

# **GAMING BRANDS**

IPA Diploma Dissertation  
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## *Abstract*

*'Gaming Brands' is an approach to brand planning that applies the principles of gaming to brand building. This approach represents a fundamental shift from building brands as message transmission devices, to building brands as behaviour change systems. This approach is firmly rooted in established human psychology, leveraging our predisposition to 'game' life to further the commercial aims of brands operating in the modern world. Gaming Brands has implications for those who understand consumers as active participants and wish to build truly interactive brands to suit their needs.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

## WHY GAMES?

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Games shouldn't exist. They seem to serve no rational or evolutionary purpose, yet we find them so compelling they have been part of our culture for as long as we have records.<sup>1</sup>

Rather than dismissing games as a leisure activity, I believe that games not only provide a good model for how we interact with the world around us, but that games provide a template for building brands suited to the modern world. Specifically, I believe that:

- ***Games provide a practical template for developing truly interactive brands.***
- ***Games provide a practical template for building rich and experiential brands.***
- ***Games provide a practical template for brands that actively change behaviour.***

It is essential that the reader is clear on one thing from the beginning, that this is not a paper advocating games as specific executions,<sup>2</sup> but a paper that argues for the principles of gaming to be applied directly to the brand planning process.

## **GAME PLAN**

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### **Level I: Gaming Life**

Level I establishes play as a specific expression of our instinctive urge to explore and discover the world around us. It is this play instinct that drives us to 'game life', an approach that sees us apply the principles of gaming to everyday tasks. Level I concludes that gaming is not just of intellectual interest, but of financial significance.

### **Level II: Gaming Brands**

Level II considers the issues facing the modern brand builder, and identifies gaming as offering a practical template for brand planning. Level II concludes that a radical shift in thinking is required to move from traditional broadcast based brand planning models to game inspired brand planning models.

### **Level III: Gaming Your Brand**

Level III applies a game based brand planning model to a familiar brand as an example and proves the applicability using primary research. This section concludes by demonstrating that the principles of gaming can be applied to a range of brands and business objectives.

### **Boss Level: Gaming Brand Value**

The boss level establishes that gaming brands can build commercial brand value by driving customer acquisition, weight of purchase and loyalty. This section concludes with a behaviour based model for measuring brand strength.

### **Bonus Level: Final Conclusions And Implications**

## **LEVEL I: GAMING LIFE**

## Why We Play Games

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### Homo Luden; The Playing Man

The role of play in culture is often understated, play is normally marginalised to a childhood activity, or described as something to be reserved for our leisure time. The separation between work and play has roots as far back as the 16<sup>th</sup> Century theologian John Calvin, who is credited with establishing the puritan concept of the 'work ethic', the idea that we must work hard to glorify god.<sup>3</sup> This school of thinking has led to the rejection of play as anything more than a childhood activity, and a failure to acknowledge play as a major aspect of our cultural existence.<sup>4</sup>

In 'Homo Ludens', cultural theorist Johan Huizinga explores the role of play in human culture, and concludes that the two cannot be separated. Huizinga finds characteristics of play evident in cultural inventions such as education, law, politics, religious rites, art, poetry and philosophy:

*"We have to conclude that civilization is, in its earliest phases, played. It does not come from play like a babe detaching itself from the womb: it arises in and as play, and never leaves it."*<sup>5</sup>

Huizinga goes into great detail in his analysis of culture to establish the prevalence of play, but a simpler form of evidence can be found in our everyday discourse. With over 94 definitions and uses of the word 'play' in the dictionary,<sup>6</sup> it is clear that the word can be used to describe a variety of behaviours. From Lady Gaga's 'Love Games', to Tom Clancy's 'Patriot Games', a cursory glance reveals that we 'play' and 'game' many aspects of culture.

If play is so central to culture, we must ask ourselves why it is not overtly central to our role as brand builders. Defining what play is, and understanding why we play will help us understand the implications for building brands.

Many volumes have been dedicated to play, but none have managed to reduce the concept to a simple sentence, Huizinga's characteristics of play are as useful as any:

- 1) Play is fun
- 2) Play takes place within defined boundaries
- 3) Play cannot be enforced

Any further attempt to define play more precisely is a route to madness (trust me). As we explore *why* we play, we will see the appropriateness of Huizinga's characteristics.

### The Origins Of Play

Being human means being curious. We can't help it, it's the way we are wired, our brains are set up to seek novelty. Interacting with novel stimulus, i.e. new stuff, triggers the release of dopamine, a neurotransmitter associated with reward.<sup>7</sup> Curiosity is our brain urging us to seek new stimulus, to explore the world around us. The neurophysiological response to novel stimulus is actually twofold, our memory circuits are also boosted during this experience, leading psychologists to conclude that the purpose of this reaction is to prompt us to learn new things, i.e. to discover the world around us.<sup>8</sup> In its purest sense, our brains reward a life of exploration and discovery.

Huizinga's first characteristic of play partially speaks to the way our brains prompt curiosity and reward discovery. If we were to express the reward we experience upon discovering new stimulus as an emotion, we might use the word 'fun'. However, the novelty reward system that prompts us to explore can betray

us. Novelty is not always good, new experiences are either positive or negative, they are either enjoyable or terrifying. Exploration is therefore broader than play, encompassing both the positive and negative elements of novelty seeking. To be fun, play must take place within certain boundaries that allow us to enjoy novelty without having to endure fear.

### **Play Is Exploration Within Boundaries**

The world is a dangerous and complicated place, exploring it can be a tricky process. Huizinga's characteristics state that play takes place within defined boundaries, it is these boundaries that allow us to explore and discover in a safe and manageable way.

Boundaries allow us seek out the buzz of new stimulus without undue risk. allowing us to explore within certain constraints that offer a degree of safety. Game shows like 'Deal Or No Deal' capitalise on our instinct for safe exploration, the contestants don't know what will be in the box, but they can be pretty sure it won't be anything dangerous. This does not mean that play is always safe, but that there are some parameters involved.

Our reward systems prompt us to explore, and boundaries allow us to do this in a safe way, ensuring a playful experience that remains fun. Boundaries also allow us to take advantage of the boost our memory systems receive during exploration, they allow us to break experiences into 'bite size' chunks. 'Playing' with discrete systems is how we learn about them, allowing us to discover the world piece by piece.

*"Let my playing be my learning, and my learning be my playing."*<sup>9</sup>

Developmental psychologists identify play as being essential for children to 'create and explore a world they can master, conquering their fears while practicing adult roles'.<sup>10</sup> Neurologists have also linked play to learning,<sup>11</sup> specifically language learning and cognitive development.<sup>12 13</sup> The positive emotions play invokes represents an adaptation that encourages us to try new things and learn with more flexibility. In fact, Melvin Konner, an anthropologist and neuroscientist, suggests that play may be the primary means nature has found to develop our brains.<sup>14</sup>

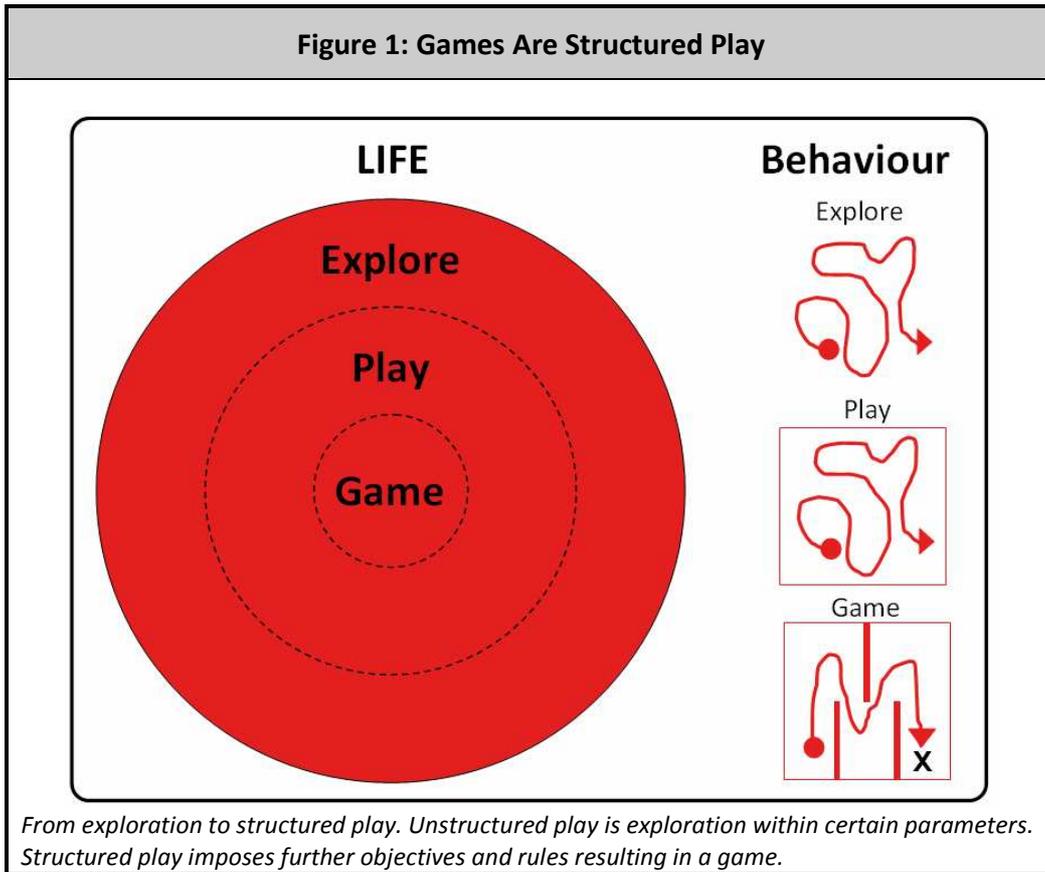
It would be a mistake to boil play down to a pure learning mechanism, to do so would be to reduce play to a process. This speaks to Huizinga's final characteristic of play, it cannot be enforced. The important point here is that we recognise the biological imperative of play without ignoring the emotional experience, which is one of fun and delight. In this way, play is a specific expression of our exploration instinct.

### **Games Are Structured Play**

*"A game is a problem solving activity, approached with a playful attitude."*<sup>15</sup>

Playing allows us to learn about discrete systems in a manageable and safe way. Manipulating those systems to achieve a goal marks the difference between playing and gaming. Gaming is the result of applying the structure of objectives and rules to play.

Figure 1: Games Are Structured Play



Source: Author

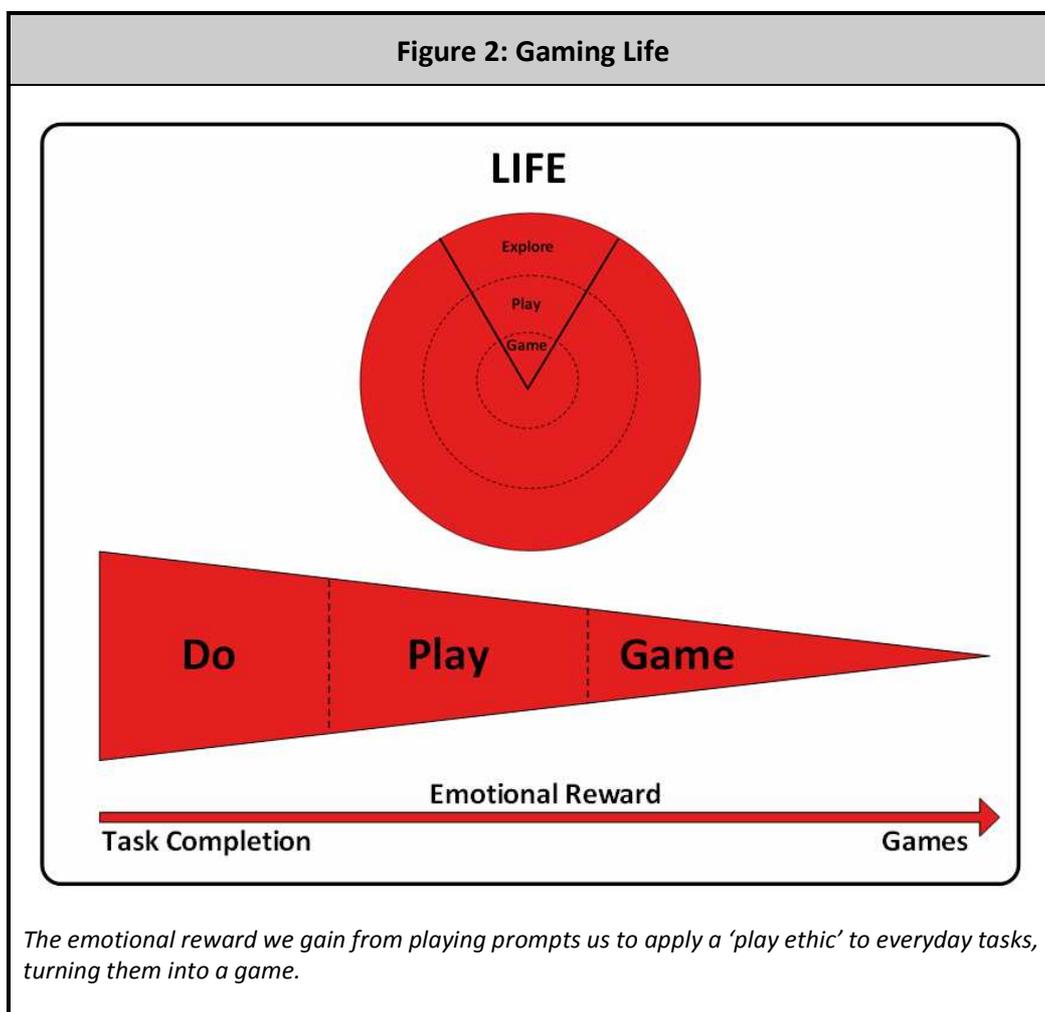
The discovery reward system established earlier takes on a new dimension during game play. Game play revolves as much around discovering *how* we solve a problem as discovering what's at the end of a problem. As much 'how do you open the box' as 'what's in the box'. Again, the brain rewards discovery of new information, prompting, an innate desire to solve the problem.<sup>16 17</sup>

Although external rewards can incentivise certain types of problem solving behaviour, it is important to separate this motivation from the simple joy of problem solving. There is no external reward for completing a Rubik's cube, success is reward in its own right. The emotional reward that game playing can bring to behaviour is what fundamentally separates games from mere task completion. It is this dynamic that prompts us to game aspects of every day life.

## Gaming Life

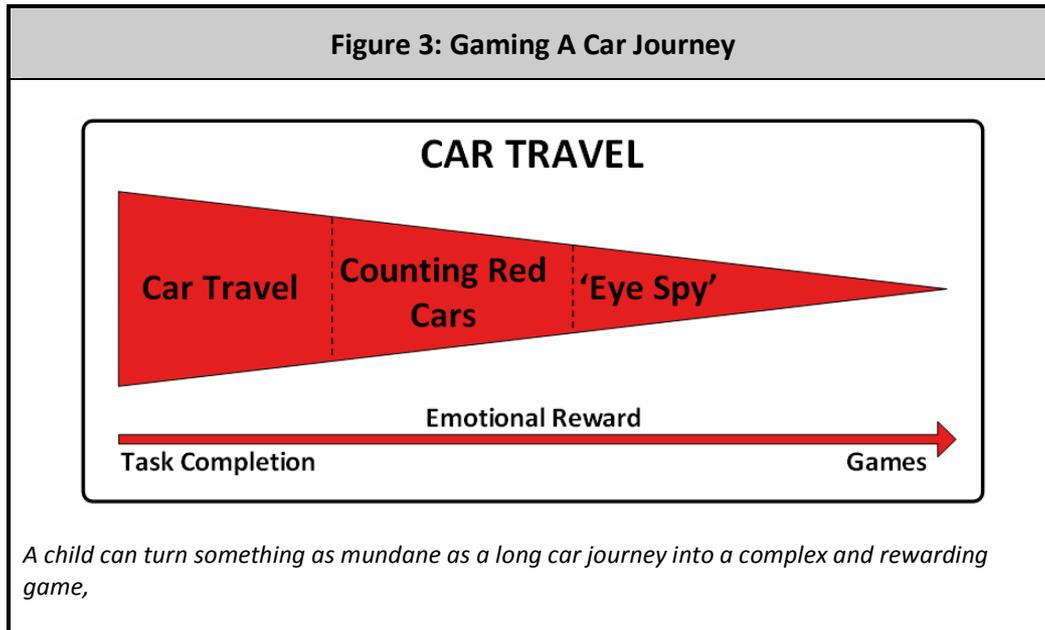
### Gaming Life Makes It More Fun

The fine line between task completion and game playing is one that we blur on a regular basis. Discovering new things about our world is a fascinating and rewarding process, but unfortunately life is not always new and exciting. When we do the same things repeatedly they become dull and we get bored. When this happens, discovery becomes just 'doing', i.e. mere task completion. The emotional reward associated with playing prompts us to apply a 'play ethic' to tasks, turning them into games. We turn the things we have to do into things we want to do. We can illustrate specific everyday tasks as a 'slice' of life, taken from the model created during this section.



A long car journey with a small child will often be enough to illustrate how we apply a play ethic to tasks, evolving them into games. In this example, the 'do' is traveling in a car, the play is 'count the red cars' which evolves into the game 'eye spy'.

**Figure 3: Gaming A Car Journey**



*Source: Author*

Applying a play ethic to this mundane task first required establishing some boundaries, these serve to define an 'arena' for play to take place. In this case, the boundaries are time, i.e. a duration for which the game will take place, and space, i.e. cars that are visible out of the window. 'Counting the red cars' is a game with few rules and simple objectives. The game primarily rewards an exploration mentality, it's about noticing things and counting them. Applying further rules to this mentality results in a more formal game, 'eye spy'.

'Eye spy' imposes a game structure onto this play activity. This game has a clearly defined objectives and rules. In this way, a mundane car journey has effectively been 'gamed' to make it more fun.

### **Gaming Life Modifies Behaviour**

Gaming life tasks can make the mundane more enjoyable, but it can also change the way we behave. When I was young, my parents often turned chores into games. The 'clean your room in under 10 minutes' game or the 'get ready for bed' races between me and my brothers were more effective than just telling us what to do. Gaming life tasks can also work for adults, the internet based game 'Chore Wars'<sup>18</sup> allocates points to housemates that complete chores. 'Chore Wars' provides the tools to game housework, attaching an emotional reward to what would otherwise be a mundane task.

The important observation here is we 'game' everyday life to make it more emotionally rewarding, and that these emotional rewards can be used to change behaviour. We will go on to see how brands can use this to their advantage.

## THE SERIOUS BUSINESS OF PLAY

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### Games Dominate Commercial Entertainment

The increasing value of games as commercial entertainment should capture our immediate attention. The brand building industry has traditionally taken its lead from the dominant form of commercial entertainment, borrowing narrative, directors and even budgets from Hollywood. Recently, we have witnessed a fundamental shift, film no longer dominates commercial entertainment, gaming does, in 2008 the total revenue for games sold in the USA exceeded that of music and movies.<sup>19</sup> As the gaming industry's dominance of commercial entertainment grows, it is natural that brand building should follow its lead.

The profit to be gained from gaming goes far beyond commercial entertainment, harnessing games can realise value in everyday life.

### Gaming Life Is Profitable

We have established that turning everyday tasks into games is rewarding for the player. What is also evident is that harnessing this dynamic can be very profitable. An example comes from an unlikely place, airline frequent flyer programs (FFPs). FFPs provide points, levels and rewards that allow consumers to game air travel, the challenge to the player is simple; collect as many air miles as possible.

The FFP game is so compelling, it actively changes consumer behaviour, over 80% of FFP users have taken an unnecessary flight in order to gain air miles. The success of FFPs cannot be attributed to external rewards, in 2007 there were over 10 trillion un-redeemed air miles globally, this represents each FFP member saving five times more miles per year than they redeem.<sup>20</sup> As a result, the most successful frequent flyer programs are now more profitable than the airlines themselves. Gaming air travel is profitable.<sup>21</sup>

Brands and services have also begun to catch on to the possible value that can be realised by providing the tools needed to game everyday life tasks. Facebook, Amazon and eBay have all taken the first steps towards allowing consumers to game their services. Boundaries such as friend counts, reviews and number of successful bids all give users parameters to play within. Other services like Chromaroma<sup>22</sup> set defined parameters that allow users to turn even tube journeys into a formal game.

Nike+, Fiat EcoDrive and Foursquare have taken this a step further with great financial success. Nike+ for example, games running. Running at its most basic is task completion. Once we start to impose the boundaries of distance and time we begin to 'play' running, Nike+ gives players the tools to 'game' running, winning conditions, objectives, obstacles, and rules are all applied

## **LEVEL I COMPLETE!**

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### **Achievements:**

- Play is a specific expression of our innate urge to explore the world around us, gaming is the means by which we manipulate that world.
- We game life to make every day tasks more enjoyable, manipulating the way we game life can modify our behaviour.
- Gaming is a profitable industry in its own right, but those that provide the tools to help people game life also profit substantially.

**Level II challenge: Applying the principles of gaming to brand planning.**

## **LEVEL II: GAMING BRANDS**

## THE NEEDS OF MODERN BRANDING

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### Issues Facing The Modern Brand Builder

The collision of a broad range of trends from technology to media, coupled with new thinking around how brands are represented in consumers' minds, present the modern brand builder with a new and unfamiliar world. Specifically, the modern brand builder now has to consider how to build rich and interactive brands that actively promote behaviour change.

*I believe that gaming provides a practical template for developing brands suited to the modern world.*

### From Broadcast Brands to Interactive Brands

The need to build interactive brands that invite participation is something many marketers take for granted in the modern world. What we do not always ask ourselves is why this shift is required. It is easy to jump to media and technology as drivers for change. Technology has given consumers more media options that are more interactive, the assumption is that because we can build interactive brands, we should.

The evolution of technology and media masks the real issue. Part I of this paper established that people are hard wired to explore and discover the world around them, our natural urge is to interact with our surroundings. Technology in this case is not a driver, but an enabler, technology allows us to interact with media in a more natural way. The need to build interactive brands is in response to enabled consumers that now have the tools to behave in the way they had always wanted.

The crux of this issue is that our ability to build interactive brands is being held back by outdated channel thinking. The 'Unique Selling Proposition' or the 'USP' was invented for, and belongs to, the broadcast media age.<sup>23</sup> However, the USP is still at the heart of the brand planning process. Propositions are inherently broadcast, however we choose to distribute them. Interaction in this case often means 'how do we get people to interact with our brand message?' rather than 'how do we create a brand that is inherently interactive?'. Games by definition are built on interactive principles, they demand you play rather than listen.

*I believe that games provide a practical template for developing truly interactive brands.*

### From Reductive Brands to Experiential Brands

New brand thinking puts more emphasis on the need to establish rich and experiential brands. This contrasts with the traditional approaches to brand planning, which essentially rely on reductive processes that boil a brand down to its simplest expression.

The first piece of new thinking comes from Paul Feldwick, who explores how brands build emotional connections with consumers. Feldwick argues that emotional connections are formed through the associations and relationships that exist between brands and consumers.<sup>24</sup>

Feldwick defines associations as 'connections in the brain that link together ideas, images and feelings'. It is these associations that build up the impression of the brand in the mind of the consumer. Feldwick argues indication of relationship is more important than message communication. Content accounts for some of our communication, but non verbal cues such as tone of voice and imagery are all very important factors influencing this relationship. If we believe the role of communication is to build emotional

connections between brands and consumers, then we have to accept the importance of communicating through the rich world of associations and relationships. The definition of this rich world often escapes the reductive process of brand planning.

The second piece of new thinking links brand value to consumer experience. Pine and Gilmore recognise that increasingly, the majority of a brand's value is not created during the production of a product but by the creation of the experience that surrounds it.<sup>25</sup> This is even more true of service brands, where the experience is the product.

The crux of this issue is related to the first. Building reductive brands is a hangover from the broadcast era, the traditional brand planning process was developed in order for brands to be reduced into easily transmitted messages. Interactive brands work in a different way, they invite their users to explore and discover a rich world at their own pace.

***I believe that games provide a practical template for building rich and experiential brands.***

### **From Attitude Change to Behaviour Change**

Brands exist to change consumer behaviour in a way that benefits the interests of the Client. The traditional role for communications has been to build brand awareness, consideration and preference, assuming that change in attitude will result in a corresponding effect on behaviour.

Recent data has challenged this model. This funnel is built on the assumption that people are passive consumers, that brand communications inform an awareness set which is narrowed down as they move from consideration to purchase. However, KcKinsey have found the opposite to be true.

*"Contrary to the funnel metaphor, the number of brands under consideration during the active-evaluation phase now actually expands rather than narrows as consumers seek information and shop a category."<sup>26</sup>*

This suggests brands can no longer rely on awareness to translate directly into sales.<sup>27</sup> Further evidence from the IPA Databank shows that campaigns that set a behavioural objective are more effective than those that set awareness or attitudinal objectives. It seems that brands should be built with behaviour, rather than attitude in mind.

The modern brand builder faces a difficult issue; communications theory is based on attitude change, and has limited implications for behavior change. Games are characterised by interaction and behaviour rather than attitude, making the principles of gaming suited to brand building.

***I believe that games provide a practical template for brands that actively change behaviour.***

## A FUNDAMENTAL SHIFT IN THINKING

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### **A Model With Message Transmission at its Heart**

Whether you believe in the potency of Brand Onions, the elevated thinking of Brand Ladders, or rely on Brand Keys to unlock business potential, most traditional brand models have message transmission at their heart. At the centre of these brand planning tools is a statement of what the brand stands for. Putting a statement at centre of these models reveals an implicit assumption, that brands are message transmission devices built to communicate that statement. It is this thinking that hinders modern brand builders from building rich, interactive brands that actively promote behaviour change. Putting a statement at the centre of a brand reflects a message transmission mindset. The result is that this mindset is often cascaded down into execution:

**Brand Idea/Essence:** What does the brand stand for?

**Campaign Idea/Proposition:** What are we going to say to communicate the brand idea?

**Executional Idea:** How and where are going to express the proposition?

### **A New Model Is Needed**

As long as brand planning models put a statement at their core, they will be fundamentally unsuited to brands with interaction at their heart. Building brands using the principles of gaming requires a shift in thinking at every level of the brand planning process.

## A NEW TEMPLATE FOR BRANDS

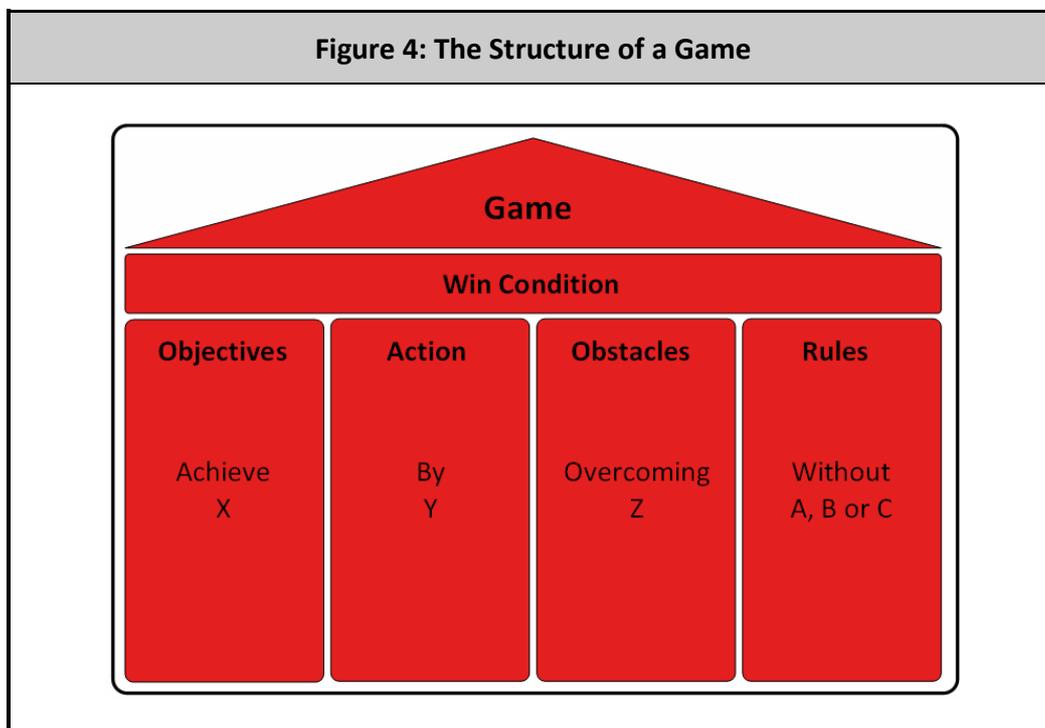
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### The Structure Of A Game

Gaming provides an alternative template to traditional brand planning models. It is this template that will allow us to build rich, interactive brands that actively promote behaviour change. Establishing the structure of a game will help us apply that structure to brands.

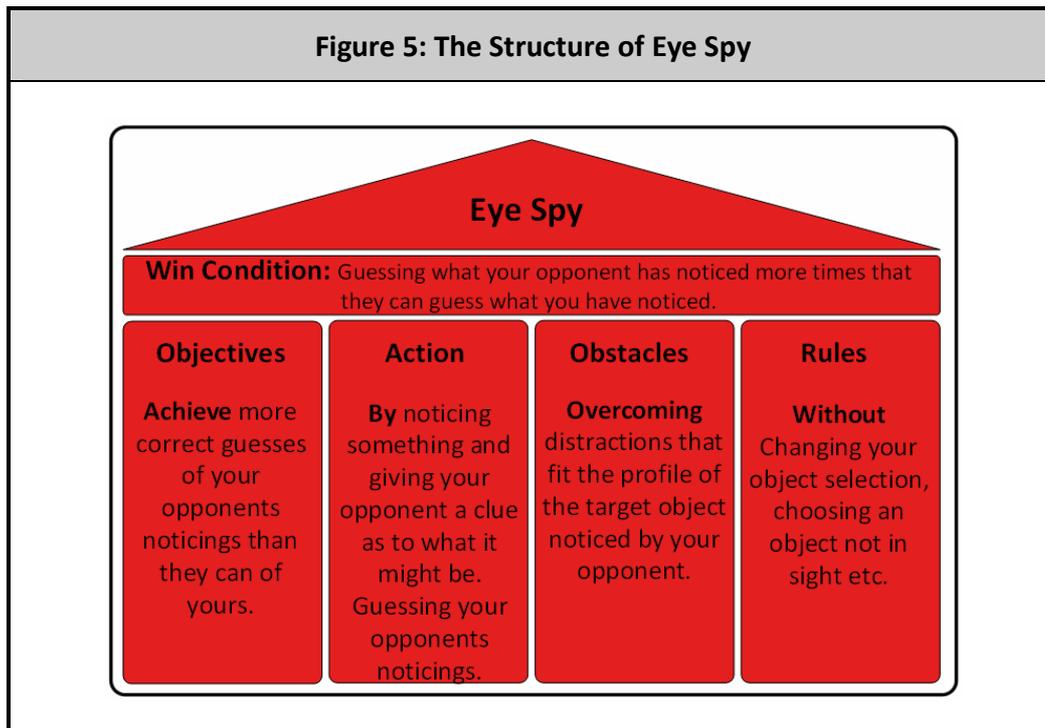
Games are characterized by:

- **Win condition**, which serves as a criteria for completing the game successfully.
- **Objective**, what the player has to achieve.
- **Action**, the behaviour the player has to exhibit to play the game.
- **Obstacles**, what the player has to overcome to achieve the objective.
- **Rules**, constraints that must be observed whilst playing the game.
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*Source: Author*

Applying this structure to the previously cited 'eye spy' game helps us understand the model.



*Source: Author*

### Structuring Brands As Games

The biggest shift we will need to make is one of mindset. We need to move away from defining our brands with a static statement, to defining our brands as game style behaviour change systems. We need to stop asking ‘what does our brand stand for?’ and start asking ‘what game are we asking people to play?’

- **Win condition**, What behaviour does the brand help consumers ‘game’, how do they win?
- **Objective**, What are we actually asking people to do?
- **Action**, How does the player go about gaming that behaviour, what does the brand provide to make this possible?
- **Obstacles**, What obstacles will the player encounter, how does the brand help the player overcome them?
- **Rules**, What are the rules of the brand game, and how are they enforced?

## **LEVEL II COMPLETE!**

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### **Achievements:**

- Gaming offers a practical template for developing rich, interactive brands that suit the needs of the modern brand builder.
- A fundamental shift in thinking is required to move away from broadcast based brand planning models to interactive, game based brand planning models.
- The structure of a game can provide a template for brand planning.

### **Level III challenge: Gaming Your Brand – Practical Applications**

## **LEVEL III: GAMING YOUR BRAND**

## GAMING A FAMILIAR BRAND

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### From Broadcast Brand To An Interactive Brand

To understand the power of planning brands as games, we will apply these principles to a familiar brand, AXE (Lynx in the UK). This will take place in five steps:

**Step 1:** Choosing a behaviour to game

**Step 2:** Understanding the consumer as a gamer

**Step 3:** Gaming behaviour

**Step 4:** Setting a brand 'win condition'

**Step 5:** Building the brand as a game

### Step 1: Choosing A Behaviour

AXE has always had a very clear product benefit. Axe makes guys smell great, helping them feel more confident and attractive to girls. This benefit has been wrapped up into a brand idea, the 'AXE Effect'. As one would expect, the majority of AXE communication has dramatised the AXE Effect. Over time, many executions have worked to establish this brand idea.

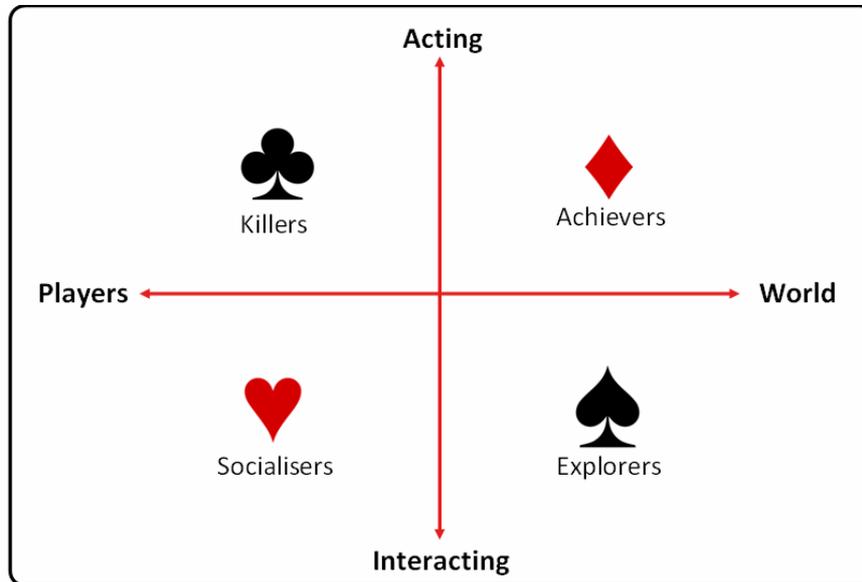
Taking a step back from communications, we can begin to assess the behaviour we want our consumers to 'game'. For a brand to be credible in this space, the brand benefits must have an active role in gaming the behaviour. In this case, the behaviour we are looking at is 'pulling', i.e. getting the girl. Some evidence that the chosen behaviour is already 'gamed' to a certain extent is also helpful, but not essential. Its easy to see how guys already 'play' at pulling, whether it's counting notches on the bedpost, or playing 'pull a pig',<sup>28</sup> guys are already playing informal games around pulling girls. Pulling is the behaviour we will be asking guys to game.

### Step 2: Understand Consumers as Gamers

Developing a brand that helps consumers game a behaviour requires a different approach to consumer understanding. Traditional consumer understanding is still important, but we need to understand them as gamers to build a brand suited to them.

Computer game designers have naturally already considered what gamers want from games. Game designer and theorist, Richard Bartle, has established four subgroups of gamers that are described by their gaming motivation.<sup>29</sup>

Figure 6: Gamer Typologies



**Killers** are interested in doing things to people, ie. in *acting* on other *players*. Killers get their kicks from imposing themselves on others, they especially like to win at the expense of other players.

**Achievers** are interested in doing things to the game, ie. in *acting* on the *world*. They regard points gathering and rising in levels as their main goal, all other activity is in the pursuit of this aim.

**Socialisers** are interested in *interacting* with other *players*. Socialisers are interested in people, and what they have to say. The game is merely a backdrop, a common ground where things happen to players.

**Explorers** are interested in having the game surprise them, ie. *interacting* with the *world*. They delight in having the game's internal mechanisms exposed to them, their fun comes from discovering new parts of the game, especially if they are the first to do so.

Source: Bartle (1996)

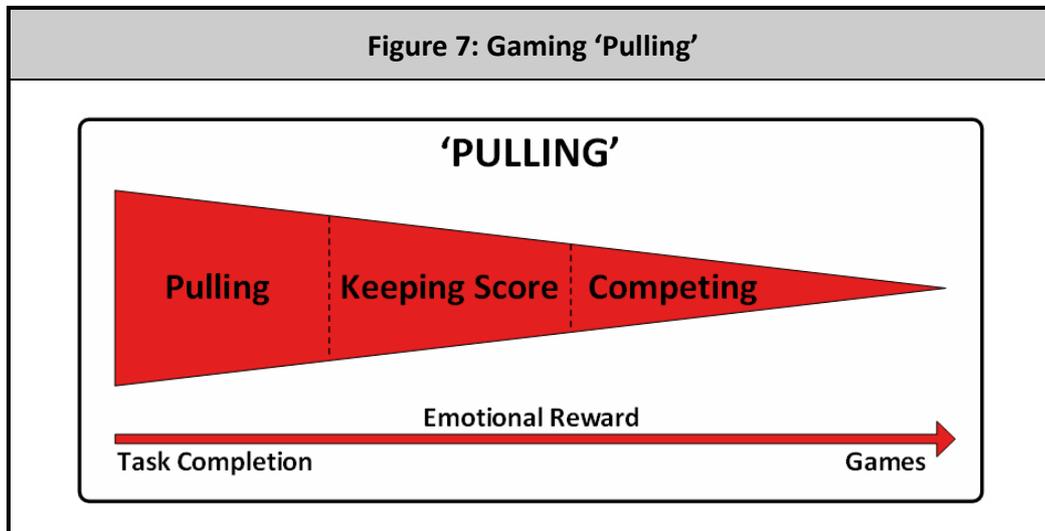
Most gamers are actually a mixture of these typologies, and most games are designed to appeal to all typologies to a certain extent. Understanding the balance of gamer motivation is key to understanding how consumers might game a chosen behaviour.

#### Axe Guys Are Achievers And Killers

As an experiment to help illustrate this paper, a brief online survey based on Bartle's work was developed to understand AXE consumers as gamers. Client confidentiality prohibits sharing raw data, but it can be reported that AXE guys scored most highly against the 'Achiever' and 'Killer' segments. The survey can be trialed here <sup>30</sup>, full details are in the appendix.

### Step 3: Gaming A Behaviour

Understanding that AXE guys are a mix between the 'achiever' typology and the 'killer' typology helps us define how pulling behaviour should be gamed. In this case, pulling is gamed through competition, guys like to keep score (Achievers) and ultimately compete against their mates (Killers).



*Source: Author*

### Step 4: Setting A Win Condition

To construct the AXE brand as a game, we will define the brand idea as a 'win condition', i.e. what consumers as players need to do to successfully game 'pulling'. Given we know that guys keep score, and are competitive amongst their friends, setting the win condition 'pulling more girls than your mates' is appropriate.

As with brand ideas, brand win conditions should not be changed frequently. It is important that a brand game should be open ended with longevity built in. In this case, 'pulling more girls than your mates' is an ongoing challenge.

### Step 5: Building The Brand

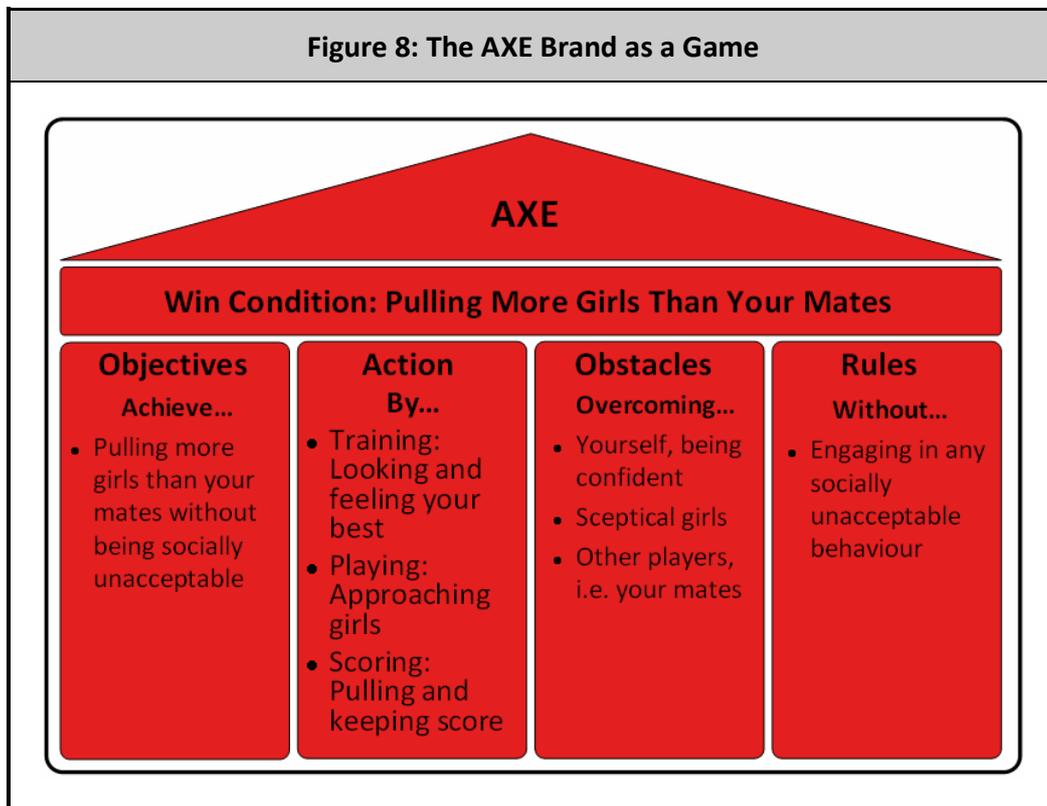
Once a behaviour to be gamed has been chosen, and win condition set, the rest of the brand can be built. Understanding the context that your brand operates in informs the structure of this game.

'Pulling' can be broken down into three broad areas that guys must be proficient in. These stages are used to form the actions that the player must exhibit successfully to meet the brand's win condition:

- **Training** is getting ready to play, both physically and mentally. For guys this means everything from grooming, to making sure they have the best chat up lines up their sleeve.
- **Playing** this is where the action happens, this is where guys are actively trying to get the girl, this is the chatting, the flirting etc.
- **Scoring** this is the actual scoring bit, the success, the pull, or more if they get really lucky.

The barriers guys feel limit their success with girls can be described as obstacles to the win condition.

Finally, the rules of the mating game tend to differ from culture to culture and from guy to guy. It is enough at this stage to define the rules as not engaging in any socially unacceptable behaviour.



*Source: Author*

### **A Gamed Brand**

The AXE brand has now been successfully gamed. The brand is no longer a message transmission device, but a game style behaviour change system. The purpose of the brand is now to provide products, services and content that help guys pull more girls than their mates.

## **GAMING A FAMILIAR BRAND: IMPLICATIONS FOR EXECUTION**

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### **Campaigns As Challenges**

Defining the AXE brand as a game has important implications for execution. As a series of campaigns traditionally build over time to bring consumers closer to the brand idea, campaign challenges build over time to bring gamers closer to winning the brand game. Brand activity cannot be thought of in terms of message, but in terms of challenges that build towards the brand's win condition.

Challenges should focus around specific behaviours that the player must exhibit in order to 'win'. The examples given in the AXE brand model were 'training', 'playing' and 'scoring'. Addressing these behaviours could cover the whole gamete of the marketing mix.

### **Training Challenge: Look Your Best**

A range of product innovations would be a natural place for AXE to address a guy's preparation needs. This approach would see each AXE variant given a specific role in the preparation ritual. The resulting campaign brief would then revolve around establishing the challenge in the minds of the player, and the role of the product in answering that challenge.

### **Playing Challenge: Get In There**

Content in itself can be a tool to aid guys in the 'playing' stage. The AXE brand could provide content that helps guys gain popularity amongst girls. This might take the form of humorous viral content, or even 'how to' style content that gives guys girl advice.

### **Scoring Challenge: Take Her Out**

Promotional mechanics can also now be informed by the brand game and used to address the 'scoring stage'. Competition prizes could be items that further guys' chances of success, i.e. gig tickets for two.

The examples given above are for illustration purposes. The important point here is that a range of channels and executions could be used to set challenges that help the player move towards the brand's win condition.

## DO CONSUMERS WANT TO BE GAMERS?

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### An Experiment

Gaming brands sounds great in theory, but do consumers really want to be gamers? To investigate this question, an experiment was devised in order understand whether brands could be structured this way in reality.

### Building The Game

The experiment took the form of 'AXE Game Tuner', a Twitter based game that awarded guys points for a range of behaviours that got them closer to 'pulling'. Every time guys exhibited a certain behaviour, they were asked to Tweet about it using a specific reference word (#tag) that allowed Game Tuner to record the data and visualise their 'game' on a dashboard. Guys could analyze their game over time, and also compare their game to other guys. 'Game Tuner' measured the following behaviours and associated actions:

- **Girl Action:** clicked / flirted / snogged / scored / dated
- **Grooming:** showered / sprayed / styled / changed
- **Timeout:** read / watched / listened / played
- **Material game:** want / bought / earning
- **Fitness:** ran / lifted / sport / weight / fit
- **Good Times:** out / home

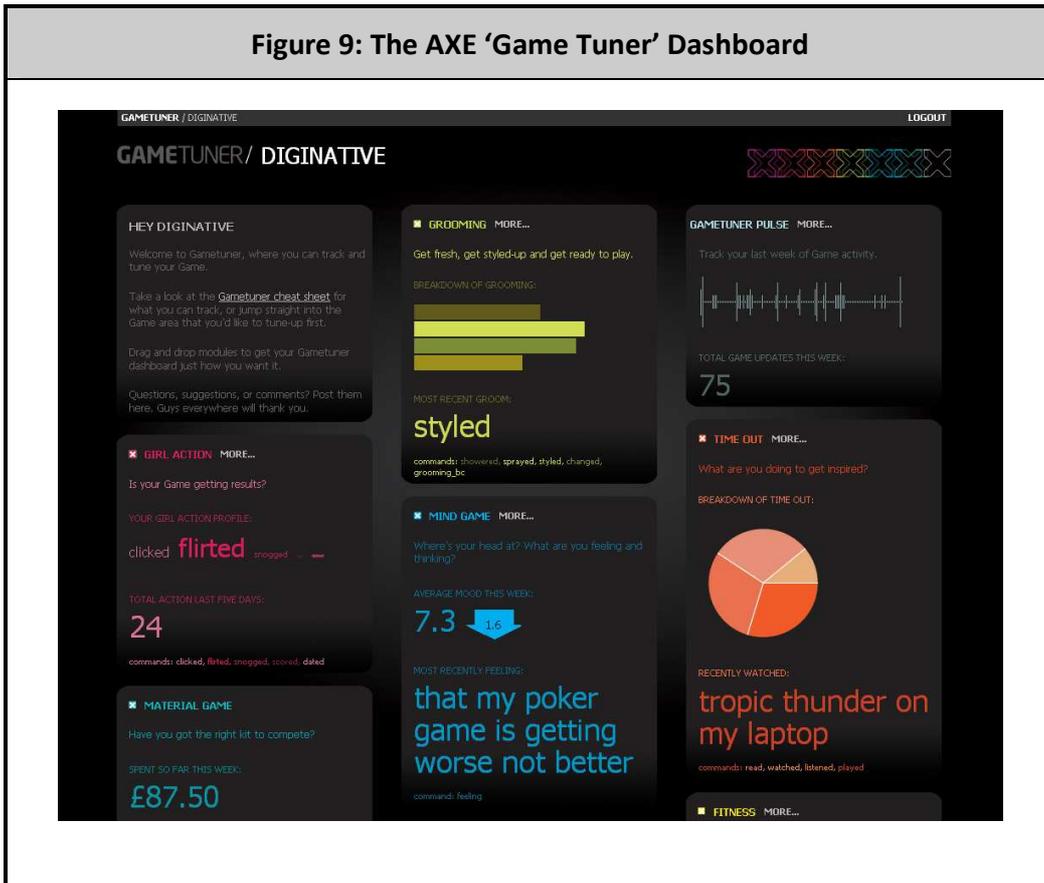
### Proof Of Concept

The experiment was piloted with 30 young guys from London, New York and Singapore and tracked their game for seven days. In total, over 2000 actions and feelings were sent to Game Tuner, just over 9 actions per guy per day. Asking guys for their feedback revealed more encouraging results, they requested more functionality:

- Even more game data options
- More community / sharing features
- A scheme that rewards frequency of use

The usage statistics prove that Game Tuner works in principle, and serves as 'proof of concept' for gaming brands.

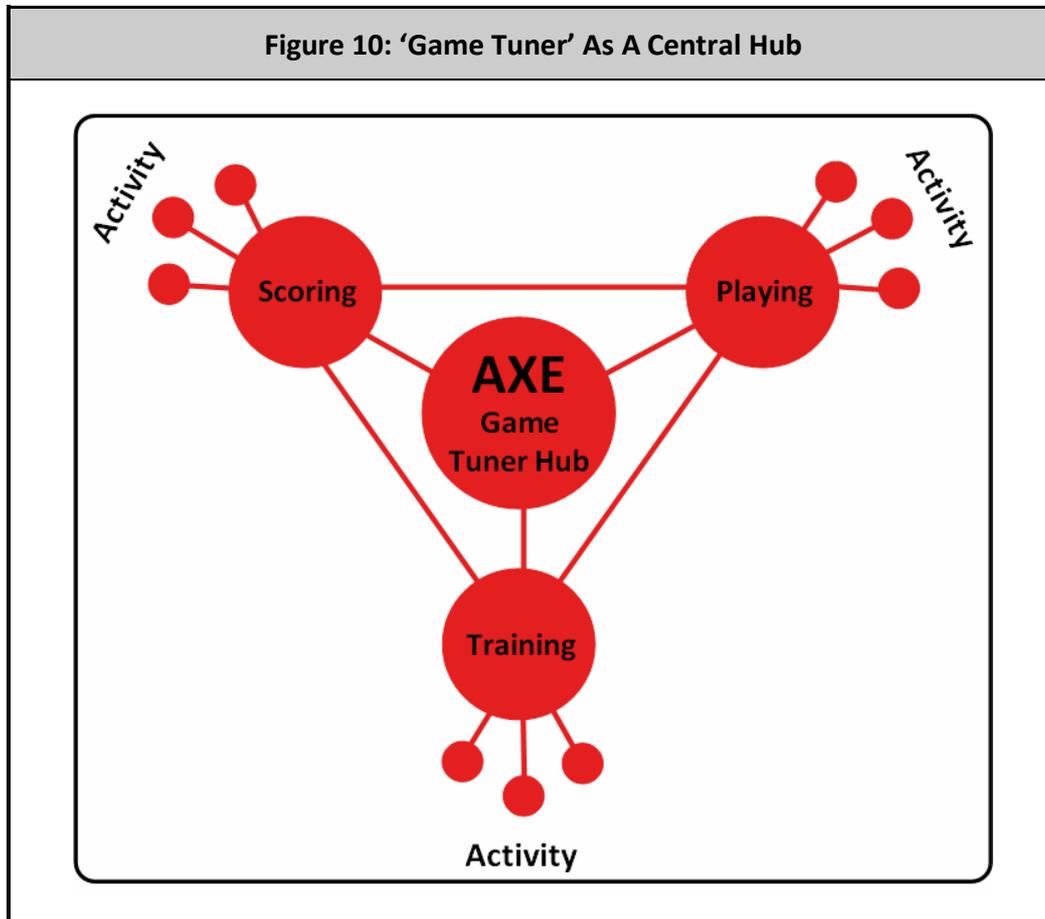
Figure 9: The AXE 'Game Tuner' Dashboard



Source: Author

### A Central Hub

The Game Tuner platform allows guys to evaluate their success with girls, it gives them the tools they need to actively game pulling. Game Tuner could evolve further into a central hub that guys could use to judge the contribution of brand activity to pulling success across the board.



*Source: Author*

This platform could develop to gather multiple inputs that measure a range of pulling factors, e.g. the number of AXE products purchased, and signs of success, e.g. the number of female friends the guy has on Facebook.

### Further Brand Activity

Whilst each individual piece of brand activity should work alone to help guys pull more girls than their mates, the experience of the AXE brand game is improved via the central hub. It is this central hub that allows guys to gain an overall view of their status in the game, and the contribution AXE has made to it.

## GAMING OTHER BRANDS

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### All Brands Can Be Gamed

I believe that gaming can be applied to all brands and causes associated with our industry. In this section we will explore how this approach can be applied to four unlikely candidates:

- Social Causes
- Financial Service Brands
- FMCG Brands

### Gaming Social Causes

As not all brands are as playful as AXE, one might question the applicability of gaming principles for more serious brands. However, our predisposition to game life is not limited to lighthearted activities. The term 'serious game' was first coined in 1970 by Clark Abt,<sup>31</sup> who defined them as games that have real life consequences.<sup>32</sup> Some organisations promoting serious game already exist,<sup>33 34</sup> examples of their work include:

- 'Against All Odds', a UNCHR game that puts the player in the shoes of a refugee.<sup>35</sup>
- 'Windfall', a strategy game about building wind farms to create clean energy profitably.<sup>36</sup>
- 'Akrasia', a US Department of Health game that allows the player to explore the issues surrounding substance addiction.<sup>37</sup>

Serious games are not just the preserve of education, in her TED speech, Jane MacGonigal explores how gaming can be used to solve real world problems with mass multiplayer games like 'Superstruct'.<sup>38</sup>

The Superstruct game had a serious aim, the win condition was saving the human race. It was essentially a huge brainstorming tool that allows thousands of players to suggest initiatives that could solve real world problems.<sup>39</sup> The game yielded many new suggestions for how these problems might be tackled:<sup>40</sup>

Social causes are perhaps easier to game than brands as they have very obvious and pre-defined challenges at their heart. 'Preventing childhood obesity' or 'eliminating poverty' are both win conditions rather than messages. The challenge is to express brands in a similar way.

### Gaming Financial Service Brands

Expressing a financial service brand as a game is easier than one might imagine, they are already set up with a lot of mechanics that lend themselves to gaming. Win conditions would depend on the specific Client's business model, but could include:

- Becoming debt free
- Being able to retire at 55
- Double your investment returns

As with the AXE example, specific campaign challenges should help the player achieve this win condition, examples could include:

- Finish the month on a zero credit card balance
- Save 10% of your earnings
- Identify one new investment opportunity each month

As with the AXE brand example, the purpose of a gamed financial brand would be to develop a range of activities that help players meet these challenges.

### **Gaming A Typical FMCG Brand**

Laundry brands are the archetypal FMCG brands, traditional brand planning has a lot of its roots in this category. We will next explore how even brands in the most established categories can be gamed, using Persil as an example. Persil have done a great job at defining a brand benefit in a compelling way, Persil cleans so well, mums don't have to worry about their kid's clothes getting dirty. This benefit has been wrapped up in the creative idea 'Dirt Is Good', which champions children getting messy as a natural part of learning, playing and generally enjoying life.<sup>41</sup> 'Messy play' is a great behaviour to game, the Persil win condition could be expressed as:

- Kids take part in more messy play than clean play
- Kids play outdoors more than they play indoors
- Kids are never clean for more than 24 hrs

It is easy to see how the Persil product works as an enabler for these win conditions, it removes one of the barriers to messy play – the resultant dirty clothes. Defining Persil as game requires every piece of brand activity to build towards the win condition. Campaign challenges like 'play in the park once a week' could lead to interesting ideas, from entertainment properties to utilities.

## **LEVEL III COMPLETE!**

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### **Achievements:**

- How to game a brand step by step
- Consumers engage with Gamed Brands
- All brands can be gamed

**Next challenge: Boss Level – Gaming Brand Value**

## **BOSS LEVEL: GAMING BRAND VALUE**

## GAMING BRAND VALUE

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### Gamed Brands As Ecosystems

As a Gamed Brand develops, it uses multiple challenges to address specific behaviours that bring the player towards the win condition. This win condition forms the hub of the brand, e.g. AXE. A Gamed Brand presents an ecosystem, or network, that breaks down the brand win condition into easily tackled behaviours, each of which is in turn is addressed by individual pieces of brand activity. The structures and properties of ecosystems, and the value they bring to business has been explored extensively by Marco Iansiti of Harvard Business School:

*“There is a growing awareness that by structuring problems so that they can be viewed as networks of smaller problems, difficult tasks can be completed more efficiently. This is inspiration for a wide variety of applications.”<sup>42</sup>*

The properties of a Gamed Brand structured in this way have direct implications for building brand value in both an equity and commercial sense. Specifically, Gamed Brands lend themselves to three key commercial pillars:

- Customer Acquisition
- Weight of Purchase
- Loyalty

### Gamed Brands Drive Customer Acquisition

Level I established our natural predisposition to game every day life, leveraging this instinct is at the heart of gaming brands. Brands that are gamed effectively use our innate reward mechanisms to incentivise behaviour. The emotional highs that gamed behaviour triggers can enhance positive experiences like ‘pulling’ e.g. AXE, or even provide an emotional dimension to life’s least fun tasks, e.g. financial service brands. It is the enhancement of consumer experience that drives customer acquisition, and ultimately commercial value.

### Gamed Brands Drive Weight of Purchase

Gamed Brands are structured to reward involvement. The player’s feeling of progression and achievement increases as they approach the brand win condition. A correctly Gamed Brand uses each piece of brand activity, including products, to bring the player closer to this win condition. Positioning brand activity in this way makes each piece inherently attractive to the player, brand activity becomes a stepping stone that takes the player closer to ‘winning’. This structure naturally lends itself to cross selling and up selling, which drive weight of brand purchase.

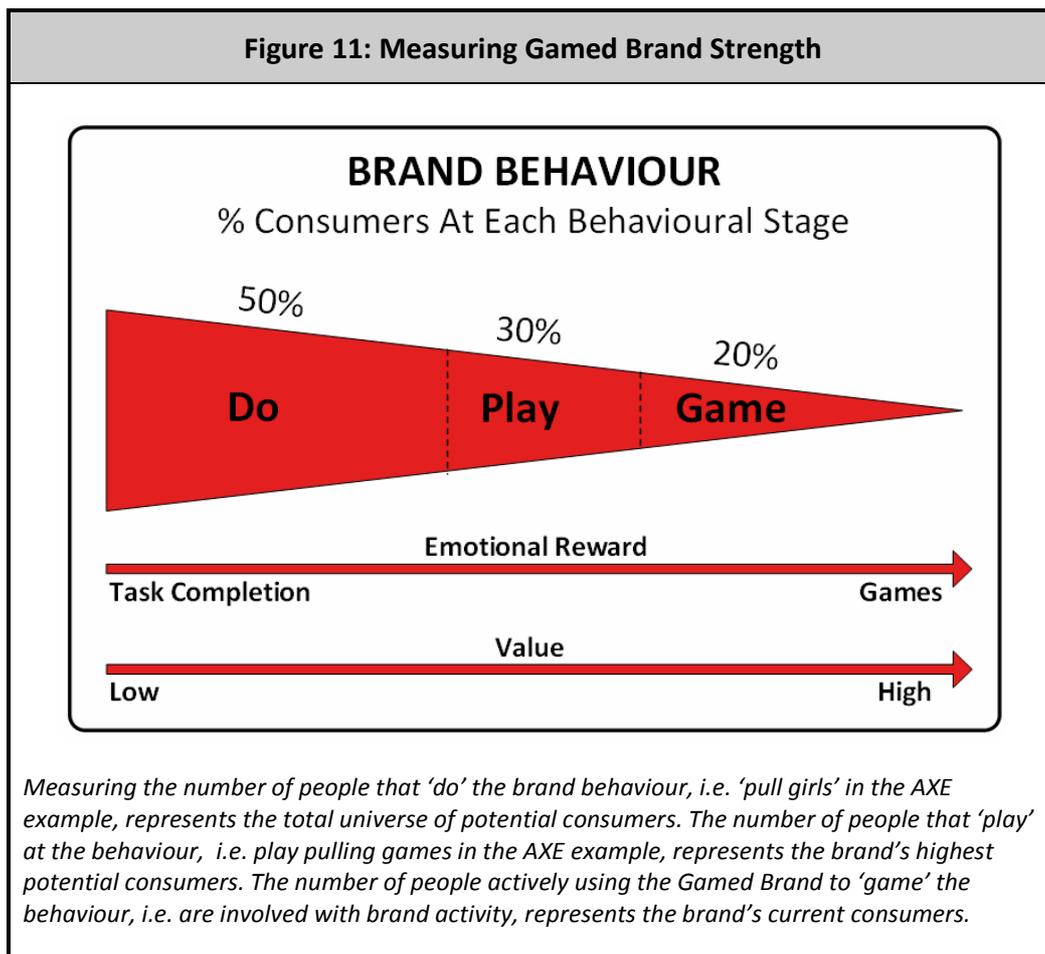
### Gamed Brands Drive Loyalty

Gamed Brands incentivise involvement, but they also punish disengagement. As a player progresses through the Gamed Brand towards the win condition, effort is expended and emotional value accumulated. Dropping out of the brand game becomes harder the longer it is played, this is driven by the cognitive bias of loss aversion.<sup>43</sup> This instinct is so powerful, immersive video games like ‘World of Warcraft’ have become clinically addictive, a modern phenomenon which is treated in a similar manner to substance addiction.<sup>44</sup> Gamed Brands ‘lock’ players in and drive loyalty as a result.

## MEASURING A GAMED BRAND

### Behaviour, Not Attitude

Measuring brand strength, and identifying bottle necks preventing further growth remains a priority for Gamed Brand marketers. As previously cited, consumer funnels have been designed with attitude change at their heart, making them less relevant to Gamed Brands. A model based on behaviour, that reported on consumers as they progress through a brand game would be more appropriate.



Source: Author

## **BOSS LEVEL COMPLETE**

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### **Achievements:**

- Gamed Brands drive new customer acquisition
- Gamed Brands drive weight of purchase
- Gamed Brands drive loyalty
- How to measure Gamed Brand strength

**Next: Bonus Level – Conclusions**

## **BONUS LEVEL**

## CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

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### Conclusions

Gamed Brands are fundamentally more suited to the needs of brand building than traditional approaches. The Gaming Brand's approach is rooted in human instinct, from the moment we are born we are driven to understand the world through play, and strive to manipulate it through gaming. Gaming provides a powerful model that helps us understand how we interact with the world, but also provides a practical template for building brands. By structuring brands in a way that leverages our gaming instinct we can transform them from message transmission devices, to behaviour change systems that ultimately drive brand value. In summary, I believe that:

- ***Games provide a practical template for developing truly interactive brands.***
- ***Games provide a practical template for building rich and experiential brands.***
- ***Games provide a practical template for brands that actively change behaviour.***

### Implications

Gaming Brands represents a fundamental shift in brand planning, providing brands with interaction at their core. The brand 'win condition' is at the heart of this approach. Defining brands in this way focuses the marketing mix around developing brand activities that help consumers 'win' at a behaviour they either have to, or want to, do. This ultimately positions the brand and its products as a tool that helps consumers to 'win at life', making the brand both attractive, and indispensable. The key question for marketers shifts from 'how will my brand activity communicate my message?' to 'how will brand activity help my consumers win?'

Gaming brands also has interesting implications for consumer understanding. Developing research methodologies based on the likes of Bartle's gamer segmentation help us understand our consumers as active participants, rather than as passive respondents, and build brands accordingly. The key question for marketers shifts from 'what do my consumers think of my brand?' to 'how do my consumers interact with my brand?'

Finally, gaming brands also has implications for brand measurement. Consumer funnels have been designed assuming a passive consumer, whose attitudes are at the mercy of the advertiser. A model based on behaviour, that reported on consumers as they progress through a brand game would be more appropriate. The key question for marketers shifts from 'what is my brand's share of mind' to 'what is my brand's share of behaviour?'

*A fuller version of this paper can be found, and discussed at [www.GameMyBrand.com](http://www.GameMyBrand.com)*

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