free-range THINKING™

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

We Have Seen the Future, and It's Fun.

The ALS Ice Bucket Challenge may be old news by now, but the components that made it so wildly successful -- $100 million raised in *one month* - are still worth studying. By infusing a fundraising campaign with game elements (e.g., physical activity, competition, status), ALS got more than 2.5 million people to play and pay. If the term "gamification" isn't in your nonprofit vocabulary by now, it's time to wake up and smell the ice water. Applying game elements to non-game contexts is nothing new - airlines have been doing it for decades with frequent flyer programs - but of late, organizations from every sector have begun to use new technologies to leverage the power of fun, and nonprofits are no exception. While fundraising and marketing may be the most common places to find gamification at work, there are many organizations that are gamifying projects to drive social change, and they're seeing remarkable results. Here are 3 of the most innovative examples we've found. Full story. *Please note: Apple Mail users may need to scroll down manually.*

Our Tribe is Gathering Again. Will You Be There?

And speaking of organizations working to drive social change: some of the best and brightest will be gathering at the University of Florida from February 28th to March 3rd to discuss what's working, what's not, and what may be worth trying in 2017. If you're a regular reader of this newsletter, you should probably be there, too. The *frank* conference, now in its fourth year, is a one-of-a-kind gathering of community builders and change-makers that ranks among the most informative, entertaining and inspiring events you can attend - but a trip to Gainesville is by invitation only. To see if *frank2017* is right for you, click here.

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SickKids Pain Squad App
Each year, Toronto's Hospital for Sick Children (better known as SickKids) treats thousands of children with cancer. In order to find new ways to manage and mitigate the pain that afflicts their patients, doctors and researchers need data in the form of daily pain reports from the patients themselves. Understandably, the last thing these kids want to do after painful and exhausting treatments is write a detailed description of how they are feeling, so collecting this data is a challenge.

SickKids knew if they didn't find a way to motivate their patients, this vital information would continue to go uncollected. In 2013, the hospital rolled out their solution: Pain Squad Mobile app, a crime-fighting game that puts patients in the role of detectives trying to locate pain and solve other mysteries. Patients were lent iPads with the app, and reminder notifications were installed to ensure that patients reported their pain levels twice a day. Pain Squad also has alarms reminding them to play and incentives for consistently checking in - like graduating to higher levels and unlocking video content.

Screenshot of Pain Squad app

Before Pain Squad was deployed, less than 50 percent of the patients were submitting their pain reports regularly. Since the app's launch, compliance rates for the pain journals have been over 90 percent. As a result of the success in Toronto, Pain Squad is now being used at hospitals around the world to gather information from young patients.

The Ocean Conservancy's Clean Swell App
The Ocean Conservancy's annual International Coastal Cleanup Day began in 1986 with a handful of volunteers collecting and cataloguing trash from beaches and waterways. In 2013, over 650,000 volunteers around the world combined to collect 12.3 million pounds of trash. With the growing success of the event, however, came an unexpected problem. Keeping a record of the trash collected was important for research and policy-making, but entering this information into the Conservancy's database was time-consuming and tedious. The Ocean Conservancy needed to find a way to keep their volunteers motivated to record trash *and* to maintain accurate records of what was being picked up.

In 2014, the Conservancy created the Clean Swell App so volunteers could use their phones to report the trash they collected and share their efforts on social media. But the Conservancy wanted to do more than simply streamline the collection process. To encourage volunteers to collect more, they created virtual badges that can be earned for collecting certain quantities and types of trash. As players received different badges, they were able to advance through levels within the app.
Because seeing progress is part of what keeps games engaging, the Clean Swell app lets volunteers track their own efforts by seeing their personal clean up history. By chronicling the total pounds they've picked up and the distance they've cleaned, volunteers get a sense of the real impact they are making.
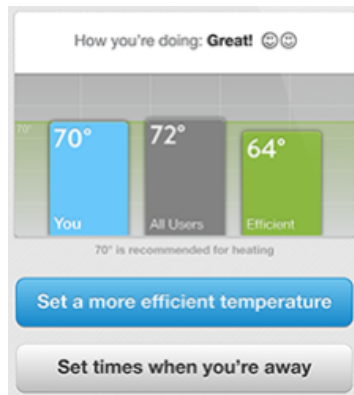

Clean Swell badge

The 2016 report from the Ocean Conservancy lists that nearly 800,000 volunteers collected more than 18 million pounds of trash for the year -- that means that each volunteer collected and recorded almost 3 more pounds of trash than in the last year before the app was rolled out!

OPower

Between state mandates to lower power usage and the threat of having to implement rolling blackouts, there are many reasons why utility companies want to encourage their customers to reduce their energy use. For customers, saving money on their utilities is always appealing, but having to closely monitor energy usage can be a nuisance. Working with utility companies, OPower, an online and mobile platform that gives consumers easy access to their energy consumption, is working to change that.

Households with participating utility companies can create an account with OPower and immediately see how much energy they have used in the last hour, day and month. They can also compare their usage to neighbors and friends who have also signed up, complete challenges (like "How often can you halve your energy use?") and see their savings add up in real time.

Caption: Screenshot of OPower app

By challenging customers, giving them instant feedback, demonstrating their progress, and encouraging competition, OPower has energized consumers about saving energy. As of June 2016, the utility companies that OPower works with have had 11 terawatt-hours of cumulative energy savings -- enough energy to power more than 1 million homes in the United States for a full year. On the consumer end, that energy savings translates into over $1.1 billion in savings for utility customers.

Whether you are trying to raise money, engage volunteers, or encourage behavioral shifts in clients, incorporating game elements can be (pun intended) a real game-changer. Though most of the examples shared here involve a heavy dose of technology, The Ice Bucket Challenge demonstrates that sophisticated tech doesn't have to be a part of your strategy.

If you're interested in learning more about how to use gamification, we'd recommend getting started by reading *For The Win* by Kevin Werbach and Dan Hunter. This book offers a great overview of what makes gamification effective as well as insight into how different game elements can be used for different purposes.

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