An Interactive Digital Game of International Business:
Design and Development

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Anyone who has ever been enveloped by the addictive power of playing a game can appreciate the desire to duplicate that level of engagement in the realm of teaching and learning. What are the properties of games which encourage us to memorize intricate rules and procedures? We are not required to play recreational games; but not only are we uniquely inspired to understand and master the gameplay—we consider doing so to be fun. Could we be similarly motivated to unravel the relationships between complex facts and figures when it’s a requirement for a class—if that content was embedded in a game?

An interactive, instructional digital game was designed and developed for a hybrid International Business course. The idea for the game was derived from a demonstration which was originally presented by the instructor in the classroom. By elaborating upon and enhancing the classroom example, an engaging online game-based learning activity for a hybrid version of the course was conceived, designed, developed, and implemented.

As the game begins, the learner creates a character through which they will experience the impact of currency exchange rates in the international market. The character selects a product to buy internationally and sell domestically with the goal of earning the largest possible profit. Currency exchange rates impact cost and profit in randomly presented story-based scenarios. As the game progresses, students make decisions which impact their bottom line in simulated business transactions.

By playing the online game outside of their classroom, students increase their understanding of the impact of fluctuations in currency exchange rates, consumer demand, and tariff rates. Students return to their face-to-face class meeting—after having engaged in simulated business transactions—ready to engage in deeper discussion around these topics.

The game was conceived, designed and developed in just over two years. During the analysis phase of the instructional design process, the learning objectives were identified. As the storyboard took shape in the design phase, two levels of game play emerged. The first level of the game focuses on lower level thinking skills and the second level prompts deeper levels of analysis. As the game was developed, web accessibility considerations were incorporated into the Flash-based game.

The first level of the game was previewed by students during spring 2011 and preliminary qualitative feedback was collected. With the second level now complete, the game is deployed as a self-directed learning activity; however, the game can also be used as a teaching tool during face-to-face class meetings to illustrate the impact of international currency exchange rates. Students continue to provide qualitative feedback, which may inform future enhancements.

This presentation will explore the facets of games which were leveraged in the design of this project; the lessons learned from the transformation of a classroom demonstration to a digital game-based learning activity; the challenges related to web accessibility of a Flash-based game; and feedback gathered from students.