

Greenlight comment: 'Social Search' is finally here!

LONDON, UK: "...Google's integration of Google+ into its search results is a major change, one that brands and businesses must not ignore. And with Facebook having the potential to immediately capture a quarter of the search market globally were it to launch its own search engine, this move by Google has not come a minute too soon..."



Google has revealed it will imminently be integrating Google+ into its search results, to deliver search results that better reflect user preferences and also incorporate content shared by people in their respective Google+ Circles.

This, says Andreas Poulos, COO at leading specialist search and social marketing agency, Greenlight, is a major change to how Google's search results are assembled and something brands and business with an online presence cannot afford to ignore. Moreover, with soon to be released research from Greenlight indicating Facebook could potentially capture 22% of the global search market were it to launch its own search engine tomorrow, this move by Google has not come a minute too soon.

"This is perhaps the biggest change to Google in the last five years and, as such, must not be overlooked by online players, says Poulos. " It is a huge opportunity for them to increase their rankings in the search engine results pages (SERPS) and also extend their search presence into the realms of customer relationship management (CRM), public relations (PR) and more."

So, what will actually be changing?

"It is important to stress the fundamentals are not changing; they are just being supplemented by social elements. Natural search results will remain and will be determined in the same way as they are now (relevant content + links + engagement signals). Paid search ads will still operate within the same model. That said, the changes are significant and breathe life into something we could call 'social search', something we at Greenlight have been expecting for a while and about which we are incredibly excited," says Poulos.

The key changes in a nutshell:

1. Google+ content to be integrated into the SERPs

For businesses with a Google+ Brand page, any content posted will appear within the organic search results of the user that has the respective firm in their circles, assuming it is deemed relevant to the users' search. This can be beneficial (Google+ content produced by the business gets wide exposure) or a threat (a negative review of the firm posted by someone with an extensive Circle membership will get increased exposure). The opportunity here is that great viral content created by the business could then be shared by many people and therefore appear in the results for lots of people.

2. Relevant Google+ Brand pages to be showcased in the SERPs

Google will be suggesting relevant Google+ profiles to follow in the search results when searches are made. For instance, if you searched for 'music', Google would display options for you to add the Brand pages of 'Britney Spears', 'Snoop Dog', etc to your circles. If you then did that, their content would appear regularly in your search results. This could be beneficial as this promotion of Google+ Brand pages to the populace will grow the number of people who add the respective brand to their Circles, giving brands a captive audience to market to and consolidate their presence in their future search results. There are a number of threats here too though - if brands do not have a Google+ page right now, they potentially leave themselves open to their branded search results being hijacked by people pretending to be their brand. In addition, the respective brand will not be amassing people who have added it to their Circles, whilst the brand's competitors might be.

This will obviously result in reduced visibility and mindshare over time.

How to respond?

Businesses and brands wanting to take advantage of these changes (or not fall victim to them) would need to undertake several activities:

1. Create a Google+ Brand page immediately

This would need to be carefully put together to ensure that it appears official, useful and worthy of people adding to their Circles. It should also be optimised to ensure it ranks for relevant brand search terms.

2. Put a Google+ content strategy in place

Once a Google+ Company/Brand page has been constructed, there will need to be a content strategy designed to deliver high quality, engaging content, consistently to that audience (i.e. daily!). Content that not only begs to be shared, but also which uses search terms and themes the target audience might be searching for, therefore increasing and broadening rankings. For instance, if you are a company that sells computer games, you would want to have regular Google+ content showing the top 10 most purchased games (or anything else we know people are searching for in Google). If consumers have you in their Circles, they will see this content in their search results when they conduct relevant searches.

It will also encourage others to add you to their Circles too. Content essentially needs to be used to increase the Company/Brand exposure to those consumers that already have them in their Circle and also compel others to add them for the first time because there is an incentive to do so. This should be aligned to the list of search terms the Brand/Company already targets in natural and paid search.

3. Benchmark your activity against the competition

As with most things, it is important to ensure close tabs are kept on how well competitors are doing - particularly in terms of the number of people that have added them to their Circles over time.

Andreas Poulos is chief operating officer at Greenlight. He has been involved in search marketing for over 12 years, working for some of the biggest and most prestigious global blue chip companies. Andreas is responsible for an international team of Search consultants, developers, programmers, and copywriters. In his role, he provides guidance to well-known brands, including Santander, New Look, Sky as well as a number of government bodies.