
First Edition

Game-ify Anything A How-To Guide

@SeanMEverett

A builder, humanizing technology

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Foreword

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Since I was a young boy, I've been searching for something. Through chemistry sets, building blocks, philosophical texts, storytelling, archaeology, astrophysics, and technology, I've been searching for one elusive element.

The answer to an unknown question.

Recently, with the help of a close friend, we've began to uncover both the question and the answer. And since that moment, I have entered one of the most productive periods of my life.

This short book on how to Game-ify Anything represents the triangulation of my extensive research into the following three major areas:

- Interactive Software
- Consumer Behavior
- Incentive-Based Rewards

This is the first edition of various volumes I plan to write, designed to teach different perspectives of one major theme:

Humanizing Technology.

Game Mechanics

Without the skeleton, a man cannot stand.



Game Atom

You “Die” If You Don’t Do This Basic Action

1. Action: what you do in the real world
2. Reaction: the corresponding action that occurs in the game world as a result of your action
3. Challenge: the part of the game you’re competing against

Overview

The Atom is by far the most critical aspect of any game, or any product for that matter. Imagine a building without any bricks, the iPhone without a touch screen, or music without notes. They would cease to exist, or exist as a deformed beast.

But what is an atom other than the basic building blocks of something bigger. Without this essential element, there is nothingness.

For games, it’s that smallest, most basic action, that if you don’t do, you die.

This is by far the most important aspect of any game. If you’re not spending months perfecting every single aspect of the atom, then anything you work on beyond this simply won’t hold water.

Problems with the atom aren’t just additive, they multiply exponentially.

Examples of Atoms

Mario (Nintendo)

- Action: hold down button and push forward on control pad
- Reaction: Mario runs forward
- Challenge: dodge/kill enemies and reach the end of the level before time expires

Tetris (Nintendo)

- Action: tap button and push a direction on the control pad
- Reaction: rotate and move a block
- Challenge: insert block into open spaces to clear lines before blocks stack to the ceiling

Angry Birds (iPhone)

- Action: tap and hold screen, pull backwards, release
- Reaction: launches bird
- Challenge: knock over structures to destroy pigs (these birds really are angry)

Jetpack Joyride (iPhone)

- Action: tap screen, hold briefly, release
- Reaction: character flies up and falls down
- Challenge: dodge obstacles to get as far as possible

Bejeweled (iPhone)

- Action: swipe
- Reaction: one jewel switches places with another jewel
- Challenge: match 3 or more jewels in a row to clear as much of the board as possible

Linkedin

Linkedin even uses a Game Atom to get you to finish filling out your profile. It's one of the most basic gaming mechanics used on the web today, and it's nothing more than a progress bar.

Action: type keys on the keyboard

Reaction: letters appear on screen

Challenge: get your profile to 100% completeness

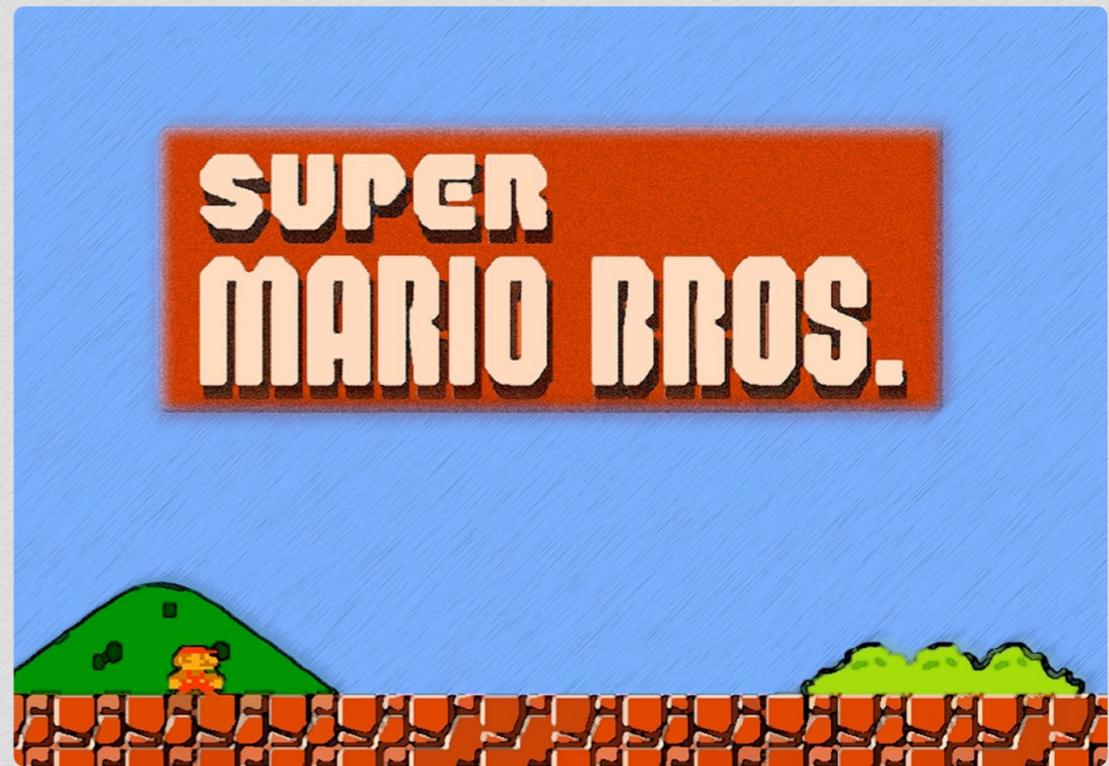
Twitter

Twitter's game atom is about as easy to sleuth out as anything that's ever existed, aside from maybe Pong. If you don't type into that little box and tweet, not only does your voice "die", so too does Twitter as an app.

Action: type keys on the keyboard

Reaction: letters appear on screen

Challenge: type something less than 140 characters and click the 'Tweet' button



GALLERY 1.1 Game Atoms

The original Super Mario Bros. Move Mario to the right and you've experienced the game atom.



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Review of the Basics

Remember, the question you need to ask yourself when designing a Game Atom is "What is the thing that, if I didn't do, I would die?". Or put another way, what's the most basic action that a person can do (i.e., pick up a pen, type an email, answer the

phone, etc)? For Tetris, it's moving blocks, for Jetpack Joyride, it's dodging obstacles, and for Linkedin, it's filling out your profile/resume. It doesn't matter what else you do on Linkedin, if you don't have a profile, you cease to exist.

Games Within Games

More Challenges = Less Boredom

Outside of Tetris, which is often heralded as the gold standard of game design, Jetpack Joyride for iOS is one of the best and most engaging simple games I've ever experienced or studied. From the attractive illustrations to the funny animations to the addiction of completing missions, it's hard to argue with its fun-ness.

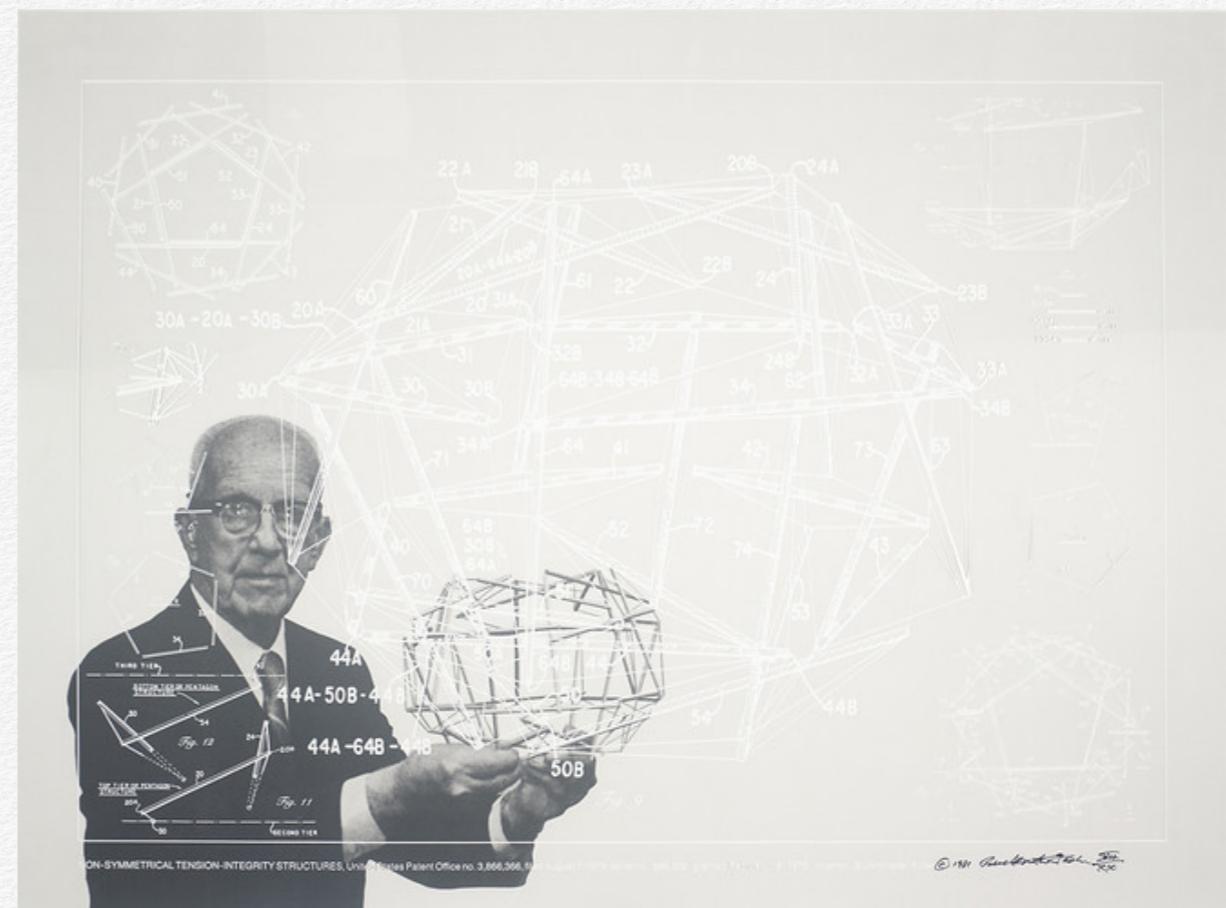
After they established the core game atom, they moved into designing a longer, more engaging experience. The concept of the game is called an Infinite Runner, which is a category of games such as Canabalt or Temple Run. The goal is to see how far you can get before dying, always traveling through the same course. The problem with Canabalt is that's where the game stops. The only challenge is to beat your high score and farthest distance, but that gets old fairly quickly.

Part of the genius of Jetpack Joyride was that they added overlapping mini-games within this major game atom.

Conceptual Note

I realize that we're mixing metaphors a bit here, saying that there's something inside a game atom, which is the smallest atomic unit, but just stick with me as we dive deeper into the concept of games within games.

The reality is that a well-designed game can be visualized more like a gyroscope with overlapping systems than an onion or electrons orbiting a nucleus.



Overlapping Mini Games

Below is a simplified and generalized game mechanics system that can be applied to most things. After figuring out the game atom, you can then apply each of the subsequent “orbits” to round out a more engaging, longer, and more immersive game.

1. Game atom
2. Collect coins
3. Beat high score
4. Complete missions
5. Spend coins strategically on power-ups to beat missions faster or more easily
6. Earn stars (more stars earned for harder missions)
7. Use stars to unlock access to new worlds
8. Earn all power-ups and achievements
9. Beat game or compete against others to rank higher

Note that this system is likely to have more success for simple gamification. This is not what’s happening in a more complex social game like Farmville.

Leader Boards

Should You Do It?

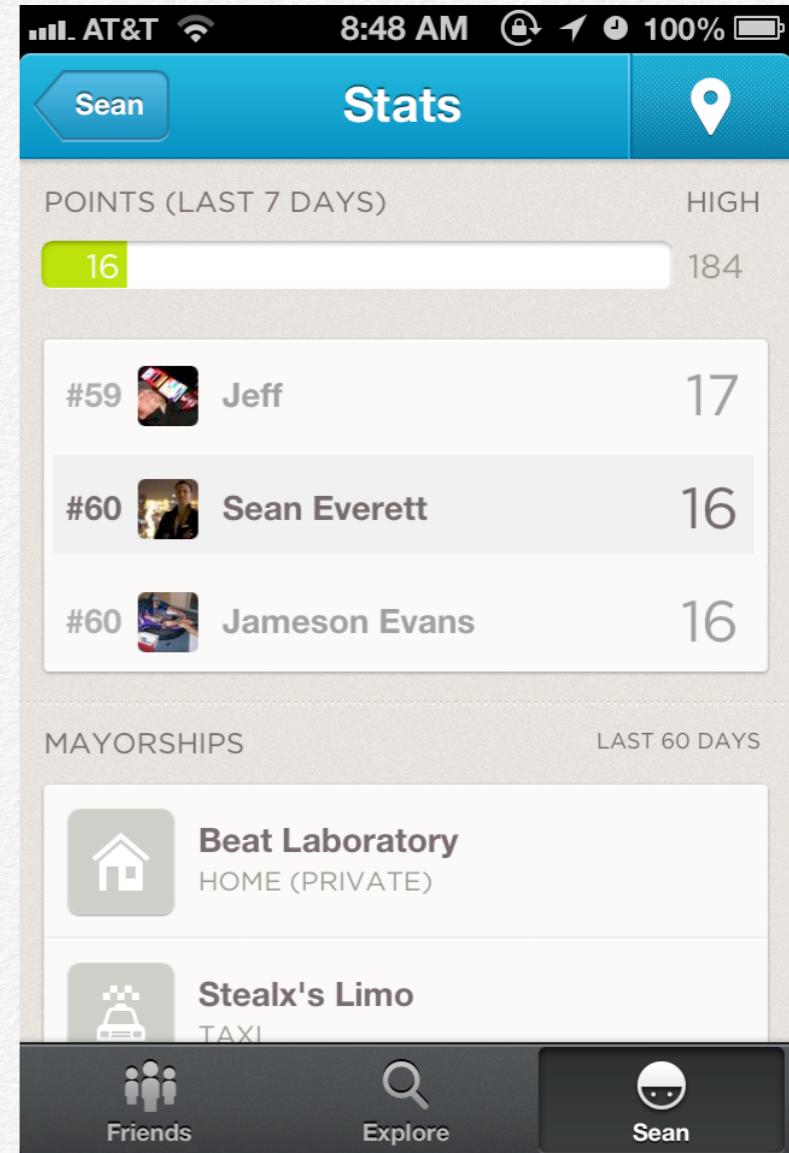
For most standard games, sure, they're a mainstay and they're pretty great. But since you're trying to game-ify something that isn't really a game, I would stay away from leader boards.

I have the scar tissue to prove it. The problem is that it only showcases the best of the best, or the most active players, which means everyone else who could possibly play (say 90% of them) no longer have a reason to play.

Why would they? They're so far away from "winning" that it's futile for them to continue.

Contextual Leader Boards

There are a few exceptions and some ways around this, though. One is a contextual leader board, like in Foursquare's iPhone app.



They show your performance in context to those around you:

- The person above you (e.g., 59th place with 17 points)
- You (60th place with 16 points)
- The person below you (60th place with 16 points)

This incentivizes you to keep playing because, while the ultimate goal is to be #1, your short-term goal is to beat 23rd place. The former requires a lot of effort, the latter, just a bit of effort. Most people are inclined to choose the easier of the two.

We'll get into more details of Foursquare's impact on gamification and why they're failing right now (teaser: it has nothing to do with the check-in or their explore feature).

Game Dynamics

If it's invisible, but you can
feel it, does it exist?



The “Fun”

Does Fun Exist?

There's a debate amongst game designers about the concept of fun. Some believe it exists and others believe it doesn't.

Pretty weird, right?

When I first heard this, I was shocked. How in the world can you say there's no such thing as fun? I mean, have you never heard Cindy Lauper's song? Girls, they just wanna, they just wanna have fun. If fun doesn't exist, then what will girls do with all their free time?

It's actually a pretty serious debate, both sides of which make interesting and logical points. The detractors say that because “fun” is such a subjective thing, it isn't the same experience for any two people, and therefore doesn't really exist.

On the other side of the debate, the “believers” if you will, watch people play with games, see them laughing, scared, or engaged and call that the “fun”.

I'm A Belieber

If I had to choose, I'm going to wave the Believer flag (and not just because I'm a Belieber). I believe that if you can feel something, even if it's invisible, doesn't mean it's not real, just harder to pin down.

Take life, for instance. We can't see or even measure love, and yet we believe it exists because we've *felt* it. Whether between a mother and her child, a man and his wife, or Steve Jobs and his iPhone, the philosophy of fun is something I'd like to subscribe to.

So yes, I believe in fun, if for no other reason than I want to have it and experience it. Hopefully I won't be persecuted for my beliefs, whether that's in the concept of fun, or in the vocal stylings of Justin Bieber.

Designing Fun

Boy is this a tricky topic. For something that may not even exist, designing it is one of the single most important and simultaneously difficult aspects of gamifying something.

But here's the rub. You don't even have to include traditional concepts of a game in order to make something fun because, remember, fun is an *experience*.

Satisfying Interactions

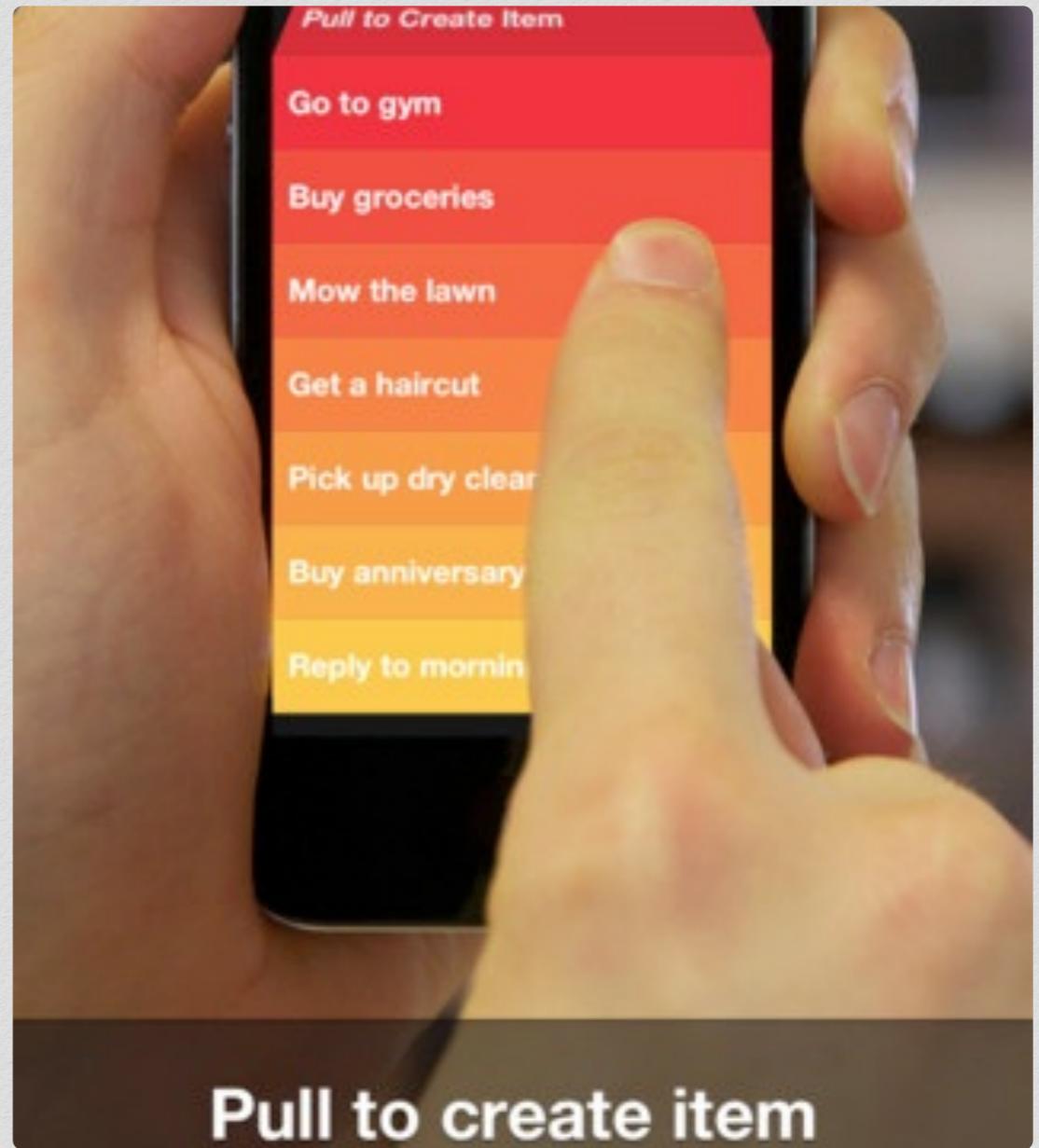
Clear is a simple to-do list app (yes, another one of those). But this one thinks different.

There is no “chrome” (i.e., header/footer bars); everything is based on gestures: pinches, swipes, taps, and pulls. The subtle animation that happens as you perform each one of these actions is not just satisfying, but dare I say, fun.

They don’t stop there, however, they include other senses (don’t forget one of the most important: sound). If you check off multiple items in a row, the tones create a satisfying melody.

As you’re experiencing this app, take note of the things that delight you. It’s likely that it has nothing to do with its main feature (i.e., to-do list), but rather for the *dynamics* of your interaction with it. You’re not even using it for its intended purpose and yet you’re experiencing something that feels...*satisfying*. It’s these core, atomic interactions that form the basis of what’s called Game Dynamics.

The developers gamified a to-do app without using points, a leader board, or even the concept of dying. They made the atom satisfying dynamically, but without including a deeper set of game mechanics, you’re left feeling that the “game” was way too short. The difficulty designed into this game was much too easy. I know they’re adding this, though, these things take time.



GALLERY 2.1 Clear Makes To-Do List Into Game

Everything in Clear is a game, from the sounds when you’re checking things off in a streak to unlocking new themes.





Definition of Fun

Raph Koster, a game design veteran with one of the longest running blogs on the topic, defines fun as the process of mastering the challenges that the game lays out before you.

I believe that this is the very mechanical definition of fun that, coupled with the more emotional dynamics, is the true essence of fun.

Fun = Mastery Process + Satisfying Interactions

The fun of Mario Brothers wasn't just that you were trying to collect coins, jump on enemy's heads, and save the princess, it was also the satisfaction of earning a star, glowing, and sprinting through worlds with super powers.

It was knowing exactly where the hidden warps were and exactly when the enemy would appear, but also the way it felt when you found a flower, ate it, and ratchet-grew your body while throwing fireballs and jumping all over the screen.

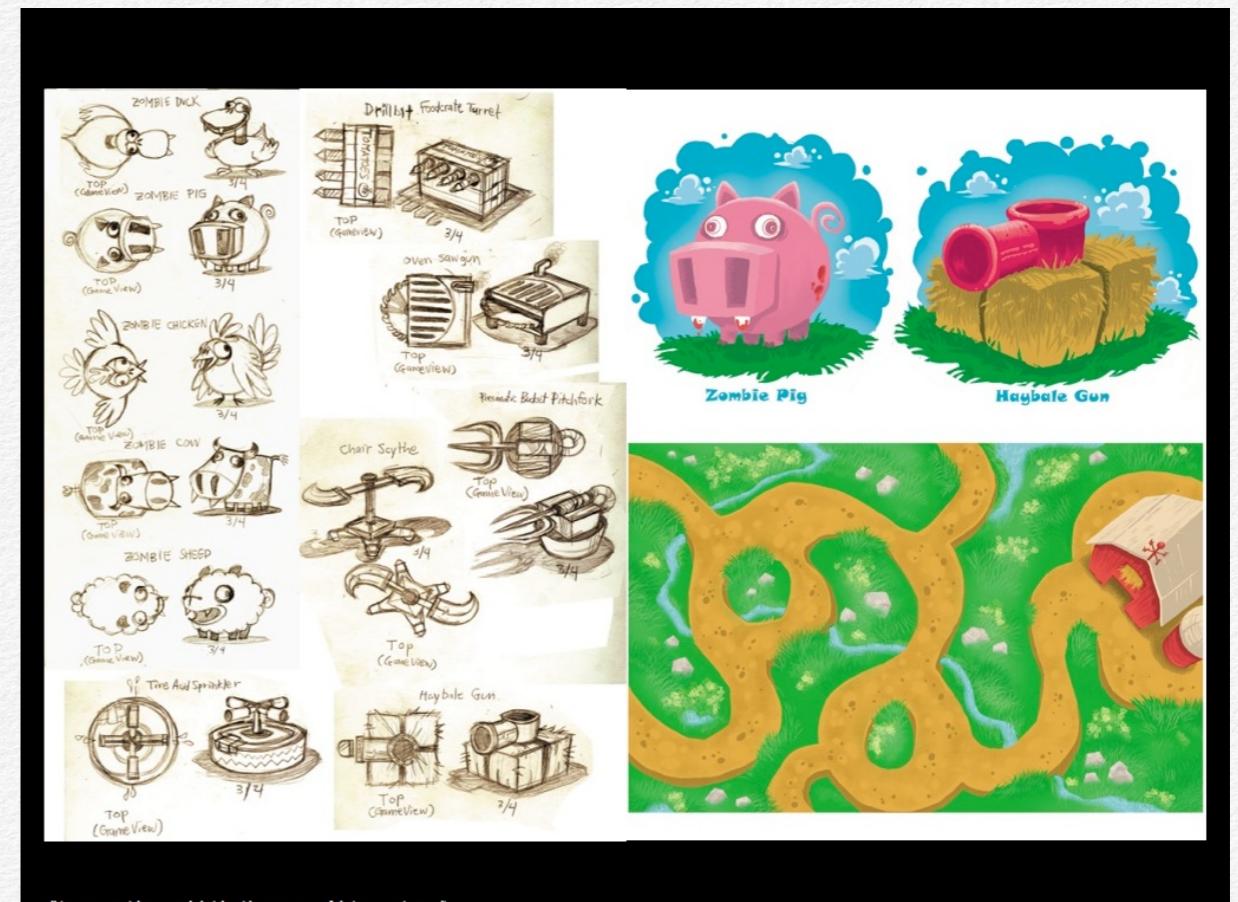
The physics of the world felt right, the sounds gave satisfying feedback, and even after beating it multiple times, you came back to play it again.

Fun exists solely in your mind, and is a very personal experience, but it gets even better if you can share it with your friends.

Visual Branding

Feels Good

sdf



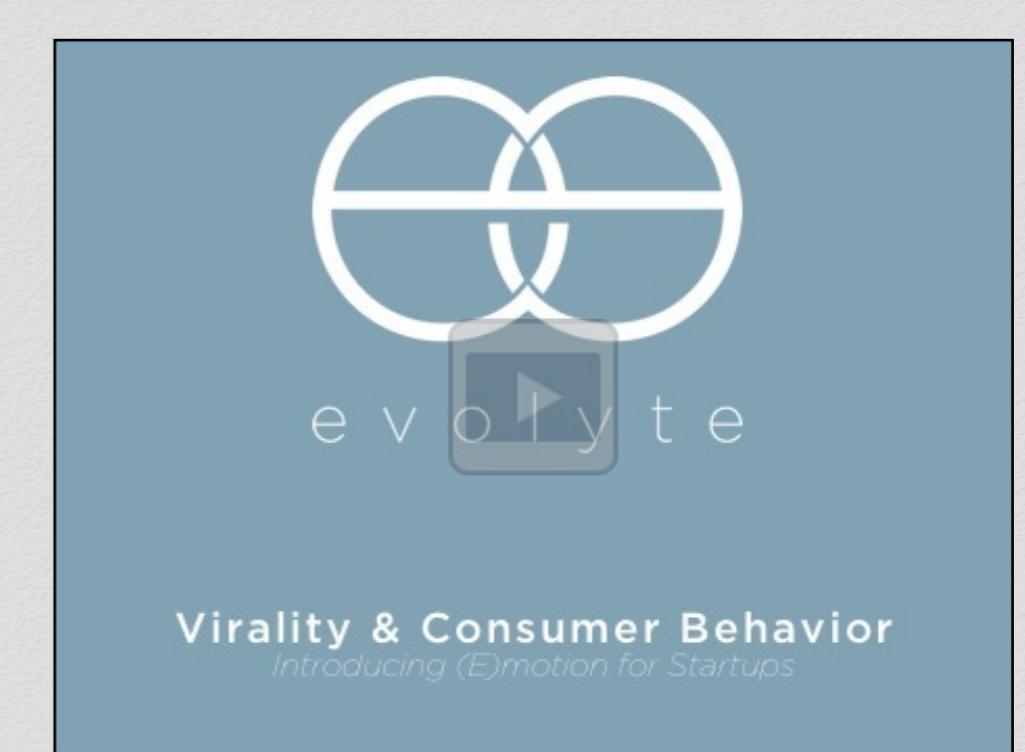
Human Behavior

Overview

The non-rational, emotional reasons why people do things. Feel free to page through the embedded report on the right, which was a high-level primer on virality and consumer behavior I put together for clients in the fall of 2011.

In this section we'll go through a few topics that could fall under the consumer behavior umbrella but are more aligned with game-ifying anything. These topics include:

- Peer Pressure
- Storytelling
- Favors
- Rewards
- Addiction



INTERACTIVE 2.1 Virality & Consumer Behavior

This 2011 report from the digital agency I started represents an overview of how to tap into consumer behavior to be more viral on the internet.

Examples

3

If you don't know you're playing a game, do you perform better or worse?

Practical Applications

Broad Categories

1. Play
2. Work
3. Relationships

Work

LinkedIn even uses it to get you to finish filling out your profile.
It's one of the most basic gaming mechanics

Play

Foursquare

Foursquare

Elephants

It's in the room, we may as well talk about it. Gamification has been around a lot longer than Foursquare, but they're the ones who really brought it into the consciousness of the general public and businesses alike. With its use of game mechanics, they were able to incentivize normal people to do abnormal things.

Remember, Dennis Crowley (Co-Founder, @dens on Twitter) had tried his hand at a location-based startup before with Dodgeball. But it wasn't until he tried again a few years later, this time with game mechanics, that he had breakout success.

Sketchy McSketcherson

I'm a huge fan of pen and paper. It allows for quick drafting of ideas and easy communication of those ideas once they're a bit more fleshed out (thanks iPhone). I use Adam's Book and App

for this process because it allows me to remove drafts that don't work and keep the ones that do.

So here's a conceptual drawing of how Foursquare's game mechanics work

Section 3

Path

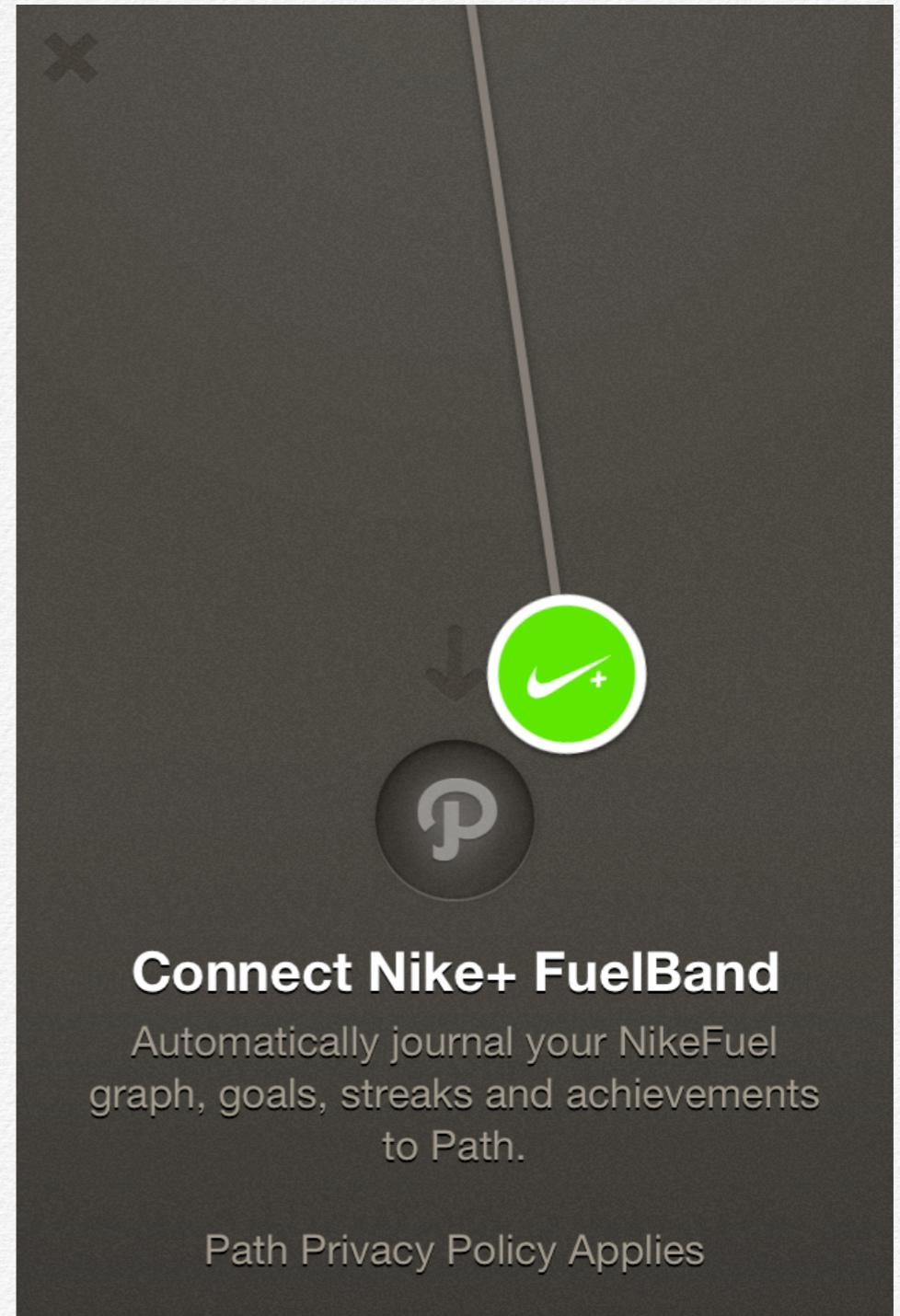
Mini Game

Have a look at what the wizards at Path did when connecting the Nike+ FuelBand to the iPhone app (image to the right).

The green Nike+ ball at the end of the elastic string was quite fun. You'd touch your finger to the screen and select the ball, keep holding and, once you let go, would spring back up towards the top as if it were attached to a bungee cord.

The funny thing was, I didn't want to connect my FuelBand to the app right away because I was immersed in just messing around with the physics of the ball at the end of the elastic cord.

Think about that for a few seconds. Path took something that we've been trained to hate doing (No, I don't want to connect to Facebook) and turned it into a surprisingly delightful experience. So when you're trying to add gaming elements to whatever you're trying to do, remember, sometimes "fun" means nothing more than just a string and a ball.



Monetization



People buy things to either save time or increase their status.

Marketing



There are only two functions in any business: make a thing, then sell that thing.

More Knowledge



We rest on the shoulders of
giants.

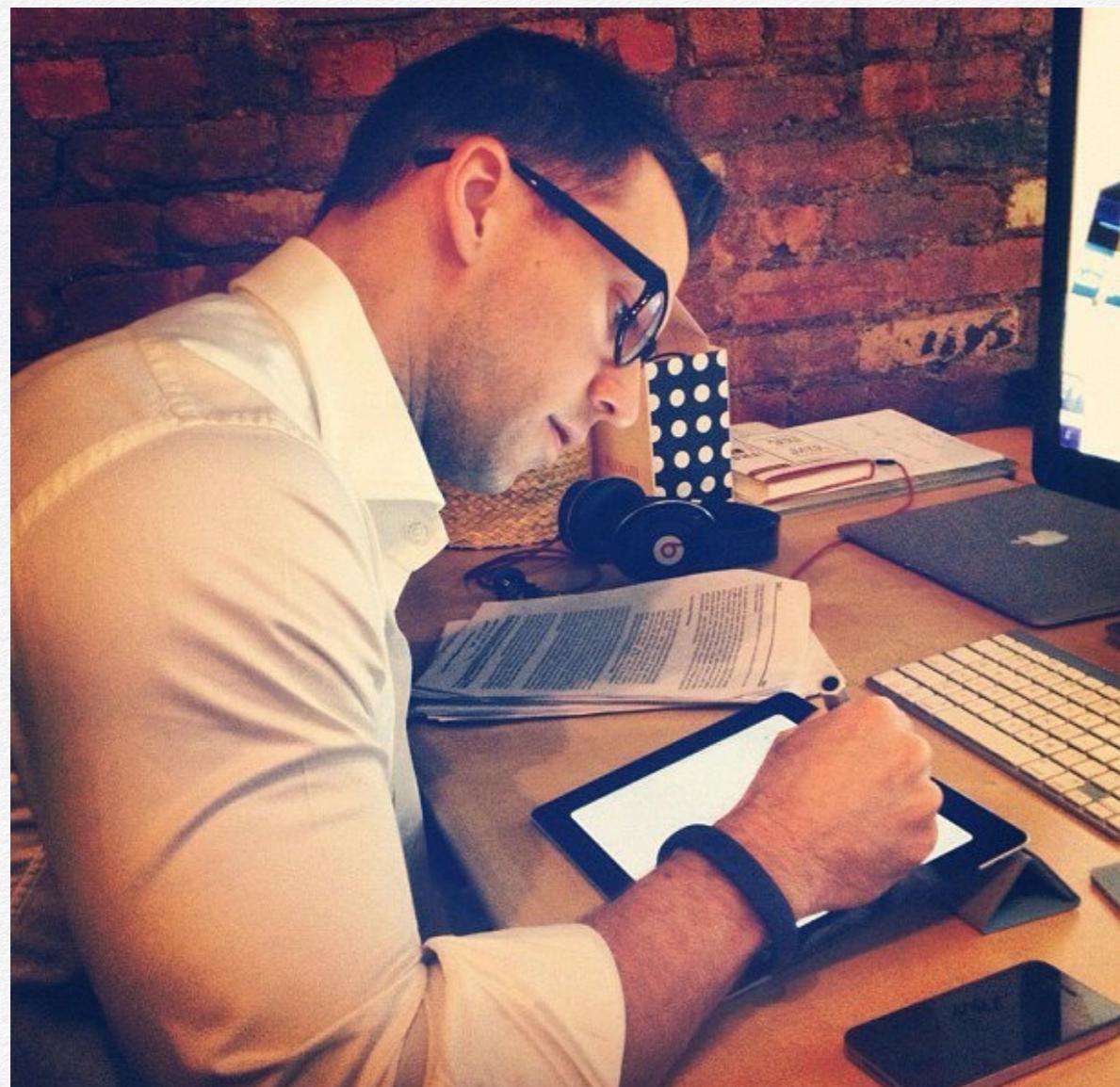
Thought Leaders

Websites

1. <http://www.raphkoster.com/2012/03/15/the-best-articles>
2. <http://www.whatgamesare.com/featured-posts.html>
- 3.

Continue Your Learning

asdf



@SeanMEverett

Λ Builder, Humanizing Technology

Sean's early career was spent consulting to the largest companies in the world designing incentive compensation systems that rewards behaviors for both senior executives and employees.

Since then, he has founded 3 technology startups and advised many others on how to humanize innovations created by people who want to help others change the world.

More recently, he has conceptualized, designed, developed, and marketed two iPhone apps that he owns, a game mechanics system for a social media advertising startup, written the story of the most interesting cow in the world, and developed a cultural system that makes slavery in your career obsolete.

He's a futurist who's love of mathematical simplicity is only matched by his fascination of art with layered meaning and emotional storytelling. He believes in the power of finding your dreams and the freedom of living them, so you too can experience what it's like to not work a day in your life.

Sean has an Bachelors of Science in Mathematics & Actuarial Science from the University of Iowa and a Masters of Business Administration from the University of Chicago Booth School of Business, which he will be paying off for many, many, many years.

Atom

The most basic element of something that everything else is built on. A building block. In a game, it refers to the most basic action you can perform in that game. If you don't perform this action, you die in the game.

In Tetris, the game atom is moving a block into a specific orientation. In Mario, it's running forward.

The concept of an Atom can be applied to many things outside of gaming, including apps, activities, or anything that requires some action.

- Apps: Twitter's atom is the tweet, Instagram's is the picture, and Facebook's is the status update
- Writing: touching the pen to the paper
- Shower: turning the water on

Once you start seeing the world in terms of Atoms, I guarantee you'

Related Glossary Terms

Drag related terms here

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Chapter 1 - Game Atom