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Automation inspiration 5 min read

Creating an active and engaged community with automation

By Justin Samuels · November 23, 2021

When I started Render-Atlanta to bridge the gap between culture and code and boost inclusion for Black and Brown engineers at developer conferences, I set three high-order goals for myself:

1. Rapidly scale from tech start-up to full-on, no-holds-barred, world domination.
2. Scale in such a way that anybody on my team—even the least technical team member—could implement new ideas and solutions without having to learn code.
3. Scale in a way that didn't merely boost the bottom line but was very fun to do, because at the end of the day, who wants to do boring work?

I'm an engineer by trade and have always understood the value of automating processes to achieve scale. But I was happy to learn

that the automation tool I chose to achieve the first two goals, Zapier, would help me accomplish my third goal as well.

> 2021 is the inaugural year of Render-Atlanta. It is a Black owned engineering converence with a mission to create a space for culture, inclusion, and education where minorities can receive recognition for their talent. Attendees of the conference have the opportunity to be recruited on-site by sponsors and other local tech and engineering companies. You can learn more at their website or follow them on Instagram.

In a process I've named "Funimation," we have developed a series of Zaps that create greater efficiencies and contribute to the bottom line—and have proven unique in generating the kind of traction that engages and empowers our internal team and external customers.

And when employees are happy, then your customers, clients, and audiences are going to be happy, too.

> This blog post was adapted from Justin Samuels' presentation at ZapConnect, Zapier's user conference. Watch the session here.

What is a funimation?

In its most basic form, a funimation is an automated process in which your customers are incented to help you complete a task through an interactive and rewarding experience. It creates a user experience that elicits high value engagement—participation and feedback—in exchange for additional data which can yield better business metrics, whether that's measured as simple ROI, Customer Lifetime Value, or Net Promoter Score. And funimations can be linked and layered to incorporate additional technologies that integrate rich data across multiple business reporting and analytic tools.

That's a mouthful, I know. But here are a couple of simple examples that illustrate the idea:

- You create an interactive survey which leads to additional customer insight on the surface, but in the background enables

you to cross-populate attributes between standalone applications, overcoming the drawbacks of siloed data.

- You create interactive links in an email campaign that literally reward user behavior in real- or near-real time.
- You develop a hyper-responsive customer service center that collects input from your favorite instant messaging platforms and email, and rewards employees based on their customer interactions.

The unifying motif in these examples is fun and often unexpected interactions. Standard automations rely on machine-to-machine or human-to-machine interactions. When you're able to gamify an automation, you're able to harvest additional data, build brand loyalty and keep your own team motivated and engaged.

How to make your own funimations

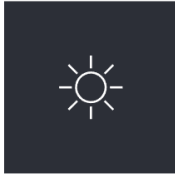Creating a funimation takes five distinct steps. Skip any one at your peril:

1. Discovery mode, when you and your team identify the mundane, manual tasks that are eating up your time and holding you back. I'm talking about the really painful stuff.
2. Exploration, where you'll seek out opportunities for unique ideas or greater engagement (again, internally and externally) that you could apply to mundane tasks, especially the ones your team actually enjoys.
3. Connection, when you identify the overlap—which processes can be accelerated through automation, and which can be more engaging—as candidates for re-engineering.
4. Collaborate, where you involve everyone in the process of imagining the funimations possible based on your findings.
5. Build, when you MAKE ALL THE ZAPS!

A word on the last two steps: collaboration really expands the realm of what is possible. At Render-Atlanta, I recognize that I can't think of all the possibilities for automation. My team imagines creative solutions and automation rules that I would never think of because they are engaged in the day-to-day work of helping customers.

And while you might think of the "Build" step as obvious, I promise you that many people never get around to building the Zaps they want because they are afraid of making mistakes.

But there's no "fear" in "funimation," and iteration is an engineer's best friend. So just build the Zaps, test them, monitor them and be prepared to tweak them to get the results you want.

If all this still seems a little abstract, I'll describe three Zaps that we use to streamline customer and staff experiences and create joyful engagements all around.

Mailchimp + Airtable

Creating a easy way for subscribers to gain access to our community Discord and receive promotional codes

Social + Discord

Creating a "firehose" of data for our social media team to closely monitor incoming mentions and hashtags around our brand identity

Gmail + Discord

Using Discord & Gmail as a low-overhead but interactive way to communicate to our customers

Build community with rewards
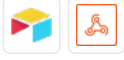
Apps integrated: Mailchimp + Airtable

Prior to building this funimation, we managed our promotional code discounts by hand. It was a very tedious, manual, and delayed process, without any opportunities for immediate customer gratification or reward.

The new automated process begins when potential event attendees come to our site and self-register, which qualifies them for a promo code. A webhook sends the registration data to our Airtable database, where we can determine if this is a new customer, a repeat customer, or however we choose to tag the interaction. That triggers a Zap to send the user data to Mailchimp with the tags we use to segment our audience.
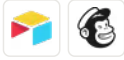
Finally, based on the customer journey we've created, Mailchimp fires off an immediate email to the customer encouraging them to

take another action. For instance, they might be granted access to one of our Discord channels. The speed and personalization of our response creates brand-loyalty engagement in a fun and unexpected way for our customers.

	Create Airtable records with new caught webhooks Airtable + Webhooks by Zapier	**Use this Zap**

	Add tags to Mailchimp subscribers for new records in a view in Airtable Airtable + Mailchimp	**Use this Zap**

	Assign Discord roles from new Airtable records in a view Airtable + Discord	**Use this Zap**

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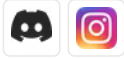**Create a social media firehose**

Apps integrated: Instagram for Business, Twitter + Discord

How can a start-up manage customer engagement like a Fortune 500 organization? Or better? One way is to use this funimation to capture all your social media interactions in a Discord channel.

Our social media firehose gathers everything from across all our handles, all our hashtags, indicating that people are actively Tweeting or Instagramming about us. This allows our social media team to act on data in real-time. We can defuse the potential threat of an angry event attendee or reward others with some extra swag because they're giving us a ton of love. Our audience is surprised by —and appreciates—the instant response, and the funimation helps keep my headcount lower—meaning we don't have to hire 20 pairs of eyeballs. Instead, we only need three.

The great thing about this Zap is that we can be very specific about the social media apps we monitor, the triggers that start the process (hashtag, at-mention, or even unique keyword), and the specific Discord channels we route messages to. It's completely customizable.

	Send new Twitter search mentions in Discord channels Discord + Twitter	**Use this Zap**

	Get Discord notifications for new tagged mentions in Instagram for Business Discord + Instagram for Business	**Use this Zap**

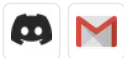Not seeing what you're looking for?
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Create a world-class help desk

Apps integrated: Gmail + Discord

If your main objective is to keep customers happy, then you need a world-class customer support line or help desk. But support solutions can be very expensive, even before you hire the trained staff to operate it.

With the help of Zapier, we're able to integrate a seamless help desk process that enables our customers to easily reach us and benefit from extremely fast response times. This funimation is triggered by a new Gmail message sent to our help desk email address. The Zap's action step sends the message and link to a specific Discord channel.

The beauty of this funimation is its simplicity. The benefit is that we don't have to monitor an actual email box all day, every day. Our customers aren't waiting hours or days for a response, and our employees don't have to constantly break context and flow in terms of trying to get work done.

	Send Discord channel messages for new Gmail emails matching searches [Business Gmail Accounts Only] Discord + Gmail	**Use this Zap**

	Send Discord channel messages for new Gmail emails [Business Gmail Accounts Only] Discord + Gmail	**Use this Zap**

Not seeing what you're looking for?
Create from scratch or learn more

Achieving world domination, and having fun while you're at it

Our team at Render-Atlanta has learned three lessons that we'd like to share in the hope that it makes your work world a little more fun (and helps you gain world domination faster than you had imagined):

1. We have come to understand that creating automations can create rewarding and engaging environments for both employees and customers.
2. Automation opportunities should go beyond addressing mundane clerical tasks, and treat computers like friends, not foes.
3. Funimations represent a balanced blend of getting work done and just having fun while doing it. You can achieve the results you want, but by adding game-like elements to it, the process becomes more fun for everyone.

I believe that automations are the future, and the earlier you adopt them, the more robust your pipeline becomes and the less error-prone your processes are. And if you just focus on your customers' happiness and their journey, your Zaps will practically build themselves.

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- 5 things you should automate today
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