

HOW A SERIOUS GAME TRANSFORMED A BUSINESS

Samuel Sawian outlines the impact of serious games and shows how one technically-oriented sales-force shifted from selling products to selling solutions.

What is the difference between 'gamification' and serious games? Gamification is the practice of adding interactions to nail a particular learning point. Serious games are meaningful play in which every action taken by the player has been designed with an underlying purpose in mind. These actions (if well-designed) are voluntary, motivational and fun.

Games, simulated environments and systems, allow learners to experience situations that are impossible to replicate in the real world for reasons of safety, cost or time. It is for this very reason that games and simulations are sometimes the only way to effectively achieve a successful learning experience.

SERIOUS DESIGN, MEANINGFUL PLAY

'Serious game design' is the method of specifying and planning a balance of the educational and fun content along with various other features that support the game-play mechanics and educational goals of the game. The difference between traditional game design and serious game design lies in the balance between fun and learning. A truly well designed game achieves the halo inducing moment of learning with fun.

In order to do this, educational psychologist

Robert Gagné, in his book *The Conditions of Learning*, developed three principles crucial to effective learning: 1) Provide instruction on a set of component tasks that build towards a final task; 2) Ensure that each component task is mastered; and 3) Sequence the component tasks to ensure optimal transfer to the final task.

WHO DOES WHAT AND WHY?

Tasks can be represented in a game in the form of puzzles, mini-games or levels of difficulty. Each component task features various game mechanics and rules of play that attempt to teach the player the learning requirements that are identified early in the design phase. These requirements can be anything from behaviour modification and process learning, to specific skills and language.

However, before a game designer goes into the heart of the design, the most important task is to identify three basic requirements: Who, does what and why? These are the cornerstones of any good game. An inability to identify these basic requirements during the initial phase of the design will send any potential game on a downward spiral.

Gagné further deepened his insight into instructional strategies, thus leading to the behaviourist model 'Nine Events of Instruction':

- Gain the learner's attention
- Inform the learner of the objectives of the game
- Stimulate recall of prior learning
- Present stimulus or lesson, by introducing the learner to the game environment
- Provide learning guidance and instruction
- Elicit performance
- Provide feedback
- Assess performance
- Enhance retention and transfer



The purpose of each of these events is to develop a flow for the entire game, and for individual levels, mini-games and puzzles. The events are then further broken down into elements and mechanics that relate directly to real-world learning objectives.

The second most defining and puzzling question in the design phase relates to classification. What genre should the game be? Games are usually broken down into multiple genres based on the kinds of game-play interactions.

Deciding on the one that best suits your

learning needs is an arduous task. The following list has helped many successful organisations arrive at the best possible solution for some of their problems.

Behaviour is taught through imitation, feedback and practice. Processes are taught through explanation and practice. Judgment is taught through hearing stories, asking questions, making choices, getting feedback and coaching. Skills are learned through imitation, feedback, continuous practice and increasing challenge.

An award-winning example of this process in action is the recently launched *Philips Outdoor Lighting Learning Game*, which won silver at this year's Brandon Hall Excellence in e-learning Awards.

CASE STUDY: PHILIPS LIGHTING

Philips Lighting is changing from a product-oriented organisation to one delivering business services and solutions. The sales force had a technical orientation and consequently found it difficult to sell these new solutions. The sales technique had to change from showing product benefits and features, to illustrating customer focused solutions and business benefits. Institutional sales were further complicated with multiple stakeholders involved, with varying requirements.

The objective of the training solution was to systemise the selling process and it encompasses four areas: 1) Identify the right stakeholders; 2) Ask the right questions and gather all data and specifications; 3) Create a proposal; and 4) Present the solution to the customer (see Figures 1 and 2).

The three most important learning objectives in this instance were **process training, judgement and skill gathering**. The 'process' is the **sales process** meant to be followed by the learner.

The 'skill' is mapped to a sales person's ability to gather detailed, accurate knowledge of customers, situations and goals – before attempting to define solutions for them.

JUDGEMENT TRIGGERS

The sales process may collapse in the absence of critical information that could and should have been collected; a lot of product selling falls into this trap. 'Judgement' comes in the form of actively listening for triggers from a variety of different perspectives and collecting clues about the customer's stated or un-stated requirements. Good sales people can match these clues to product or service features and provide compelling benefit statements.

Based on this identification, the mechanics of the game were defined as: explanation, imitation, feedback, continuous practice, increasing challenge, listening to stories, asking questions, making choices, and coaching. These were further narrowed down to the following core mechanics: listening to stories, asking questions, making choices, feedback and increasing challenge,

The resulting solution is the *Philips Outdoor Lighting Learning Game* accessible via the LMS. It has an investigative format, where players employ the interview format extensively to deduce information about a customer, and use this information to build a compelling solution that meets the requirements (see figure 3: Overview of a new residential area).

The development team consisted of two programme/project managers, one each from Philips and Tata, who communicated with subject matter experts during a one-week onsite visit. One game designer, two visual designers, an animator, a content developer and two software engineers (for the coding in Flash and LMS technical integration), completed the team. The project took slightly less than four months to complete.

PLAY BEEFS-UP EXISTING KNOWLEDGE

The game is designed around a simple 'solution selling model' designed by Tata Interactive Systems and approved by Philips' subject matter experts. This model breaks the selling process into the distinct steps that help sales people recommend the most appropriate outdoor lighting solution to customers.

Figure 1

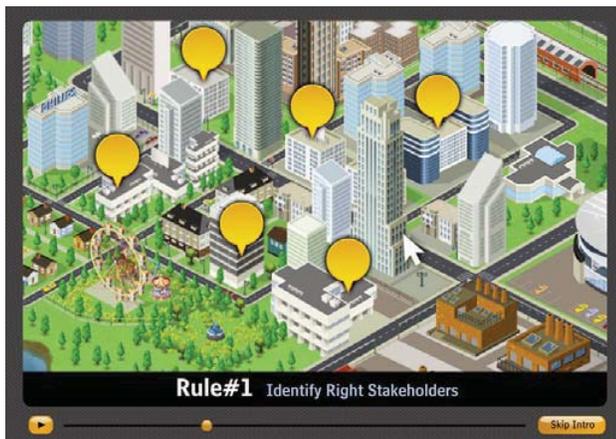


Figure 2



Figure 3



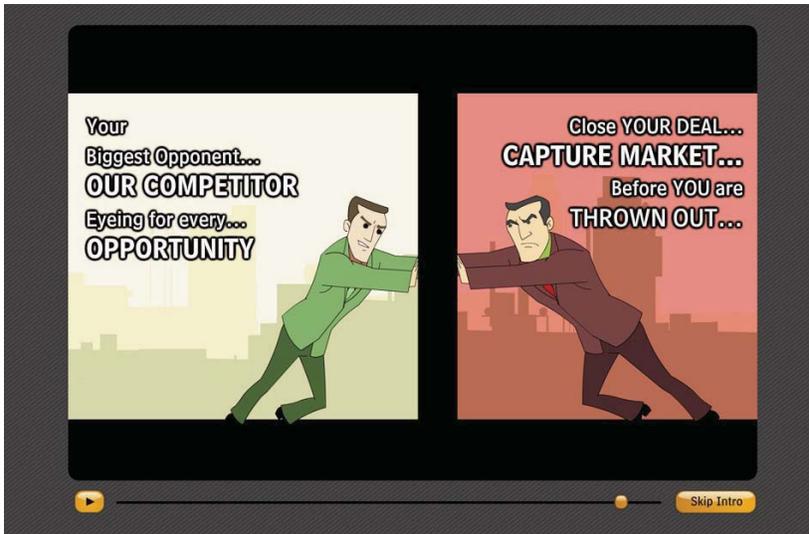


Figure 4

The game is primarily meant for all new and existing sales people, regardless of location or function.

They are expected to be familiar with the product solutions, but may not yet have adopted the solution selling process. The game builds on existing technical knowledge so people can practice it

successfully in their everyday sales encounters with customers. The scenarios deploy a case study approach which allows sales people to identify the different stakeholders involved, ask the right questions to elicit the requirements, select the right solution, and put together the value proposition to present to the client.

SCORES CREATE COMPETITION

The intention is to offer a stretching learning experience. Players have to display the right behaviour for asking the right questions and selecting the right stakeholders – all rewarded by points.

Success is depicted visually through graphical elements indicating an increase in customer engagement and market share (see Figure 4: The competition).

The game creates healthy competition and engagement by sharing the top ten highest scores with the global sales force. This leads to re-playing the game to get the highest scores, thereby leading to a greater degree of engagement.

The game inspires people to change their behaviour by becoming more consultative. And, at the same time, they're having fun!

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