7 GAME MECHANICS

STREAKS **POSITIVE** **INCENTIVE** **NUDGE** **FUN** **NARRATIVE** **INTERACTIVE**

THAT NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATIONS CAN USE

LeadFamly

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1. Introduction

Using game design mechanics to engage with your audience can help set apart your organization. It can make donating time or resources fun for your audience. In her book *Reality is Broken*, game designer and futurist Jane McGonigal explains that successful games mimic the feelings of accomplishment we get when we do fulfilling work. She writes that game mechanics work so well on our brains that when used correctly, they can make any task enjoyable.

Reading this, it must seem like a no-brainer.

In addition, non-profit organizations are in a great position to create an emotional connection with their audience or prospective donors. According to a *Harvard Business Review* study, an emotional connection between a 'brand' and their audience actually matters more than customer service. While customer service is definitely important, it is surprising to read that it's not always #1.

Let's think past PBLs (points, badges, and leaderboards), which are a 'gateway' to game design mechanics. In this e-guide, we'll share seven game mechanics that can be used to inspire, motivate, and activate your followers, contributors, or volunteers.
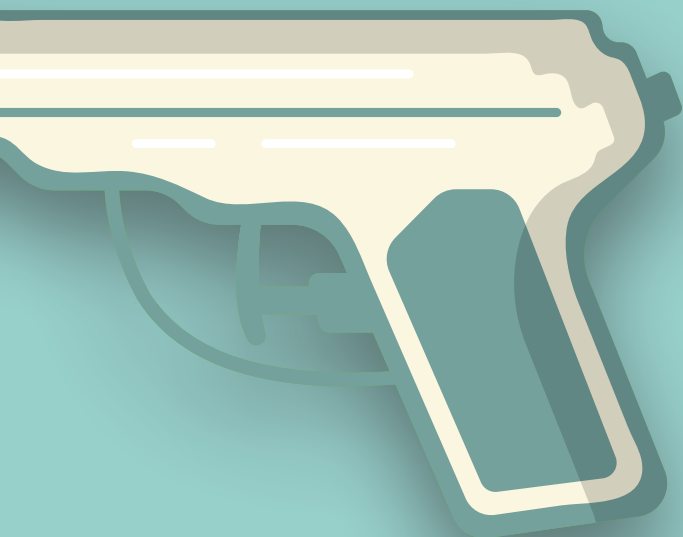
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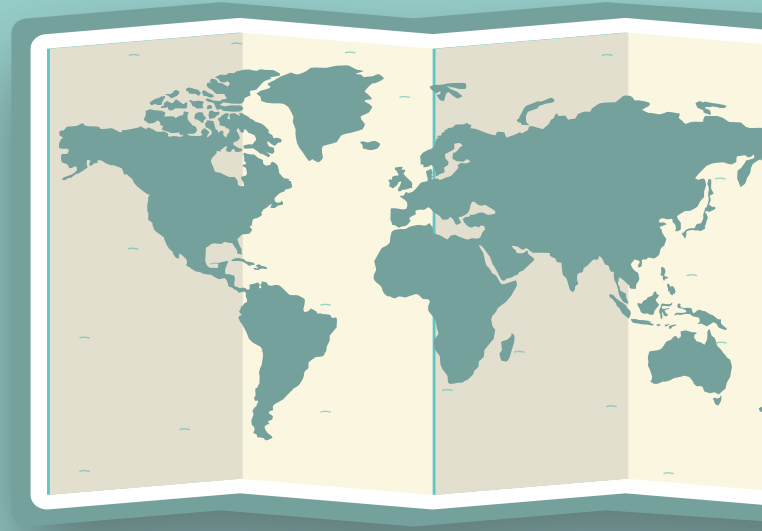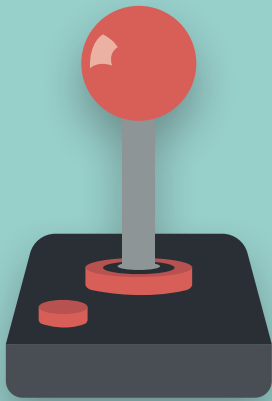
2. Seven game design mechanics

For many non-profit organizations, the traditional way of fundraising typically includes receiving funds, donations, grants, or government aid. When fundraising with the public, a fresh element to add to a campaign can be to use game design or game mechanics. Here are seven ideas for you to try.

2.1   Include streaks

A streak describes a <u>consecutive number of successful actions</u> and increase in the players' attention to complete their goal. Streaks can be used to share that you've hit your daily fundraising goal and to keep the momentum going, or to get your audience excited to commit to telling their network about your initiative. It can even be as simple as a volunteer getting a star for telling one person a day about your non-profit initiative.

Snapchat has a popular streak feature that has gone viral and can be addictive. It's simple: friends send each other a daily snap, and the streak starts. The longer the streak goes on, the more effort that's been put in, and the more the streak represents. <u>This article</u> even explains that some teenagers use the streak to define how close their friendship is.

We recommend setting short-term streaks so that your audience doesn't run into the <u>stress of breaking their streak</u>. Keep it fun and light.
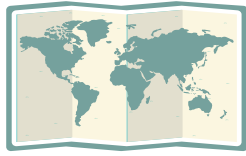
2.2 Create a story or quest narrative

A popular game element is the story or quest, which is defined as a 'long search for something.' For example, well-known role-playing game Dungeons & Dragons is based on cooperation and storytelling, and the point of the game is to gain experience.

Another example of a game with quests is <u>Jane The Concussion Slayer</u> created by Jane McGongial. The sole purpose of the game was to be an aid to help McGongial heal and recover from a traumatic brain injury. Once it helped her recover, McGonigal then renamed the game SuperBetter and made it available for others to use to manage pain and hopefully get well. Since its release, McGonigal has been told that SuperBetter has helped people with chronic illnesses like Crohn's disease and ALS, a neurodegenerative disease.

2.3   Make it positive

Fundraising naturally helps people feel altruistic, which for most, also falls under positive reinforcement. Why people choose to be involved can be for either intrinsic or extrinsic reasons:

Do your volunteers feel good contributing?

or

Are volunteers contributing for a reward or to receive credit?

This is the difference between intrinsic (feels good) and extrinsic motivation (reward). Yet these types can both equate to positive reinforcement. What may be more important to focus on is why someone is donating their time or resources.

Hubspot defines intrinsic and extrinsic motivation as intrinsic motivation involves doing something because it's personally rewarding to you. Extrinsic motivation involves doing something because you want to earn a reward or avoid punishment.

Neither type is better than the other. Rather, non-profit organizations can think of these two types of motivation when they are designing the volunteer or contributor experience and/or rewards.

2.4 Keep it interactive

One thing that many phone apps do well is make the experience interactive, and typically this is done by progress tracking. For example, <u>Fitbit uses user data</u> to create fun, digestible graphs.

Another example is <u>Forest, an app</u> that helps its users focus. Using the Pomodoro method of timed focus then small breaks, users can set a timer on Forest. During that time, they 'grow' a virtual tree and this is their progress indicator. There's a catch: they cannot use their phone when the tree is growing.

People who use Forest can track their tree growth, collect coins that can eventually be used to plant a real tree in Sub Saharan Africa, and look at graphs of their weekly progress.

The takeaway from these examples is to consider how to make your experience interactive. Is it using a public dashboard that is updated daily with new data? Is it sending motivating reminders? Or is it something else?

2.5 Nudge but don't nag

Nudge theory is the use of behavioral science to influence behavior, most of the time in the public sphere. The idea of nudging rather than nagging is that it gives people a choice. One of the 'fathers' of Nudge theory, economist Richard Thaler, explains that nudging should be guided by three principles: transparency, easy to opt out, and improves a person's welfare.

For organizations in the non-profit sectors, a nudge just makes it easier for an individual to get involved. An often cited example of a nudge is automatically enrolling people as organ donors, and then allowing them to opt out. We covered an excellent example of Nudge theory in a recent webinar; the subway steps in the Odenplan stop in Stockholm were converted into piano keys. This 'nudged' people to use the stairs in a fun way. It worked; they measured that 66% more people took the stairs over the escalator.

For nonprofits, a nudge would be showing people how their contribution can help the cause by creating a fun experience that also benefits them.

2.6 Time your incentives

Incentives are something we experience throughout our lifetime. A lot of what we do in life eventually leads to an incentive:

Work =   **A salary**
Hobbies =   **A finished product or accomplishment**
Sports =   **Recognition or camaraderie**
Club affiliation = **A sense of belonging**

For non-profit organizations, they can create a set of meaningful engagements or experiences that have an incentive in mind. Kickstarter, an American public-benefit company, is a platform for crowdfunding. One thing that everyone expects if they back a product on Kickstarter is that they contribute to the product fundraising, and in return, they get early or discounted access to the product. This is an incentive. Timing matters too: Kickstarter backers get involved at an early/pre-launch stage, which is motivating and feels special.

For organizations, perhaps the right incentive for your audience is more intrinsic, or is delayed but extrinsic. Each organization will have to find the right motivator(s) and the sweet spot for their audience.

2.7 Make it fun!
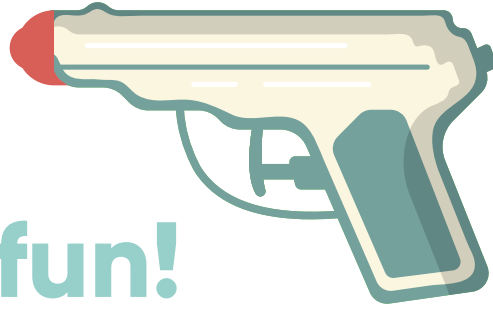
We've never been busier, so a way to catch a person's eye is to create an engagement loop to make the experience fun. In his book _Gamification By Design_, Gabe Zichermann, an expert on game mechanics and how to use them in business, explains that there's one purpose of an engagement loop: to motivate emotional leads and promote re-engagement. Two ways to check this: look for signs of visible progress and/or use rewards.

For game designers, the four well-known steps in an engagement loop are:

Motivate emotion

Call to action

Re-engage

Feedback and reward

Nonprofits can use this loop to plan out the ways in which they will engage their audience.

3

Conclusion

Using game design mechanics can bring a fresh element to traditional non-profit experiences. Another reason is that gamification <u>releases feel-good chemicals:</u> DOSE (Dopamine, Oxytocin, Serotonin, Endorphins). These influence happiness, and our brains crave these chemicals. They are each triggered by gamified experiences.

What is important for nonprofits is to customize or adapt game design mechanics to their business and/or audience needs. Think from the point of view of your audience:

_____ **What game design mechanics would they enjoy?**

_____ **Are they comfortable using technology in new ways?**

_____ **How much do they use technology?**

_____ **How can we gamify fundraising events, galas, or initiatives?**

Thinking from the point of view of your audience is the first step of a method called <u>Design thinking</u>. Coined by IDEO, Design thinking means "pulling together what's desirable from a human point of view with what is technologically feasible and economically viable." It includes three pillars:

_____ **Empathy and understanding of who you are designing for**

_____ **Ideation so brainstorming multiple solutions**

_____ **Experimentation through testing ideas**

Our last piece of advice is to not be afraid of testing, iterating, and improving. Think beyond the ordinary and expected.

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About LeadFamly

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