



Beyond Game Design: Nine Steps Towards Creating Better Videogames

Chris Bateman

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As a game designer, you are always looking for new ways to make a game unique and interesting. *Beyond Game Design: Nine Steps Toward Creating Better Videogames* shows you how to make better video games by challenging you to think outside of conventional game design wisdom. Written as a series of essays by industry experts on different components of game theory and design, the book tackles the full spectrum of issues related to how and why players enjoy certain games. You'll explore player emotions, patterns of play, gender and cultural diversity, accessibility issues, and various types of player skills. Providing practical, hands-on design tips and advice, as well as the theory and psychology behind how and why people play games, *Beyond Game Design* will help you tap into new player types and new ways to engage players as you discover how to make better, more successful videogames.

Editor Introduction

More Than Design

Beyond Game Design began with my dream of creating a book that would offer more than the nuts and bolts of game design. I wanted to offer something that would look *deeper*--into the psychology of play--and also look *further* into the issues relating to making games in our modern diverse cultures.

It was a great privilege to work with the authors of the chapters in this book--Richard Bartle, Noah Falstein, Katherine Isbister and Nicole Lazzaro are some of the biggest names in game design and the psychology of play, and Michelle Hinn, Joe Sauter and Sheri Graner Ray are unparalleled in their work in game diversity.

The book offers "Nine Steps" toward creating better videogames, but this nine-step program actually has two distinct aspects: *understanding* what games do and *including* a larger audience for games. Both steps are about making videogames for the new marketplace, one that is very different from the market for games just five years ago. It's a survival guide for companies who make games in an increasingly competitive marketplace.

Here's a potted version of the nine step program that explains what it's all about:

1. Understand Emotions:

Nicole Lazzaro is the leading researcher into game emotions, and explains why any game must be accessible and fun, and why "fun" means different things to different people. We don't all enjoy the same emotions of play; some players *love* failing a tough challenge and repeating it over and over again until they eventually win sweet victory, but for other players that's their idea of hell. Developers who understand the emotions of play are ready to compete in the new market for digital games; those who don't are living on borrowed time.

2. **Understand Social Play:**

The explosion of Facebook and casual games has happened on the back of a newly recognised *social* aspect to play. Even traditional game forms, like First Person Shooters, are now dependent on social design for their success, as *Modern Warfare* amply demonstrates. Katherine Isbister describes the different social mechanisms available for game design, and why success in the wider market for games now requires designing for more than just a single player--even for single player games!

3. **Understand Patterns of Play:**

I've been writing about Roger Caillois' patterns of play for many years, but with *Beyond Game Design* I took his work to a new level by tying each pattern to a specific neurobiological mechanism. The patterns of play are specific neurochemical responses that govern how and why games are fun--and understanding these is vital to commercially successful game design. This is your brain on games!

4. **Understand the Limits of Theory:**

Richard Bartle's infamous "suits" model of Massively Multiplayer gamers was a seminal event in player studies, and remains widely read and used today. But a model can only take you so far. Bartle explains why *every theory has limits* and also why--despite those limits--it's still vital that commercial game design deploys theories.

5. **Include Both Genders:**

Sheri Graner Ray has written extensively on gender distinctions in play, and makes a compelling argument that modern digital games that do not take into account issues of gender are leaving a lot of money on the table. Designing to include both genders means expanding the players who might enjoy your game--and that can make all the difference in commercial success.

6. **Include Cultural Diversity:**

Joe Sauter is a jazz man turned game developer, and has a stark warning for players making games for a white male audience: that isn't the consumer base for digital entertainment anymore. If you're making games for just one ethnic group, you're already falling behind your competitors in the new marketplace for games.

7. **Include Players with Accessibility Issues:**

When it comes to accessibility, it starts to look like diminishing returns... Is it really worth designing elements of games for players with specific disabilities? Michelle Hinn argues that many of the changes required to reach gamers with disabilities are trivial to implement, and that the number of affected players can be far larger than most developers and publishers usually think--especially when designing for a mass market audience of the kind Nintendo's Wii and DS target.

8. **Include Players with Different Skills:**

My studies of the audience for games have thrown up a lot of interesting discoveries, but my most basic result still has the most to say to commercial game development: different players have different capabilities, and enjoy different things. If you are spending a lot of money developing a videogame you can't afford to be designing the game for a very small subset of the audience for games. The games that succeed support different ways of playing for different players.

9. **Include Structures That Adapt to Player Needs:**

Finally, Noah Falstein brings it all together by exploring how games can be *responsive* to player needs. It's a cutting edge issue, and one that Noah has considerable experience with. By building games that work for many different players, you target a wider audience--and commercial success in the new market for digital games depends upon precisely that.

That's *Beyond Game Design* in a nutshell, but of course, the chapters of the book go into far more depth than I've described here. This book is an essential guide to creating commercial digital entertainment for the new audiences, the new marketplace and the new conditions in the videogames industry. Ignore it at your peril!

Chris Bateman

Editor, *Beyond Game Design*

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