

Playing with the Internet of Things

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Abstract

PROJECT DASH is a critique of frictionless consumerism in the Internet of Things (IoT). Amazon Dash buttons are inexpensive IoT devices adorned with brand names that allow customers to purchase products at the press of a button. Pressing a “Glad” button allows one to purchase trash bags and a “Huggies” button allows the purchase of diapers. Attached to the wall of a garage or changing table in a nursery, Dash buttons turn any household object into a makeshift node in the Internet of Things that normalizes on-demand purchasing behavior under the guise of convenience. These new domestic technologies can be interrogated through the process of “defamiliarization” described by Bell, et al. (2005) by finding new uses for common household items.

Because they are an affordable and easily hackable wifi-enabled tinkering platform, Dash buttons are “(ab)user-friendly products that lend themselves to imaginative possibilities [...] otherwise limited by intended use” (Dunne and Raby, 2001). PROJECT DASH, a game built by DePaul Game Design students, repurposes these simple input controllers in a post-civilization pervasive scavenger hunt game that tasks players with finding Dash buttons. In the game's fiction, Amazon.com's infrastructure is still functioning thanks to human-free fulfillment and delivery automation and is thus able to deliver virtual products as survival resources to the players.

Though the buttons are physical, their delivered goods are purely virtual and ownership is represented to the players through LED displays in the environment in the same way that buying goods online obscures processes of warehousing, complex delivery infrastructure, and human labor. The current work in progress describes the design of the game, the technology that supports it, and features a demonstration of the hardware.

This project is conducted under the direction of CDM School of Design faculty members Jayson Margalus (jmargal@cdm.depaul.edu) and Bobby Schweizer (b.schweizer@depaul.edu).