

Videogames in Training: The Potential for Generation-Game Employees - By Gerard LaFond, Partner,  
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Think videogames are just for fun? Think again. Using video games for training is serious business - and the concept is rapidly gaining acceptance.

Why? Videogames communicate differently than other media: Not only do they deliver messages, but they also offer stimulating experiences and 'real time' practice through game play. As a result, these games have the unique ability to both engage learners AND influence player behavior in the real world, as well.

In spite of their growing popularity, videogames still lack some of the stature of 'legitimate' learning programs. But research indicates that, as an educational medium, videogames are superior in teaching complex topics and helping learners to master process-oriented tasks. Specifically, videogames are effective at:

1. **Showing inter-relationships in a system.** A hotel front desk trainee can see how his or her actions impact housekeeping, facilities and even the hotel restaurant.
2. **Using time-compression to demonstrate the long-term impact of a decision.** In one short game session, a restaurant manager can see how a decision he makes in the morning will affect his or her ability to run the dinner shift.
3. **Conveying economies of scale.** A kitchen manager can see the cumulative cost of failing to manage portions and/or waste over a long period.

But video games are just for young people, right? They can't possibly be useful for trainees of all ages. No so: Today's average 'gamer' is actually 33 years old-and the biggest player group on AOL Games is comprised of 40-year-old mothers. You've probably seen the latest commercials and heard the hype for the recently released Halo 3. Its predecessor, Halo 2, was one of the most popular games of all time and had more than 500 million players worldwide.

The gaming industry is now larger than the movie industry. And it's not just about blowing up bad guys or beating a computerized Tiger Woods at golf. One of today's most popular 'casual' games gets right to the heart of the restaurant industry. It's an Internet juggernaut called, 'Diner Dash(TM),' in which the player acts as 'Flo' and tries to keep up with her tables in a busy restaurant. The incredible popularity of Diner Dash has already spawned offspring, including 'Diner Dash 2(TM): Restaurant Rescue' and 'Diner Dash 3(TM): Flo on the Go.'

Another argument for videogames in training is that the demographics of gamers match those of entry-level and front line hospitality workers. Labeled 'Generation G,' gamers are competitive, ambitious risk-takers who grew up with videogames. Does this sound like any of the employees you train?

Videogame training has already taken hold in the technology industry, where game-based training like Cisco Systems' Binary Math teaching tool is in wide use. But low-tech companies like Dominos Pizza have delved into the realm as well-and Cold Stone Creamery has even developed a proprietary game, 'Stone City,' to help new employees learn about products, portion sizes and customer service.

Before you launch your own videogame training program, however, there are several points to consider. First and foremost, it is NOT a standalone solution. Plopping someone down in front of a game will not guarantee learning success, you have to reinforce the messages in the learner's real-world working environment. Also, while games may be played alone, game-based learning still requires facilitation by a qualified trainer. And marketing to employees is critical, communicate clearly about the game's purpose, include incentives for participation and provide plenty of support and feedback.

If you're getting serious about developing a game-based learning solution you may also consider the following questions:

When do you expect participants to play?

Will playing be required?

Will I.T. support and involvement be available?

Do you have a LMS (learning management system) in place?

How will you conduct assessments or progress and results?

How much can you afford to spend on development?

Where will people play (corporate Intranet, CD at the location, computer terminal in the store, at orientation, etc)?

Do you have at least six weeks for development and production?

For more information about the evolution of videogames, pick up a copy of the new book by Ian Bogost, [Persuasive Games: The Expressive Power of Videogames](#). The author examines the way videogames mount arguments and influence players, and he demonstrates how videogames have a unique persuasive power that can be used effectively for politics, advertising and education. Websites you can visit to learn more include: [www.persuasivegames.com](http://www.persuasivegames.com) and [www.watercoolergames.com](http://www.watercoolergames.com).

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