



*free-range thinking* is a monthly journal of best practices, resources, and generally useful stuff for public interest communicators who want to reach more people with more impact.

## Getting Serious About Playing Games

***If they can drive positive social change, maybe games should be part of your strategy.***

As commuters exit a subway station, they are faced with two choices situated side by side: a staircase and an escalator. Rather than opting for a little healthy exercise, the vast majority chooses the escalator.

On a highway, a radar speed sign equipped with a camera captures the speeds of oncoming cars and flashes the numbers to drivers. When a car exceeds the speed limit, the camera snaps a photo of the license plate and a ticket is automatically issued. Drivers know full well how this system works, but the sign has done little to reduce speeding.

In a public park, circular blue garbage bins are situated at convenient distances for visitors to deposit their trash. The bins are used sporadically, however, and littering remains a problem in the park.

Now pretend it's *your* responsibility to encourage better behavior in all three scenarios. What do you do? Do you shut down the escalator and eliminate the less healthy choice? Do you raise fines for speeding and littering? Or do you set aside the "sticks" and instead create games that make compliance - a word not normally associated with fun - fun?



This was essentially the challenge issued by the automaker Volkswagen in 2009 through a Swedish project entitled "[The Fun Theory](#)." Contestants were invited to submit their solutions to these and other behavior-change issues (such as encouraging greater

use of seat belts); the best solutions would be enacted in and around Stockholm. The winning ideas are both ingenious and a strong case for the power of games to drive positive social change.

February 2012

### Getting Serious About Playing Games

Should fun be part of your strategy?

### Why Bad Video Happens to Good Causes

One-time-only webinar on February 14th

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## About Us

*free-range thinking* is written by Andy Goodman and edited by Lori Matsumoto. To read back issues, download free publications, and to learn more about our work, please visit [www.agoodmanonline.com](http://www.agoodmanonline.com) and [www.thegoodmancenter.com](http://www.thegoodmancenter.com).

In a subway station, a staircase was converted into a piano keyboard. As commuters walked up and down the steps, each stair played a corresponding note. At first, a few adventurous individuals tried the stairs and even attempted to play songs. Over time, there was an eye-opening (and waistline reducing) 66% increase in use of the stairs. A [video about this project](#) went viral and now has over 17 million views on YouTube.

On the highway, the speed sign was replaced with a new version reading "Speed Camera Lottery." Like the old sign, this one also captured the speed of oncoming cars and issued tickets to drivers, but that's only half the story.



If you passed the sign driving at or below the speed limit, your license plate was still photographed, except this time your name was entered into a lottery. If you won, your prize money came from a pool funded by - and here's the truly ingenious part - *the ticketed drivers*. During a three-day test, average speeds on this stretch of Swedish highway dropped from 32 to 25 kilometers per hour. Check out [the YouTube video](#) to see the sign in action.



Finally, in the public park, the solution to the littering problem may have been the most imaginative of all - in that it played off the imagination of park visitors. A regular trash bin was rigged with a small sound system. As a piece of trash was dropped into the bin, the system was triggered and played a cartoon sound of something dropping an absurdly long distance. [Park visitors were delighted](#) - more

than twice as much trash was deposited in this bin as the next nearest in the park.

Volkswagen concluded The Fun Theory Project in 2010, but the larger "gamification" trend continues unabated (even with such an ungainly name). Gabe Zichermann is one of the leading advocates for using game theory to solve business and social problems, and I encourage you to read [his latest thinking](#). No matter what issue your organization is working on right now, there just may be some fun ways to make serious progress.

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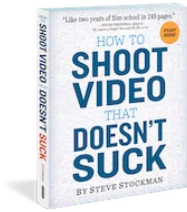
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# Why Bad Video Happens to Good Causes

*Join us for a special one-time-only webinar on February 14th.*



If your website features video that you believe could be more engaging, I'll be hosting a webinar on February 14th you'll want to join. The webinar is part of the Nonprofit Technology Network's online learning series, and my special guest will be Steve Stockman, author of *How to Shoot Video That Doesn't Suck*. Steve will offer 10 practical tips for improving the video you use on the web, in presentations, and in other media.

The webinar will run from 11am to 12noon Pacific (2pm to 3pm Eastern) and costs \$35 for NTEN members (\$70 for non-members). For more details and registration, visit [NTEN'S website](#).

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