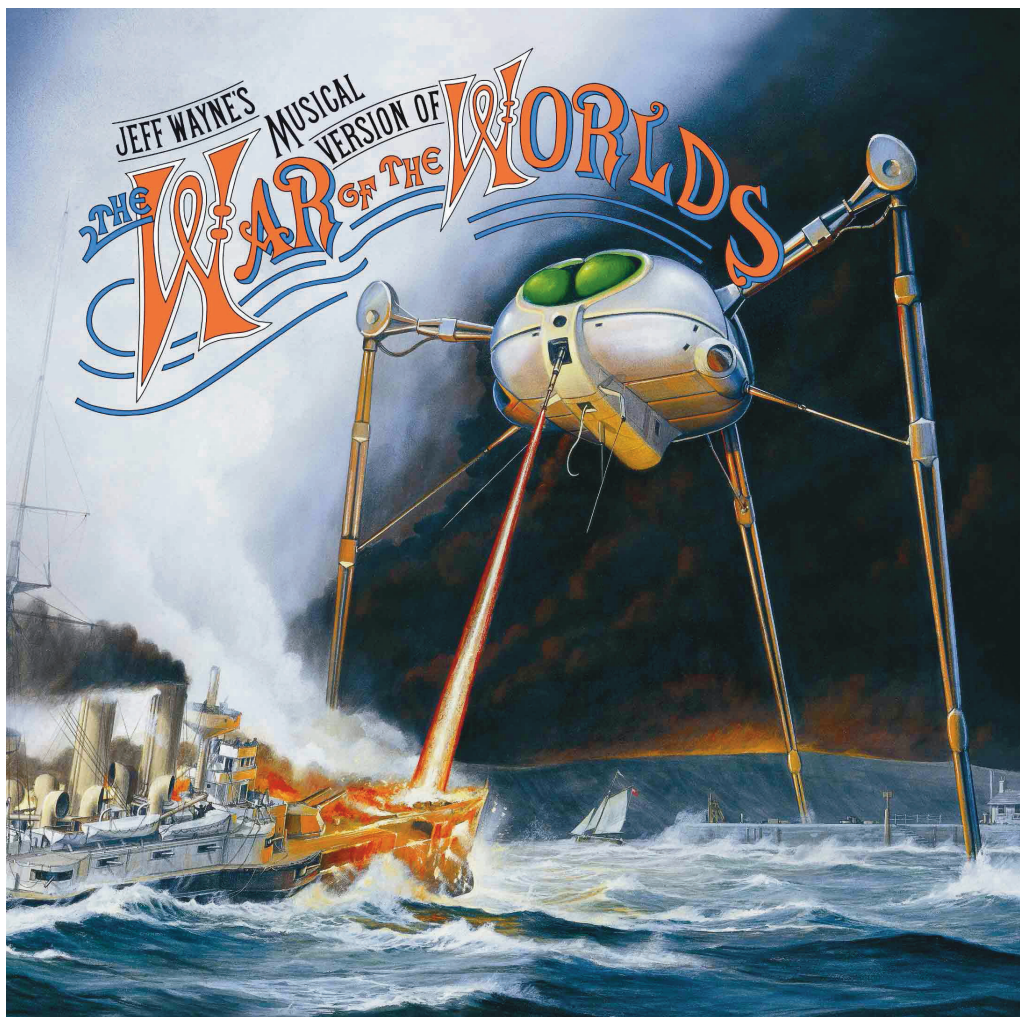


Game on to keep consumers engaged



Gamification is helping research professionals to gain valuable consumer insight using engaging games

Lucy Fisher reports

Sony used a quiz format to find out more about War of the Worlds fans

Marketers at Sony Music need to understand the connections fans have with their artists. So, in advance of the release of a new edition of Jeff Wayne's Musical Version of The War of the Worlds album later this month, a quiz was dropped into the official forum, which was in fact a loosely-disguised market research exercise.

The gaming approach to research seems to have paid off: there were almost 2,000 completed quizzes in less than 24 hours.

The game was designed to tap into the competitive, even 'obsessive', nature of the album's fan base by testing individual knowledge of the product. At the end of each round there was scope for more traditional market research questions. Sony Music UK & International insight director Daniel Hall says that he was surprised by the speed and scale of response.

"We're fortunate in terms of being able to use gamification effectively because music is a high interest, high involvement category," he says. Fans were asked to upload photos and describe what the album represented to them. Open-ended questions explored themes and an online leader board was used in order to tap into the competitive spirit of the 'super fan base'.

"It was designed to help us know who to target, how to position the product and highlight any watch-outs or themes or elements that we might want to either keep in the shadows or bring to the fore. Crucially, it was a stimulus for more creative marketing ideas," he explains.

Creative surveys

Hall believes that the term 'gamification', which has become something of a buzzword in market research circles, is often a proxy for more creative, and therefore more engaging, surveys. He has been working with agency GMI over the past four years to make the research process as enjoyable as possible for respondents.

"We are fortunate as we are able to leverage the natural enthusiasm our fans have to push the boundaries more. For us, gamification is an approach that has evolved over time," he says.

Of all the emerging market research methodologies, gamification methods are attracting the greatest 'web buzz' after online communities and social media analytics, according to this spring's GreenBook Research Industry Trends Report. However, this report also indicates that the number of clients and agencies using gamification techniques are still small: it suggests that only 3 per cent of ►



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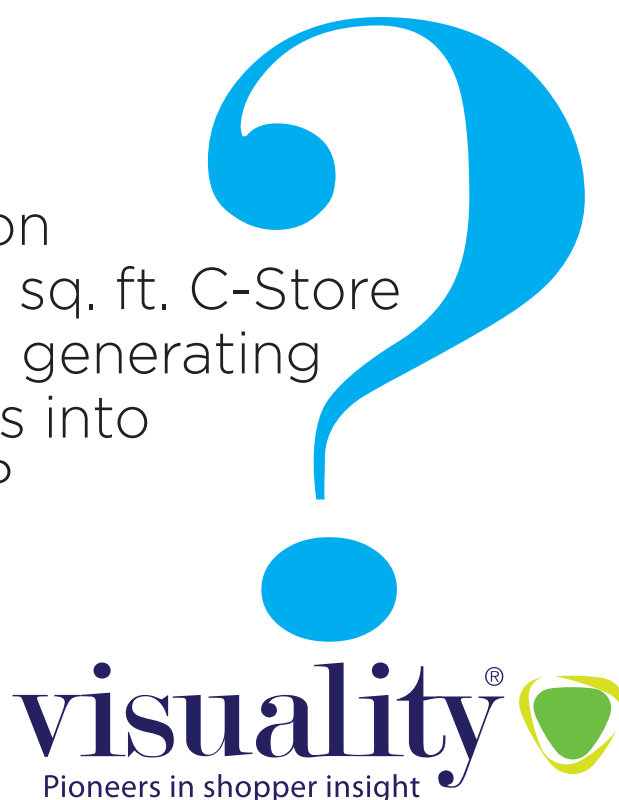
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“Gamification is a useful tool. In the next stages it will involve mixing qual, quant and data capture via mobiles and tablets”

Betty Adamou, RTG



Heineken says successful projects are the ones that give consumers new ways of participating

► research buyers and 6 per cent of suppliers are using gamification methods.

At its core, however, the notion of making elements of the research process more game-like for respondents is a simple one. Gamification of a survey, for instance, can be as simple as re-wording some of the questions. “Describe yourself in exactly seven words” is a challenge. Compare the more stark and arguably less inspiring request: “Describe yourself.”

So gamification need not be an expensive exercise. There are various studies and conference papers extolling its virtues as a technique, such as ‘The Game Experiments’ by GMT’s Jon Puleston and Engage Research’s Deborah Sleep, which provide evidence of the effectiveness of this type of approach and the resulting data quality.

Moreover, in today’s world of media fragmentation, attracting the attention and concentration of consumers often necessitates

casestudy Bounty

Parenting club Bounty used a technique called ‘DesignGame’ in a focus group that was set up to understand the relationships mothers have with the brand and the concept of advocacy within parenting circles. Participants were divided into two groups of three and the two teams were given tasks as they made their way towards the finish line on a simple Snakes & Ladders-style board game, devised by Blauw Research.

Bounty head of insight Vicki Kateley says that in her 12 years’ experience, she had never seen a focus group designed in this way. “It was fresh, engaging and genuinely good fun,” she says. “It was also incredibly productive. There was no element of fatigue.”

The element of competition adds a new dimension and helps to keep respondents engaged and focused on the task. “Bounty members – pregnant women and those with babies of up to two years – have a natural tendency to talk about their pregnancies, their babies and children. In a focus group situation this can be really distracting,” says Kateley. “But the games pit you against the clock.”

The project was no more costly than a more standard focus group, but it was important that recruitment was “spot on” given that the game is most effective when played by two teams of three. Kateley suspects that it might

innovative and creative approaches. “The most successful projects are the ones in which consumers are confronted with new ways of participating,” says Henk Eising, international consumer insights manager at Heineken International, who is working with InSites Consulting to make the research process as appealing as possible to respondents, via online research communities that leverage game-style techniques. “We need new and more creative ways to stay connected to our consumers. It should be fun to participate in market research.”

Be cautious

Those who have tried gamification techniques in an offline, qualitative setting urge some caution. KP Snacks research & insights controller Lisa Hunt says she explored the relevance of gamification in a qualitative setting with Engage Research while working at Heinz. She says it was a useful exercise and she would use gamification techniques again, but adds they are of less relevance in an offline setting than in online quantitative work.

“I think what gamification helps you do in a quantitative setting, in terms of keeping respondents engaged, is less relevant in a qualitative setting. You need to use it quite carefully or the energy levels can be off-putting.



Bounty’s focus group divided people into teams to play a Snakes & Ladders-style board game

not work so well if the purpose of a research group was to delve deeply into the reasonings behind certain behaviours, or the ‘whys’.

“This piece of research has made me realise that qualitatively there’s not been enough innovation,” she adds. “It’s similar to the way in which children learn through play but don’t realise they’re learning.

“The word ‘gamification’ risks sounding like it’s not that credible, that it might be about trying to reinvigorate for the sake of it. But there’s real merit in this approach. The outputs are really very, very rich. It’s about providing real insight without even realising you’re doing it.”

You could end up with too much stimulus in a focus group,” she argues.

It is also important that these techniques are not used as a replacement for qualitative probing and interpretation or in such abundance that results are skewed or respondents are left with no time to reflect or think about the issues. “It’s more relevant in quant where there is the difficulty in keeping consumers engaged in an online survey without them getting bored very quickly,” says Hunt. “Gamification techniques can help to break the monotony here.”

Some suggest that a new breed of research design agencies are likely to emerge in order to counter the difficulties clients face when online data gathering for quantitative research purposes. Research Through Gaming chief executive and founder Betty Adamou set up her company 18 months ago and creates systems for running online games for research purposes.

“The word gamification is seen as very faddish by many,” she says, “but it’s a useful tool. In terms of the next stages it will probably involve mixing qual, quant and in-the-moment data capture via mobiles and tablets.”

Indeed, Sony Music’s Hall describes the research done in advance of the re-release of the Jeff Wayne album as ‘qually-quant’. “It’s the best of both worlds,” he says.

Many are in agreement about the

“The effects of gamification can be hard to measure but I’m open to these ideas as long as it’s not a game for a game’s sake”

Alex Hardy, Unilever UK & Ireland



Smartphone technology has aided EE's research initiatives

► importance of mobile in next-generation market research. “The industry finally seems to be getting to grips with the power of mobile-based research and what a great asset the smartphone is in the research process,” says Nick Bonney, market and customer insight director at Everything Everywhere, which is working with mobile-specialist research company Crowdfab. “It’s a great way to combat falling response rates, particularly among less engaged audiences or those with short attention spans.”

Asim Burney, co-founder and managing director of research firm B&G-IMR, who works with Adamou, believes that gamification can be effective in research projects across all industry verticals. But he believes that the market research community needs to be more open to it. “The industry is very conservative,” he says. “But games are played by everybody – take card games, for instance – and they really do deliver high quality data.”

Reaching out

Many suggest that gamification is more attractive as an approach if the objective is to reach young or hard-to-reach audiences. Market Research Society chief executive Jane Frost agrees, but she stresses the importance of maintaining rigorous standards while embracing

viewpoint



Alex Hardy

Consumer market insight (CMI)
director, Unilever UK & Ireland

People’s lives have changed enormously. The media they are using have changed. You need to ensure you are speaking to consumers in the right way about the right thing. Innovation is important to reach them.

Gamification is about building engagement with respondents. You could argue that it’s been done for years with the use of projective techniques. But I think we’re seeing more of it, especially in the online arena.

Our target market for the Lynx brand, for instance, is teenage males. They are not watching TV every evening – they are out and about. Gamification may have more relevance to groups like these, who are harder to pin down. But, if it is about engagement, I think gamification is relevant to all groups.

New techniques in research take a while to get to a point where they are cost-effective. But with gamification I don’t see that cost implications are a barrier to its use.

I can think of an instance when an agency came in with a concept of using a hypothetical pot of money and asking respondents what they would invest in, for a group around new product ideas. There was also one where we were looking at concepts

and pack designs and we used virtual post-its; green if you liked a concept and red if you didn’t. This was visually attractive and helped with engagement levels.

The danger with gamification is when it becomes more about entertainment than research. And when you introduce new ways of doing things you need to have some comparability. It’s not the same thing asking respondents whether they ‘strongly like’ something or whether they’d invest in it. The effects of gamification can be hard to measure. But I’m very open to these ideas, as long as it’s not a game for a game’s sake. You just need to be sure about the objective.

Gamification appeals to Lynx’s target market and has no major cost implications



and stimulating innovation.

“Many new routes to data are emerging,” she says. “We’ve always had audiences that are difficult to reach and now we have new technologies we can use which are good for reaching them. But standards and ethics are important otherwise you run the risk of creating ephemera.”

Frost says that training in gamification is one of the Market Research Society’s growth products and that there is so much innovation going on in the industry that it can be a struggle to keep up with the pace of developments. “Gamification is becoming more mainstream,” she says. “But we’re a long way from maturity in a lot of these areas. We’re still grappling with social data. There are so many new opportunities and challenges, we’ll be busy for a while.”

Using gaming in research is just one method to gain insight and what is important, adds Frost, is to focus on the outcome and then pick the methodology to match that, rather than the other way round. “It’s a bit like being a doctor and using a new technique. The principles of anatomy remain the same,” she says.

KP’s Hunt also suggests that if she were to consider an agency that specialised in gamification, she would want to know that it could deliver the whole research ‘story’: “There is no point in being a great technician if you

can’t tell the

story. And it’s not just about reporting. It’s about qualitative interpretation, understanding body language, what respondents mean and not just what they say.

“You need the understanding. You can’t just include gamification techniques without understanding the ‘whys’ and you can’t substitute gamification for really good probing, for following the conversation and the analytical piece, in terms of how it’s all interpreted.”

In fact, any business, if its marketers are willing and able to think laterally, will have ways that it can use its products and services to make the research process more of an experience or event for respondents in this new world of pull-versus-push marketing.

CNBC EMEA research director Mike Jeanes describes a focus group that took place in the company’s studio, at which respondents were invited to breakfast, made up and interviewed on camera before being given a DVD to take home.

“We had to create something to attract our viewers, who are affluent and upscale,” he says. “We were surprised to see how much they interacted. They were exchanging business cards and it became a networking event.”

It is clear that games can help but research is not synonymous with entertainment. ●