

## The Use of Gamification in Events Marketing

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*Abstract.* Marketers have not only the task to attract stakeholders to participate in the events that they organize, but also make them adopt the behavior that the company wants. In order to achieve this, a new form of strategy is used, that is gamification. Gamification can be used both in the management of motivating the employees and on customers, partners such as distributors and suppliers, in order to increase the involvement of the attendees at different kinds of events, whether we talk about pre event, during or post event, only to attract the attention and retention of the participants, to generate the desired behavior, at the same time to reach the objectives set for the events. Through this article we want to show the benefits of using gamification in events marketing and also to establish what specific strategies of gamification should be used according to the type of event, to reach the maximum potential of these strategies by taking into account the participants' structure and profile.

*Key words:* gamification, events marketing, social media networks  
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### 1 Introduction

Since we are born we have entered the competition with the others, either if we like it or not, or want it or not. The first "competition" that we take part in, is the APGAR score that is given by the doctors to the new born children, no matter if they are given birth naturally, or by caesarean operation. Most often children born in private hospitals receive easier better APGAR (Einarsdóttir et al, 2013) grades than those born in state hospitals. Starting from this point forward, the GAME is ON. And we can talk here about the gaining in weight, in height, starting to walk, talk as soon as possible and so on, with which the parents can be proud of / or praise with, and usually the parents are pushing the boundaries and inspire their offspring to do better, to perform better in earlier stages and not only, in other words to be the best.

### 2 Gamification and Events Marketing

Using game thinking and applying to non-game systems is much more appealing, interesting and fun for the stakeholders, no matter if we talk here about customers, actual or potential customers, suppliers, distributors etc.. The issue is how events can be created and organized in

order to maintain its attractiveness as well as the interest of the audience during it. There are some events where employees, suppliers and distributors are obliged to take part in, like seminars, teambuilding, conferences, but in these cases, the organizers have to find different ways to make them more rapid. The information transmitted in a dull and monotonous way, many times, is not learned and assimilated by the audience, thus the objective of the meeting is far from being reached. The speakers or trainers can have recourse to using the journalistic way of sending the information, having an interesting and catchy headline or title, but on the other hand the body of the text has to explain in a short and structured manner the information that must be passed on.

Bearing in mind that events can be divided depending on the public category to which it is addressed, events are classified as follows (Moise et al., 2012):

- I) Events that are addressed to the public from external environment:
  - a) Sponsorship / Patron ;
  - b) Conferences, symposiums, seminars, the General Assembly of Shareholders;
  - c) National and local fairs and exhibitions;

- d) Releases of products/ services / rebranding;
  - e) Itinerary shows;
  - f) Workshops and open day.
- II) Events that are addressed to the public from internal environment:
- a) Religious Holidays;
  - b) Training, teambuilding, seminars, webinars;
  - c) Happy Hour;
  - d) Special occasions (exceptional results, discoveries, etc.).

Events and games have the same features, as for an event, a good game (McGonigal, 2011) can provoke positive emotion and structure experience through the players, by inspiring participation and hard work, as in their case, the rules must be obeyed in order to achieve the goal, or else disqualification might appear. Properly configured, advertised and implemented, either if we talk here about the public from external or internal environment network, can involve and motivate tens, hundreds, thousands, or millions of stakeholders at a time, in changing their behavior in the way and manner the organization wishes.

In the case of the external environment, the complexity, the number of rules, the effort that is supposed for the players to make, to reach the goal or the goals of the game, must not be too difficult or numerous, as it is very likely for them to lose interest due to lack of time. Game designers have to rethink the strategies by letting the players find out the rules while playing, so they will learn them at the same time, without giving them penalties.

As for the internal environment, game designers can use technological slang, not being afraid that the employees would not understand the rules and the language. The company can grow if the employees are motivated to overcome their targets and their thrive and hard work should be rewarded accordingly. Usually companies are using this kind of incentives for the sales department where their success and work can be measured very easily and quickly, only by looking over the orders and the units sold by each salesperson.

It is advisable to conduct the game at different levels, as those sales persons who have key accounts clients to be in competition with their colleagues who also have key accounts clients as hypermarkets and cash & carry shops, rather than their colleagues who have as clients supermarkets or even kiosks, but this depends on the products / services that they offer.

### 3 SAPS model of incentives

Gamification and events go hand in hand, when we consider the system of rewards, regardless if the event is offered to the public from internal or external environment, being called SAPS, which stands for (Zichermann & Cunningham, 2011):

*Status* is the relative position of an individual in relation to his peers or strangers, in a defined ranking system. In games badges or levels can be awarded, but at events, the awards may consist of the best seats in the front rows or even backstage access.

*Access*, for the audience, in the point of view of the events, can be the main issue if they are going to take part, or not, first of all depending on the location and the time when the event occurs. From the game point of view access can be granted very easily if the games are deployed via the internet, which is worldwide, the only restrain being a good connection. Organizations can reward the most deserving players by rewarding them with VIP treatment, or access to important meetings, or even allowing early and preferential discounts

*Power*, which can be relatively given as long as the game designers allow it, is considered to be a great success, also as an honor for players provided they take their roles very seriously, for example, granting them moderator or master features and in this way they get greater power over the others players. As for the event organizers, they can grant power especially to the volunteers who are willing to take part in creating the show.

*Stuff* like giveaways, as clothes or gadgets, that are unique and produced in limited series, especially for the event and the game, can have great value and be highly appreciated by the

participants. Although a consistent prize can be used to motivate a greater number of people to take part in the event, the same thing can be done for the game.

Participants, tending to overvalue the benefits offered by the four incentives mentioned above, would make the organization benefit from it, especially if it can succeed to transform the non-players into players, and non-audience or indirect audience into direct audience, creating a memorable event combined with the perfect game, this means that its marketing objectives have been met.

The form of games that can be used to draw the attention of the two categorizes of public may differ but are suitable and appealing to them. A good example is that for the external public, the prizes are mandatory to have a bigger value and the game can end at the time when the event takes place, or for the internal public, the game can go on, very often the prizes have more or less a symbolic meaning, this depends on the marketing objectives that the company wants to achieve. Also, the way that the game is played can differ from one public to the other. For the external public the internet (Edu, 2009) or other means of communication can be used, to which both the organizer and the public can have access. As for the internal public, we have in view here internal reports as sales reports, intranet, also the internet, or websites only for the players. It is a “must” that the winner or the winners of the game are to be announced during the event. The gamification has to begin before the announcement of the event to arise the interest of the stakeholders and, at the same time, to be as a surprise for them, that their effort will be recognized and appreciated in a sumptuous way. Both the player and the participant will become the audience.

Another problem that arises when implementing and developing gamification strategies is the value of the prize and also the number of the prizes that will be offered to the players. The terms and the rules that are going to drive the game, are essential, as more often than not players might lose interest if the chance of winning the prize is less probable. It is advisable that the organizers should offer to all

the participants, no matter if they are the winners or not, at least some giveaway products, like T-shirts, hats, items of clothing, in general, with the company logo, and the event name so that the cognitive dissonance will be very unlikely to appear, so the participants might conclude that they did not waste time and gain nothing. And furthermore the image of the company will not suffer, in fact the giveaways products if used, become another way of promoting and creating buzz marketing around the event and the organizer.

#### **4 Communication environments for gamification and events**

The most useful and easiest way to implement gamification strategies is by internet.

This does not mean that marketers have to leave out the other means of mass communication like TV, radio or newspapers, to transmit information regarding the event and the game. Traditional mass media (Strauss & Frost, 2011) is represented by TV, radio and newspapers where it is used a push strategy between the company and the clients with a direct answer that can be noticed by the increase, decrease or stagnation of sales. In the case of the online media, there is an interaction, a dialogue between the organization and its stakeholders, where the communication is to and from the both parties involved. At the same time, players can see their status, chances or position held to win the game or achieve the goal. Also players might receive incentives or credits if they bring friends, family members, colleagues, willing to enter the game and allowing them to socialize, asking those who are the first how they succeed and so on.

Marketers who want to deploy an event using gamification strategies, must be aware that they are going to turn a crowd, which is represented by the direct audience of the event, into a community, where the members of the group start to interact, to achieve the common goal requiring simultaneously a positive participation from all the participants giving them the means and motivation to pursue the goal of the game. So spirit of community (McGonigal, 2011) can

be created, which is a powerful sense of togetherness, solidarity and social connection, protecting not only the vulnerable ones of loneliness and alienation.

Through the advantages that the internet (Kotler & Armstrong 2011) offers, we can distinguish lower costs, immediate interactivity, flexibility and a very high development, while the mobile marketing offers extra geographic targeting, which in the case of the events is very useful to communicate especially with those who are near the location of the event, with a reduction of the overall advertising costs, as in the case of a direct marketing email campaign sending emails to those who might be in other town, country or even continent. The main disadvantages of using the internet are the facts that the impact is pretty low and the audience is controlling the environment, as for mobile marketing the environment is new and people can be reluctant.

It is a common practice for organizations to firstly launch ads on the internet (Ries & Ries, 2004), or trailers for movies to see what is the reaction of the public and the number of viewers before starting the ad campaign on TV screens or shooting the whole motion picture, knowing that the TV publicity or creating a movie are much more expensive and not always targeting the wanted segment that the company wishes.

The most used instruments for online marketing suitable for gamification and the promotion of events, are social media networks and web sites, no matter if they are created especially with the occasion of the game and event, or is the already the website of the company. This does not mean that the other instruments as online publicity, search engines, campaigns of email direct marketing, forums and blogs are not used to achieve the strategic objectives of the marketers to increase the number of players and audience of the event. What is more consumers have discovered a new way of gathering information about products and services regarding their quality, price, best practices, know how, demonstrative videos, opinions regarding the company and their merchandise. Online media is satisfying (Filip et al, 2010) a

fundamental human need which is communication with more and more people, companies and brands whenever and wherever the potential customers want, with the online single condition to have a device with internet connection. That is why social media networks (Smith & Zook, 2011) have so much success like Facebook, Youtube and Myspace, as they ease the communication between consumers, but also between the clients and the company. Social media is also a very good tool for organizations to implement and to deploy events as well as gamification strategies. Most of social media networks allow their users, it does not matter if they are individuals or brands, to post information about the events that their users are going to organize in the near future, or to conduct different contests for their followers, while the prizes can be free tickets at the event or other stuff in order to attract internet surfers. In 2012, social media networks were used especially for conversations and interaction as in figure 1, regardless if the connection was realized by PC's, laptops, tablets or Smartphones. The most used social media networks were Facebook, Twitter and Google+,

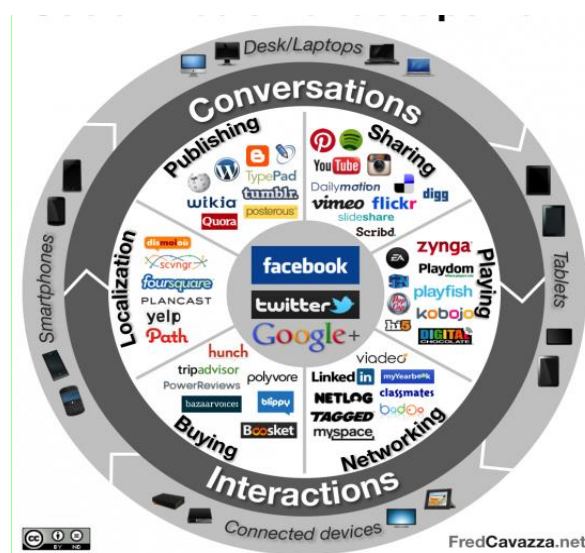


Figure 1 Social media landscape in 2012  
Source: <http://www.fredcavazza.net/2012/02/22/social-media-landscape-2012/>

which had so much success as users' created the accounts especially for playing, sharing, localization, buying, networking and publishing.

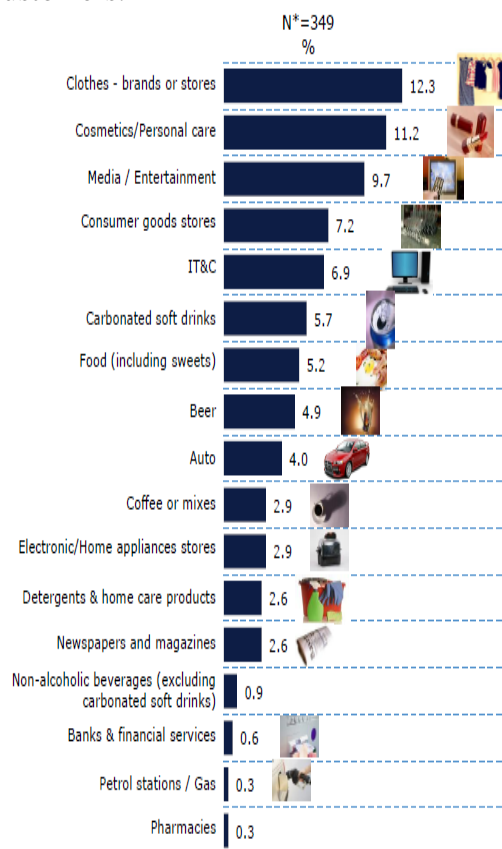
The diversity of interactions and the ease of connecting in the network led to the opportunity for organizations to target the wanted segments of market, more accurately and mainly with those who are more likely to respond in a positive way, taking part in the game and participating in the event.

The most popular companies (Daedalus, 2013) from different economic sectors that have Facebook profiles are brands or stores for clothes, cosmetics, media entertainment, consumer goods stores and IT&C as seen in figure 2. Users usually like a Facebook profile of a company or brand as 36.4% of those questioned answer that they want to be up to date with the new products, services and special offers, 27.2% want to see what companies are deploying different social campaigns and events, and 10.3% of the respondents admitted that they liked the apps and the games. Adult people are reluctant to admit that they play online games, even if they are playing the games at home or at work, they only want to appear more responsible in front of their employers and family. But the fact is that the games, gambling and so on are more and more popular within all segments of consumers, irrespective of their gender, income, location, etc.

The three most important things (Losada & Heaphy, 2004) as shown in figure 3 that companies take into account are: *firstly* the profitability to develop and to increase the company overall, *secondly* the customer satisfaction in such a way that customers should be determined to become more loyal and engaged and *thirdly*, without this point the first two cannot be reached and obtained is the teams' growth in value, welfare and satisfaction as well. Bearing this in mind we can add that in the case of events another factor must be included which is gamification, so companies can differentiate themselves from their competitors and tend to become more attractive through buzz marketing within the campaign for promoting and increasing the event.

It is advisable that before the event, the companies should appeal to gamification through different kinds of channels with which

they communicate with their stakeholders, like the customers and especially the potential customers.



\*Base: Respondents who live in the city, are Facebook users and liked a brand

Figure 2 The most popular industries on Facebook  
Source: Daedalus Millward Brown Study (2013): Consumer Engagement on Facebook – the Romanian Perspective

Transmitting the event and the game messages, that can be done either by the usual communication channels with which the customers are used, but also through social media networks which can reach the exact segments of market that the company wants to be present at the event.



Figure 3 The three main things for a company

Companies have to decide if the use of traditional mass media like newspapers, TV and

radio are the best ways to communicate with their potential customers and audience for the event and also to start the game, to make those who want to seek for more information to attend the event.

So gamification of the event can be the solution to increase the team, customer satisfaction and especially the profitability of the company as shown in figure 4.

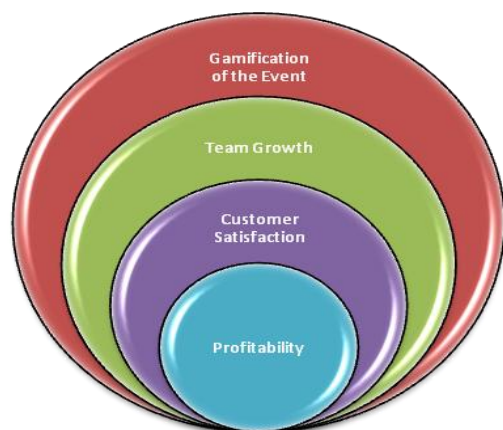


Figure 4 The use of Gamification of the Events in order to enhance the main important things for a company

## 5 Conclusions

Were gamification and events to be used together and simultaneously, there would result a bigger synergy in attracting both audience and players, with great power and benefits upon their stakeholders, by making them loyal together with those who will adopt the behavior the organization wants so that it could achieve marketing medium and long term objectives.

The easiest way to implement and to have greater transparency concerning gamification is by using the internet and especially, social media networks, which for now have a tremendous increase of users day by day. We suggest that we should implement new means of studying what sorts of users who are playing online games or games from social media

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networks that can be played online only on their platform.

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