

# Context Optional's Guide to Google+ Pages for Brands

Six Steps to Build Your  
Presence and Communicate  
with Customers on Google+

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It's hard to overstate how much Google has become a part of our daily online lives. Yet Google's impact is expanding even further. In June the search giant introduced Google+, which is expected to have an impact across all of Google. Google+ has now grown to more than 40 million users and aims to change the way we communicate with all the different people in our lives.

Last week the company introduced Google+ Pages for businesses, designed to help brands connect with customers and to act as the centerpiece of a brand's presence on Google+. While the Google+ Pages product is in its infancy, the user base is growing and warrants attention and testing from brands. Now is a good time to explore how Google+ works and what impact it can have upon the way your brand communicates with customers.

This guide includes six steps to help jumpstart your brand presence on Google+ and what you should consider in communicating and engaging followers specifically in the Google+ environment.

1. Drive Follower Growth
2. Segment Followers with Circles
3. Understand Your Google+ Audience
4. Differentiate Google+ Content
5. Take Advantage of Google+ Features to Engage
6. Analyze and Adjust Your Google+ Strategy

As with any social media channel, begin by asking yourself what your communities will want to get out of your presence on Google+ and how this platform ties into your larger business goals. Once that's squared away, create your Google+ Page and take a look at these recommendations to develop your Google+ Page growth and engagement strategy.

## 1. Drive Follower Growth

When Google+ users arrive at your Page, they'll see a big, red "Add to Circles" button. After clicking this button, users follow your brand and receive brand updates in their stream. But how do users get to your Page in the first place? Here are some ideas:

- Place a **Google+ Badge** on your website that redirects users to your Page.
- **Drive viral growth** by asking your employees and partners to share your Page with their Circles. For businesses with multiple brands, they can create one Circle and share a portfolio of those brands with friends and users can decide which ones they want to follow.
- **Direct Connect** is an interesting search tie-in that enables users to automatically add brands to their Circles by adding a "+" before a brand name in their Google search query. Similar to call-outs in advertising that ask consumers to "Like us on Facebook", brands can say "Search for +Context Optional on Google" in an ad and the action will take users directly to the brand's Google+ Page and prompt them to add it to their Circles.
- **Leverage existing best practices** for increasing Page Likes on Facebook and Follows on Twitter and apply them here. Just remember, a user must add your brand to a Circle on his profile in order for you to publish content to him. The +1 action does not automatically create that connection.
- And, of course, use **advertising and media** to drive traffic directly to your Page.

## 2. Segment Followers with Circles

Once you have Followers, you'll want to consider how to segment those audiences so you can target the right Followers with the right messages. Your Google+ Page comes with four default Circles – Following, Customers, VIPs and Team Members – and the ability to create custom Circles. Once users add you, they'll show up under the "People Who've Added You" tab. You can then drag and drop users into your Circles to share with and follow.

Because Google+ Pages does not currently support geo-targeting, effective Circle management is crucial to connecting with Followers and driving engagement effectively. You're trying to build loyalty and the quickest way to turn users off is by spamming them with irrelevant and untimely information. Approach Circle creation as you would audience segmentation in ad placements. Who would respond best to what?

The great thing about Circles is you can get as nuanced as you want. For example, in addition to lumping all your customers into one Circle called Customers, you can segment them by product affinity, preferences, likeliness to influence others, or even history of engagement. The downside, at least currently, is that without location, demographic or

preference data that allows for scalable segmentation, Circle management is a manual process. Be vigilant early on about adding Followers to Circles daily or you'll wind up spending a lot of time sorting through user profiles.

### 3. Understand Your Google+ Audience

Because Google+ is only a few months old, and its user base is changing daily, it's important to gather insight on who your audience is and determine how best to capitalize on those connections and build an engaged following. You should not assume that your Facebook Fans and your Google+ Followers are the same. Are your customers on Google+? Which of them are actively using it? What type of content resonates with them and drives +1s or comments? And what content encourages Shares that spread brand awareness and drive follower growth?

Google will soon launch data tools that give a brand insight into typical areas like user demographics and social engagement, as well as unique views into influencers and trends in your community.<sup>1</sup> Tracking engagement metrics per Circle will give you perspective into how effective your publishing strategy is and how likely that group is to share your content. The Google+ Search tool can help identify trends based on keywords and the Ripples tool aims to provide insight into viral Shares and identify influencers.

### 4. Differentiate Google+ Content

As a result of taking the time to analyze and understand your Followers, you'll likely find interests and engagement success differ from your communities on Facebook and Twitter. Best practices developed by the Context Optional Community Engagement team recommend differentiating brand content among social platforms, and that will also apply to Google+. Twitter tends to lean towards short, informative, witty posts in 140 characters that typically link away from Twitter to an article, blog post or website. Facebook thrives on a mix of informative posts, links, marketing campaigns (deals, coupons and initiatives), and easy questions designed to drive engagement. What brand content might flourish on Google+?

Google is an information powerhouse with over 11 billion searches monthly.<sup>2</sup> People are searching for relevant and timely content – like product and services information, local content, news, deals, how-to videos and behind-the-scenes photos – and other interesting stories they can consume and share. While Google+ is in its infancy, stick to Google's roots and publish informative content about your brand that customers will find relevant, +1 and share with friends and colleagues. And it never hurts to ask your community directly what type of content they want from you on this platform.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.google.com/+business/measure.html>

<sup>2</sup> comScore Explicit Core Search Query Report, May 2011

## 5. Take Advantage of Google+ Features to Engage

If you've been thoughtful about the first four steps, you should have a solid foundation for a Google+ publishing strategy that aims to engage the right Followers with relevant content. In addition to a text-based status update, each post can attach a photo, video and URL link to make the post richer. Directly engage your Followers by asking questions that start discussions in the Comments and directly ask them to +1 the post and share it with their Circles. The more users engage with a post – through +1s, comments and shares – the greater the viral effect in user streams and brand awareness on Google+. This keeps your brand top of mind and drives interest in your offering. Here are other Google+ specific features you should consider:

- **Google's +1 button** can be placed virtually anywhere, including your website, articles and even in ads. Each time a user +1s your content, the action creates a personal recommendation for your brand that appears in the user's stream and is shared with his Circles. By strategically placing +1 buttons on engaging content and connecting them to your Page, Google+ users create experiences about your brand for you.
- **Hangouts** give brands a very cool opportunity to connect directly with customers in a video chat environment. Think about virtual wine tasting events, Q&A sessions, new product demos, webinars and customer service calls with a real, live person on the other side of the camera.
- **Cross-product integration** opportunities abound with Google products like YouTube, Picasa, Reader, Documents and Calendar. There is tremendous opportunity to effectively integrate those elements into Google+ to engage Followers even more deeply.

## 6. Analyze and Adjust Your Google+ Strategy

Google has made a huge investment into Google+ and it's here to stay for a while. Because of the cross-product integration, brands may see some exciting effects from Google+ social activity, like increased lift in search results and traffic from +1 buttons embedded in display ads. Consider how to integrate Google+ into your overall Google strategy – from SEO and ads to mobile and video – and view it as the social layer that ties all Google-owned properties together.

Brands should stay focused on Follower growth and improving engagement rates by analyzing Circle trends and user behavior. Regularly assess data to improve Page performance and brand awareness. The more viral your content is, the more engaged the audience and the greater the likelihood of new users following your brand.

## Managing Presence on Google+ Pages

Navigating a new social platform can be challenging, especially for larger brands that have a global presence, multiple brands and millions of fans. Based on their experience helping brands manage their presence on social media, Google this week announced relationships with a handful of third-party social media management software companies that will provide tools for brands to manage their presence on Google+, including the ability to manage Circles, publish to Google+ and access analytics. These tools will help streamline publishing to multiple Google+ Pages and effectively manage Circles in a scalable manner while enabling access to analytics across a brand's Google+ presence.

Context Optional, an Efficient Frontier company, is one of only a handful of companies selected to be part of the Google+ Page Trial Program.. We've worked with Google to bring high-quality Google+ integrations into our product suite and we look forward to helping brands better connect with Google+ users and build better relationships with their customers.

For more information, visit [www.contextoptional.com](http://www.contextoptional.com) and follow Context Optional on Google+.