**Why Intrinsic Motivators Trump Extrinsic Motivators and How You Can Use This to Build Better Websites**

In my Girl Develop It Intro to Gaming class, we had a fascinating discussion about the difference between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Using a gaming example, intrinsic motivation arises from inside the individual, such as when you want to play a game because it’s fun and gives you satisfaction. Extrinsic motivation arises from outside the individual, such as when you’re playing a game because you want to win a shiny badge. Intrinsic motivation will beat extrinsic every time, but is much harder to generate within your website. In 1984, Pizza Hut launched the Book It! reading incentive program where children got one free pizza if they read the required number of books from October through March. Everybody wins, right? Unfortunately not. Studies found that Book It! neither increased nor decreased the number of books that kids were reading. What psychologists identified was that kids liked reading less, because they had to be bribed to do it. They started to feel like reading was a punishment and pizza was the reward. In fact, some psychologists even suggested that it would have been better to make kids eat pizza and to have books as the reward! Book It! reduced children’s intrinsic interest in reading, an example of the overjustification effect: where an extrinsic motivator such as a prize decreases a person’s intrinsic motivation to perform a task.

I refer back to my second blog entry, on motivation and the dopaminergic system. Lomography.com is a website that understands how to overcome the overjustification effect. They offer prizes, without reducing a user’s inherent enjoyment and satisfaction with interacting on the website. They also understand that a powerful intrinsic motivator is the social interaction provided in their online community. Another good example is OKCupid, which increased use of its platform by providing offline social events at places like bookstores. What are some other intrinsic motivators that websites can use? The simplest concept is to make it easier for people to do what they already want to do. For instance, Weight Watchers combines in-person meetings with tools such as their online “Simple Start” app, which gives users two weeks of meal suggestions. People use Weight Watchers with the concrete goal to lose weight and the website helps makes this process easier for them.

This entry wouldn’t be complete without talking about the neural correlates of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. When fMRI is used to scan neural activity when participants decide to engage in an activity for intrinsic reasons, activation was seen in the insular cortex. This is an area tucked deep within the fissure separating the temporal, parietal and frontal lobes. This insular cortex is associated with consciousness, emotion, self-awareness, perception and cognitive functioning. This fits in the idea of intrinsic motivation being based on interest and enjoyment. On the other hand, acting for extrinsic reasons caused activation in the posterior cingulate cortex, located in the medial part of the inferior parietal lobule. This is a very metabolically active area, but there is no clear consensus about what this area of the brain does. However, there is some evidence that it is involved in regulating the focus of attention, planning for the future and conscious awareness. With clear neural differences in activation between intrinsic and extrinsic reasons for acting, it would be interesting to see future research that clarifies the neural correlates of the two motivators.

To recap:

1) Intrinsic motivators will always beat extrinsic motivators, so one way to use this to your advantage on your website, is to provide a way for people to interact socially. Online forums and in-person meetings will increase the use of your platform.

2) Figure out what people already intend to do, such as losing weight or quitting smoking, and provide online tools that make it easier for them.