



Ten Game Design Lessons from Games-as-Service

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“It's a SERVICE. Not a game. It's a WORLD. Not a game. It's a COMMUNITY. Not a game. Anyone who says *it's just a game* is missing the point.”

The Laws of Online World Design, c. 1997

<http://www.raphkoster.com/gaming/laws.shtml>

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Why does one
create a
service?

Most reasons are from subscription businesses:

- Lock in customers because of loss aversion
"I'm used to having this, and if I stop paying, I'll lose it."
- Recurring revenue
*Users frequently fail to take the initiative on cancelling
Razor and blades model, or content access model*
- A way to prevent theft/piracy
A network "dongle"
- Tiered pricing models via service plans

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Freemium
undercuts the
notion of
services

Loss aversion is greatly minimized

- Nothing is lost if you are absent

No recurring revenue model

- Microtransactions are king
- No concrete action required to exit service

Tiered pricing models are replaced with microtransactions

- No service plans; instead we have “whales”

But! A service provides re-engagement tools

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Going back to
the dictionary
definition of
“service”

1. an act of helpful activity; help; aid: to do someone a service.
2. the supplying or supplier of utilities or commodities, as water, electricity, or gas, required or demanded by the public.
3. the providing or a provider of accommodation and activities required by the public, as maintenance, repair, etc.: The manufacturer guarantees service and parts.

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The stuff we
sell

Utilities

- Access being the most fundamental

But keep in mind games are truly luxury goods

Commodities

- Virtual items

Also, pure luxury goods

Maintenance

- Manifests in games primarily as data persistence

Repair

- An expectation of customer support

Helpful activity

- Our customers are connected to each other too

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The free sample model

- Give them a taste, they pay to get more because they like it.

Free ice cream samples; free month of premium cable

The blocking model

- Allow advancement towards a goal, but make completion impossible/implausible without payment

Collectible card games; too many auto mechanics ☹️

The cheating model

- Let them purchase the equivalent of time or skill

Buy a bigger gun; buy a FastPass to the head of the line

Upsells are always about customer needs.

What this
means

Fundamentally, your customer has an *emotional* relationship with your product

- You're not offering something they *need*
Therefore no external factors will drive them to engage or re-engage
- They don't even have to walk away; exiting the service is passive
They just "don't show up"

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You are in an emotional relationship with your customer

- They must come back because they want to

A single player game is like a one-night stand

A service game is like a marriage

In the long run, engagement drives revenue

Lesson #1: The name of the game

Key emotional drivers:

- Guilt

Failure to harvest crops in time

Feeling like they abandoned their pets

- Love

Truly enjoying the community they created

The game becomes a hobby

- Obligation

A feeling that they must support their friends

Commitment fallacy: they signed up for it

- Pride and anger

Defending or regaining standing

- Security

Game as private refuge from real life

- Curiosity

What happens next?

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Take cues from serial storytelling

- Cliffhangers

Our equivalent is delayed gratification, as in crop maturation

- “Event” viewing

Themed releases of new content with “must-see” appeal; holidays, charity drives, and other such “specials.”

- Crossovers

The cross-promo bar is functionally equivalent, but consider the depth to which television does crossovers!

- Arcs

Underutilized today, but early glimpses appearing

Lesson #3: Playstyles as service driver



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Lesson #4:
Lifetime is not
the same as
content

In packaged games, we thought of player lifetime as being equal to the length of the game.

- The industry gradually realized it was overbuilding the games!

In virtual worlds, we spoke of the “elder game”

- The alternate play style players pursued when the content ran out

In service games, huge benefit arises from algorithmic or systemic games rather than content

- Users consume content faster than any team can create it

But content is great to sell. So, strike a balance there.

Lesson #5: Glory and Shame

Jonathan Baron divides multiplayer games in two:



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games drive them

Historically, player vs player competition games have higher churn

- Surprisingly, people dislike playing games just to lose repeatedly to people much better than them

“Humiliation Online” is a pretty lousy game concept

Social games tend to be cumulative character

- But it’s not unusual to see the competitive characteristic present to drive revenue
- Often via non-zero-sum mechanics, so losers don’t feel abused

Lesson #7: Expressivity, signaling, and self-discovery

The classic elder game is player expressivity

- No accident that iso decorators are such a major part of the social gaming arena



- Mostly seen in virtual world spaces

*Play different character types, roleplay and experiment with identity,
engage in politics, act out*

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Over time, your playerbase will come to be the group of people who most enjoy the style of play that your world offers.

- The others will eventually move to another game.

It is very hard to attract players of different gaming styles after the playerbase has been established.

- Any changes to promote different styles of play almost always conflict with the established desires of the current playerbase.

-- Jason Wilson, aka "Hanarra"

also from The Laws of Online World Design

Lesson #9: Game design is a contact sport

Game services are online

- The service itself is a medium of communication

Sub-Forums		Last Post	
	News and Announcements Get the latest updates on Gardens of Time here!	Threads: 11 Posts: 11	 Chapter 11-Cowboys and India 3 by StinkyTofu 06-20-2011, 12:36 PM
	General Discussion Discuss general topics about the game and get to know your fellow Time travelers!	Threads: 309 Posts: 4,668	 Items By Location / Theme 3 by sedge Today, 10:41 AM
	Tutorials and Guides Place any tutorials you've written or guides in this forum!! ***SPOILER ALERT*** This forum may contain spoilers on upcoming scenes or content. Read at your own discretion	Threads: 6 Posts: 109	 Wonders and Side Quest... 3 by billejosunrise 05-16-2011, 04:53 PM
	Bugs & Technical Issues Helpful tips for troubleshooting known issues. For official help, please visit http://playdom.custhelp.com/	Threads: 45 Posts: 573	 stars resetting 3 by Sherry.berry69 Today, 10:04 AM
	Sugestions and Feedback Got an idea for how to make the game better? Have some feedback? Let us know!	Threads: 195 Posts: 1,988	 What Do You Like About The... 3 by W.A. Today, 09:11 AM
	Find Neighbors A place to meet new friends and fellow time travelers! Please keep all "add me" requests to this forum.	Threads: 5 Posts: 527	 ***Official "add me"*** 3 by MaraschinoC Today, 10:16 AM
	Off Topic Take a break from time traveling and building your garden!	Threads: 24 Posts: 1,077	 3 word story :D 3 by SassyLady Today, 09:35 AM
	Gardens of Time (Deutsch) Für unser deutsches Publikum	Threads: 7 Posts: 7	 Nachbar 3 by fraupfel Yesterday, 01:27 PM
	Gardens of Time (Español) Para nuestros jugadores de habla Hispana	Threads: 4 Posts: 5	 Meas traducciones 3 by XxGIRaX Yesterday, 02:02 PM
	Gardens of Time (Français) Pour nos utilisateurs Français	Threads: 2 Posts: 2	 Besoin d'aide en français... 3 by cloudoune 06-17-2011, 10:43 AM

Also increases re-engagement

- Prompt responses to inquiries
- Firm hand on troublemakers

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Lesson #10: Measuring differently

Retail measures an instant: the sale

Most service industries measure longitudinally

- Every customer is known

Often with extensive CRM

- Lifetime & churn

Kind of hard to do this when users can vanish

- Customer segments

Social currently measures in time-slices

- Daily activity, revenue per day
- Lifetime is *computed* rather than a core metric

Little sense of the arc of a typical user

Leads to lots of re-acquisition

Your cheat
sheet
(use for your SO
too)

*You're designing to up-sell luxury goods
That means you're selling emotion
And you are marrying the customer*

- Learn to read their emotional desires
- Tell them a story, and don't forget date nights
- Keep the relationship fresh and varied
- You can't keep it going forever just on gifts of chocolates
- Give them moments of glory
- Protect them from humiliation
- Help them learn about themselves and be creative
- Hands off anyone else!
- Talk regularly and honestly
- Live in the now, but remember you're in this for the long haul

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Resources

- The Laws of Online World Design
<http://www.raphkoster.com/gaming/laws.shtml>
- Dr. Richard Bartle's Player Types
<http://www.mud.co.uk/richard/hcds.htm>
- Nick Yee's research
<http://www.nickyee.com/>
- Nicole Lazzaro's research
<http://www.slideshare.net/NicoleLazzaro>
- Jonathan Baron's *Glory and Shame*
http://www.gamasutra.com/view/feature/3395/glory_and_shame_powerful_.php
- Slides will be on my website: <http://www.raphkoster.com>

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