

Your Brand on



An **idea** Guide

Credits

Authors

Stefanie Brower
Digital Strategist; Idea-Houston, TX.

Chris Pitre
Executive Director, Social Media & Innovation; Idea-Houston, TX.

Brett Malden
Executive Creative Director, Digital Practice Lead; Idea-Houston, TX.

Design and Creative Direction

Chris Hungate
Associate Creative Director; Idea-Houston, TX.

Gabriel Gamio
Designer; Idea-Houston, TX.

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Introduction

Social isn't a 'new' trend per se nor is it the "end all-be all" marketing panacea that some would like to argue. It's just the means by which we get social that have changed and integrating these innovations within your overall digital engagement strategy will drive desired results quicker and more efficiently. We live in a very fast paced environment, and thanks to advancing technologies, we have the luxury of connecting to friends and family online in real time in the moment. Connecting with customers face to face in a store isn't always possible today and for some businesses customers are on the other side of the world. Luckily, social platforms allow people to connect within only a few clicks anytime-anywhere.

Just about everyone is social these days:

Facebook: 1 billion monthly active users

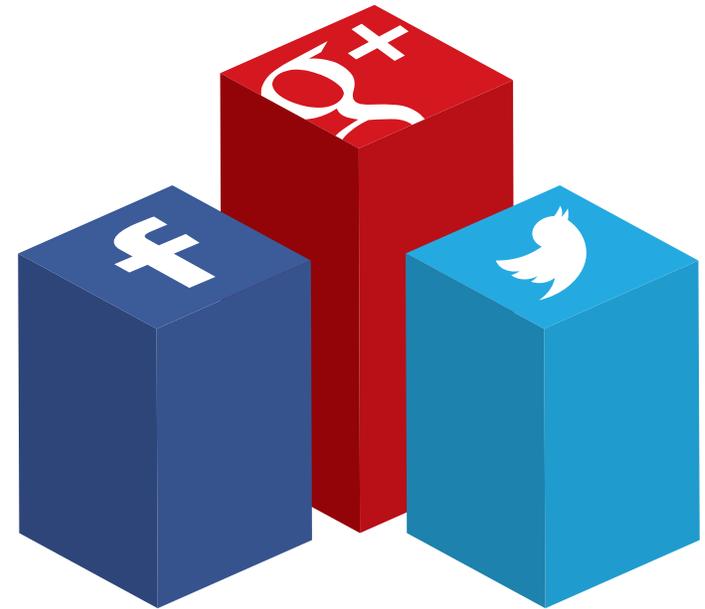
Twitter: 500 million active users

Google+: 400 million active users

And these users spend a lot of time on these platforms each day. When they aren't catching up with friends they're sharing snippets of their life, often these involve conversations about brands, products they love, products they don't love, experiences and interactions with brands-good, bad or indifferent and much more.

If a brand isn't there to reciprocate the conversation they tend to lose credibility and more importantly a voice and a stance for their brand.

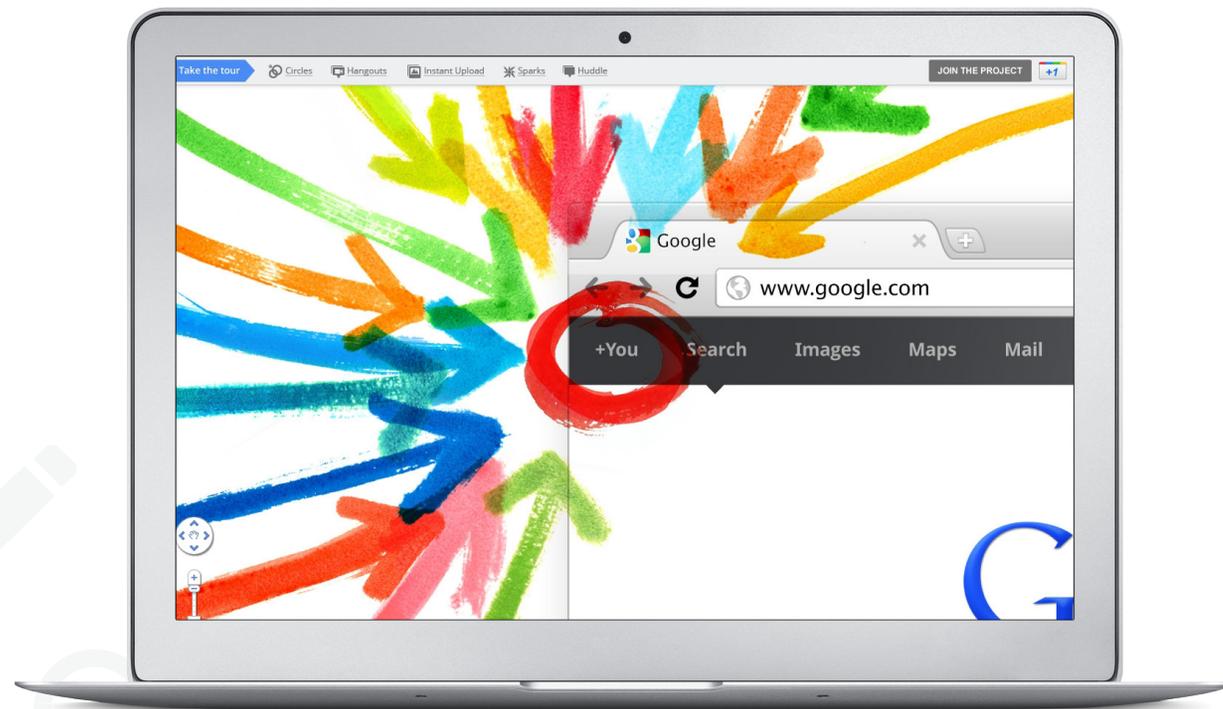
Google+ is one of the newer platforms to hit the market (officially launching September 2011), but it has a large backing and a steadily increasing adoption rate. So what does it mean to be on Google+? What should my business do? It's a unique space, and it offers more personal tools compared to the other platforms for SMB's and enterprise-level companies alike. Dive in and find out how to optimize a brand presence on Google+.



Google+ Overview

First, Google+ is more than a social network; it's a platform extension of Google, it brings a social element to the web and everything users do when they're connected. Whether its searching for a local dentist, writing a restaurant review, liking a video on YouTube, posting a photo to Picasa albums, Google+ connects all of that seamlessly and integrates it into a Google+ profile. With Google+, social isn't just confined to a specific website.

Secondly, Google is the largest search engine in the world, with 90% of all searches happening here. Plus, it also owns YouTube, the second largest search engine in the world. This automatically means that Google has a one-up with their +1 button vs. Facebook's Like.



Why does this matter?

If a user opens their browser and does a Google search for:

Let's say they choose Dental Partners of Boston, seeing it scores 23/30 and has 11 reviews.

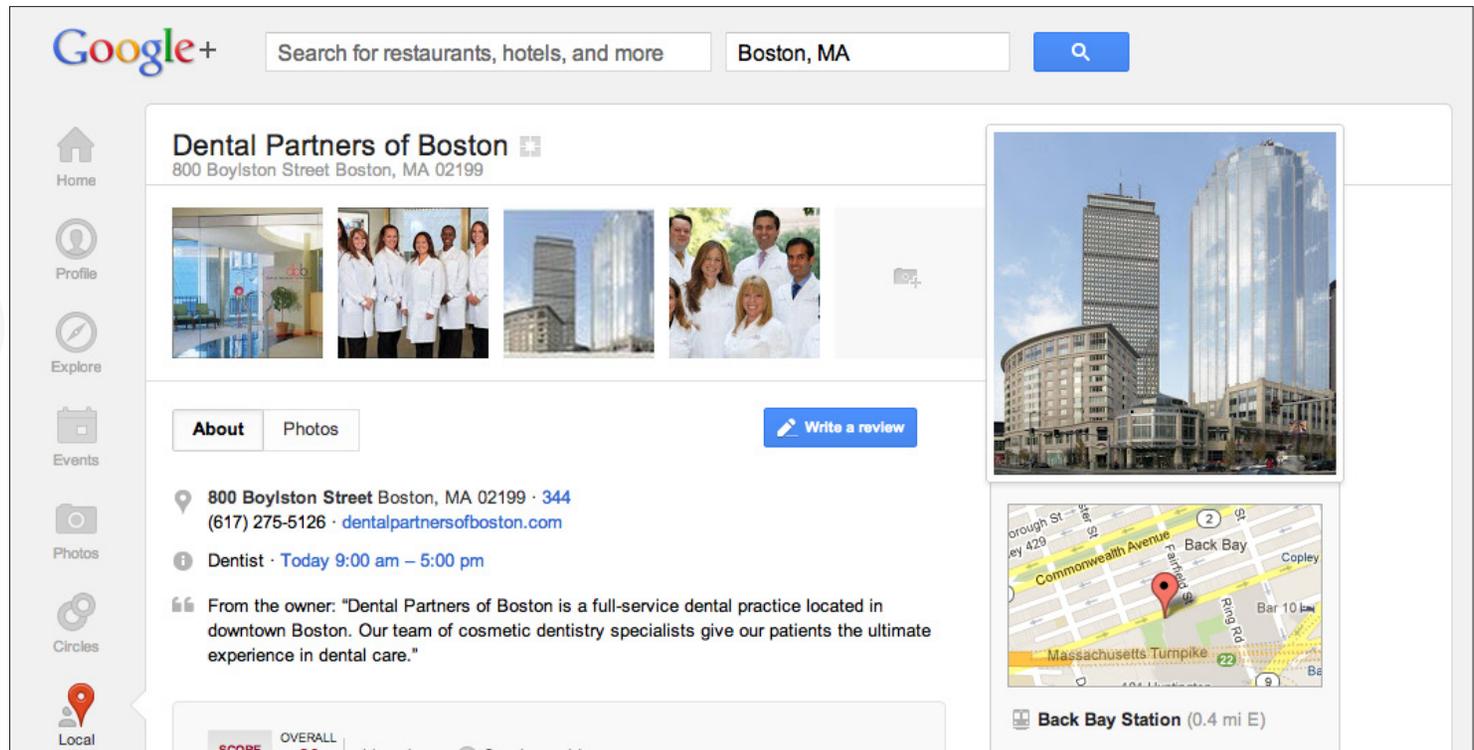
The screenshot shows a Google search for 'Boston Dentists'. The results include several links and a map. A red oval highlights the 'Dental Partners of Boston' listing, which has a score of 23/30 and 11 Google reviews. Other listings include 'Top Boston Dentists - Make Your Appointment Online- Free', 'Boston, MA Dentistry', 'General Dentistry', 'Top Boston Dentists', and 'Emergency Dental Care'. A map shows three locations: A (800 Boylston St, Boston), B (36 Chauncy Street, Boston), and C (50 Staniford Street #303, Boston).

Once the user has selected Dental Partners of Boston they are taken to Google Maps where they can see the location in relation to their city, along with additional information.

The screenshot shows the HP Operations Management website. The main heading is 'Operations Management' with the subtext 'Automate, manage, secure and optimize your IT investments.' There is a 'Contact us' button and a 'Share' link. Below this, there is a section titled 'Keep mobile apps humming' with a list of bullet points: 'monitor the mobile client: understand the true user experience at the smartphone or tablet level', 'monitor the cloud: get insight into the user experience for services in the public & private cloud', and 'monitor outside in and inside out: monitor end user experience and within your data center'. There is also a video player showing a dashboard. On the right side, there are sections for 'Software Products A-Z', 'Discover Performance', and 'What's new'.

Your Brand on Google+

They are now on Dental Partners' local Google+ page.



With just two clicks from the search results page users land on the Google+ Local page for this business. Whether or not the owner of Dental Partners of Boston maintains this page, Google has generated it as part of its Local Pages, which is also a part of the Google+ platform and Google Maps. Everything is now becoming seamlessly connected. It integrates company information as well as reviews, directions, and photos and is likely being seen by hundreds of users each day.

Companies need to maintain these pages in order to facilitate the social conversations happening within their digital ecosystem.

Google has now taken search to the next level, by adding the ability to converge with social at this ever-important intersection. Imagine seeing search results recommended by family and friends. Google+ is making that happen.

Your Brand on Google+

With the April 2012 announcement of “Search Plus Your World” (SPYW), Google confirmed search results would now display Google+ content first.

This means images; news articles, reviews and any content shared on Google+ will now have priority in search results. That’s pretty powerful.

Lastly, in terms of audience, users on Google+ are pretty unique. Most users tend to be technically advanced, engaged in active conversation and open to share their opinion. Brands are finding this to be a positive attribute of the platform. A smart, active and honest group that wants to tell brands what they think is definitely a ‘plus’.

Brand Strategy on Google+

Jumping into a new social platform can be a little intimidating, but remember, Google doesn't want Google+ to be treated as a completely new platform. It's an integration of the many existing Google products most companies are already using, so there's an untapped audience waiting to be reached.

Plus, with Google's integration of Google+ into its search results, there's really nothing to lose. Here are some best practices for crafting a brand strategy on Google+.



Setting up the Brand Page



Adwords Integration



Optimizing Circles

Setting Up the Brand Page

Similar to Facebook, the Brand Page offers an area for a profile photo and large header image. Then the typical categories will need to be optimized: About, Photos and Videos. To set up a Business page, a personal Google+ profile must be set up to serve as the initial admin.

A Google account is needed to set up a personal profile on Google+, but this does not have to be a Gmail account. It can be associated with any email address.

The personal profile that initiates the business page will be the initial administrator and owner, however, admins can be added anytime and ownership can be transferred to any admin who has been associated to the page for at least 2 weeks.

Once the Brand Page has been set up and content has been posted to the stream, the page is verified by Google and you can start acquiring followers.

Verification is a simple process, and more details can be found here. Verifying the business page helps search performance, and will allow other Google products, like Adwords and YouTube to connect seamlessly.

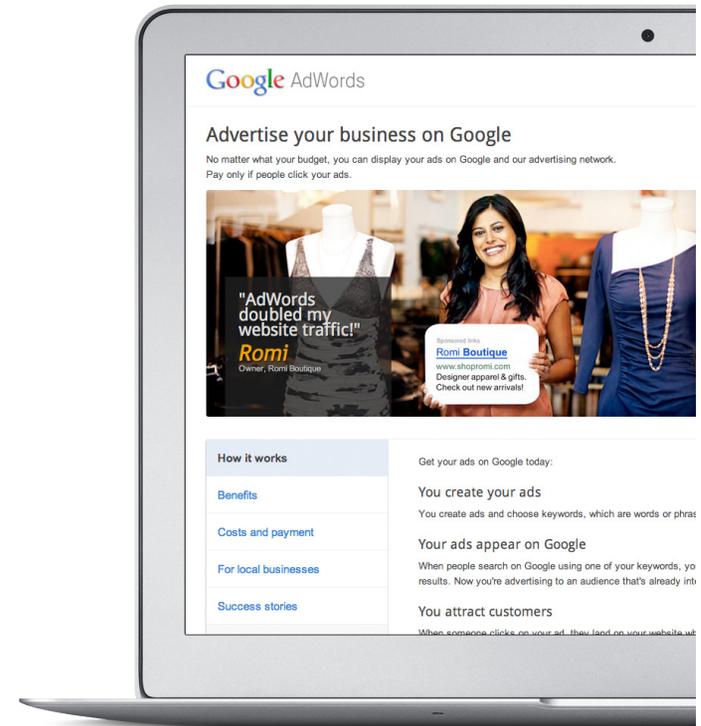
To start acquiring new customers, brands should incorporate their Google+ page into their existing marketing efforts. Adding the Google+ URL at the end of TV spots and print materials and also integrating the +1 button onto web properties are just a few examples.



Adword Integration

Linking a company's existing Adwords advertising account with the Brand Page is also an immediate way to grow a follower base and to start getting users engaged with the content. As soon as the two are connected, the usual text ads that show up in search results now include the +1 button along with how many people have given this brand a +1 rating. This can be a very powerful tool, especially since people trust recommendations. If the user performing a search activity is signed in, Google+ will even display the ad with profile photos of their friends who have recommended that particular landing page.

Those who have implemented the Adwords integration have seen an increase in CTR. Intel, the global chip manufacturer, is experiencing an average of an 8 - 10% increase and H&M, the global fashion retailer, as much as a 22% CTR increase. And for now - the click to the company Google+ page is now being offered in the text ad free of charge (at no additional cost).



<p>Houston, TX Change location</p> <hr/> <p>Show search tools</p>	<p>Dell's Ultrabooks™ dell.com www.dell.com/Ultrabooks ★★★★★ 2,363 reviews for dell.com Shop Now For Inspiron & XPS Ultrabooks™ Inspired By Intel.</p> <p>The New XPS 12 Touch Ultrabook XPS 12 Touch Ultrabook for Business Bookmark Our Black Friday Site</p>
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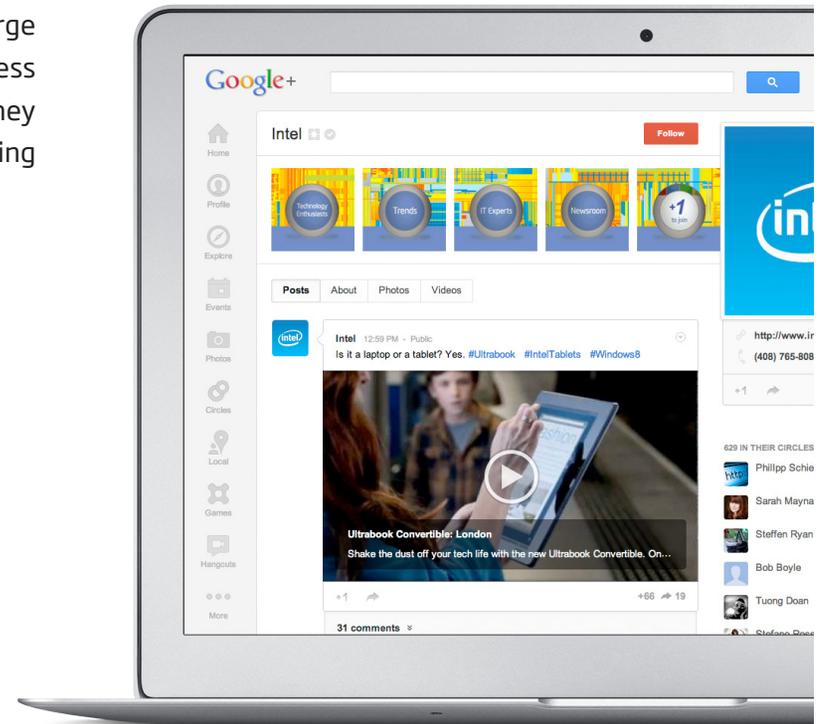
Optimizing Circles

Google+ has one thing marketers have longed for on Facebook - targeted sharing. While Facebook does have the ability to select who sees certain posts, it's been a very manual process. Google+ Circles has made sharing information, much more personal and effortless.

Now, every update or post doesn't have to be seen by the entire customer base. Think of this feature in the same context as group email lists. Customers can be segmented into Circles that they decide to opt in to. Circles work best when passion points are targeted, things customers are interested in. For instance, a large hospital network wants to share a particular fitness message with its 'Running' and 'Yoga' circles. Now, they can quickly share their 'Tips for keeping active during the holidays' guide out to these targeted customers.

Also, customers can fall into multiple circles, so they can opt into several if they all apply.

Intel is a great example of a brand that is optimizing Circles. In their header image area, clickable images are used as the Circles, with clear instructions on how to opt in. Circles should be created based on customer interests that the brand participates in or promotes.



User Engagement Tactics

Once the basics have been put into place and a follower base is being established, its time to engage the audience, here's how:

Rich Media & Photography

By design, Google+ is very visual. Brands have experienced great success with beautiful imagery, infographics and videos (i.e. rich media). Swarovski and Toyota are well known for their consistent stream of beautiful product imagery. Toyota averages 30 +1s , 7 shares and 8 comments per post, with its most successful post receiving 272 comments, 713 +1s and 309 shares. Toyota, the world's leading automotive company, has over 1.5 million followers on Google+, more than it does on any of its other social-media channels.

The Financial Times (FT), among the world's leading business news and information organizations, quickly noticed the highly visual nature of the platform.

They have found rich media posts to work particularly well. "Google+ is a hugely visual platform for the FT and that is where we see the highest degree of engagement. Whether it's a video, image or infographic, the interface of Google+ just works well."

Co-Create Content

Since the Google+ audience is fairly tech advanced and highly engaged in participation, the call for user-generated content (UGC) works exceptionally well. Mashable, the largest independent news site devoted to digital culture and technology, hosted a contest in which they asked their audience to create a design for their Google+ page. They received great feedback upon sharing the winning design. "A lot of people thought it was really cool - not only that the design was good-looking - but also that we did a contest like that and let people have the opportunity to participate."

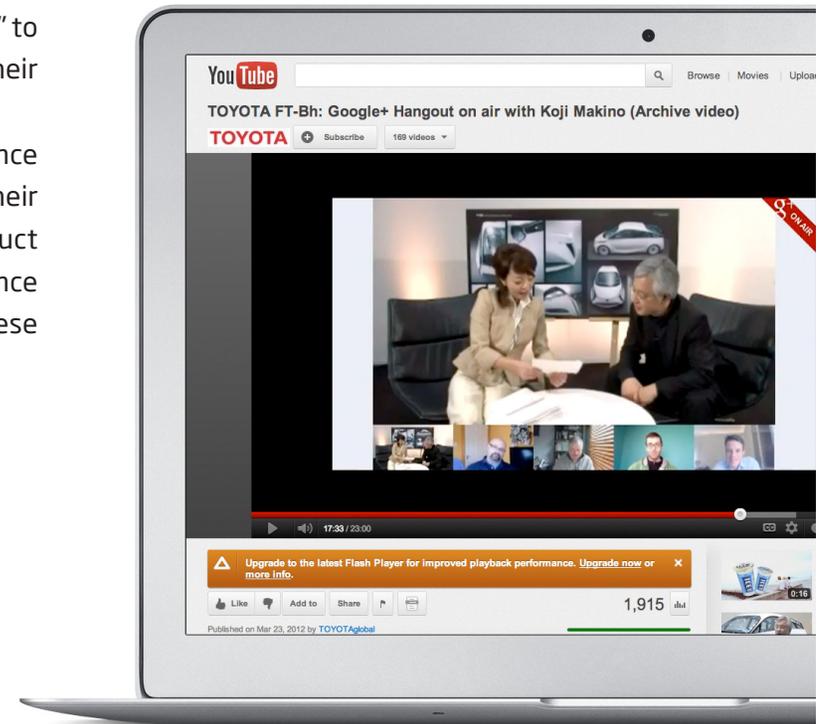
Asking the audience to collaborate is a great way to get them to feel like they contributed in some way-like they are an important and valued part of the process.

This definitely builds brand loyalty.

Hangouts

Hangouts are the most engaging tools yet on Google+. They offer the ability to connect live with customers. Hangouts can be private and open to a max of 9 participants, 10 including the host. Or Hangouts can be 'On Air' which means they are streaming live and are open for anyone on the web to watch, interact and learn from in real-time. Brands are seeing exceptional feedback when they use this deeper connection for conversations, opinions and even just a friendly "thank you". Cadbury, one of the biggest names in the chocolate business, hosted its first Hangout just to say "thanks" to their first 500k followers. They unveiled a replica of their Google+ page, made entirely of chocolate, and even featured profile pictures of followers. They have since had two more Hangouts, which were geared at their 'taster' audience to get feedback on flavors and product ideas. Each one was planned with a specific audience in mind and the content worked. Since hosting these Hangouts, their follower base has grown by 150k.

Similarly, Toyota has used Hangouts to provide followers the opportunity to connect with and ask questions to product engineers. In March 2012, they hosted a Hangout On Air from Tokyo with Kouji Makino, an engineer for the FT-Bh concept car. Followers were able to ask questions and learn about the car's features and the technology behind them. This was the first Hangout by a major brand in the region, and it was well received.

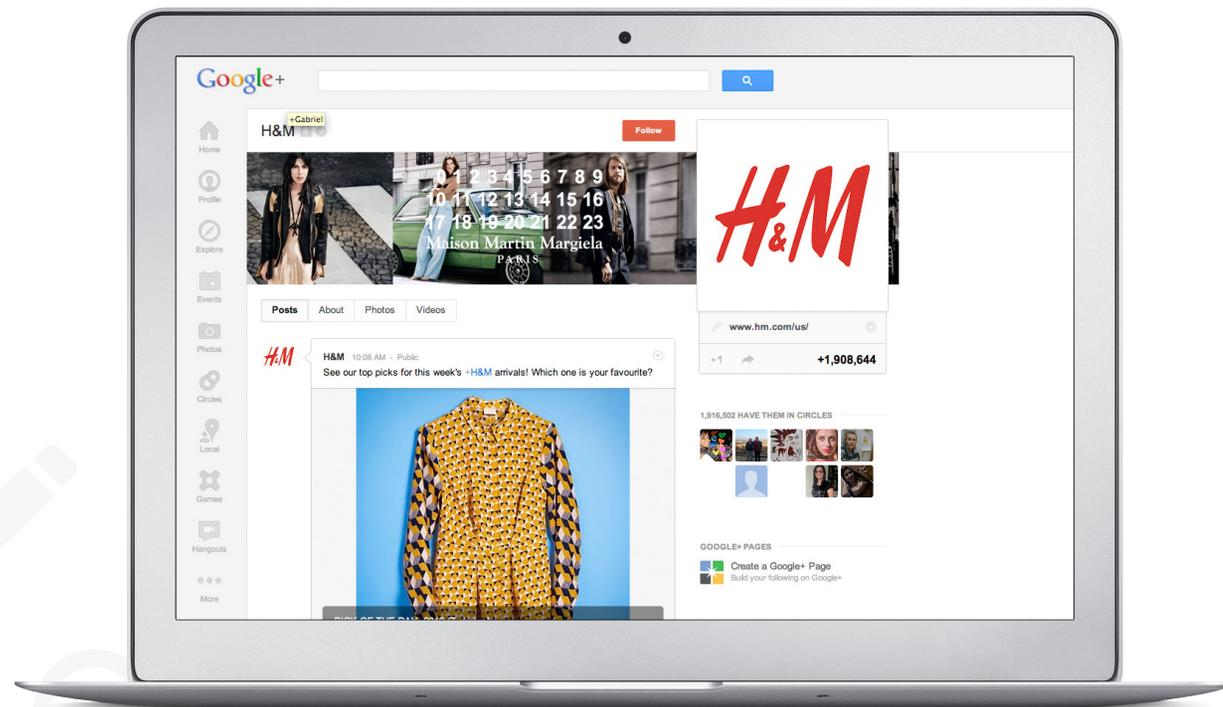


Measurement on the Platform

The most successful brands on Google+ use engagement metrics as the leading source for measurement. Increasing follower base is very important, but more importantly, how engaged are the users? For this reason, +1s, comments and shares on particular posts and pieces of content are key. Acquiring followers doesn't mean much if they aren't interested in what's being posted.

Again, the audience tends to be more engaged on Google+. So as long as content is well thought out for the particular audience, there should be favorable results.

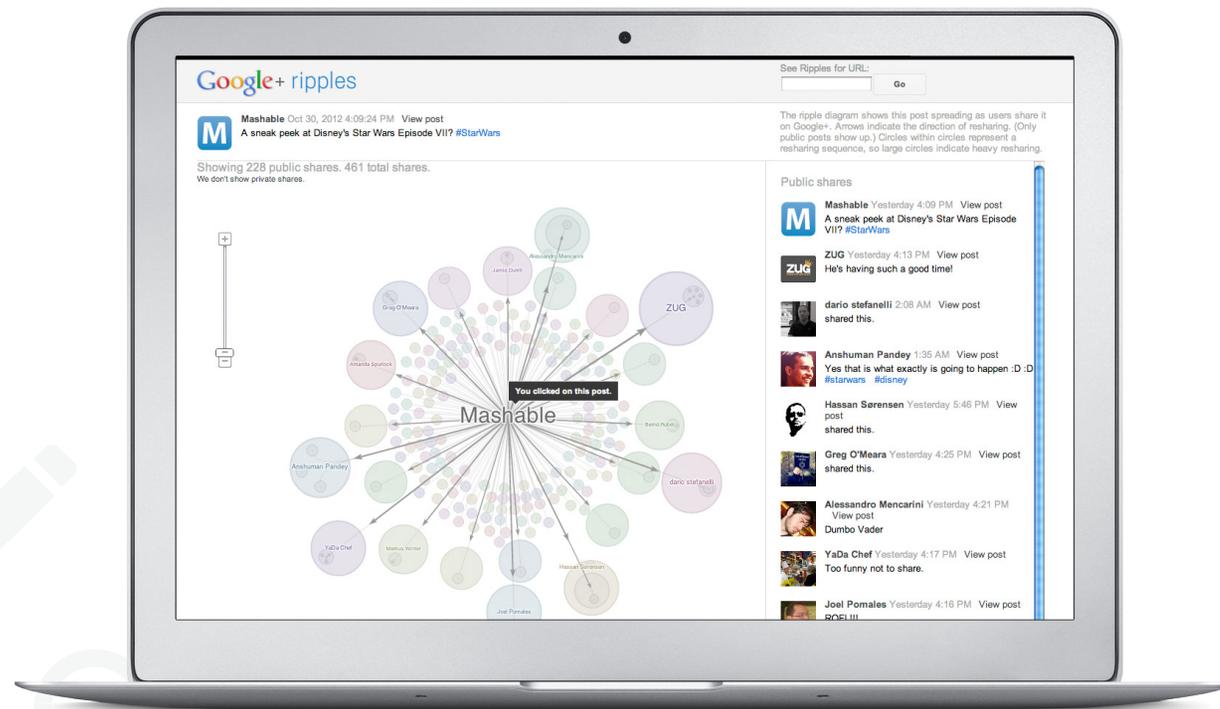
H&M, is one of the most successful brands on Google+. They experience an average of 72 +1s, 22 comments and 11 shares per post.



Google+ Ripples

Another good tool for monitoring the popularity of content is Google+ Ripples. Google+ Ripples create graphics that illustrate the public shares of any public post and allow anyone to see how that post has made its way through the Google+ network. It especially allows brands to see virality and top influencers.

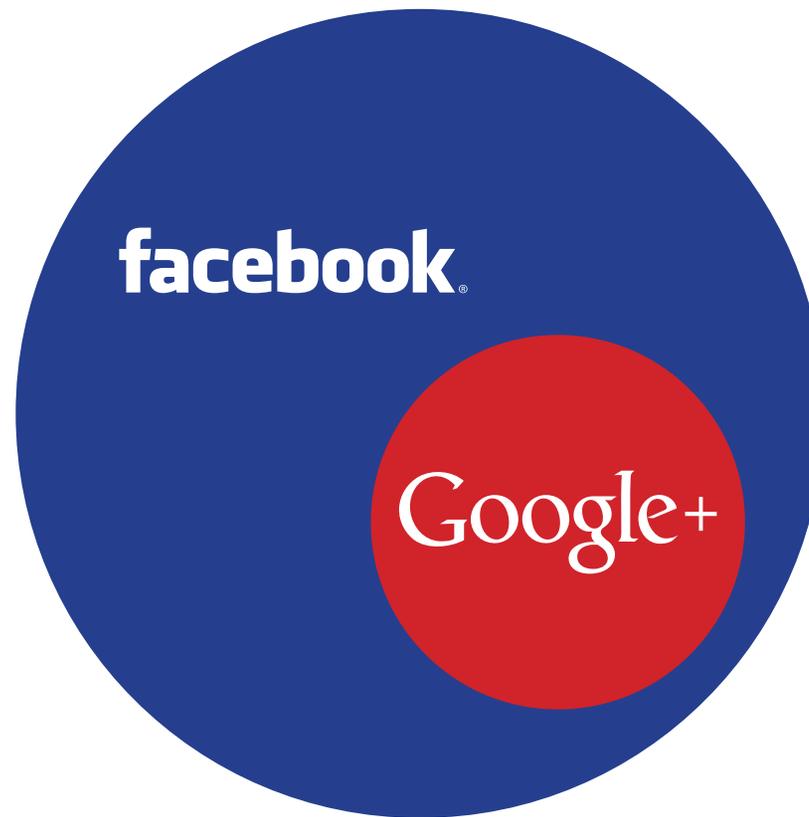
Tools like this help determine top content and who key followers are. This information is extremely helpful when planning editorial content or special engagement projects.



Known Pitfalls/Challenges Brands Face on Google+

So far, the biggest challenge to using Google+ seems to be the lower number of participants than on other social platforms. While Google+ has a healthy adoption rate that is steadily increasing, it currently doesn't have the number of users that Facebook has (approximately half). Ultimately, this means a smaller playing field. However,

the nature of the audience is highly tech savvy, social, engaged and eager to share opinions. This being said, the space may not yet have the numbers that Facebook has, but if content is meaningful and well-crafted there is a qualified and captive audience ready to engage and connect with brands on Google+.



Tips/Tricks/Recommendations

Being a part of the Google+ network is crucial for brands to grow awareness, recommendations and a larger follower base. The integration of Google search and Google+ content offers up a huge opportunity for the

brand page to be discovered by millions of users each day. Beyond being discovered, it allows for the opportunity to connect with customers in a new and personal way. Here's how brands can get the most with Google+:

- **Get active:** Social is, and always has been, a two-way street. Don't simply post content with the hopes that hundreds of people will find it. It will take work to foster an engaged community. Interact with the audience, connect with other brands and partners in the industry, and put forth meaningful conversations and sustainable content. If Google+ is a new space for the company, the best way to learn is to get in there and spend some time each day navigating the space.
- **Exclusive & unique content:** Google+ shouldn't be treated like all the other social networks. Just as Twitter content isn't treated like Facebook content, carefully plan and curate content for Google+' unique space. Keep in mind, the platform lends itself to visually rich content and the audience tends to be more technically savvy. This may take more planning and production time, but it will pay off with positive results.
- **Grow follower base with Adwords:** Most businesses already use Adwords; therefore, integrating the Google+ Brand Page with the Adwords account is a no-brainer. For no additional cost, than what is already being spent on search advertising, brands can instantly incorporate the +1 button, the number of recommendations, and a direct link to the company Google+ Brand Page, all within the existing text ad placement. Brands leveraging this tool have seen a significant increase in CTR.
- **Hangout with customers:** Hangouts offer a very personal and unique way to connect with customers that have never been available previously - a real face-to-face connection. Take advantage of what customers have to offer and use this opportunity to share exclusive content. Hangouts can be used in a variety of ways including focus groups, feedback, product Q&A, exclusive announcements and much more. The brands using Hangouts have seen great success, and they tend to generate a lot of social buzz.

Brett Malden

Executive Creative Director, Digital Practice Lead

Specializing in U/X, Design, Content
Development + Consumer Engagement

Key duties and responsibilities include executive creative oversight and direction of complex integrated projects across the entire digital ecosystem. Expert knowledge of strategic planning, creative operations, digital and mobile technologies in addition to strong relationship building with internal teams (from account services to strategy; creative to content marketing; front and backend development to final production and delivery) as well as external partners and co-development vendors (from pre-pro to production to post).

Led successful large-scale integrated digital and social-centric projects (budgets ranging from \$500K to over \$2M scopes), client engagements in excess of \$40M annually (excluding media) and high-performance integrated creative + production teams for Fortune 500/Global 1000 clients and is award-recog-

nized including the Cannes Cyber Lion. Thrive at juggling multiple projects and clients, and have a passion for creating the best integrated consumer/user experiences in the world. Clients include: American Express; British Airways; Celebrity Cruises; Chrysler Corp; COKE; Mars Chocolates; NCL; POWERADE; Unilever; VW. Graduate courses in Business and Finance towards MBA (Magna Cum Laude Honors) Florida Atlantic University. BSME Mechanical Engineering (Cum Laude Honors) University of Miami (The "U") College of Engineering. Frequent Guest Speaker and Adjunct Professor at Miami Ad School; "Social Media and Pop Culture"; The Wolfsonian-FIU; "Web 2.0: Power to the People" and the University of Miami School of Communication-Advertising; "Web 2.0 Beyond the Campaign: Crowdsourcing and Co-Creation."

Chris Pitre

Executive Director, Social Media & Innovation

Chris Pitre, Executive Director of Social Media and Innovation at Idea, oversees the social media initiatives and experiences built for global clients like HP, Microsoft, and GE, across mobile, web, and internal channels. He firmly believes that when social dynamics are researched, reported and applied, they can greatly impact strategy, design and technology.

In order to create these experiences, Chris has performed and led innovative research methodologies, including crowdsourced research, to uncover real-time insights to help inform on brand and design direction.

During his time at Idea, Chris has pioneered the social media practice by uncovering and relying on key user insights. Those insights lead to the successful delivery of key social and integrated experiences that meet the needs of the business and the behaviors of the user.

Chris stays current with the mobile and social web, continuing to educate and update clients on new possibilities and user norms, expectations, and behaviors.

Prior to Idea, Chris has worked at web and mobile development firms, as well as traditional advertising agencies, with brands across fashion, quick-serve food, tech, energy, and healthcare industries. Chris has a BBA in Marketing from The George Washington University, where he studied marketing and communications

Chris Hungate

Associate Creative Director

With over 16 years of experience leading creative and strategy for global technology brands like HP, Microsoft, Sprint, and Sony, Chris is a passionate, versatile, and innovative designer, strategist and technologist.

Chris specializes in mobile, web, and application UI/UX design, strategy, and innovation, with additional expertise in marketing strategy and visual design. He brings to the table a strong understanding of human factors and user-centered design, and the ability to translate research findings into relevant, intelligent and exciting design concepts that drive engagement.

Chris effortlessly switches between handling the big picture, to finessing the tiniest detail.

A true hybrid designer, he uses both creative and analytical thinking to solve complex business problems.

Footnotes

Financial Times Case Study

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Mashable (April 2012)

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