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Google+ POV



Google+

OVERVIEW

Google+ is a new social networking destination, reaching more than ten million users in its first few weeks of field trial. While it is natural to compare Google+ to Facebook, its founding concept does not entirely mirror that of Facebook's. Google+ is positioned as more than just another social network, and Google's new theme that changed the look and feel across all products (Search, Email, Calendar, etc.) is a testament to that. The core idea around Google+ and the Google +1 Button is "Google + You", which is Google's overarching plan to move the search engine into the next era, fight web spam, and make the company more social.

This POV is intended for performance marketers trying to understand the potential impact of the Google+ launch on their digital media programs. The information contained in this POV highlights key implications for marketers, business implications for Google, and introduces several important features of this new social network.

BUSINESS IMPLICATIONS

With recent buzz around a Facebook IPO, Google timed the launch of Google+ perfectly. Google has invested more than \$585MM in Google+, a product that also added \$20B to Google's market cap within weeks of launching.

Why is Google+ attracting so much buzz and consumer interest? Facebook is needy, time consuming and, after more than 750 million people joined, it's a stretch to call it "cool" anymore. Since Hitwise reported that 25% of all U.S. pageviews came from Facebook, marketers and advertisers dropped their jaws and assembled their teams to begin increasing advertising on the social network. However, this level of usage isn't always a good thing for consumers and exposes new risks that the social network must innovate against – Facebook fatigue. Facebook users have too much to check, too much to update, too many messages to respond to, and too many new friend requests from people they barely know. This overwhelming responsibility makes users shut down and disconnect with the very reason they joined the social network.

Initial *buzz* around Google+ is fueling its rapid adoption; however, if this excitement and adoption rate plateaus too soon, it will pose a huge threat to the lasting success of Google+. Like many social-centric products, this adoption and growth is impacted by network effect. The more people you know who are actively using Google+, the more value it will provide to you personally. If adoption and usage falls flat, it could initiate a domino effect that causes users to abandon the new social network.

SUMMARY OF KEY IMPLICATIONS

Google+ has many implications across the entire breadth of Google's products, ranging from photo sharing applications such as Picasa to video sharing platforms such as YouTube and, of course, Search. Search has the most to gain from Google+'s success.

Google has been searching for the answer to an extremely important question, "how do we make Search more social?"

It's very likely that links shared and +1'd within Google+ and +1'd across the internet will begin to impact Google search results. With the Google +1 button being clicked more than 2.3 billion times per day and equally impressive numbers around Google+ sharing, Google is inching closer to its answer.

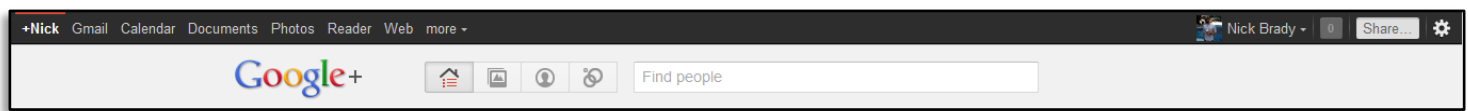
If Google+ can sustain its early growth, advertisers should ready their owned assets and build a presence on this new network. In addition to the user engagement you may receive within Google+, having a dominant presence within the network may also impact your brand's visibility across the internet.

HOW IT WORKS AND SPOTLIGHT FEATURES

Not surprisingly, Google+ works in a similar fashion to Facebook. Users can create robust profiles, post comments, links, photos, videos, and re-share posts from other users, etc.

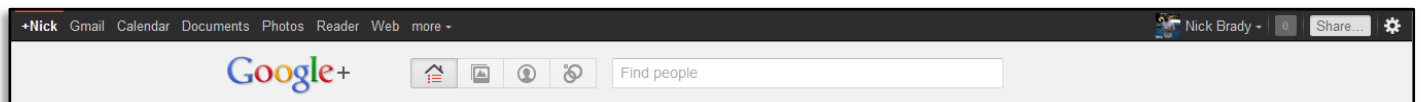
However, Google+ has several distinct features as well.

New Google Theme and Toolbar



This was the framework to make "You" a part of the Google experience, regardless of what Google product you are using. The new theme will eventually rollout with the same look and feel across all Google products, connecting you to your activities across Google properties like never before.

Comment and Share, Anywhere



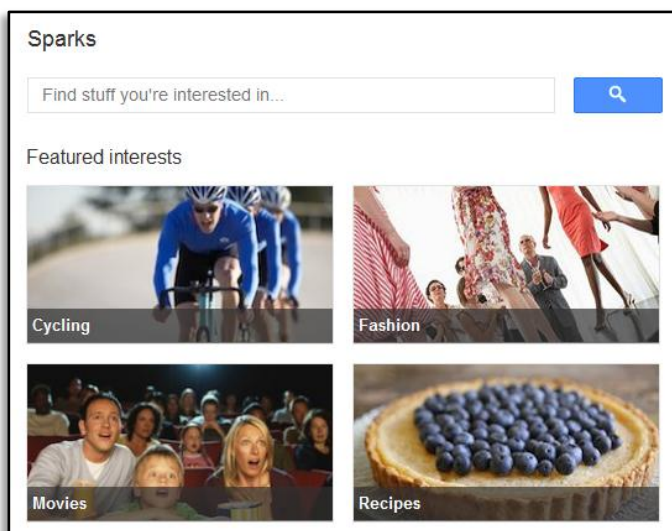
No matter what Google product you are using, if you're signed in, you're able to immediately receive notifications from your Google+ social network and instantly comment back, all within this new widget and without actually visiting the Google+ destination interface.

+1



With the early success of Google's +1 Button ([adoption rate now above Twitter](#)) and the launch of Google+, the main thrust of Google's "Google + You" initiative is becoming clearer. Google, and all search engines, are drowning in web spam. By giving users a personal benefit to +1 web content, Google is effectively collecting quality assurance data at massive scale – the scale needed to minimize web spam. It's not just about search, though. Google wants to become your "+1" for all your web activities.

Sparks



Sparks in Google+ are simply *themed* content aggregators, similar to Google Reader and Google Alerts. The user specifies a particular interest and Google+ aggregates related content around the internet and adds it as a Spark on the user's Google+ homepage.

KEY IMPLICATIONS

Search Market Growth:

Many have speculated about Facebook's plan to create a search engine. Now, flip that scenario. Google creates a social network with more than 100 million users in the U.S., and this social network connects all Google products. Suddenly, non-Google search users begin using other Google products, ultimately leading to them changing their primary search engine. If this happens, three potential possibilities emerge:

1) Google gains market share against the Yahoo and Bing Alliance.

2) By giving consumers more methods to perform search queries, such as search being integrated with Google+, the overall volume of search queries grows.

3) Total search volume increases and Google outgrows the category as a whole to continue dominating market share.

Photo Sharing Market Growth (Picasa):

Photos added to Google+ are automatically added to [Picasa](#), Google's competitor to Yahoo's Flickr, the leading photo sharing service.

Video Sharing Market Growth (YouTube):

Videos added to Google+ are played within Google+ only, using the YouTube framework for playback. In the future, it seems likely that consumers will have the option to link Google+ videos to their YouTube account. YouTube is already the leading video sharing service and a top search engine in and of itself.

Also, YouTube links posted to Google+ are automatically hyperlinked using the YouTube video's title as anchor text. This could indicate that Google is placing increased importance on cleaning up the quality and ranking signals of YouTube, the [second largest search engine](#). If so, this immediately impacts how you should optimize YouTube video naming for broader reach within and outside of YouTube.

Web Email Client Growth (Gmail):

To join Google+, consumers must create a Google account. The Google account is the gateway to all Google products and was started by Gmail, Google's web email client. Whereas Facebook's attempt to allow its users to use [Facebook as an email client](#) seems to have failed, Google's positioning as the consumer's "+1" for all web activities may give it an advantage in effectively cross-promoting Gmail adoption. This holds especially true since Gmail can also be a stand-alone email client, exclusive of its social network counterpart.

Location-Based Services and Local Deals (Google Places and Google Offers):

This feature operates like many Location-Based Services (LBS) before it, such as Facebook Places and Foursquare. Mobile users can quickly check-in to local businesses and share this across their Google+ network. This local focus may also impact [Google Offers](#) in the future, especially if users are able to +1 and share offers within Google+. This feature could help drive user adoption, scale, and give Google a unique offering within this coveted space. Also, imagine the opportunity for Google to serve users these *Offers* within search results or within Google+ if they have searched "pizza" in NYC.

Social Gaming (Google+ Games):

This unannounced feature is hidden in the [source code of Google+](#). Google's entrance into the social gaming community isn't a big surprise when reviewing recent investments made by the company, namely the [\\$100MM+ invested in Zynga](#), a leading social gaming company.

Internet Browser Growth (Chrome):

This will be the hardest to win for Google. While its Chrome browser has gained ground in the [web browser war](#), it is still far behind the likes of Internet Explorer and Firefox. However, if millions of consumers flock to Google+, this gives Google the perfect opportunity to feature its web browser on Google+ users' homepage, think: "For the best Google+ Experience, Use Google Chrome."

Personalized Search and Improved Quality:

Bing partnered with Facebook to help personalize search results and fight against web spam. Google recently [relinquished its contract with Twitter](#), possibly signaling bigger changes coming to Google's algorithmic search results. The problem with these search engine + social network partnerships is exactly what Google+ is looking to solve: social networks as destination portals. What consumers do within their social networks does not always coincide with consumer behavior on a search engine.

While consumers do share impressive amounts of information, links, and other content within social networks, matching these "Likes" to search results and porting this massive amount of information into a search engine algorithm is not easily accomplished. However, Google+ and Google's +1 Button provide the leading search engine with the information social networks provide, already in the format and platform that Google needs. For example: a consumer "Likes" a URL and shares it on Facebook. Google would then have to find and match that URL in Facebook to the exact URL within their database and attribute a "Like" to it. This "Like" is stored within Facebook's database and comes in a different format than Google's. Now, imagine a consumer "+1's" a URL. That back end connection to Google's database happens instantly, enabling real-time personalization and immediate quality improvements.

Search Targeting:

What is one of the largest opportunities for search engines that Display marketers love? Demographic and behavior targeting. If you're signed in to Google+ or any Google product, you've most likely given Google your gender, age, location, and probably more. If you're +1'ing links around the web, you're telling Google what you are interested in (Sparks in Google+ as well), what you're in-market for, or what you simply "Like", which enables Google to aggregate these +1's into "interest categories." Search marketers could then potentially target not only the search query, but the "search query" + "males" + "ages: 34-54" + "living in NYC" + who have "+1'd the automotive interest category."

Imagine two sections of paid search ads **within Google Search**: "Related to your search" and "Related to your interests". This is purely speculative, but the opportunity does exist for Google to take it this far.

Next, imagine ads **within Google+** that target "users who have searched within the automotive industry in the past 3 months" + "males" + ages: 34-54". This extra layer of "users who have searched" immediately indicates consumers who are in-market and becomes a powerful targeting attribute within the network.

CONCLUSIONS

Currently, businesses are being asked to stay out of Google+, with promises of business-oriented solutions coming soon. Ads are also absent on Google+, as the company will evaluate user adoption during the field trial prior to its full-scale launch. However, Google became an idolized, multi-billion dollar company by creating simple text advertisements and streaming revenue by the click, so it's safe to assume we will see advertisements on Google+ in the future.

The greatest implications for search marketing are market share, personalization, quality, and targeting. If all of these are capitalized on by Google, the search giant may be well on its way to creating the next generation of search. However, as with all web innovations, success is contingent on user awareness and adoption.

If Google can keep Google+ simple to use, provide a unique utility not found with Facebook or other networks, and shy away from the time-draining destination feel of its competitors, Google+ has the opportunity to win.