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Fun, Fun, Fun

How 'gaming' will form a layer on top of the world

If Facebook created the social layer across the internet as we know it, the gaming layer is still under construction. Yes, we perform a lot of connected activities through Amazon, Spotify, eBay and other successful ventures, as we've already discussed in the previous three trends. But nothing brings all of our news, commerce and connectivity together like Facebook. Mark Zuckerberg's empire may not always be first with new functionality or ideas, but they're quick to incorporate any and every interest their users want to share or participate in. Since half a billion of us are on Facebook, it's a logical place for us to integrate our activity in exchange for fast gains in our highly valued social currency.



Next to come is the gaming layer. 2011 is likely to see 3 million people playing a single online game concurrently, topping 2010's record of 2.2 million concurrent players. Whether it's Rovio's Angry Birds app or Zynga's social game phenomenon Farmville (which now has more players than Twitter has participants), the games that have impacted most on popular culture have not as yet been fully monetised. Pay to play has fuelled micro-payments from users in millions of transactions, adding up to hundreds of millions in hard cash. Yet this is but a scratch on the surface of the commercial potential for gaming. The game creators are yet to integrate product placements, or to maximise affiliate revenue potential. We're betting the farm this will emerge in 2011, as API's become increasingly versatile and a wider band of developers find ways to integrate commerce into fun.

This is a trend with two discrete, but related sides. By 'the flip-side' we mean that game-inspired dynamics can and will become integrated into commercial marketing and even transactions. A few years ago the social economics of Nudge theory was the subject of multiple blogs, publications and marketing industry forums. Yet it's only in 2011 that we'll be practising Nudge theory in its fullest form. There's a good reason for that. We needed a fully fledged, multi-functional social layer to facilitate marketing as a game, or marketing with game-like characteristics. Now with a robust social context, let the fun begin. Early plays in the right direction include ideas like Jimmy Choo's trainer hunt, inspired to market the brand's first range of trainers last year. Using check-ins, the user stood a chance to win a pair of the high-priced trainers by following a treasure hunt app.

See Saw, Hulu, YouTube and Google are all playing – or thinking about it – in the broadcast space. Today's internet users expect entertainment as a part of the perceived social contract they have with brands. Early players in web-based programming, such as Katalyst Productions in the US, have sold proprietary web programming to broadcasters already in 2010. Expect more seamless production values between web-based entertainment and broadcast equivalents. Think MPU meets game show. In the 80s and 90s we saw first a divergence of telecommunications tools, followed by subsequent convergence as single platforms served multiple purposes. (Remember fax machines? The PABX?) Now as web-based platforms and hardware converge and the cloud becomes our filing cabinet, individuals will not only expect to be entertained, they'll be determining their own channel content. With a multiplicity of access routes, a huge bank of content from all genres and personal determination of what constitutes leisure time, Sky Channel will become My Channel.