

Marketers: Ignore Google+ At Your Own Risk

Uninformed marketing professionals and business owners have long considered Google+ to be the ugly stepchild of social media giants such as Facebook and Twitter. The majority of companies that have already dedicated time and resources to growing their social influence have largely dismissed Google+ as a waste of time. Even though Google+ is a relatively new player in the social media game, it has a constantly evolving platform combined with unique features and important SEO capabilities that must not be overlooked.

Here are seven reasons why marketers should incorporate Google+ into their clients' social media efforts:

1. Instant Indexing and SEO

Much like Facebook, Google+ has already introduced hashtags that allow users to conduct custom searches via specific keywords. Unlike Facebook, Google+ has the power of the world's largest search engine behind it. Google Search users in the United States and Canada are now able to search hashtags, which pop up as a list of related Google+ posts on the right side of the page. The SEO importance of this feature is undeniable – companies that incorporate hashtags into Google+ posts that match user keyword search results can experience a significant upswing in link clicks and website traffic.

2. Hangout with Your Audience

Google+ Hangouts is a free app that allows users to video chat with up to ten people at once. Hangouts can be private, only visible to the people invited, or on air, which are publicly viewable and simultaneously recorded to your YouTube channel. Other Google+ Hangouts features include photo and document sharing, emoji, and video effects. Businesses can broaden their reach by incorporating Hangouts into their marketing plan; for example, LA-based digital publishing platform BakeSpace has amassed 360,000 people in its Google+ circles after hosting 40 hangouts, compared to its 14,000 Facebook "likes."

3. It's Growing

Step aside, Twitter. A recent report from Internet analytics firm GlobalWebIndex shows that the number of active Google+ users is close to 360 million, second only to Facebook and up from 259 million in June 2012. That's a hefty number of potential customers that has been left untapped.

4. Content Authorship

Businesses and individuals who have a Google+ profile are able to claim authorship over their Internet content, and it's going to play a big role in future content marketing strategies. Authorship allows writers to link the content they create to their Google+ profile, and also

provides Internet users with the opportunity to find additional content from the same author. Content linked via Google+ Authorship establishes credibility, increases content reach, and improves search engine rankings – all resulting in greater exposure.

5. Build a Target Audience

Having a hard time getting your message heard by the right people? That's where Google+ Circles excel. Circles are a way to segment other users into targeted groups based on their relationship to you. Businesses can use this to their advantage by breaking their connections down by interest group, location, or audience demographics (i.e., customers, employees, VIPs). Messages can be tailored specifically for each group and you can choose to receive updates from members of your circles, which can help you better understand your audience and increase engagement.

6. Say What You Need to Say

Let's face it – it's hard to communicate effectively in 140 characters or less. Not everyone is a wordsmith who can fling out witty sayings on the spot that capture attention and deliver the perfect message every time. Google+ posts have no character limit, which allows businesses to engage their audience in normal and personal conversations that are uninhibited by arbitrary restraints. Try responding appropriately to a customer complaint in less than two sentences.

7. Google+ Caters to a Business Community

Thus far, your social media strategies have largely focused on building an audience via Facebook (too many 13 year olds posting self photos) and Twitter (overrun by outspoken celebrities like Miley Cyrus and Justin Bieber), but you're just not capturing the right market. Google+ has branded itself as THE social network community for making connections and collaborations within the professional community, particularly in the business and technology spheres. Whether you're a B2B company or a consumer-oriented brand, Google+ is the place to reach a professional audience that tends to shy away from Facebook and Twitter.

Google+ has experienced unprecedented growth since its launch. Marketing professionals and business owners who ignore its potential and leave its wealth of resources untapped will undoubtedly find themselves falling behind in the ever-changing landscape of social media.