Plugged In BY RENATO SOGUECO

GOOGLE’S A+ SOCIAL PLATFORM

Let’s be honest about Google+ (plus), Google’s social platform: You probably don’t know many people who actively use it. You may have never even heard of it. But it’s big. With 359 million active users (according to GlobalWebIndex), Google+, which launched in the summer of 2011, has surpassed Twitter’s numbers and is second only to Facebook’s 700 million users. You can see where I’m heading, right? Yes, this is another social network you need to join.

Try to not view this as another techie chore. Like Facebook and Twitter, Google+ has its unique value propositions, which may positively impact your online business even more than some of the older social networks. Plus, we’ll give you step-by-step instruction on getting started.

Familiar Features

There’s a reason we referred to Google+ as a social platform, rather than a network. But before delving into its differences, let’s discuss what it does like its rivals.

- Add friends! Like Facebook or Twitter, Google+ includes a profile that links to your spheres of influence. Google+ goes further by letting you classify friends, placing them into “Circles” (think: family, college pals, colleagues, floral industry peers), allowing you to share specific content with specific people. See google.com/+learnmore/circles/.

Exclusive Operations

How does Google+ distinguish itself from Twitter and Facebook? For starters, it boasts a feature called “Hangouts,” a virtual meeting place where you can collaborate by exchanging instant messages and multimedia or by participating in real-time video conferences of up to 10 people. Even better? Collaborators can be on any device: desktop, tablet or smartphone. Visit google.com/+learnmore/hangouts/.

Hangouts are great, but in my opinion, the most killer advantage of Google+ is that it ties into all other services in the Google ecosystem (email, calendar, docs, maps, images, etc.). And let’s not forget that Google has more than 80-plus percentage market share of all desktop and mobile searches. Facebook and Twitter have no such leverage; they are solely social networks.

As you populate Google+ with useful content and people begin to give you “+1s,” your brand’s relevance will grow and, subsequently, your ranking may rise. Google’s algorithms for its ranking results will always be a mystery, but you can safely assume that using their social platform only helps. If you’ve done your homework from previous Plugged In columns (built a Google Places listing, used Adwords, uploaded videos to your YouTube (owned by Google) channel), this is just one more step in embracing Google’s potential.

 Getting Started

Jump-start your Google+ efforts by creating a Google account if you don’t yet have one – any of the aforementioned links have a button to “create an account.” Consider using your shop email address to keep it professional. Also, be sure to use your real name, not a business name, or Google may suspend the account. (It’s okay to have both a personal and business account with your name.)

Now visit google.com/+business/. Hit “Create a Google+ Page” (on the right side). Download clearly outlined steps at google.com/+business/assets/getstarted_guide.pdf. Below are suggestions to make your page stand out.

- You’ll be asked to write a tagline about your business in 10 words or less. Choose your description wisely as this gives users a taste for your brand and is critical to appear in search results.
- Next, select a high quality image of at least 500 by 500 pixels to represent your shop. (Might we suggest your logo?) For the cover photo (another feature similar to Facebook), show your talent with the best 2120 by 1192-pixel snapshot of a recent event or an incredible horizontal arrangement.
- The last area to flesh out is the About section. Here, you should add links to all your online properties: Facebook, blog, Twitter, etc. This is a great opportunity to tell Google where you do business online. And finally, add lots of photos and videos to entice users to follow your page. Yes, Google+ is yet another social property to manage, but this one has impact that resonates in the fastest growing revenue stream in your business, your website. So it is a must. $0.

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