Using Gamification to Improve Employee Productivity & Customer Relationships
INTRODUCTION

In today’s tough business environment, no one can afford disenchanted workers, particularly because success hinges on fewer people being more efficient. Yet seven in ten American workers feel actively or passively disengaged in their jobs, according to a 2013 “State of the American Workplace” Gallup poll.¹

Unenthused and unproductive, customer service, sales, and technical support workers are a company’s front line. Their disenchantment can erode overall business morale, customer satisfaction, and ultimately a businesses’ financial success.

That’s why it’s game on!

An increasing number of firms have turned to gamification—an incentives-based tool that relies on contests rather than mandates—to polish performance and meet business objectives. For workers answering phones, that translates to more efficient call handling, fewer call escalations, higher accuracy and greater customer satisfaction. By year’s end, at least 40 percent of the Global 1,000 organizations will rely on this motivational technique, reports CIO magazine, citing statistics from Gartner.²

BENEFITS

Games are a winning formula because such virtual quests ignite workers’ competitiveness with their team and themselves. Regardless of age, gender or cultural background, people are wired to care how they rank among others. It’s human nature to strive for status, achievement and rewards, since such strokes lead to higher levels of the feel-good hormone dopamine in our brains.

Moreover, millennials—an increasingly dominant part of the workforce—don’t respond as well as older workers to more traditional rules and controls. But they love games. Younger generations have had their heads immersed in phones and other gadgets since childhood. They’ve played video and online games for hours at a time, striving to improve their scores and rise on communal leader boards. They get instant gratification from competing. Why not take advantage of that?

Smart businesses match challenges and achievements to their firm’s needs, giving to those who attain company goals. Gamification is a win-win: It leads to five percent higher customer retention, which in turn raises profits 25 to 125 percent, according to data cited in “How to Keep Customers and Win Back Lost Ones,” by Polaris Marketing Research.³

Additionally, based on a study by the Aberdeen Group, gamification hikes worker engagement by 48 percent and slashes turnover by 36 percent.⁴

Not only do organizations boost productivity and earnings, but employees feel connected and empowered as they burnish their natural competitive streaks and take pride in their productivity. Their pleasure and pride influence their customer interactions, leading to all-around satisfaction and success for the organization. No business area needs to harness the power of gamification more than call centers and tech-support departments, where associates’ repetitive tasks can lead to higher absenteeism, irritability, inaccuracy and poor attitude. Such dissatisfaction can rub off on customers, with 68 percent defecting due to a perceived “attitude of indifference,” according to the American Society for Quality, cited in the Polaris white paper.⁵

IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

Like any competition, gamification only works if it’s well-designed. Eighty percent of gamified applications fail to achieve desired business objectives, the Gartner study cited by CIO showed.⁶ To improve odds, competition must be packaged in transparent, easy-to-use and fun ways, and provide workers and managers feedback in real time. Desired behaviors should be promoted, decision-making honed and productivity rewarded, all while improving workers’ engagement, satisfaction and loyalty. In addition, this type of program needs buy-in and support from business leaders and managers, and rewards must be fair and consistent. That’s why it pays to engage a back-office solutions specialist to create and implement the program. An expert service provider gives up-to-date analytics that inform companies which challenges team members respond to best and which produce the desired results.

To score with gamification, the focus is not on joy as much as quantifying performance goals and providing fast feedback and a sense of progression. Just as with the games themselves, gamification requires a number of steps to reach the finish line, challenges that create a more motivated and efficient customer experience center.

As with any race, the route must be mapped toward reaching goals. Start by reviewing
the company’s past call center performance, net promoter scores and first-call conversions. Look at current handle times and past consumer survey results to determine what spurs customer allegiance and motivates workers. With this information, game designers will have a sense of company goals that can be measured and thus converted into a game. At that point, one hones in on a few key behaviors that spark productivity and customer satisfaction—four or five actions at most—so workers know where to place their energies.

Possible call center challenges can include answering a set number of calls in an hour, reducing average call handling time by a certain percentage, and resolving customer issues without having to escalate. Associates may be recognized for making strides in net promoter scores, improving their accuracy, or excelling during training. They can also compete to see which person or team collects or verifies the most information, such as a customer’s name, email and Twitter handle.

While creating contests, mix short- and long-term challenges so workers get positive reinforcement—both from the system and their managers—along the way to bigger goals. Gamification remains appealing if, over time, tasks rise in intensity and speed. Keep in mind the organization’s goals are not the only ones that matter in developing a winning experience. Players only participate if tasks are reasonable, attainable and instill pride. They also need to know how they’re doing. Post results on a leader board visible to all associates in real time so they can see how they rank against themselves and their colleagues. They should be able to see their current point totals, how many points they’ll need to reach the next reward level and what prizes they’re capable of earning.

Beyond the leader board, it’s important that employees gain recognition from their managers for attaining specific goals. Call center supervisors should recognize these achievements both in one-on-one reviews, and in front of the team at large. For example, in an email sent to all employees, a manager may recognize one call-center worker for the way she handled a specific challenge.

Achievements should be tabulated instantly, publicly and permanently so players and their managers can observe performance consistency and improvement in hourly, daily, weekly, biweekly, monthly or quarterly periods. Prizes should be plentiful, consistent and meaningful to the players. Lesser achievements may earn gift cards, special parking spaces, or the title of weekly, monthly or quarterly MVP status. Major wins could be rewarded with stock options and bonuses. Again, it’s key that management play a role in the distribution of these prizes so that employees know their supervisors are recognizing their achievements.

In preparation for rolling out gamification, the company’s internal marketing team should fuel anticipation with a slow buildup with small chunks of information disseminated regularly, perhaps weekly. This will be less likely to overwhelm associates and thus will lead to higher adoption rates. Training and informational videos can motivate workers and explain rules and rewards. Instructions should be clear, activities actionable and scores based on factors that boost profits while adhering to the company’s values and goals.

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FINE-TUNING THE PROCESS

As with all ventures, gamification may need some fine-tuning. That’s where business outsourcing services are particularly handy. They’re skilled at raising adoption rates and improving results. They can suggest new approaches when participation or performance slips on certain fronts, and they can create one-time contests or change prizes to interject excitement monthly, quarterly or yearly.

It’s also vital to strike a balance between teamwork and individual performance. Highest achievers want to feel appreciated, but the workplace should be collaborative and not become a “hunger game” of overly competitive fierceness. Top performers may be paired with lower ones to encourage peer support and nurture team camaraderie.
CONCLUSION
Adding gamification to a company’s playbook is a creative and successful way to motivate customer service, sales and tech support workers, boosting their loyalty while focusing their drive on firm goals. The habits learned may extend beyond the competition.

Call abandonment rates drop two-thirds, from 30 percent to less than ten percent, reports the Gartner study, also cited by the American Express OPEN Forum. And the average handle time falls from five minutes to less than one minute. This means a better running company and more satisfied workers—and customers. Ultimately, everyone wins.

SOURCES