and strengthens.

- To Have a Purpose and Direction: People need to feel that their day-to-day activity maps to something of greater value; a greater overall goal. It depends on whether it is a customer or employee-facing community as to what that overall structure might look like, but the main idea is that people want to find purpose.

BEHAVIOR DATA = BIG DATA

Track & Analyze Behaviors

Export Data to Customer Analytics Tools

Design & Update Your Mechanics

Apply to User Experience

YOUR USERS

THECR NETWORK

BEST PRACTICES

- **Understand the Tools that Can be Leveraged with Gamification:** Chris explained that there are three main levers:
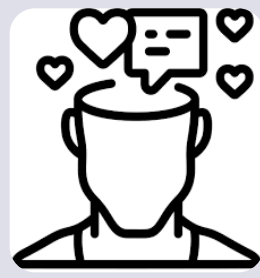
Game Mechanics

This is the concept of rewarding users in real-time. Individuals desire instant feedback for their contributions to a community and recognition for their achievements.

Reputation Mechanics

This is the notion of showcasing rank and status within a community and championing the most active advocates.

Social Mechanics

The idea behind social mechanics is to showcase the high-value behaviors and the various individual achievements.

THECR NETWORK

BEST PRACTICES

Realize the Importance of Data within Gamification:

Chris wanted to point out that it is very important to understand the data that underpins gamification.

Many people think of gamification in terms of the frontend engagement mechanics that the end user would see, i.e. perform an activity and earn points. However, that is merely the visualization side of it. Beneath that is the data.

For example, how well the users are responding to the different content that is in place within the gamification program and how sticky the overall experience is to the user. Specific behaviors may make the experience better for the end user.

If the organization has the ability to understand these behaviors and is able to understand the analytics and even tie them right down to a player level, it will help the company to understand which users are the most engaged.

When that is understood, it can help the organization to put other users on a path to improved engagement**.**

Another aspect of the data within gamification is iteration. *Gamification never really sleeps.* The organization must iterate on a frequent basis to tweak the different engagement mechanics to see what is working and what is not working. That is another reason why the data is so important within the gamification process.

LESSONS LEARNED

The following is a summary of lessons learned as shared by participants within the discussion:

Hillary asked Chris to explain the difference between the intrinsic and extrinsic rewards and when to pull those levels within gamification. Chris responded that there are some inflection points that are dictated by time, but it mostly has to do with what is important to the users. In certain cases, intrinsic rewards will be much more powerful, such as within a community that is very content heavy and the community's purpose is to share best practices and knowledge. If it is more of a product-centric community (such as in the consumer goods industry where the innovation cycles are fast and new products are abundant), extrinsic rewards may be a more important factor because users wish to receive compensation for their participation. In certain cases, it could be a hybrid of the two, i.e. the user does not receive anything for free, but they may gain access to a product prior to others in the community, as an example. All in all, it comes down to the motivators of each user base.

One participant asked Chris how long it typically takes to see results. As a second part to that question, Chris was also asked whether or not he recommends setting up gaming initiatives to be ongoing or to have an end.

Chris replied that results can occur very quickly. It is like any other type of new technology that is implemented in that in the first few months of implementation there is a pretty big spike until the novelty wears off. However, this does yield important data. After the initial spike, the sustained growth is more exponential, provided that the gamification program has been designed correctly. That is the caveat.

As for the second part of the question, Chris shared that one arm of Badgeville is their behavior lab. The head of this lab has a great deal of gaming experience. He recommends that gaming be thought of as a program vs. a project. It is impossible to sustain engagement over the long-haul if people are able to see the beginning and end of their level of participation. Gamification is really about ongoing engagement and iterating on a frequent basis.

LESSONS LEARNED

Participants wondered if the level of community maturity contributed to gaming success, i.e. whether or not the community is a mature, fully developed and/or self-managing community vs. a brand new community. Chris responded that he has seen success in both new and mature communities. The core of it is baseline adoption. Therefore, in the less developed communities Chris explained that in the first quarter of implementation they will ensure that they have designed the mechanics to be very activity-focused. This way, it focuses on helping users to learn the different features of the platform. Once that baseline has been established, the next step is to design mechanics that map to recognition, reputation and expertise. In other words, if the community is very passionate about a particular product, it probably makes sense to have a track where the user can build a reputation around that specific product based on his/her content contributions vs. just slapping a leader board into the community that rolls up behaviors that occur across the whole community. A few people might care to get to the top of that leader board, but in Chris' experience it is probably the same users that are already the community's power users. What people care about is their areas of their expertise. So, the more that the design mechanics can be customized to map to that experience – especially in a mature community – the better the chances of success. That being said, Chris reiterated that he has seen success in both instances.

Sam from CA Technologies stated that for those communities that may look down on gamification due to the professionalism of the environment, the terminology of "gaming" can be completely removed so as not to taint the benefits that gamification could afford the community.

LESSONS LEARNED

One participant asked Sam what he felt were the important steps in planning for their gamification program, such as identifying the specific behaviors for which the company wanted to promote and to, therefore, design the gamification program around those behaviors. Sam replied that it is important to be able to track the activities. Online activities lend itself to that much better than offline activities. Ensure that leaders understand this very important point because once the value is realized, leaders will inevitably ask to track less trackable activities.

Sam was also asked how CA Technologies deals with the organic growth and development of their community as it adapts to gamification. Sam replied that their first set of levels was algorithmic; a curve. Basically, it was really easy to be a member and fairly easy to be a contributor. However, when it came to reaching the champion, hero and icon level, it took a dramatic spike upwards. Consequently, after six months they only had one user make it to the icon level. Since then they have readjusted the program to change the way the curve works. They have made it easier to move from member to contributor to aficionado. Then it begins to level-out between the aficionado, champion and VIP levels; those all require the same amount of effort. From there, it begins to curve up. So, the idea was to get them over the hump early for a couple of levels and then get the user accustomed to this plateau. Next, once it became easier for the user, the difficulty increased. The main lesson learned is that it definitely requires a willingness to make adjustments by paying attention to the metrics in order to see what is working and what is not working.

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Rewarding users for quality over quantity is something that can be achieved in the design of each company's gamification program. For instance, do not reward for behaviors that were not performed by the user, i.e. to write a review or post a blog may not be worth as many points as the number of people who mark that content as being helpful. Sam added that their system allows for the user to give ratings. However, the user is not rewarded as greatly for that type of behavior. They are awarded a greater amount of points for when the user receives a "thumbs up". Furthermore, the system prevents someone from being rewarded for "liking" their own comments.

Sam and Chris both pointed out the importance of building anti-gaming mechanics into the gamification program. For instance, Sam stated that in his program they reward people for giving a message board thread a thumbs up, but a user can only be rewarded every two or three minutes. That prevents people from going through the threads and clicking thumbs up on every post.

LESSONS LEARNED

The question was raised regarding expiring or resetting the game. Chris explained that the idea of resetting points or resetting rewards depends on the context of the community. There are a few different ways of dealing with this, i.e. awarding lifetime points, points that roll up into an overall reputation score or a separate bucket of points that map to something more specific. These points can be reset on a monthly, quarterly or yearly cadence. From a technology perspective, Badgeville bakes that into their platform. Sam added that they reset points by giving users a perpetual badge for all of the levels that he/she has achieved.

The issue of frameworks was discussed. Chris stressed that frameworks are very important. Badgeville ensures that all of their new customers do not have to reinvent the wheel on each of their implementations. Therefore, they have created internal and external frameworks. They have also developed "solution templates" in which they pre-populate a set of behaviors and a set of mechanics that have been proven to work in those different types of environments to drive a desired type of outcome with the user base. Even though they repopulate them with just about everything in their platform, each individual company can change and tweak them accordingly. The idea is to get the gamification program off the ground quickly by learning from previous communities that have been successful.

One participant asked how Chris would deal with a mature community that already had tenured users with established reputations. This is, obviously, a delicate matter that requires sensitivity. Chris replied that there are two ways to handle this, either on a programmatic database level (i.e. understand the data and import a series of behaviors) or, more often than not, to work with the community manager. In working with the community manager, they come to understand who the power users are and the important attributes that he/she has exhibited within the community. They then build some custom achievements for these power users and/or automatically reward them so that the power users do not lose their statuses, points or reputations.

LESSONS LEARNED

Chris was asked to describe some of the biggest challenges that he has seen within companies as they build their gamification programs:

The biggest challenge that most organizations face is the concept of gamification itself. However, there have been some companies that have done an excellent job with internal marketing in order to overcome the misconception of gaming. For example, EMC does not use the term gamification at all. They use an acronym called RAMP, which stands for Recognition, Awards, and Motivation Program.

Another challenge is to ensure that gamification does not appear out of context. That can lead to rewarding the wrong behaviors or not understanding what makes the community operate. It is important to understand the context in order to make gamification fit into the flow. Do not allow it to appear as a gimmick that is operating off to the side. The idea is to have it woven into the experience.

CASE STUDIES

- **EMC: EMC's challenge was to increase user engagement and better connect thousands of partners, customers and employees**

- EMC has a very large community built on Jive. Jive is an excellent piece of software, but has the standard challenge of engaging people to contribute to the community on an active, frequent basis.

- EMC was able to engage customers to share best practices and connect with others based on mutual interests. For instance, their big data mission is focused on ensuring that different types of content contributions map to their big data topic. They also have another data mission focused on Cloud computing.

- Chris explained that they have seen the overall number of activities and the consumption of content increase using different touchpoints. In certain cases they have a mission where the first few steps of that mission happen within the Jive community, but then the latter steps of that mission include checking in at a booth at the EMC World Event. In other words, they tie their online virtual community to their real-world event community, which helps with long-term engagement.

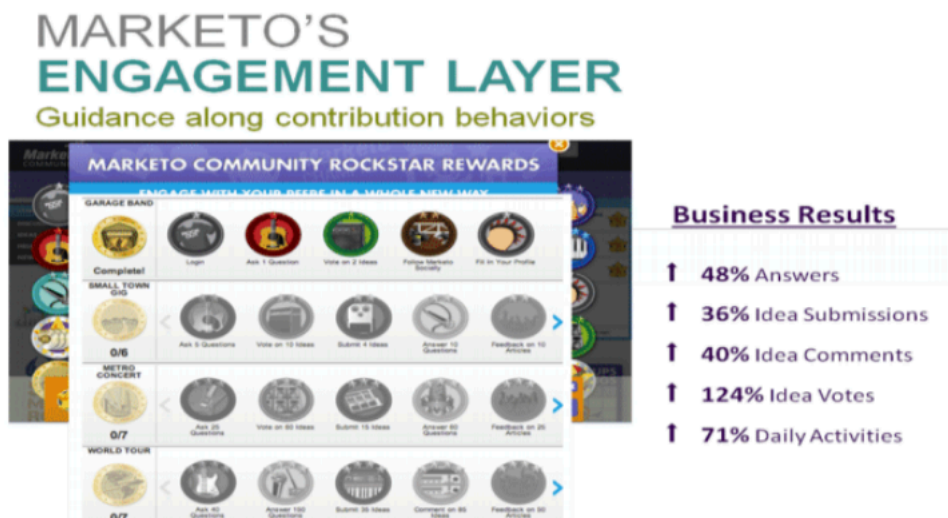- Results: A 10% increase in visits and a 21% increase in user activities.

EMC'S
ENGAGEMENT LAYER
Encourage customers to share best practices, connect around mutual interests, and consume valuable content

CASE STUDIES

- **Marketo: Marketo's challenge was to build a world-class knowledge-sharing community.**

- Marketo has a very vibrant community. They have a great tool for lead scoring and that type of discipline, but they rely on the community to make the most out of that type of technology.

- To answer that challenge, Marketo layered Badgeville's engagement mechanics across their user experience in order to entice people to submit more content in order to create ideation type of forums, which by nature requires a great deal of user motivation. Much of the achievement that they have created mapped to the activity itself. Those achievements tend to be focused on adoption.

- Another achievement was to actually map to their particular area of marketing that is of most interest to the user. One way to do that was through Badgeville's reputation mechanics. This required the leveraging of a feature called "Tracks". One such track is lead scoring. For instance, they will extend what the user has already done with something such as speaking at a company webinar.

CASE STUDIES

- **Samsung Nation: The goal for Samsung Nation was to use gamification to reward engagement with key products and content, increasing the number of customer advocates.**

- Samsung Nation is a B2C community with millions of visitors to their website. Samsung Nation has two purposes for their site: one is product catalogue research and secondly, as a means for consumers to register a complaint.

- The digital marketing team wanted to design a way to build out the community around the products to get consumers to come back and share their product experiences as a means to keep them engaged through ongoing conversations within the community. As such, they leveraged a product called "Bazaarvoice", which mostly handles ratings/reviews and ask/answer type functions. Badgeville integrated their product on top of Bazaarvoice and a few other pieces of technology on the Samsung Nation site. Through this they were able to identify the key behaviors that would help Samsung Nation to achieve their goal.

CASE STUDIES

- One such behavior was to register a Samsung product. For example, if a consumer purchased a Samsung TV from Best Buy, Samsung benefited from selling a product, but they did not know anything about the consumer beyond the transactional data. However, if the consumer registers the product on the Samsung site and tells Samsung about his/her experiences, this affords Samsung the ability to capture more data about each purchaser. In particular, they can learn what it is that is important to the purchaser.

- Secondly, Samsung Nation has noticed an interesting mix of intrinsic and extrinsic rewards. On the intrinsic side, there are many Samsung enthusiasts in the Samsung community who come to the site because they take pride in their knowledge of the different Samsung products. They like being showcased on leader boards throughout the site. Then there are other folks who stay engaged throughout the month because that qualifies them for various raffles. The most engaged users of Samsung Nation will, as a result, qualify for free products at the end of each month.

CASE STUDIES

CA Technologies

Company Overview: CA Technologies has over 40 online external communities covering a product portfolio with hundreds of products. These communities began in the early 1980s as regional groups that have met in person and evolved into a mix of online communities and regional user groups that also meet in person. The regional groups are subsets of the global communities and number around 150 groups today.

New communities are added regularly as CA develops new products through organic development or through acquisition of other companies. Their communities are independently incorporated from CA and are led by customers, although primary systems support and funding comes from CA Technologies.

The typical user belongs to one to three communities. There are one to three separate tracks, which have levels built out within those tracks. For example, a user could be an expert in clarity and be a level six "hero", but he/she could also be looking into some of the infrastructure management products and just be a consumer of information, which is a lower level in the second community.

Purpose of Gamification: Sam stressed that the purpose behind gamification is to view user behaviors in a way that allows the company to track, analyze and then project desired behaviors.

One of the best methods of getting people from point A to point B using desired behavior is something that has been worked out in game design, i.e. the ideas of levels and rewards and missions that move people along, motivate them and help them to be a part of the overall experience. Gamification also contributes to helping a user have a meaningful experience as it relates to an organization's products, brand and reputation. Sam stressed that this is how he was able to sell it to his organization to gain funding.

CASE STUDIES

CA Technologies Gamification Tracks – Customers

Sam explained that they focused on tracks for each of their communities. The idea was to develop a set of missions that could be accomplished for each community.

To begin, start with a couple of tasks for community members to achieve. For CA Technologies, they wanted their users to ask questions, answer those questions and consume content. The tracks are used to drive the users towards that desired behavior.

Each user has the ability to carve out their own identity, which will be interesting because some of these communities have been in existence for over 20 years. For instance, some of their communities are for their mainframe products that have been around for a long time. CA Technologies has been trying to derive institutional knowledge from this community. Therefore, the idea is to build missions around these members to reward them for building out their wikis and talking about his/her experiences with the products. They are looking for the rock stars within the community.

Then there are communities around some of CA's new products. With those products, they obviously do not have the institutional knowledge or the experts. However, what they do have are people who can talk about thought leadership and how to develop the new Cloud virtualization technology. In that area, Sam explained that they want to reward and recognize users when they conduct webcasts, when they speak on behalf of CA Technologies at events and when they share information through various social channels.

All in all, the kind of behaviors that they are trying to drive depends on the maturity level of the community.

CASE STUDIES

CA Technologies Gamification Tracks – Employees:

Sam explained that they are setting up another layer on top of this to monitor how our CA employees engage with customers.

CA Technologies has created teams for each one of the business units. Then, within each of these business units they have created sub teams. For example, they can have very high-level views of how product management relates to support in terms of contributions on the site. Then, within support they can break it down to each one of their product delivery areas to showcase how each team is performing. Within that data they can see leader boards that show which support engineers are contributing the most. It showcases how the employees are working at a granular level.

The benefit of this is that it gives management insight into the value that their teams are providing directly to customers. That has been a big selling point, i.e. the fact that management can now track and manage some of this behavior and really look at the low effort/high touch items.

CASE STUDIES

Activities: It all boils down to activities. When CA first started, their communities had thriving message boards. That was – and still is – the heart and soul of all their communities. One of the things that they wanted to convey with their online communities was to offer them a few more alternatives, including content. In other words, wikis that people could build out, blogs for thought leadership that came from customers, advocacy from customers and then documents, libraries, calendars, etc. for which members could collaborate, conduct webcasts and/or upload presentations, etc.

What they discovered in the first couple of years was that message boards were the only thing that had any kind of ranking system. That was definitely the most active area. A lot of the other areas were ghost towns. Therefore, they began looking at ways to get people engaged in activities outside of the message boards. When CA worked with Badgeville, they focused on spreading out those behaviors so that people had to touch some of these areas that they might not have even known existed.

They had to learn how to get people to participate right away, which was a challenge. CA actually gave rewards for exercising passive behaviors, such as consuming content. For example, they would acknowledge when a member consumed content or read the message boards. The idea was to move them from passive behavior to active behavior.

Results: Sam shared that they have been very happy with the results, which have been measured six months from the launch. There has been a massive uptake in areas where people did not even realize options existed. Fortunately, there was also an uptake in those areas that had a direct impact on gaining additional funding, such as questions answered.

- 15% increase in wiki pages created
- 57% increase in questions answered
- 306% increase in wall-to-wall communication
- 600% increase in blog comments