

# Life Imitating Art: Envisioning a “game layer” for better decision-making

by Jeff DeChambeau

In the last 48 hours, more data was created than from the earliest recorded history until the year 2003—thousands of times more data than the human brain can carry or process. The speed at which new data is generated will continue to grow by orders of magnitude, particularly as smart phones and sensors continue to proliferate. The challenge—and opportunity—for enterprises is finding a way to use these massive data sets for competitive advantage. Finding a way to make these massive data sets intelligible to human decision-makers presents enterprises with untold opportunity. Design principles from online games and gaming interfaces point the way forward.

In the words of futurist and nGenera Insight collaborator Ray Kurzweil, “games are the harbinger of everything.” The data-capture and -summary abilities baked into current-generation games foreshadow the near future when everything is a source of data—because in games, everything already is a data source.

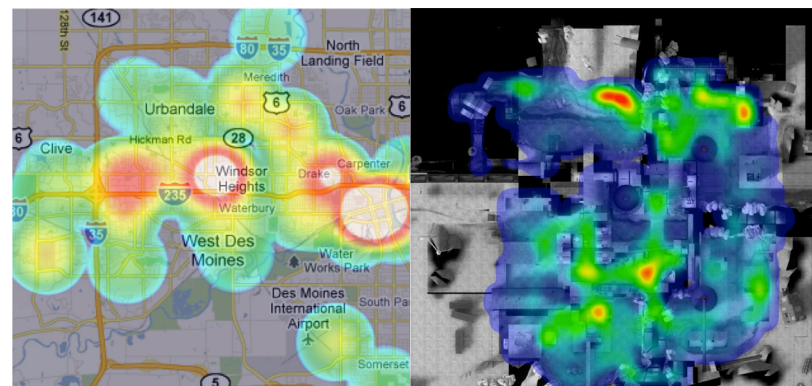
Leading game development houses capture this data and have an immense amount of information about how players are behaving in-game—from where they’re standing and what they’re looking at, to what their item preferences are, and who they most often play with—and then use this data to refine their products to create better customer experiences.

The benefit from all of this data collection isn’t limited to game developers: game-world information is often made available to the gamers themselves, who craft customized interfaces to summarize and display the information that they consider to be crucial in their quest for victory. This information, provided either directly by the game engine, or estimated by custom code, allows for contextual information to be delivered directly to gamers when and where they need it. This ability that gamers have to process both the game world, and the layer of extra information provided to them through heads up displays is shared by both gamers who create their own interfaces and those who use the stock user interfaces.

In order to make the increasing ocean of enterprise data intelligible and accessible to human decision

makers, the information must be summarized and contextualized, following suit with what game interfaces have done. Enterprise dashboards represent only one half of the shift that is needed, with the other being the contextualizing of information and layering it on the physical world. If implemented properly, we can envision a “game layer” on the world that makes enterprise data more visual, relevant and useful.

But what would such a layer look like? To provide feedback to gamers, some games are accompanied by automatically generated “heat maps” that show where players are moving in game and where key events happen. In a case of life imitating art, this heat map overview was recently identically replicated to model foursquare geographic check-ins in the real world. Similar experiments have been successfully conducted with prediction markets and data generated by call-centers. To display such information, augmented reality applications on smartphones and tablets have successfully rendered many data sources in real life heads up displays that are nearly indistinguishable from their in-game precursors.



As the real world (left) becomes more like the worlds of video games (right) thanks to the proliferation of data, gaming interfaces represent the way for the enterprise to seize the opportunity of all this data.

Such a game layer would also help democratize analytics by putting the tools needed for data reporting and manipulation in the hands of users—a shift that increases the speed of decision-making by presenting real-time data, options, and even probability predictions to employees at all levels of the organization. While this space may change as more energy and effort is put into solving the problem of too much data, games provide the strongest metaphor for our best, first step—a step that has proven to be tremendously empowering and effective.

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