

To celebrate 25 years of business, we're doing what we do best – thinking. Each month, our team at Thinc Beyond identifies a megatrend that's set to change the way we work and live. Knowing about these trends lets us help our clients plan for the future, position their projects for success, unlock new possibilities and transform their business.

This month we're looking at 'gamification.' If ever a trend could be characterised as transformative, this would be it.

understanding the **THINC**<sup>25</sup>  
megatrends



# gaming for good

**T**hree billion hours a week. That's how much time people are spending in on-line gaming environments, according to Dr Jane McGonigal. But – according to McGonigal – this is not enough. In a much-blogged-about presentation at the 2010 TED Talks, she argued that as a global community, we need to set a target of 21 billion hours of collective gaming per week. Not, McGonigal argues, because people need to retreat from the world through gaming, but because it offers us a way to better engage with it.



*Online gaming, could help us solve the world's most urgent problems*

Billions of hours of online gaming, she argues, could “help us solve the world's most urgent problems,” including hunger, poverty, climate change and – not one to think small – global conflict. Given this claim, it's not much of a stretch to imagine that gamification may also have the potential to affect your business.

Still, as McGonigal herself notes, her claims about the potential power of gaming are “counterintuitive” to say the least. But McGonigal's research into gaming was triggered by her own long-term love affair with gaming. McGonigal – like the gamers she went on to study – says she often felt that she not only enjoyed the world of online games more than the real world, but that she was “better” inside the online world. This realisation prompted McGonigal's research into the question of what it is about online games that makes them more appealing than life. Essentially, she found that gamers get enormous satisfaction out of being immersed in a game-world with clear goals; that they enjoyed the collaboration that's typically required in online games; and last – but definitely not least – they derived a lot of

satisfaction out of the rewards that these games provide.

Still, it's hard to see how McGonigal moves from identifying the particular pleasures of gaming to suggesting it's a tool that will help us address the world's most pressing problems. But after completing her research into the drivers that get people playing games, she set herself the task of seeing if she could design a game that changed players' real-world behaviour. The result was 'World Without Oil'. In this, McGonigal constructed a plausible on-line world that made gamers live their life as though the global supply of oil has been exhausted. It prompted gamers to react to a world where transportation had collapsed, where the economy had folded, where riots were erupting. To successfully participate in the game, players had to transform their virtual lives to adapt to a world without oil.

But the real action, as far as McGonigal was concerned, was always going to be in the follow-up study she tied to 'World Without Oil.' Three years after its conclusion, McGonigal went back to players and assessed whether

it had changed their attitudes to oil consumption – the goal that had prompted McGonigal to design the game in the first place. Sure enough, McGonigal found that it had. Post-game, players had radically changed their real-world consumption of oil. McGonigal's belief – *that games have a unique capacity to engage us and in turn to affect our beliefs and behaviour in the real world* – was vindicated.

Examples of the power of gamification to engage people in new ways are growing rapidly. Australian David Hollywood recently partnered with Arkansas State University on a project to preserve that state's built heritage, focusing on Dyess Colony. While this 1930's housing development has long been recognised in architectural circles for its merit, civic leaders had found it hard to excite enough public interest in the site to fund its preservation. In a move calculated to engage the community, Hollywood embarked on a project to replicate the buildings of Dyess County in virtual

space using the Second Life platform. This was not done as an alternative to real-world building work. Instead, Hollywood's virtual construction served to amplify a real world process and attract community interest (and money). As Hollywood noted, the gamification of this conservation process gave members of the community a "very dense experience," that couldn't be achieved any other way.

Given the power of gaming to transform the way we engage with the world, there's an emerging body of work on the potential benefits of gamifying the workplace. Marigo Raftopoulos – who has a long-standing interest in strategic management – predicts there'll be big rewards for those businesses that can successfully gamify their organisations. She cites recent research that reports that there's a crippling "global engagement gap" within most workplaces, with 41% of employees saying that they are "not fully committed" at work, and a startling 38%

of employees saying that they're "either disenchanted or disengaged." Given statistics, like these Raftopoulos sees enormous potential for business leaders to introduce elements of collaboration, connectivity and rewards into our workplaces and reap the benefits. She argues that "gamification focuses on building engagement, and engagement is the first step towards developing more creative and innovative solutions to . . . problems."

If any proof were needed of this, then look no further than a medical breakthrough that has just occurred. For years, scientists have been trying to map the structure of an enzyme of an AIDS-like virus. The stakes are high. Mapping this enzyme is a vital step towards developing and commercialising a range of pharmaceutical therapies. This is where online gaming comes into the picture. In 2008 the University of Washington developed Foldit, a 'fun-for-purpose' game in which gamers – divided into rival teams – compete to



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unfold chains of amino-acids. Whereas scientists had spent 10 years on this task, gamers took just three weeks to succeed where scientists had failed. Asked why he thought gamers had been able to resolve such a long-standing and complex scientific puzzle, Foldit's creator Seth Cooper speculated that "games provide a framework for bringing together the strengths of computers and humans . . . to make advances that were not possible before."

The race is well and truly on to identify and maximise the commercial possibilities associated with gamification. Seth Priebatsch, who gave the keynote speech at this year's South by Southwest interactive, music and film festival in the United States, states his goal is to "build the game layer on top of the world." Priebatsch is the 22 year-old Chief Operating Officer (or as he says, "chief ninja") of SCVNGR. As it's name suggests, SCVNGR's clients – a wide range of businesses – engage Priebatsch's company to involve them in what is essentially a complex scavenger hunt that's played out on social media platforms. The aim of the game, as Priebatsch says, is to "influence people's behaviour" – to get them to consume the goods and services that SCVNGR directs them to.

Of course, the world has seen a lot of online enterprises come and go, and there are those in the business community who have doubts about SCVNGR's long-term potential. One thing is certain however: business's desire to gamify our consumption patterns is not going to subside. And as Priebatsch

freely admits, he's far from the first person to gamify commerce. Frequent flyer points and café loyalty cards are both basic manifestations of this. Whereas you once paid your money for an item – be it a flight or a coffee – and received it and nothing more, the addition of rewards engages the buyer and seller in a new relationship, a kind of game. Gaming is here for good.

Or, perhaps, evil. It's impossible to look at the implications of gamification without considering the work of Jesse Schell. Like McGonigal, Schell believes that the world has already been gamified and that gamification will continue at an ever-faster pace. But Schell sees the Orwellian face of gaming. At a presentation delivered at the 2010 DICE forum, Schell sketched a disturbing future where the gamification of consumption permeates every facet of human life; where eye-scanners on our set top boxes register how much advertising we watch and encourage us to watch more by rewarding us. Where health insurance companies monitor how much exercise we're doing by giving us shoes with digital pedometers in them and rewarding us – or punishing us – for our behaviour. It begs an obvious question. How will we exercise this new power in our own lives? Gamification is upon us, and it will be up to us – as individuals and as businesses – to decide how we harness its huge potential.

***To find out more about how you can leverage trends to help your business or project, contact the Thinc Beyond team at [thincbeyond@thincprojects.com](mailto:thincbeyond@thincprojects.com)***

## Thinc Beyond

The time has come to provoke a new way of thinking and to challenge organisations to ask "What if?"

Thinc Beyond is the vehicle to help organisations to open their minds to the potential of new strategic opportunities. Thinc Beyond provides advice on trends and how organisations can take steps to turn this advice into action – and in turn adopt the trends that are right for you.

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