Interview

with **Isobel Wallace**,
General Manager,
Thinking Cap

Gamification and Unlocking Badges

About Thinking Cap

Thinking Cap was founded in May 2001 to provide innovative XML-driven applications and custom software development. The company released the first version of Thinking Cap® Studio and LMS in January 2003 and re-released version 3 of the Thinking Cap suite of products in January 2009. Version 4 Studio and LMS are mature enterprise-grade solutions. Thinking Cap is our logo and our ethos — there is science, magic and just a bit of whimsy in our Thinking Cap, in us and our clients.

Recognition

Thinking Cap is a Brandon Hall Group Bronze Preferred Provider.

The Brandon Hall Group Preferred Provider Program is specifically designed as a single source of truth that can validate your technology selection decisions.

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About Isobel Wallace

Isobel Wallace has been with Thinking Cap since its inception in 2001 as General Manager. Specializing in process and user experience, Isobel works with customers to onboard their training programs into the LMS. Her valuable insights help deliver unique and engaging training programs for associations such as NCPA, corporations such as Amazon and nonprofit organizations like the British Council.

About Rachel Cooke

Rachel Cooke is Brandon Hall Group's Chief Operating Officer and Principal HCM Analyst. She is responsible for business operations, including client and member advisory services, marketing design, annual awards programs, conferences and the company's project management functions. She also leads Advancing Women in the Workplace and Diversity, Equity and Inclusion initiatives, research and events. Rachel worked in the HCM research industry for 20+ years and held several key management and executive positions within the Talent and Learning Research, and Performance Improvement industries.

RACHEL

Q What are some of the benefits of gamification in today's environment?

ISOBEL

A We are working with organizations that are trying to achieve 100 percent completion in a compliance program, for example, in a course on preventing workplace harassment. It's usually not a fun subject, but it's a necessary subject. How do we make that interesting and get people to come back in and take the other necessary courses? There are specific objectives organizations are trying to achieve and they're using gamification as a way to augment their solutions to make it more possible. We've done a number of projects with clients where we try to encourage higher completion rates along with interest in the content and retention. There's generally a way with gamification to make that a little easier.

Clients that do really well are the ones who take whatever the theme of their program is and expand that beyond just the courses they are looking at. For example, your audience is customer service operators and you're trying to get them to learn as much as possible about the services they're supporting. You want them to take as many courses as possible but also want them to retain the knowledge. Most of it is trying to get them to want to come in and learn more because

they'll get more information that way. With a lot of those programs, they'll take the subject matter and make that the theme throughout everything, including the name of the source of points they might reward people with or some fun badges that incorporate different aspects of that topic they were just learning about.

Whatever the subject is, just expanding it outside of that area really helps with building that retention but it also encourages some curiosity. Seeing that badge in someone else's profile might encourage them to learn about how they got that badge and ask what they learned from it. They might take that course and then build their retention that way. But it's also building on that once the activity has been completed. Whatever tidbit of information they need to learn, the ideal situation is to build that into a little fun activity they can do anytime with the LMS.

I love programs that focus more on microlearning because it's one piece of knowledge that they can apply as fast as possible. There are a lot of opportunities in gamification to allow you to apply that quite quickly and reinforce that knowledge or behavior.

RACHEL

Q What are some of the things Learning professionals need to think about when implementing gamification?

A ISOBEL

Start with, what's the learning objective? It shouldn't be "I don't really care if they learn this, but I need to get 100 percent completion." You want them to learn what is in that course as well. Objectives could be: "I need them to get as much knowledge as possible?" or "I need them to self-identify areas of improvement and build from that." It could also be to build and encourage an audience that helps each other. There are a lot of team-building options around gamification. Instead of saying, "badges sound great," it's about looking at the real objective and piecing the program together around that. You need to look at the different tools within gamification that will support that objective.

Q RACHEL

Are some types of games or approaches better?

A ISOBEL

It really depends on the audience and what your objectives are. I see a lot of people taking advantage of competitive audiences, but I don't know if that's necessarily more successful or if it's low-hanging fruit. We see a lot of

people implementing learning points systems. However, you're only going to capture the ones who come in and take the course because they are competing with someone else who has more points. You need to reach the people who aren't engaging as much but could see massive benefits if they were approached appropriately.

Q RACHEL

Could compliance training be converted into gamification?

A ISOBEL

Anything can be gamified, even if it's the saddest subject in the world. There's still an opportunity because it's how you approach that subject. Compliance can be a definite area for gamification. It is a great way to maintain the 100-percent compliance that you need in a lot of these programs.

Q RACHEL

Are there things you advise against when designing these programs?

A ISOBEL

Games for games' sake aren't always a good spend. It may not be worth the money if you're just trying to make your course more fun and throw in something that seems like a game theme. It's better to focus on having good content, but it's worth it if you can analyze it and figure out the best way to make it an actual game to boost retention. Some people just try to theme their courses and think that makes it gamification. That's not a good area to spend money on.

Q RACHEL

How can you get more companies on board with gamification?

A ISOBEL

I pitch gamification for just about every onboarding project now, not just because it makes the project a bit more fun, but because I know they have an objective and I'm trying to make sure that what they set up in the LMS will meet that objective. A lot of LMS administrators are trying to set up or maintain programs and they don't have time to do more than just the bare basics of "let's get this course in, set it up and get it out to whoever needs it." Most of them don't take a step back, analyze and change the architecture of the program.

Gamification is not being implemented as much because they're not aware of their options or they don't have time to investigate those options. It could be simple as what you add to your certificate at the end of completion. There are so many low-budget things that can be done and supported within an LMS. We've had some clients who had learners messaging them, saying "we need more courses to take." You don't hear that very often.

Q RACHEL

Are there any considerations that companies should know in terms of LMS technology?

A ISOBEL

I would look at an LMS that has supportive badges using the open-batch standard. You want to make sure the badges follow the standard and can be shared, if possible, outside of the LMS. I would also make sure that they have a good points system that allows you to break up your points wherever possible. I don't think one point is necessarily the same as another point. You can make a set of leadership points that award different skills based on the activities they've done. That's extremely helpful. Most of the other things I recommend center around making sure they have good certificate options.

(continued)

Ideally, an LMS should let you customize the learner experience as much as possible. The more customized you can make that experience to what you're teaching, and following that theme, the better it will be.

Q RACHEL

Is there anything else you'd like to share?

A ISOBEL

I would just continue the theme that's within your subject matter. Make sure it expands across everything because it helps keep everything within the learner's memory. Even little visual tips and tricks throughout your interface can make a difference. For example, if you're teaching someone to be a wizard, I would make the entire interface look like a Harry Potter experience. Just take everything about your subject — whether it's the design of your progress bars and your doughnut charts, or how you unlock courses when you meet the prerequisites — and try to incorporate fun things in a themed way that matches your subject matter. It's a minor thing but it does help open doors to more things you can do to incorporate gamification.

Here are some ways to listen to the interview on Brandon Hall Group's Excellence at Work Podcast:

iTunes   Spotify   YouTube

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EXCELLENCE AT WORK

About Brandon Hall Group

With more than 10,000 clients globally and 30 years of delivering world-class research and advisory services, Brandon Hall Group is focused on developing research that drives performance in emerging and large organizations, and provides strategic insights for executives and practitioners responsible for growth and business results.

SOME WAYS WE CAN HELP

Professional Certifications
Self-paced certification programs. Virtual group sessions for companies. In-person conferences and summits.

Membership
Individual and Enterprise Membership Options: Includes research assets, advisory support, a client success plan and more.

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