

An Introduction to Google+

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Chapter 1: Getting Started



Introduction

According to [statistics provided by comScore](#), [Google+](#) had 20 Million unique visitors in its first 21 days of service. comScore's statistics were measured between June and July of this year (2011). While it took me a few months to jump aboard, I've been actively using Google+ for the past month. I thought I'd share some things I did to help me get started with the service.

1) Add People to Circles.

Like Twitter's tweet stream and Facebook's Newsfeed, your experience on Google+ is largely defined by the people you follow. In Google+ parlance, this is called "people in your circles." Visit your "Circles" page, then click on "Find people". As you add people to your Circles, Google+ gets smarter about its recommendations, since it can find people that both you and a recently added user have in their Circles.

As you find people you'd like to add, determine which of your circles to place them in. I currently have 221 people in my Circles. This is quite manageable for me and quite different from the 1,300+ people I follow on Twitter. As a result, I place nearly everyone in a single Circle and my default mode is to read the Stream from all Circles.

2) "Go Out" to Find and Discover.

Unless you're a celebrity or a social media A-lister, you'll find that a modest number of people have added you to their Circles. So think of Google+ as a cocktail party that you just arrived at. No one's coming to chat you up, so grab a drink and go mingle. As you meet and interact with new people, you'll start to gain attention.

How can you do this? It's easy:

1. +1 other people's posts.
2. Comment on other people's posts.
3. +1 other people's comments.
4. Comment on other people's comments.
5. Re-share other people's posts.

If you're new to Google+, posting to your page (alone) won't cut it. "Go out" to find and discover interesting content (and people) and you'll feel that much more a part of the community.

3) Check Out "What's Hot."

Click the "What's hot" link on the left side of your Google+ page. Your Stream then gets filled with popular posts on Google+ - those that received a higher number of +1's and comments. I use this as an effective way for finding interesting content – and, discovering interesting people (or Google+ Pages) to add to my Circles.

4) Start a Blog!

When I gave a [presentation on personal branding](#) earlier this year, several audience members asked my opinion on whether they should start a blog. With Google+, there's apparently no character limitation on posts. I'm seeing some users opt to publish long-form content on their pages. These longer posts look a lot like blog posts.

So if you've been wondering whether (or when) to start a blog, experiment on Google+ and drop a long-form post here and there. There's no set-up required and you can connect it right into your Google+ social graph. Perhaps you'll find my next blog posting there (and not here).

5) Be Different.

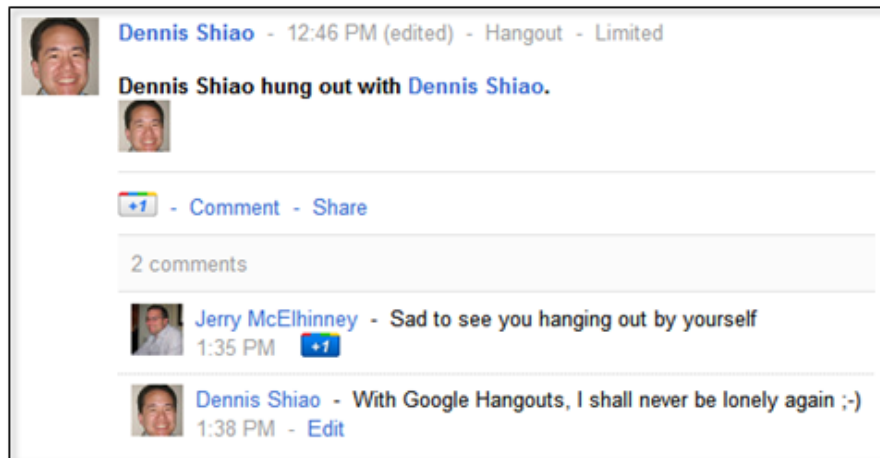
I use Twitter for "all business" and Facebook for "all pleasure." So it didn't make sense to me that I'd use Google+ in an identical (or even similar) fashion to an existing social network. Instead, it's served as a nice middle ground between the two. I mix business-related content with personal interests and I can use a "voice" different than what's possible within 140 characters. For instance, here's a [recent post I made about Amy Grant](#).

3 Things You Didn't Know About Google+

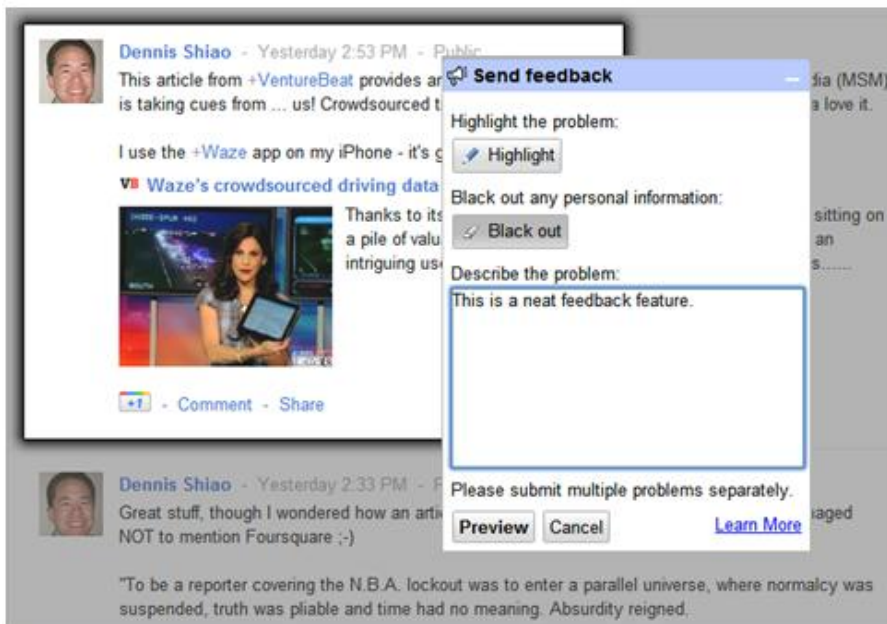
You can grow an instant moustache.



You can tell the world that you talk to yourself.



You can provide feedback and send a screen grab of the Google+ page.



Bonus Tip: Follow Me and I'll Follow You Back... Um, Maybe Not



The following tip is provided by Heidi Thorne ([Heidi on Google+](#)).

Remember the early days of Twitter (like 2008 and 2009) when people were putting statements such as "follow me and I'll follow you back" in their bios? Tweeters were anxious to build their Twitter street cred by having kaboodles of followers. And you also saw people who followed anyone whose Twitter handle they could find, hoping for a reciprocal follow. Didn't care if they were relevant or not. Only the numbers mattered.

Now it's a social media lifetime later. We're more cynical and overwhelmed with Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn and a host of social network wannabes flooding our streams and attention. Active social media types were rejoicing at the prospect of starting over with a network from a technology powerhouse like Google. They could get rid of the junk followings and followers, put their contacts in appropriate categories or "circles," with the goal to only see what's relevant. And Google+ delivers on that. Kind of like what Twitter lists and Facebook and LinkedIn groups hoped to be, only in an easier to manage and manipulate format.

But you still see people trying to use Google+ as if it's the early days of Twitter. In a day, I might have a dozen or so people circling me that I have no idea how they've connected with me. Do I automatically add them to my circles as a reciprocal courtesy? No way! If it's not someone from one of my established networks or someone I regularly follow, or doesn't have a bio filled out, I don't circle them. But I will follow people I've met in discussions on other people's posts who have fun, interesting or intelligent conversation. In fact, I've found some incredible new people on G+ that way.

So use Google+ as a clean social media slate, only filling that stream with what matters to you.

Bonus Tip: Try Google Hangouts



The following tip is provided by Jenise Fryatt ([Jenise on Google+](#)).

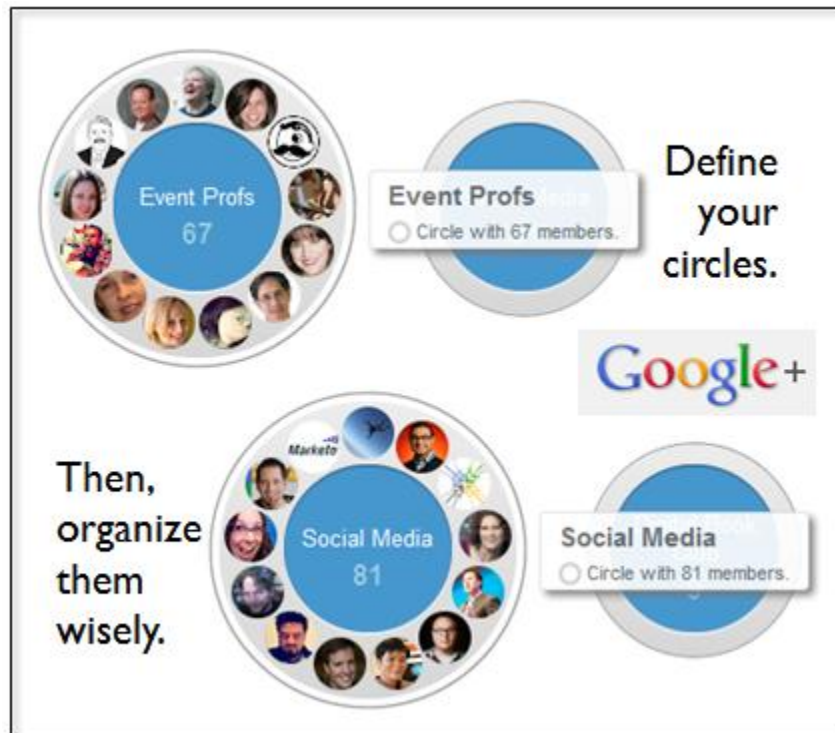
Most of the time I use Google+ for the Hangouts function. I've found hangouts to be easier and more consistent than Skype for video chats. You can chat with up to 10 people and starting a Hangout and

inviting people to it is very easy. I'm going to try using it for regular company meetings when some of us are out of town.

Conclusion

I'm enjoying my time on Google+ so far. It's a neat mix of Twitter, Facebook and a few other services. Use the comments section below to let us know how you're using the service. In the meantime, you can find me on Google+ here: <http://gplus.to/dshiao>.

Chapter 2: Organizing Your Google+ Circles



Introduction

Want to get the most of [Google+](#)? It's all about the Circles. I've been using Google+ for a number of months; however, it wasn't until recently that I made the investment in time to organize my Circles properly. Having done that, however, I can state with confidence that it was more than worth the time. Here are five tips on organizing your own Circles.

1) Prioritize to Organize.

It's best to "get organized" when you first start using Google+ (e.g. when you add your first batches of users to your Circles). Since I'm used to the "full stream" on Twitter (where I've been similarly lax on organizing), I figured that I'd simply add all new Google+ users into a single Circle. For a while, this seemed fine. But the reality is, there are some users I'd like to hear from more than others (just like on Twitter).

And Circle management helps you do just that. First, define the categories or topics you'd like to organize around. I went with the following:

- Event Profs
- Social Media
- Digital Book Club
- Vcs & Execs

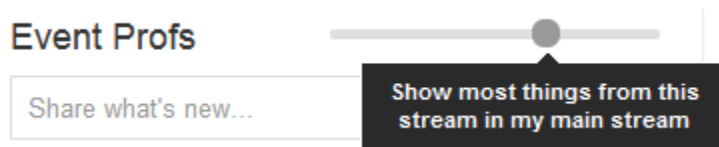
12Most
VWs & Gamification
Brands
Friends
Misc
Sports

Since I organized late in the game, I worked backwards to create some Circles. If you're starting out early, you'll have less work to do on organizing people, but you may find the need to create new Circles as you go (which is completely fine).

2) Order Your Circles.

Did you know that you can define the order that your Circles are listed? Simply visit your [Circles page](#) (you can click on the "Circles" icon in your Google+ navigation), left-click on a given Circle, then drag it in front of (or behind) another Circle. Return to your Google+ home page and you'll notice that the list of Circles has been re-ordered.

3) Tune Your Stream.



The default view in your Google+ home page is "Stream," which is a combination of all your Circles. You can "tune" which Circles appear most/least in the "Stream." Simply click on a Circle, then adjust the "tuner settings" left (least) or right (most). What I like to do, however, is glance briefly at "Stream," then navigate directly to individual Circles.

4) Find Shared Circles.

In my list of Circles (above), you'll notice one called "12Most." This Circle was created by [+Peggy Fitzpatrick](#) of [12Most.com](#). Peggy created a Circle of all 12Most authors and contributors, then shared it with the Circle members. I added the shared Circle and now I'm able to conveniently view a Google+ stream from authors at 12Most. Be on the lookout for users who share their Circles.

5) Share Content Wisely.

Once you've organized your Circles, sharing content becomes more efficient. I may share event planning links with my Event Profs Circle, while sharing the latest Mashable article with my Social Media Circle.

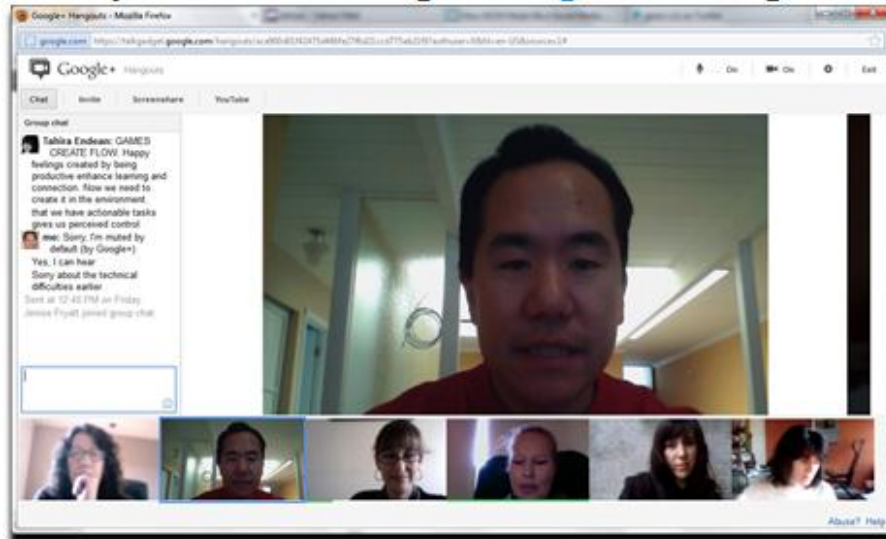
Similarly, a picture of my dessert may be best shared with "Friends" and not "Social Media." Finally, note that users in your Circle will only see content you share (with that Circle) if those same users have added you to their Circles.

Conclusion

Putting in the time and effort to organize your Google+ Circles is well worth it. Start organizing up front and you'll have less to do over the long term. Use the Comments section below to let us know your tips for organizing Circles.

Chapter 3: Hosting Google+ Hangouts

5 Tips for Hosting Google+ Hangouts



Introduction

A bunch of us started a [digital book club](#). On a regular basis (well, soon to be a regular basis), we meet via Google+ Hangouts. We recently held our first meeting, for which I was the host of the Hangout. I learned a lot from my first Hangout, so I thought I'd share these five tips.

1) Do a dry run in advance.

Another way of saying this is, “when hosting your first Hangout, don’t enter the Hangout five minutes prior to the start.” Similar to hosting a webinar, you need a dry run prior to the “live date.” I discovered that one browser crashed [perhaps I need to install the latest version], while on another browser, the Google Talk plugin seemed to consume 100% of my CPU, rendering my laptop (and the Hangout itself) unusable. I ended up moving to a better equipped laptop, but in shutting down the Hangout, it bumped everyone else out.

2) Have a backup host.

In the off-chance that you experience technical difficulties, have a designated “backup host” who can fire up a new Hangout. You know how some events publish a “rain date” in advance? Do the same with your Hangout and let your target audience know about your backup host (e.g. “for any technical difficulties, be sure to join a new Hangout that <BACKUP> will create”).

3) Create a Circle of your Hangout's participants.

In the case of our book club, we asked interested people to “opt in” to our club. Once they did, I added them to a Google+ Circle that I created. I then “shared” the Circle with its members, allowing them to

conveniently add the same Circle to their Google+ account. The Circle makes it easy to invite “members” to the Hangout – when the Hangout begins, you can invite the members of the Circle to join.

4) Encourage use of the “Chat” tab.

Text chat can add an entirely new dimension to a multi-party conversation. While one person is making a good point, others can write “Thumbs up!” in the chat area. Or, they can provide a related comment, or perhaps a hyperlink to a relevant article. In this way, the chat creates “more bandwidth” within the Hangout, without the “overhead” of switching from one speaker to another.

5) Set expectations in advance.

Participants in your Hangout ought to have a clear expectation of the agenda and flow. If you want to have 30 minutes of completely free form discussion, state that up front. For our book club, I created an agenda that included introductions, discussion points and a wrap up. Of course, I didn’t do my dry run, so my first Hangout didn’t follow the agenda as outlined.

Conclusion

My first Google+ Hangout was a lot of fun. They happen to be a great tool for digital book clubs. Use the comments area below to let us know your tips for hosting Hangouts.

Chapter 4: Why Google+ May Be the Social Network of the Future

Introduction

No, [Google+](#) will not be displacing Facebook any time soon. However, the Circles component of Google+ is the “killer app” that, in my mind at least, is a game changer.

Previously, I [provided tips on how to organize your Google+ Circles](#). Organizing my Circles made Google+ so much more effective for me. That’s led me to wonder whether Circles could propel Google+ into a leadership position among the major social networks. Let me list five reasons.

1) Topically Focused Social Surfing.

Facebook and Twitter have conditioned us to peruse streams. Whether it’s our Twitter stream or our Facebook Newsfeed, we’re used to browsing through a set of tweets and updates that are not connected by topic or theme. Google+ Circles, if organized well (by you), changes things.

I’ve created Circles around selected topics, which means that when I select my “Event Profs” Circle, I know up front that most of the posts will be about event and meeting planning. This allows me to **surf my social streams topically** – and I find that to be very powerful.

On Twitter, I could follow the #eventprofs hash tag – or, I could create a Twitter List comprised of EventProfs folks. But for me, the Circle approach is the best solution. Not only is my Circle private (unlike a Twitter List), but I can also publish to selected Circles, rather than to all of my followers. I find this “bi-directional management” (consumption plus publishing) quite elegant.

2) Time-Segmented Social Surfing.

Let’s say you have 15 minutes to surf your social streams. That’s not enough time to get caught up with everything. If you’ve organized your Circles well, you can now surf 1-2 Circles, saving the rest for later in the day (or tomorrow).

You don’t quite have the same flexibility on Twitter and Facebook, since they’re **organized around a more holistic stream**. If I go half a day without checking Twitter, I don’t go back to try to consume the tweets I missed. Instead, I peruse through recent tweets to see what’s going on – and as a result, I’ve permanently missed the earlier tweets.

Facebook addresses this by retaining active posts (those that received a lot of Likes and Comments) in my Newsfeed, as a way of saying “you ought to check this out.” With Google+, I can simply check one Circle for those 15 minutes, then check my other Circles later in the day. And the result is that **I’ve missed a lot less**.

3) Continual Segmenting.

[Louis Gray](#) posted a neat [tip about searching within your Circles](#). Let’s say I’m learning about HTML5. I could search for mentions of “HTML5” within my Circles. The search results will show users in my Circles that have mentioned HTML5. I can then create a new Circle (e.g. called “HTML5”) and add them to my

new Circle. In this way, I can continually refine and further curate my Circles, making the service more and more effective (to me).

4) Search, plus Your World.

It's the elephant in the room for your corporate or personal brand. With [Search, plus Your World](#), Google is incorporating content from Google+, from users whom you've added to your Circles. While some have criticized Google for not including results from other social networks, the impact is clear: being present and active on Google+ is now part of your search engine optimization (SEO) strategy. And that alone, will cause brands (including personal brands) to sign on.

5) One Size Could Fit All.

With Circles, Google+ may be the only social network that allows you to combine business and personal use simultaneously. While many prefer to segment their social media use across distinct services (e.g. Facebook for friends/family and LinkedIn for work), Google+ gives you the ability to manage this segmentation in a single application.

You can create Circles for your business interests, your hobbies, your friends and your family. From there, you can segment your social surfing (as discussed above) and segment your (outbound) sharing.

Conclusion

Having said all that, I understand that to become the "social network of the future," Google+ needs to get Mom and Dad using the service (instead of Facebook). And frankly, many of the points I've made (above) don't apply to Mom and Dad.

So time will tell how well Google+ is able to capture the Mom and Dad audience. In the meantime, I'm happy to continue with my topic and time-segmented social surfing.

About The Author



Dennis Shiao is Director of Product Marketing at [INXPO](#) and author of the book “[Generate Sales Leads With Virtual Events](#).” At INXPO, Dennis is responsible for go-to-market strategy and execution, and for shaping product and platform evolution via the “voice of the customer.” Dennis has managed virtual event campaigns for Cisco, HP, Oracle and Microsoft, among others. Dennis blogs about virtual events at [INXPO](#), and on his personal blog, “[It’s All Virtual](#).”

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