TO: Benevolent Dictator For Life, Guido van Rossum

FROM: Your loyal and devoted subject

SUBJECT: Gamification

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We currently don’t have data for much of the city because only the handful of people involved in the project have installed the mobile application and collected data. If we hope to improve coverage then we need to expand the userbase and to do that, there needs to be some incentive for people to download and install the application. One way to encourage users to use the application is through gamification.

**Gamification**

Gamification is the application of game design ideas to non-games to engage the user by appealing to desires such as achievement, competition, mastery and status. A specific method is the use of points, achievements and badges to reward the user for doing certain tasks. If a user’s rewards are publicly visible, this also adds a sense of competition between players. Another more difficult application of gamification is to make the non-game task feel like a game itself, rather than simply adding game-like elements.

Gamification has had many success stories[[1]](#footnote-1), several of which are highlighted below.

**Case Study: Mexico City Mapathon**

Mexico City is served by a large informal transit system of privately-owned minibuses known as peseros. These peseros are crucial for residents to get around, carrying as many as 60% of daily trips in the city. Yet, because they are private vehicles, the city doesn’t know what their routes are. From February to March 2016 the government ran a crowdsourcing effort to learn the routes called Mapathon. Citizens were able to download a mobile application and record a route using their phone’s GPS. Daniel Tello of the Laboratorio para la Ciudad, the organization that facilitated the Mapathon, said that gamification was crucial to their success[[2]](#footnote-2). Users were awarded points for each route that they collected. At the end of the Mapathon the users with the most points were award cash prizes. One novel technique was changing the point value of different routes dynamically. For example, of part of the city was not being well covered by the users, the point value for mapping that area would be increased, thus incentivizing users to go out of their way to collect data that hadn’t already been collected. This was invaluable in collecting data from parts of the city where there is lower smartphone usage.

**Case Study: Reddit, Stackoverflow, etc.**

Many websites that are about user interaction and conversation utilize gamification to promote valuable discussion. Reddit and Stackoverflow, for example, allow users to vote posts and comments up and down based on whether they were deemed “good” or not. The score is visible next to the posts, and cumulative scores are shown on user profiles. Users with high scores are appreciated and respected by the community. This encourages users to do their best to add valuable content to the communities. These sites also hit on the important social aspect of games. Stackoverflow points, in particular, have transcended just the Stackoverflow community in value, with high scoring users being targeted by job recruiters.

**Considerations**

While there has been much success leveraging gamification to engage users, there are also drawbacks and pitfalls to consider. First, the game aspects shouldn’t feel shallow and tacked on, or they will likely not work in engaging players long term. Games are also about stories and experiences, not just a score or badge to show off, so gamification should strive to achieve that as well. If gamification is successful, cheating or unintended behavior also needs to be considered.

1. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/256743509\_Does\_Gamification\_Work\_-\_A\_Literature\_Review\_of\_Empirical\_Studies\_on\_Gamification [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. From a personal Interview with Daniel Tello [↑](#footnote-ref-2)