

The Marketing Gamification Guide for Travel & hospitality

playable



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Introduction

Gamification offers the travel and hospitality industry a golden opportunity to create stronger, more personalized connections with consumers by redefining the entire guest journey. Whether your audience are travellers, guests or visitors to hotels, airlines, restaurants, or entertainment destinations, every interaction matters.

Although [RSM reported](#) that across all demographics, fewer people are planning vacations, this only highlights the importance of creating incredible experiences for travelers - something gamification can help with.

There are signs that the industry is recovering from a period of low growth, but consumers remain cost-conscious. This, plus the high competition in the space and relatively tight profit margins means that you may need to refine your marketing strategy to encourage sales and bookings. Key to that is building awareness, trust, and value for customers.

But to deliver these important messages to customers, you need to understand them. Learning more about their buying behavior will help you build more targeted and cost-effective marketing campaigns that will boost sales and bookings. This all starts with collecting customer data, but in today's data-savvy world we need to offer an incentive to get customers to part with their data.

Our research revealed that [41% of consumers are willing to share data](#) in exchange for an incentive such as discounts, prize draw entries, and personalized experiences. How can you deliver those incentives? The answer is marketing gamification. A well-designed gamified campaign can help you capture key information about your target audience while also driving awareness and building customer loyalty in the process.

This guide will reveal how the power of gamification can help you achieve your marketing goals, how to get started with your own campaign, and some examples from brands in the travel and hospitality space using gamification successfully.

The psychology of how marketing gamification works

The science behind the power of play

The act of playing a game causes our bodies to release feel-good hormones that make it a positive and memorable experience. Associating your brand with these feelings is exactly what you want customers to experience when engaging with you.

Let's look at each of the DOSE hormones in more detail:

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Serotonin

The ultimate mood booster, serotonin is associated with fun and positivity.



Endorphins

Endorphins help us persevere to win, giving us a boost of focus, attention and energy.



Dopamine

Dopamine controls focus, attention, learning, and memory – enhancing our sense of achievement.



Oxytocin

Linked to a feeling of togetherness and bonding, oxytocin is released during shared play experiences and encourages empathy and collaboration.

How does this all relate to your marketing strategy?

By triggering these feel-good hormones, you can prompt consumers to take desired actions such as further engagement or a purchase – while also enhancing awareness, trust, recognition, and memorability.

Play boosts focus and attention

When playing a game, we become more alert, present and immersed thanks to some of those feel-good hormones. It captures ‘first screen attention’ that other forms of content like sponsored or TV ads struggle to do because of their more passive nature. This means that you’re more likely to encourage active decision-making with content that implements play elements.

As a marketer trying to gain attention in a competitive industry like travel and hospitality, this is a game-changer in capturing consumer attention and keeping it.

Play helps us remember

Capturing attention is important but you also want people to remember your brand the next time they need to make a relevant purchase. In a crowded market like travel and hospitality, brand memorability can make all the difference to your sales. Your marketing, whether in email inboxes, social media feeds or on the high street should stand out – and gamification can help you do that.

Just think back to the last time you were immersed in a game. What do you remember? The challenge, reward, the feeling of accomplishment and enjoyment all make it a memorable experience, so imagine if you used that principle in your marketing! That’s why gamification is so powerful for fostering customer loyalty, retaining attention and influencing purchasing behavior.

Play taps into our desire to win

Play is one of the most universal and natural human instincts. It’s why games and sports are popular worldwide, even with those who wouldn’t call themselves traditional fans. We all enjoy the feeling of being rewarded and accomplishing something, whether that’s learning new information, winning a tangible reward or reaching the top of a game leaderboard.

How does gamification work in travel and hospitality marketing?

By using the psychology of play and our natural desires to compete, win and learn, you can make your marketing more effective and engaging. Gamified campaigns naturally stand out compared to more static or passive ads and are also more effective at persuading consumers to share zero-party data.

Let's look closer at the top game mechanics you can tap into with marketing gamification:



1 Use rewards as an incentive

Engaging with consumers and building authentic brand loyalty starts with a value exchange. Building a genuine, two-way relationship is about offering benefits that really matter, rather than just driving consumer action.

Rewards can be tangible, such as discounts, free add-on perks such as travel or accommodation upgrades, or even exclusive offers from partner brands. Loyalty points are also a great tangible reward for fostering long-term customer loyalty and repeat purchases.



Did you know?

A YouGov report found that [more than half \(51%\) of respondents](#) preferred winning a voucher over being given one.

But not all rewards need to be tangible. Your incentive could be to help in the often stressful process of planning travel arrangements. Using a survey about customer preferences lets you send personalized email offers based on the data you collect. A survey from Deloitte found that [44% of loyalty program members](#) said that they like to receive personalized rewards based on previous purchases.



Did you know?

A report by YouGov found that [41% of consumers](#) are happy to share zero-party data in return for a better, more personalized brand experience.

2 Challenge participants

With the stress of booking tickets, flights or hotels, you may think the last thing customers want is to be challenged. But that's not true. A challenge in the form of a gamified experience helps to keep it engaging and immersive. No one wants to play a game that's too easy because you just lose interest. If it's too hard, you get the same results.

The right balance of challenging and enjoyable makes a gamified experience more effective in prompting further action and engagement from a customer. It gives them a greater sense of accomplishment when winning and makes them more likely to continue engaging with your brand or even become a paying customer.



3 Encourage mirroring

People have a natural tendency to compare themselves with others. We call this mirroring and it taps into our sense of belonging to a community and a need for social connection.

One of the best things about playing games is often playing with others, working together, comparing scores and learning more about others. A score on a game doesn't mean much in itself unless it's compared with other scores, either your own previous ones or those from other players.

When comparing scores and results, people want to know how they fit in and how they're different. It's not just about winning and competing. One way to use this effectively in a gamification campaign is with personality tests or polls that show how others answer and how participants compare.

4 Provide a fun experience

Competition in travel and hospitality is fierce, but it's important to lean into fun and inspiring content to reflect the excitement that consumers have when booking vacations and other related purchases.

Gamification can help you stand out with campaigns that are eye-catching, interactive and fun, that trigger those feel-good hormones and leave consumers with a positive experience of your brand.

Our research found that 56% of consumers are more likely to click a gamified ad over a normal static one and 36% said that fun and seamless branded games positively influence how they feel about a brand.

5 Give participants a chance to compete

People have a competitive streak that has survived long since our hunter-gatherer ancestors. While we might not have to compete to survive, many of us indulge in sports or games and enjoy the thrill of the competition.

You can't beat the feeling of winning something, which is what makes gamification a stand-out marketing strategy. Add in a dose of competition to your campaign and you can effectively draw people in and encourage action.

Through our own research, we've found that gamification campaigns that use a leaderboard can have a significant positive effect on engagement.

We found that games with leaderboards and scoring elements:

Increased the number of times participants played a game by **184%**

Increased the length of time spent engaging with the campaign by **120%**

Using these game elements in your campaigns can make them much more effective at driving the results you want from your marketing.

They enhance the interaction with your brand, prompt direct actions like purchases or engagement, and also give you an opportunity to collect data and learn more about your customers.

How marketing gamification can drive results in travel and hospitality

Now let's look at how gamification can help you achieve the results you most need in the travel and hospitality space.

Whether you're looking to collect customer data to learn more for future campaigns, attract guests and bookings or enhance the guest experience, here are some ways you use the power of playable marketing.



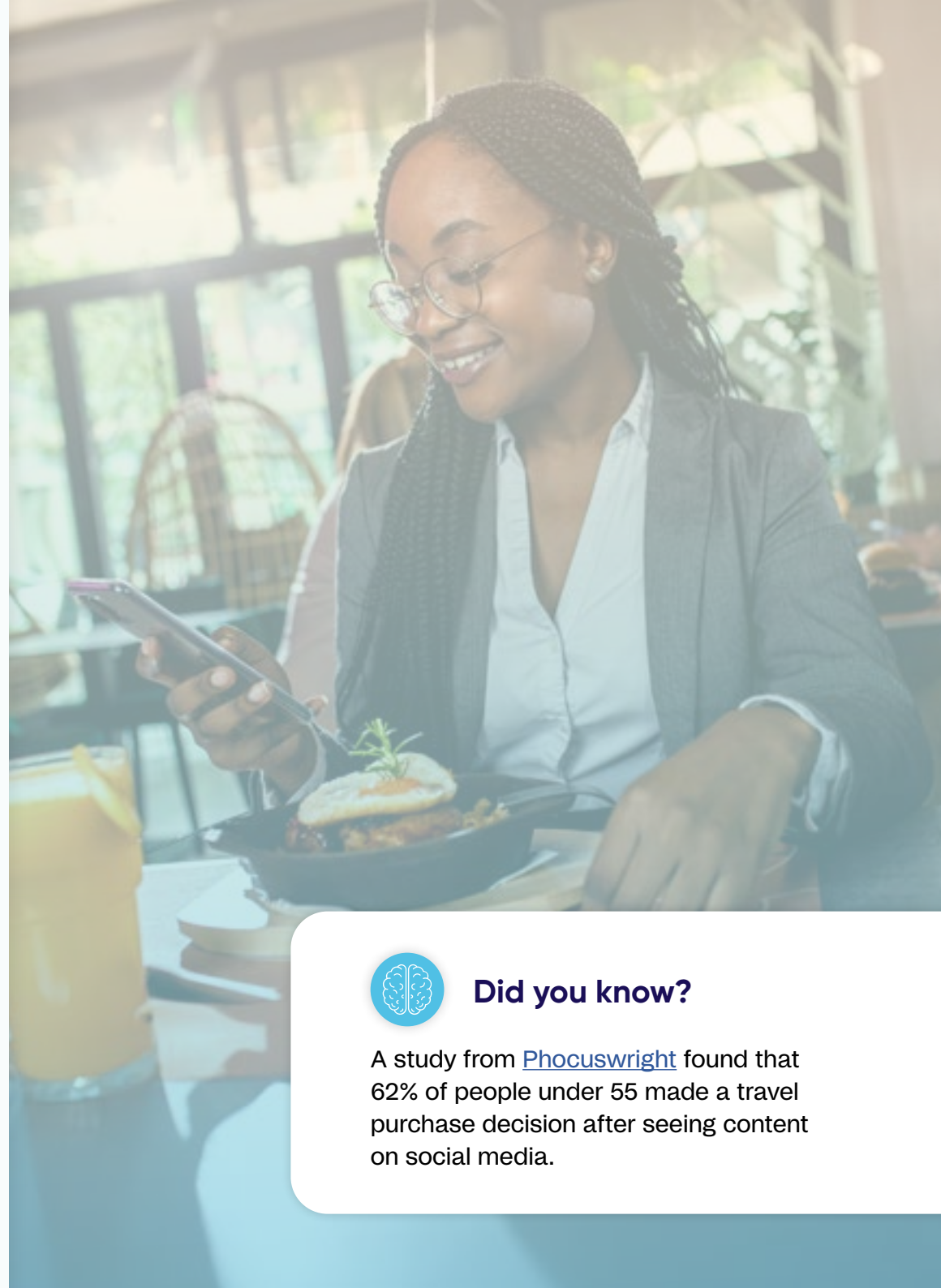
Attract and engage guests

Boosting guest numbers is often a top priority for marketers in this space and the trick to this is by providing engaging and personalized experiences across multiple touchpoints in the guest's buying journey.

Meet your audience where they are and promote campaigns that you know will grab their attention, for example on social media, travel blogs, travel fairs, and in physical travel and hospitality-related spaces, such as theme parks, restaurants, and hotels.

By promoting playable campaigns on social media, you can reach an audience of people who are ready to research and even make purchase decisions based on travel-related content they see.

Another way to attract and engage new guests is to create engaging seasonal campaigns that tie into seasonal vacation time to stand out in times of high competition.



Did you know?

A study from [Phocuswright](#) found that 62% of people under 55 made a travel purchase decision after seeing content on social media.

Drive direct bookings

DTC bookings are often a core objective, so integrating gamification is a great way to encourage customers to book through your website. Through gamification, you can promote making direct bookings on your website with discount codes and exclusive perks to reduce reliance on third-party booking platforms. This also helps you to foster long-term customer loyalty and keeps your brand top of mind.

With the increasing popularity of third-party sites, direct booking reduces commission costs and increases revenue. Part of the reason people often use third-party sites to make bookings is because of the convenience, but you can use gamification tactics to enhance the on-site experience. For example, using gamified experiences to make the booking experience more engaging, reduce abandonment rates and queue management.

How to incentivize direct bookings:

- ✓ Luck games with discount codes that work only on your website
- ✓ Rewards for those purchasing through your site
- ✓ Loyalty points if booking through your app
- ✓ Gamification features that make the purchase experience seamless

Deliver personalized experiences

Consumers increasingly expect personalized experiences, particularly if they're returning customers, and the travel and hospitality industry is no different.

Gamification can help you collect zero-party data about your potential guests' preferences, travel behaviors, favorite destinations, and upcoming travel plans so you can tailor future marketing communications to them and encourage purchases.

Once you have collected more data about your audience, you can use this to create personalized campaigns that tie into what your audience wants and expects to see. The more you know about your customers, the better targeted you can make your marketing and the more effective it will become at driving results.

Boost brand loyalty

Customer expectations are high in the hospitality industry and brand loyalty is crucial for success with returning guests and word-of-mouth recommendations. Loyalty should be part of your long-term strategy, but it needs to be earned. Hospitality brands have a range of time-honoured loyalty programs that range from straightforward points systems to incentives.

These drive consumer interest and encourage repeat business. Furthermore, the travel industry is well-known for offering some of the most advanced and attractive loyalty programs, where customers can take advantage of perks such as priority check-ins, upgrades, and exclusive access. Gamification complements loyalty programs by turning routine interactions (such as checking in or leaving a review) into something fun and potentially rewarding.

One great way to boost brand loyalty is by recognizing repeat guests or visitors with gamification experiences that reward them with exclusive perks and incentives. Loyalty programs with ongoing rewards in the form of points, discounts, and exclusive offers can also help to maintain that loyalty and encourage them to come back for more.



How to start using gamification in travel and hospitality marketing

Gamification can and should be part of your long-term strategy to increase engagement, loyalty, trust, and guest bookings. Here's how to get started with your first campaign.

1

Get to know your audience

To build the most effective gamified experiences, you need to know about your potential guests' behaviors, preferences and demographics. You can pull any existing data you have from booking data, in-store sales data, or insights in your CRM to identify audience segments and use that to inform your gamification strategy.

Later, once you have gamification campaigns up and running, you can use game types like quizzes, surveys and personality tests to collect more relevant data and increase the knowledge you have of your target audience. The more you know, the better chance you have of creating marketing campaigns that are targeted and resonate.



Pro tip

Use personality tests or swipe it games to collect data on visitor preferences. For example, a personality test called "What type of traveller are you?" can provide great insights into your target market.

2 Establish your goals

Your primary goals will determine your approach to gamification. Are you looking to boost guest bookings? Increase social media engagement and website conversions? Or do you want to learn more about potential guests to refine your marketing strategy?

The great thing about gamification is that it makes KPIs easy to measure and achieve. By aligning gamification KPIs with your overall marketing objectives, you can see how effective your campaigns are. You can look at metrics such as number of times played, registration rates, and click-through rates to your website.



Pro tip

The goal of your gamification campaign will influence the type of game you use.



Did you know?

Our platform data shows that the unique registration rate for hospitality, travel and leisure campaigns is 61% (compared to 45% platform average), providing with marketers in these industries with a great opportunity to generate leads and collection marketing permissions.

3 Choose a gamification platform

The most cost-effective way to build a gamified campaign is to use a platform like Playable rather than using developers to create one from scratch. There's no need for coding knowledge to create customized gamified campaigns if you find a platform that's user friendly for your team and audience.

You'll also want a platform that has built-in analytics and integrations with existing systems like CRM and marketing tools so you can make the most out of the data your campaigns collect.

Another thing to consider when choosing a platform and building your campaign is whether it'll be an always-on or seasonal campaign. Seasonal campaigns can help you stand out during busy times such as during summer vacation time or spring when people start to book ahead. However, an always-on campaign can help you build long-term awareness of your brand.



4 Promote it

To ensure your gamification campaign drives engagement, it must be integrated with your overarching marketing strategy. Effective ways of promoting campaigns include paid social media ads, banner ads on third-party travel sites, and QR codes at stores or events to direct people towards your game. You might also reach your audience through loyalty programs, your app, and by integrating the game into the website for customers who may just be browsing.

The success of integrating gamification relies on driving measurable outcomes at each stage. It's vital to set KPIs such as driving first-time purchases or increasing app downloads. Think about where in the buying process your different customer segments are and use that to inform where and how you promote your campaigns. For example, if you're trying to drive awareness and first-time purchasers, leaning into travel inspiration content on social media can be an effective way to promote your campaign.



Did you know?

Playable online campaigns are easily displayed as an iFrame or a webview.

For offline promotion, use our integrated QR generator both for on-screen display or high-quality printing.

4 Measure results

Think back to your original brand goals when measuring results of your campaign. What were you trying to drive and how can you measure that effectively?

Gamification platforms like Playable come with reporting features that help you track user interactions and conversions to learn more about how effective your campaign was with customers. You can then feed that data into your CRM and marketing systems to use in future marketing efforts.

Integrating your gamification platform with analytics tools can help you easily measure metrics such as:

- Number of redeemed discount codes
- Basket size
- Booking data
- Impressions
- Click-through rates
- Conversions

This data will give you a tangible indication of how effective your campaign was.



Did you know?

The Playable platform includes a real-time dashboard and analytics to enable you to monitor campaign visits, registrations, engagement insights, conversion rates, drop-offs by flow page, and more.



Travel and hospitality brands that successfully used gamification

Gamification can help you see great success in driving guest bookings, conversions, and increasing brand awareness, loyalty and trust. Our work with brands in this industry has enabled them to reach new audiences and stand out with engaging marketing campaigns that their audiences love.

Let's take a look at some examples from theme parks, airlines, hotel chains, and more!

Thorpe Park

Thorpe
PARK

Popular UK theme park Thorpe Park had a unique challenge to contend with – managing long queues while maintaining a great visitor experience. They teamed up with Playable’s platform to create a series of campaigns including “Fright Nights” for Halloween and a “Mardi Gras” treasure hunt to entertain visitors while they wait.

Promoted via the park’s app through push notifications, QR codes on the maps around the park, and screens at Thorpe Park’s hotel, guests were directed to a landing page with all of Thorpe Park’s games for easy access. One permanent game on the Games hub is the always-on quiz which consists of five questions about Thorpe Park. This effectively educates visitors but also keeps them entertained and satisfied while waiting in line.

[See more details in the full customer story](#)



Results:

Over 7500
sessions

01:35 minutes
is the average time a participant
spends per session

174 hours
of engagement with
Thorpe Park in total

Sol & Strand

Sol & Strand, one of Denmark's largest summer house rental agencies, ran a range of different games, from quizzes and personality tests to 'guess the picture'. One game—part of their 'Slice It' campaign—had customers slicing “annoying bugs, clouds, and ice creams”, but avoiding the Sol og Strand+ magazine, to win benefits and discounts. Participation in this game had a lead form to sign up for email communication and required membership of Sol og Strand+. Lots were also drawn among all participants for two tickets to Legoland, which encouraged even more people to sign up and play.



Scandic Hotels

Scandic

Danish hotel chain Scandic Hotels used personality tests to gather valuable insights into their customers. For instance, in one test, users could discover their ideal restaurant, while in another, they could find their perfect vacation. At the end, a CTA encouraged participants to explore hotels in different cities or restaurants that matched their results.

Scandic Hotels also used an advent calendar with twenty-four doors where participants could win rewards such as spa treatments and theatre tickets. The calendar had a lead form at the beginning to ensure they collected marketing permissions.



Icelandair

To capitalize on the Iceland vs Slovakia football match, Icelandair ran a scratchcard campaign with Playable to gain new marketing permissions, as well as renew the email addresses and permissions of longer-term members.

Participants who scratched off the same three versions of their Icelandair logos (the pink ones) would enter a draw to win the grand prize: tickets to attend the match, as well as the possibility to take a shot at half-time and win Icelandair gift certificates.

To promote this campaign, Icelandair used organic Facebook posts to reach out to their social media followers, and then use paid versions for further reach.

ICELANDAIR



Results:

3900+
sessions

3000+
registrations

1300+
new registrations or people renewing
their email addresses/permissions

THIS IS
BASEL

Basel Tourism

Basel Tourism, a tourism advertising association, developed a digital advent calendar campaign to showcase the city's winter attractions and engage potential visitors. Throughout December, participants could win daily prizes across tourism categories like 'Food & Drink' and 'Leisure & Adventure'. Each day would spotlight a partner (restaurants, hotels, leisure activities) and feature a unique prize opportunity, such as circus tickets or hotel stays.

Participants registered for the contest and had the option to subscribe to Basel Tourism's newsletter. The campaign's core objectives were to highlight Basel's seasonal offerings and expand its digital marketing reach through newsletter sign-ups. Basel Tourism promoted their campaign through pop-ups on their website (available in five different languages). They also ran daily organic promotion on Instagram and paid advertising on both Instagram and Facebook.

Results:

820,000+
impressions

7,200+
new newsletter
registrations

16,500+
participants in total



Air Miles



In 2022, Air Miles launched a 12-day advent calendar campaign, offering daily interactive games with different prizes, such as extra Air Miles or a hotel stay. For instance, on Day 12, participants could play a slot machine, and on Day 20, a memory game.

While the games were not gated (to maximize engagement over gaining permissions), participants needed to complete a registration form to enter the daily prize draws, balancing user experience with marketing objectives.

Air Miles' calendar was shared in their monthly newsletter and promoted as a paid campaign on Facebook and Instagram. They also featured a banner on their website's homepage, and members could find a coupon with a direct link to the advent calendar in their account.



Results:

40,000
email clicks to
the advent calendar

14,14%
CTR with their Meta campaign
(their highest Meta CTR recorded,
with the lowest cost as well)

137,000+
sessions on the advent
calendar in total

10,500
sessions on the daily games
on average

26% increase
sessions on the advent
calendar in total

Stonegate Group

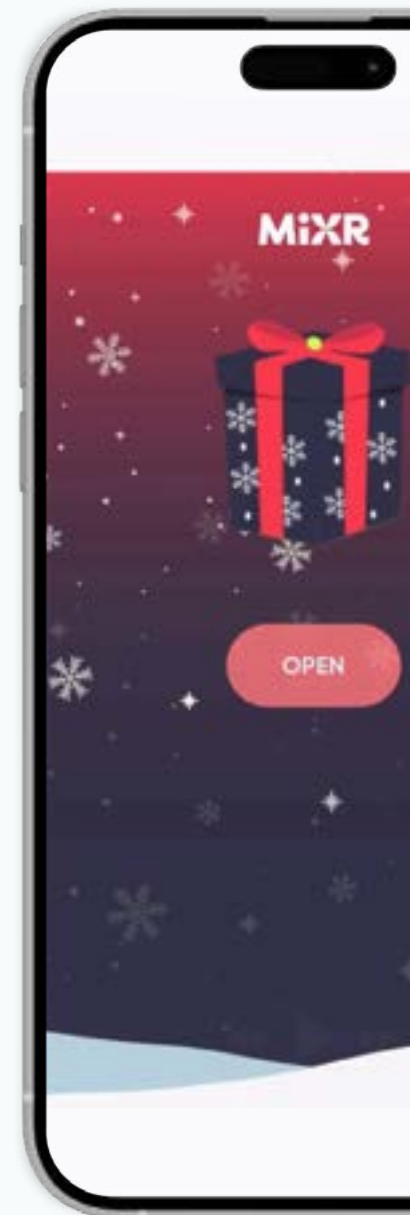
Stonegate Group

In 2023, Stonegate Group launched a fantastic advent calendar on MiXR—their app that showcases the best of the UK's pubs, bars, and clubs. With this campaign, going out was never been more fun! For 25 days, the calendar kept users engaged with sponsor-branded prizes, including free drinks and loyalty points. The rotating sponsorships added even more excitement, featuring amazing brands.

At Playable, we were particularly impressed by the seamless integration with Atreemo, ensuring in-app rewards are delivered straight to users' wallets—talk about convenience! What's more, leveraging the Loot Box functionality, the advent calendar revealed prizes behind doors with a MiXR-branded, animated Christmas present for an extra festive touch.

This example perfectly illustrates how advent calendars can boost engagement and brand awareness during the festive season.

For travel & hospitality brands, calendars also attract guests and drive direct bookings.



Should you use gamification marketing for your brand?

By using gamification marketing, you can build a highly strategic campaign to build awareness, collect zero-party data, and drive direct bookings. While travel and hospitality can be a crowded marketplace, gamification enables you to stand out and provide a more dynamic introduction to your brand that encourages people to take direct action.

With a platform like Playable, you can take full control of your campaign's design, customizing it for your brand's personality and audience to make it truly unique for your audience. Playable is an easy-to-use platform with built-in analytics and integrations with third-party systems to make collecting and using data from your campaigns seamless.

Are you ready to start building your first campaign?

Get in touch today for a demo
of the platform in action!



About Playable

The marketing gamification platform

Playable is the gamification platform for marketers. Combining the power of play with the fundamentals of gamification, we unlock playable marketing; using interactivity to engage for extraordinary results.

Our flexible SaaS platform allows marketers to create, tailor and deploy marketing gamification campaigns that deliver results at every touchpoint. Powering the playable marketing of 650+ brands globally, 15 games are played every second from our platform.

Founded in 2017 in Denmark, our expert teams in Aarhus, Copenhagen, Amsterdam, Helsinki and London inspire game-changing marketing every day.

playable

Get in touch

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