

Foster innovation and productivity with Serious Games!

by Palo IT

What do Mental Math, 20/20 Vision or Brainrush have in common?

Here is a hint: they are not the names of next generations pills that will give you perfect vision instantly or teach your kids advanced maths overnight. They are the names of “Serious Games”. Not a single month passes without a book, [article](#), [conference](#) or [training](#) about this increasingly popular topic.

A Serious Game is a game whose primary intent is not pure entertainment. We learn best when we play and an increasing number of organizations have realized the potential of game-based activities. Serious Games can be applied to a broad spectrum of areas like training, hiring, innovating or team building. Organizations like [IBM](#), Nissan or the United Nations use Serious Games on a regular basis.

Here are some examples:

- [Free rice](#) is a game launched by The United Nations World Food Program. Its goal is to educate the public about world hunger. Players answer questions and for each correct answer the program donates 10 grains of rice.
- [Crystal Island](#), from North Carolina State University is a game where players learn scientific problem solving and systemic approach by investigating an epidemic outbreak on an island.
- The [Product Box](#) (see picture below) is a game to identify the most desirable features for a new product. Here is a [live example](#) at a Microsoft’s Sharepoint event.
- The [Marshmallow challenge](#) is a team building game. It’s an energizing activity but it also reveals team dynamics, leadership patterns and teaches the power of experimentation.



A group playing Product Box

As shown with the previous examples, Serious Games come in two flavors: online/video games and low-tech games. The latter often don't require more than color pens, paper and scissors. Singapore has a well-established serious video games following community. The city hosted the [Serious Games Conference](#) last August. A chapter of the [Serious Games Association](#) has taken residence in Singapore. Some companies like [Serious Games International](#) have a branch here.

Serious Games work because they combine two characteristics that brain and behavioral sciences have identified as key learning enablers :

- Physical engagement
*"Students remember only 10 percent of what they read; 20 percent of what they hear; 30 percent if they see visuals related to what they hear; 50 percent if they watch someone do something while explaining it; but almost 90 percent if they do the job themselves, even if only as a simulation."*¹
- Fun
Playing a game is an activity that stimulates our brain reward system. Having fun and winning releases dopamine in our brain, a neurotransmitter related to pleasure.

¹ "Harnessing the Power of Videogames for Learning" - 2006 Summit on Educational Games



A Serious Games workshop

As other industries, InfoComm were hit by the Serious Games tsunami around 5 years ago. Game-based activities had been around since the 50s for team building or soft skills trainings like communication, leadership development. They are now used for many other purposes: innovating, demonstrating concepts or coaching.

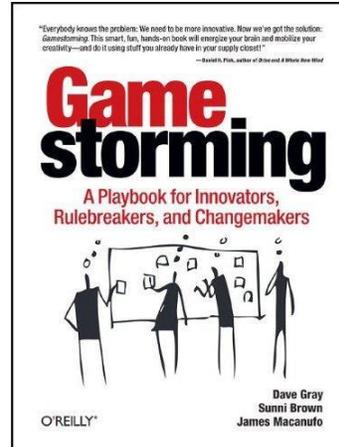
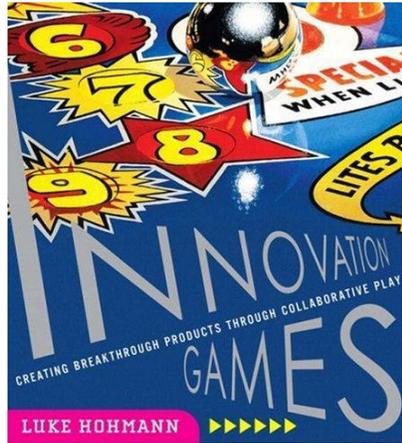
The large majority of Serious Games played in InfoComm are low-tech games.

The growing success of Agile methods, which put a strong emphasis on people interactions, fun and build a creativity-friendly environment, have made Serious Games even more popular.

Two books have greatly contributed to the success of Serious Games in the InfoComm industry:

- *Gamestorming: A Playbook for Innovators, Rulebreakers, and Changemakers*, by Dave Gray, Sunni Brown and James Macanuffo (2010). 80 games.
- *Innovation Games: Creating Breakthrough Products Through Collaborative Play*, by Luke Hohmann (2007). 12 games.

The term Innovation Games was crafted by Luke Hohmann and made popular with his book.. The original aim of Innovation Games was to improve productivity of direct market research and speed up customer-centric innovation. The book has been so successful that the term is often used by the Serious Games community to refer to any game-based activity.



Serious Games is a great tool that can be used on a daily basis internally to generate new ideas or make meetings more effective. We think that most teams would benefit from what they offer as well.

Many topics can be addressed with the help of Serious Games: innovation or team building as we said before but Serious Games are also great for feature prioritization, brainstorming, vision sharing, SWOT analysis, strategy building, reflect and learn sessions and last but not least change management.

Serious Games have more to offer than just learning. They bring people together and even after many years of practice, we are still amazed by their power. Not only they really help reaching the objectives, they also contribute to creating a fun and friendly environment. Low-tech games are our favorite ones, as they are simple and as bring people face-to-face, they are more engaging.

If you want to know more about Serious Games used in InfoComm, <http://tastycupcakes.org/> is a great resource. [Luke Hohmann's website](#) is an essential bookmark too.

To conclude, if you want to give Serious Games a “serious” try, here is a link to a presentation on [Serious Games](#) by analyst Tom Grant of Forrester.

Here are a few tips issued from his presentation:

- Pick one or two games depending on your goal. Not more.
- Carefully prepare the game: rules, material...
- Improve your facilitation skills to become a great game facilitator.
- And keep learning new games !

Are you interested in experimenting Serious Games and see how they could fit in your organization? The upcoming SITF Innovation Series #1 is a hands-on workshop where you will have the opportunity to play a Serious Game and discuss your experience with other InfoComm professionals.

Valerie Wagoner and Sylvain Mahe - Palo IT

About Palo IT



Palo IT is a consultancy firm specialized in Agile practices. Headquartered in France and operating in more than 20 countries, our team of 120 consultants are among the best practitioners in their industries. Our mission is to help our clients define innovative strategies to improve their SDLC and processes. Our customized approach integrates the best of lean and agile practices derived from our field experience and relies on performance metrics to precisely measure the efficiency of change.

With a strong culture of delivery, Palo IT gives you full support to compete in the most challenging markets.