

Driving Call Center Performance to Higher Levels with Gamification

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One of the many great truths voiced by the iconic Green Bay Packer coach, Vince Lombardi, exemplifies the core principal behind the growing interest in modern game mechanics, aka “gamification” among businesses today:

Coaches who can outline plays on a black board are a dime a dozen. The ones who win get inside their player and motivate.

Gamification is comprised of a versatile set of data-driven tools, principles and techniques that are primarily associated with video games but can also be integrated into business processes, work flows and related software applications in a myriad of innovative ways to help focus, motivate, support and inspire employees. Advances in interactive and Web-based technologies and specialized application of behavioral psychology enhance gamification’s potential to deliver quantifiable business value on a vast scale.

Contact center and back office operations, where hundreds or even thousands of personnel are organized into teams performing service and support tasks vital to maintaining loyal, profitable customer relationships, are ideal for gamification. The repetitive nature of the work, job stress and, typically, entry-level pay, define environments prone to employee dissatisfaction, burnout, and subsequent high rates of

turnover, all of which negatively impact customer satisfaction, revenue, and profits. Gamification can help address these challenges by making work more interesting, engendering collaboration and camaraderie and fostering the development of stronger leadership. But, success with gamification is not simple – it requires thoughtful, thorough planning, resolute executive commitment, and a robust performance management system. With these prerequisites in place, gamification offers an integral component of a complete performance management system within a corporate culture where employee development and well-being are considered fundamental to the business's success.

In preparing your gamification plan, consider the following:

1) Recognize the entire field of play

Gamification initiatives in contact centers typically focus on a specific key performance indicator: first call resolution, customer satisfaction, skills development, total sales, attendance, etc. It is critical to monitor all of the KPIs relevant to the business and understand the relationships between them. For example, achieving improved customer satisfaction or net promoter scores is desirable, but was another KPI negatively impacted to deliver on the target KPI? Be sure to define all KPIs and utilize a modern contact center performance management software platform and balanced scorecard methodology to stay on top of the inter-relationships between your critical metrics. Eliminate the risk of one KPI improving only at the expense of another.

2) Know your team

It is important to have a solid understanding of what is significant to your employees, but for success in gamification, it is vital. What motivates one individual may be ineffective or even counter-productive for another. There is no single theme that will inspire everyone simultaneously, but as you plan gamification initiatives, take the time to know and consider the preferences, needs and sensitivities of your people, (see Richard Bartle's research on player personality types here - <http://mud.co.uk/richard/hcds.htm>), change up the game themes often, and appeal to both the extrinsic and intrinsic drivers that generate engagement and motivation - <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Motivation>).

3) Score what matters

Contact centers bristle with data, and it is easy to become distracted by the voluminous silos of statistics, graphs, lists and reports generated by an increasing number of disparate systems with their isolated analyzers, alarms and dashboards. A successful gamification program requires a single platform that can aggregate any performance-relevant data from independent systems and sensibly (and simply) assimilate them in the corporation's unique business context. Modern Contact center Performance Management software platforms are specifically designed for this purpose. Gamification investments are wasted and possibly damaging without a robust performance management software solution.

4) Commit at the top

Contests, quests, missions and other performance driving gamification ventures can be fun and deliver strong, long-lasting value, but they are not "set-it-and-forget-it" systems. Commitment and involvement from leadership is mandatory; without it, results will suffer on the front lines or elsewhere. Establish work flows, routines and objectives during planning that dictate a pace and rhythm of support, recognition, accountability and celebration. Reinforce the project's core objectives through consistent delivery of events and messaging that are authentic to the gamification theme. The need for commitment and

direct involvement from executive leadership cannot be overstated. Effective gamification is not an isolated event, but an ongoing component of the corporate narrative. Well-utilized gamification can inspire while reinforcing the company's determined values and mission.

5) Spread the field

Gamification and performance management aren't just for agents: bring supervisors, trainers, management, and even vendors onto the field of play. Modern performance management software supports data-driven scorecards for any position or role, so include them in your gamification plans and expand your business analytics across the resources that combine to benefit the contact center operation.

6) Celebrate strength, pinpoint weakness

Metrics and scoring drive successful performance management and are essential to effective use of gamification. Well-designed gamification initiatives not only reward those that excel, but also quickly identify the areas of weakness that diminish overall performance. Quickly shift training, coaching and supervisory resources to those in need of assistance. Consider modification of rules, techniques and logic to more effectively motivate and incentivize developing performers.

7) Recognize progress towards a goal

In the mid-1970s, Bon Scott of AC/DC proclaimed, "It's a Long Way to the Top If You Wanna Rock 'n' Roll" (available for your listening and viewing pleasure here - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZDCs7ijNUVM>) and this message is true for any meaningful endeavor. So recognize, motivate and reward your people often. If they're on the right track, trending toward a goal – make some noise (guitars and bagpipes?!) and let them and everyone know. It is not only the ones at the top of the leaderboard at the end of a contest that should win, feel good or be recognized.

8) Score team contribution at the individual level

Some managers contemplating gamification worry that its focus on individual achievement could degrade the team dynamic, morale and performance. Fortunately, this is an easy challenge to address by creating an agent-level metric for team performance. The KPI should be configured with a meaningful weight calculated within the balanced performance score. Not only will the team dynamic be preserved, but rock star agents will be motivated (and rewarded) for assisting less skilled team members.

9) Modify the game plan; leverage the entire playbook

Success with gamification requires a constant awareness of campaign status and the courage and agility to modify strategy, if needed, on the fly. With the right tools and performance management software, and active engagement, contact center leaders can stay close to the action and adjust tactics intelligently, whenever and however necessary.

10) Appoint a quarterback

Chief Morale Officer, Keeper of Culture or Master of Merriment – whatever the title you use, appoint a champion with applicable skills to develop and maintain your gamification plans and framework. The position requires creativity, enthusiasm, and communication and organizational skills to manage cross-department coordination. Project planning expertise and proficiency with the underlying science and technologies to ensure that your gamification system is complete and aligned with the greater enterprise

are also important.

Gamification's principles might not be new, but its spike in popularity over the past few years is understandable because advances in performance management software combined with innovative application of behavioral science delivers smarter business processes and more intelligent work flows. Gamification improves growth, engagement, and profits and drives down attrition, absenteeism, and risk and offers exceptional potential for quantifiable financial benefit. Gamification, however, is also an embodiment of the corporate conscience, so it requires specialized expertise, the right technology, and sustained executive dedication to ensure that it is applied with authenticity and produces positive, reliable and lasting impact.

So, go for modern gamification, but don't embark on the journey haphazardly. Diligently plan, rigorously execute and sufficiently invest — keeping in mind these words of wisdom from The Ohio State University football coaching legend, Woody Hayes: "Nothing that comes easy is worth a dime."