

Boehringer launches Syrum - pharma's 'first social game'

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Boehringer Ingelheim last night unveiled its most ambitious attempt yet to harness the power of gaming at a consumer-style launch event held at the Science Museum in London.

Its long-awaited Facebook game Syrum challenges players to run their own pharmaceutical company and develop drugs to combat a range of deadly diseases.

Explaining the company's reasons for developing the game, Boehringer's director of digital John Pugh told PMLiVE: "We built Syrum with a view to creating an ecosystem through which we could engage with

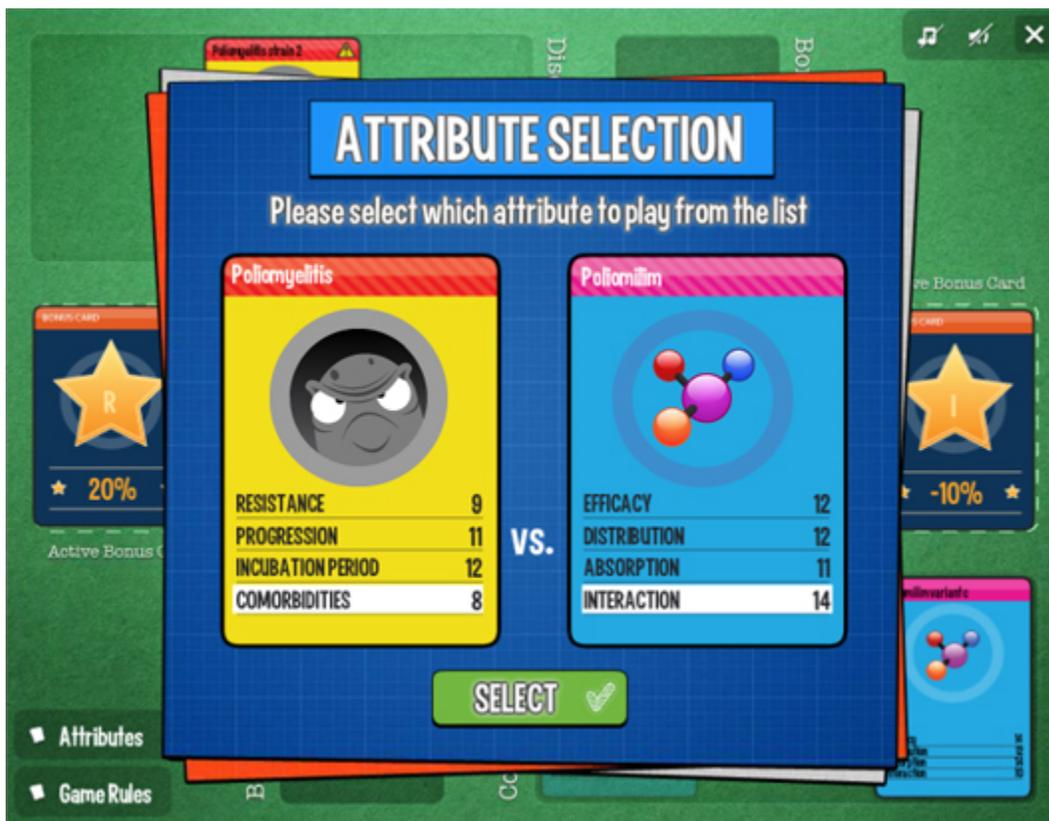
people around education. It's also to do with reputation management, market research and recruiting talent.

"We spend quite a lot of time and energy on our social media channels and this is another part of that, where we create a whole integrated framework."

Billed by the company as pharma's first social game, Syrum launches without covering any of the company's key therapy areas, as pharma marketing initiatives usually do, because Boehringer wanted to "keep it clean", said Pugh.

But he added: "Perhaps as we move forward there may be opportunities to put Boehringer therapy areas in there. We have nothing planned for that at the moment – it's part of the vision for the game."

Three years in the making, **Syrum** combines elements of a trading card game such as Pokemon with the social interactivity of a Facebook game like Farmville.



It has been released, some months **later than planned**, in a public beta format in Europe and Boehringer plans to give it a full global launch – including the US - next year, potentially at the **SXSW conference** in March.

Moving the game into public beta-testing, pharma and agency personnel can finally see if the hype that has been building since details of the game first emerged last year is justified.

But Boehringer's big hope, and part of the reason behind last night's consumer-style launch event – which came complete with lab coat wearing waiters, test tube cocktails and molecular snacks, is that the game will gain traction outside of the industry.

Refusing to be drawn on what sort of user numbers Boehringer would like to see, Pugh was adamant that, at this first public stage in Syrum's development, the company was focusing more on refining its product.

“Our main objective for this beta launch version is just to get feedback, so what we want to do is create iterative cycles of development. So as long as we get good feedback that can help make the game a better game, we'll be happy with that.”

Social Syrum

Would-be players of Boehringer's game must add the Syrum Facebook app to their account on the social network. They can then set out trying to develop seed compounds into marketable drugs to treat a range of deadly disease and epidemics.

Players can also participate in the game with their Facebook friends – sending them gifts, headhunting their staff or even conducting industrial espionage against them.

Beyond its aim of producing a truly social game, Boehringer is also using several social media channels to help spread its message.

So there's a dedicated **Syrum Game YouTube** channel, **Syrum Game Twitter account**, **Syrum blog**, a feedback wiki page, and, of course, a **Syrum Facebook page**.



Boehringer and gamification

Presenting the game at the Science Museum, Pugh sought to fit Syrum into the lineage of **serious games such as Foldit**, which last year saw players solve a problem in 10 days that had baffled scientists for 15 years when they deciphered the crystal structure of a protein that causes AIDS in rhesus monkeys.

It's not the first time Boehringer has dipped its toes into the gaming waters. It has already worked on a couple of Facebook apps and two years ago funded the **HealthSeeker Facebook game** developed by the Diabetes Hands Foundation.

More recently it **worked with online scientific research community Kaggle** to successfully apply a '**gamification**' approach to clinical research, producing academic-standard predictive data models in just three months.

With its latest game Boehringer is setting players the lofty task of improving global health, but Syrum players are also tasked with keeping their virtual laboratory independent – an amusing touch from the 127-year old, family owned, pharma company turned game developer.