



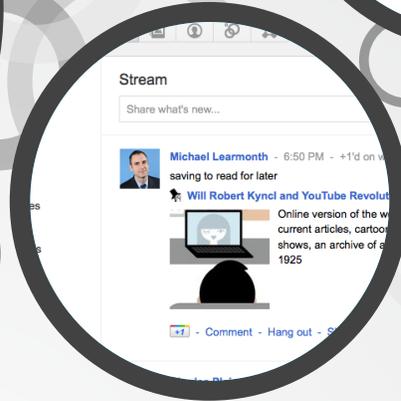
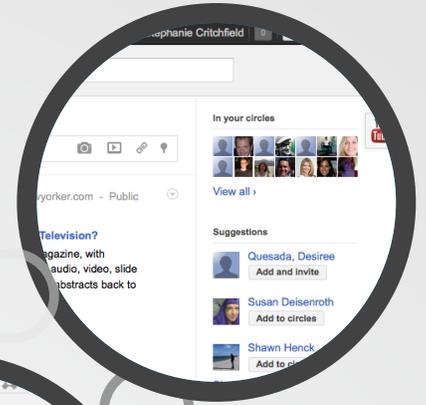
THE SKINNY: **Google+**

SKINNY PAPERS: VOLUME 1

Your source for insights on the latest in emerging trends and platforms.

Google+

Get the SKINNY on brand pages from the latest social network.



WHAT IT IS

Google+ is the latest social platform to hit the scene. The user experience, tools and functionality are all designed with Google’s mission in mind - “to make sharing on the Web more like sharing in real life.” Circles, for example, act like friend groups, letting people tailor and include/exclude their communications to the people they choose. Despite this, the company has been quick to set their own language, saying they don’t consider Google+ a “social network”, or for that matter, a competitor to Facebook.

Both their beta and public launch intentionally left brands out. This let them stay focused on their users – to see how people were using the platform and what they could do to improve it. After a few months to sort itself out, Google+ launched brand pages with a select group of companies, including Ford, CNN and Pepsi. Now, the platform is open to any company that wants to get in.

And brands have strong reason to be interested. While Google hasn’t released the exact number of active users, according to U.S. analyst Paul Allen, the platform has passed 62 million, with a quarter of those signing up in December. Paul further claims that roughly 625,000 members are signing up per day.

NUMBER OF USERS



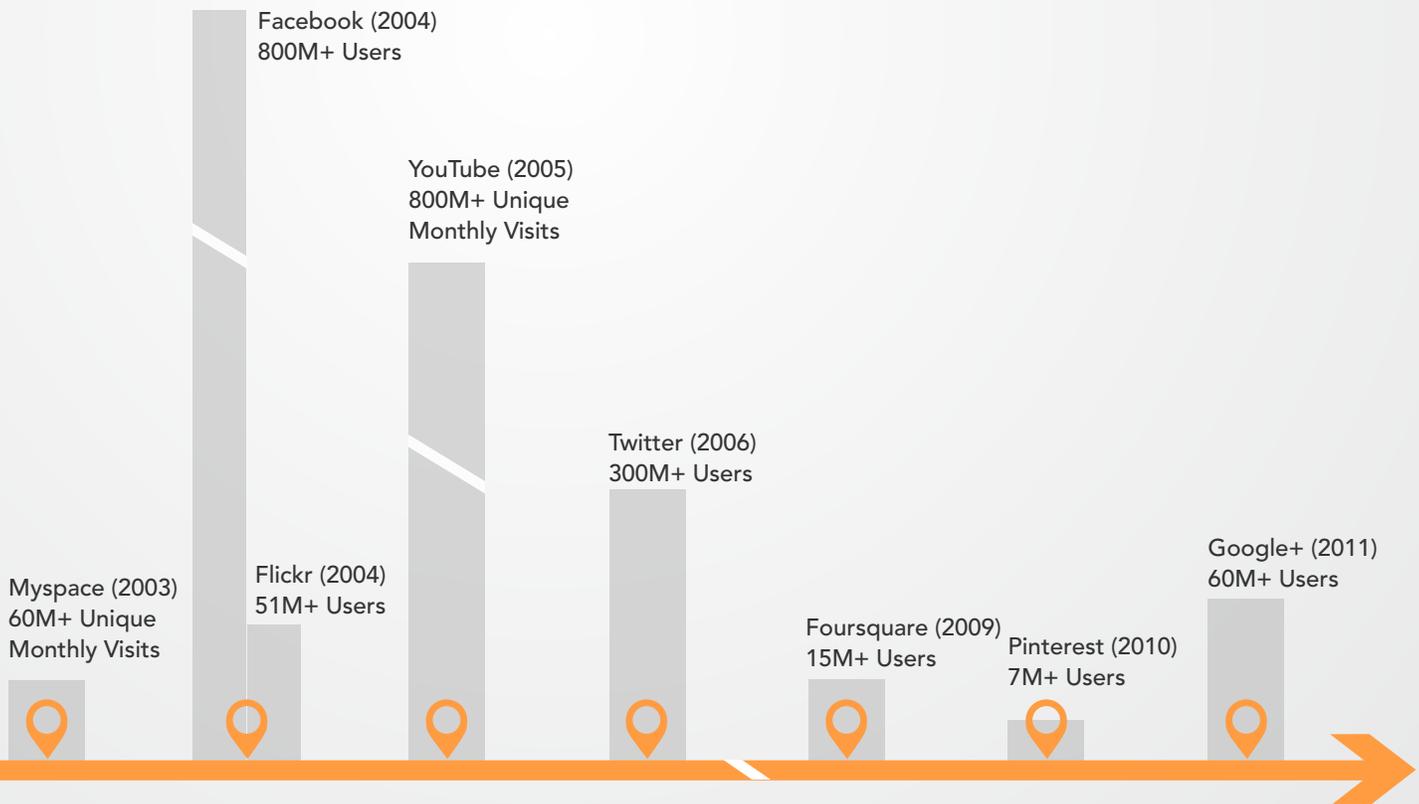


WHY IT'S IMPORTANT

Every new launch in the social space gathers attention. But when its Google, it gathers a little more interest. With a semi-failure already behind them (Brazil loves Okurt), it's safe to say this launch was done with considerable attention to delivering success.

Google should stand in a position of considerable strength. They're not only well backed and trusted, they have a roster of products that one can expect will offer *some* degree of integration or support in the future. Progress is certainly promising: In just 21 days of existence, Google+ racked up 18M users. It took Facebook 2.5 years to achieve the same. For a number of reasons that comparison isn't quite fair, but it's still reassuring.

SOCIAL MEDIA: CURRENT USER COUNTS & START DATES





THE ENGAUGE POV

Google+ could be seen as the next big thing in social. Few new social platforms have survived with the dominance of Facebook. Yet, Google+ is drawing attention, and a following. If its growth to date indicates anything, it will be around for a while.

One of the biggest opportunities for brands is the ability to have deeper interactions with an audience. Features like Hangouts and Circles all work to make personal connections a focus on this network, even for brands.

However, not discounting the features of Google+, it's still a new platform with a (so far) limited offering. Companies should approach it with a watchful eye on audience and a commitment to a long-term plan.



GROUND RULES

Every new platform comes with a new set of best practices. With that in mind, here are three *early* ground rules for launching in Google+.

1. GIVE GOOGLE+ A ROLE

One of the largest foreseeable problems for Google+ brand pages is the blatant duplication of content across social channels. It's like spraying a message through all channels hoping one will stick, rather than choosing a network based on the message that's being delivered and who is best served by reading it.

Brands should, instead, develop a plan for how Google+ will be used. Start by evaluating your existing social presence, the purpose or role of each of the existing social channels, and how Google+ fits into the larger social ecosystem. Then determine a content strategy that leverages the platform's unique functionalities to give followers a unique experience.

2. KNOW WHAT GOOGLE+ DOES BEST

If Facebook is used for contests and community building, and Twitter for customer service and shorthand conversation, Google+ could be considered a deeper audience interaction platform. The features available with the platform lend it to a more intimate level of contact – Circles allow brands to divide their interactions based on the needs, interests and preferences of an audience, while Hangouts offer the ability to interact with these audiences in a way other social channels aren't offering. Brands need to consider this and react accordingly.

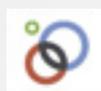
3. BE PREPARED TO EVOLVE WITH THE PLATFORM

New platforms evolve – in feature sets, interactions, customization and audience. Brands who commit early have to be prepared to evolve with the platform. That means reacting to changes in a timely matter, adjusting messages as needed, and evaluating and using new features in the platform.



FEATURES

Let's take a quick look at the features of the platform so it's clear how they map to opportunities for brands. Note that user-level pages have access to all of the features of Google+, but brands do not.



CIRCLES

Lets Google+ users neatly organize friends in buckets (e.g., family, work friends, college buddies, etc)



HANGOUTS

Multi-person video chat that lives within Google+, users and brands can create Hangouts for up to nine people



GAMES

The Google+ "game room" for users, includes everything from Angry Birds to The Godfather, Google+ users can play against their followers' high scores



SEARCH

Search brings updates from Circles, news from around the Web and public Google+ posts



RIPPLES

An interactive graphic of the public shares of any public post on Google+, showing how it's moved through the network



PHOTOS

A place to see your Circles' photos, as well as photos from your phone, your posts and your albums, also has an instant upload feature from mobile

BRAND PAGES VERSUS USERS (VIA SUPPORT.GOOGLE.COM):

- Pages can't add people to Circles until the page is added first or mentioned.
- Pages can be made for a variety of different entities, whereas profiles can only be made for people.
- The default privacy setting for elements on your page profile is public.
- Pages have the +1 button.
- Pages can't +1 other pages, nor can they +1 stuff on the Web.
- Pages can't play games.
- Pages don't have the option to share to "Extended Circles"
- Pages don't receive notifications via email, text, or in the Google bar.
- Pages can't Hangout on a mobile device.
- Local pages have special fields that help people find the business's physical location.

EXPANDED FEATURE DETAIL

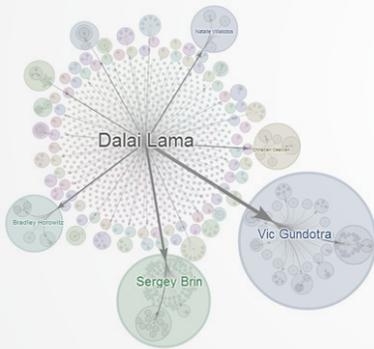


HANGOUTS →

A relatively simple video chat feature, Hangouts offer a lot of opportunity for brands. They can have many purposes – focus groups, employee discussions, customer support, live showcases of new products, meet and greets, and Q&A. They can even host a live discussion between employees that an unlimited number of Google+ users can then watch.

And, as of December, Google+ Hangouts include voice calling, which allows outside phone calls to be placed from within a Hangout. In this way, participants no longer need a Google account or even a computer to join a conversation. This could have a huge impact on the way Hangouts are used, particularly when it comes to brands. It opens the door to many more participants (and more brand exposure).

Brands like The Muppets, Dell and Ford are already using the feature for brand/consumer interaction.



← ANALYTICS: RIPPLES

While Google Analytics integration is still being anticipated, Ripples is what is available now. Google defines Ripples as an “interactive graphic of the public post on Google+ to show you how a post has rippled through the network and help you discover new and interesting people to follow,” (support.google.com).

Ripples show who has shared your post, what comments have been made, a timeline of sharing for an individual post, and general stats on how the post was shared.

DIRECT CONNECT

Google Direct Connect makes it easier to find (and follow) a Google+ page. All a user has to do is type a “+” in front of a brand name (e.g., +Nissan) to find an association.

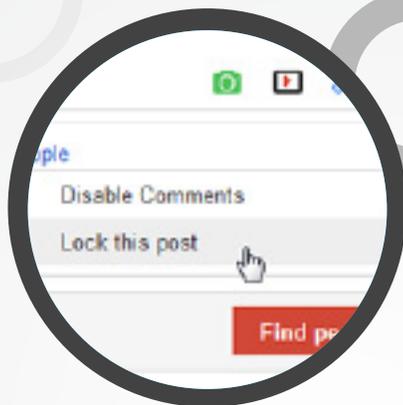
However, Google says they are still experimenting with Direct Connect, so it won’t work on every page, and some users won’t have access at all. As it moves out of its beta phase more users will have access.

BADGES

To help enable Direct Connect, brands are encouraged to use the G+ badge on their site, or to use a snippet of code embedded in their site. It can be expected that as time goes on, with the power of Google search behind the network, brand pages will find their way into natural search as well.



TIPS & TRICKS



LOCK POSTS

Brands can lock, or target, posts within specific Circles so information cannot be shared outside of a select group. This allows companies to provide a level of exclusivity to those within certain Circles.

HIDE FOLLOWER COUNT

While brands are building their presence on Google+, they may be wary of displaying their follower count. Google+ allows for the option of hiding the follower count while building a strong fan base.

REMOVE EXTRANEIOUS TABS

Brand pages include the ability to remove tabs, such as photos and videos, which may not be relevant for a brand's presence. Instead of blank tab, brands can clean up their page and remove these tabs altogether.

CREATE CUSTOM LINKS

Brands can add links to their About tabs that, instead of generic website labels, can be described in their own words.

LIMITATIONS



REACH

The platform is open to 60+M Google users, compared to 100M active Twitter users and 500M active Facebook users. Combined with a predominantly male audience (68%), Google+ is currently a platform for more targeted content.

GROWTH

Due to the similarities in functionality of Facebook and a triplicate of users between Facebook, Twitter and Google+, the early indicators of the Google+ audience show a struggle to sustain growth in users. This lack of user growth means less people to interact with brands on the platform.

ANALYTICS

Deep analytics are not currently available, but in the future, we can anticipate the support of Google Analytics for in-depth, real time measurement – far beyond what other social platforms provide.

VANITY URLS

Brand page URLs are locked to the original URL given by Google+ when a page is created. Unlike Facebook, the URL cannot be changed to include your brand's name and brands are left with a long, confusing ID number that is not easily remembered. This can be expected to change.

ADMINISTRATION

Brand pages on Google+ allow only one admin. So, for now, brand pages can only be tied to one email address, which makes it difficult for teams to monitor and manage brand pages within the platform.

CONTESTS

Google+ doesn't offer a structured way to run contests. While this may not be the main reason for a brand to engage on Google+, it would be a valuable native option to have.

API

As it stands, there is no known API access to the Google+ platform. This means that users and brands alike are not able to schedule posts, making page management more time consuming.

CUSTOM TABS

Custom tabs are not currently available. Only the default tabs (photos, videos, etc.) are available to brands at this time.

LIMITATIONS, CONT.



PAGE VERIFICATION

There is currently no standardized application process for brand verification. Page verification is, instead, performed on Google's end after a page is already published.

PAGE INTERACTION

The ability to write on the "wall" itself is currently unavailable, meaning users are only able to interact with a brand's posts via comments.

MUTUAL CIRCLES

Brands cannot add a user to a Circle unless the user has already added the brand into a Circle.

HANGOUTS

Brands are not able to jump into Hangouts that have already been started. Therefore, they are unable to actively insert themselves into relevant conversations.

MOBILE APP

The mobile app does not allow for brand page management; only user profiles are accessible – for now.

PRODUCT INTEGRATION

Despite Google owning YouTube and Blogger, there are no integrations of these platforms within brand pages at this time.

LOCATION INTEGRATION

So far, there's no integration with Google Maps/Places. Brands with brick-and-mortar locations are left without a way to integrate with Google Maps/Places data.

AFFILIATIONS

Brands who are part of a network of entities, or have strong partnerships, are unable to clearly portray these partnerships within their Google+ brand page. This feature is a useful and prominent one within Facebook, in which brands can "like" other pages that they have an affiliation with.



BRANDS & CASES

Google's launch partners (companies invited to create a brand page prior to public launch) included Angry Birds, CNN, Fox News, the Muppets, the Dallas Cowboys, Pepsi, Toyota, Macy's, X Games, WWE, Train, Barcelona Football Club and Save the Children.

Since launch, several more have joined, including companies as varied as McDonald's and BMW.

CASES



THE MUPPETS

First Post on G+: November 7, 2011
Statistics: 20 Posts | +37K followers
Overview: Hanging Out with the Muppets

When Google+ for brands went live on November 7th, 2011, The Muppets were one of the first brands to engage on the new platform. Timing was right, considering the movie launch was only a few short weeks away (November 23, 2011), it offered an opportunity to use the network for movie promotion, and they did it well, with activity continuing well after movie-launch.

The first communication to their followers was an invite to Hangout. In true social fashion, the brand doubled up the sharing, also providing their Hangout announcement on Twitter (but, interestingly, not on Facebook). The buildup to the event provided content and posts exclusive to the brand's Google+ page. Moreover, for those who missed the live Hangout (spoiler: Ms. Piggy calls out Lady Gaga), they posted the YouTube video of it back on their Google+ page.

The Muppet's first Hangout is a great example of how Google+ can host a live roundtable discussion via video. However, the comments show the desire for audience participation. Most of the 500 comments on the original Hangout were from fans asking how they could participate in the Hangout, showcasing a desire to ask questions via text or video.

The Muppets also use Google+ for sharing content. Notably, the content is exclusive to Google+. Material has ranged from behind-the-scenes shots from the Country Music Awards to the Latin Emmys.

And while they have a larger Facebook presence, and the movie has long since launched, they still manage a post a week on Google+. This level of sharing will be something to watch, to see if the brand is using Google+ at a frequency level in-between Facebook and Twitter. Overall, the brand is off to a great start, leveraging the Hangout functionality in an entertaining yet branded fashion that has successfully managed to live on past a promotion.

The Muppets ✓ ⊞ Add to circles
 Disney's The Muppets is the #1 Comedy in America!

42475
 +1'd or added to circles

Share this page

Have The Muppets in circles (37288)

View all »

Block The Muppets
 Report this profile
 Create a Google+ page

The Muppets - Dec 29, 2011 - Public

Kermit and Miss Piggy took a moment to talk actions, awards, Amy, and other behind-the-scenes secrets from our movie.

Kermit and Miss Piggy Tell All

The stars of "The Muppets" take us behind the scenes in Hollywood.

+104
 12 shares - Amy La Sala, CinLil Carabajal, Let Hernandez, Malinda Lloyd, Miguel Angel Ruiz ...

CASES



FORD MOTOR COMPANY

First Post on G+: July 1, 2011 (as a part of the Google+ test group)

Statistics: +3600 (had over 27K in their test launch)

Overview: Ford Automobiles and Innovation

As one of the first brands on Google+, The Ford Motor Company had time to gain insight into and understanding of the platform. Ford used the platform to showcase content related to the Ford Fusion. It was more promotionally-based content, but was still a great way for them to feel out the platform.

Now that they are officially launched, they plan to continue to evolve their presence. According to AdAge, the head of social media, Scott Monty, says they plan to make a stronger content push in the coming months as technology on the platform is enhanced. He was quoted as saying, "The more deliberate we are with the content we create and share on Google+, the more those earned search results are going to come up."

They share content regularly – generally once per day, more during auto shows. They have also been fairly smart about not overlapping content with their other social channels, like Facebook. Even though they are still evolving their use of Google+, they have a very strong early presence with a good content focus. Time will tell if they can find ways to keep content distinct from Facebook and other channels.

Google+ Search Google+

Ford Motor Company [Add to circles](#)

The official G+ page for Ford. Drive One. Feel the Difference.

Posts About Photos Videos

Ford Motor Company - Yesterday 9:26 PM - Public

2013 Ford Fusion Reveal

As we're getting ready to reveal the all-new **2013 Ford Fusion** next week at the North American International Auto Show, you can help us count down and see some of the vehicle in action via the Ford Fusion app.

Just go to <http://fordfusionapp.com> to download it. Most iOS and Android devices are supported.

Ford Fusion App Walkthrough

tap on the Ford logo to continue

3315
+1'd or added to circles

[Share this page](#)

Have Ford Motor Company in circles (3048)

[View all >](#)

[Block Ford Motor Company](#)

[Report this profile](#)



CONTACT
US

1230 Peachtree St NE
Promenade II
Suite 2200
Atlanta, GA 30309

Joe Koufman
404.601.4367
jkoufman@engauge.com

ABOUT ENGAUGE

Engauge is a full-service agency for the digital and social age. We help grow our clients' business by leveraging creativity and technology to connect brands and consumers through the most relevant content and channels.

The proliferation of content and channel opportunities for both consumers and brands has forever changed the communications landscape. What hasn't changed are the core fundamentals of marketing: The ability to richly understand a consumer; to derive a thoughtful insight; and to create a big idea. For the past several years, Engauge has helped lead its clients by staying true to these fundamentals, while focusing on talent, technology, innovation and building a dynamic range of capabilities – from the tried and true, to social, mobile and whatever's next.

Today's marketing is assuredly more complex, but to us the premise is still quite simple. Listen to the client. Listen to the consumer. And deliver big ideas at the right time and place.

IMAGE CREDITS:

Shutterstock, Google+ public images