



# Google+ for Business

How Google's  
Social Network  
Changes Everything

Chris Brogan  59



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Changes Everything

Chris Brogan

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800 East 96th Street  
Indianapolis, Indiana 46240 USA

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## About the Author

**Chris Brogan** is a *New York Times* bestselling author and professional speaker, as well as president of Human Business Works. He has been involved with social networks since the bulletin board services of the 1980s and started blogging in 1998, when it was called journaling. Chris cofounded the international unconference experience, PodCamp, which teaches media making and its value to people all over the world. He keynotes at many major corporate events, as well as several technology and web culture events.

## Dedication

*To everyone who brings a positive view of the world to their surroundings. And to Jacqueline, for believing.*

## Acknowledgments

Thanks to Katherine Bull, for suggesting I could do this, and to Ginny Munroe, for helping me make it all work better.

## We Want to Hear from You!

As the reader of this book, *you* are our most important critic and commentator. We value your opinion and want to know what we're doing right, what we could do better, what areas you'd like to see us publish in, and any other words of wisdom you're willing to pass our way.

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                     Que Publishing  
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# Introduction

## Google+ Is So New

*If you're picking up this book, it's because you've heard about Google+ (maybe even have signed up for an account), and you're curious as to whether this can be helpful for your business. It's a technology that launched to a limited audience in July 2011, and so, if you're even considering this book, it means that you like to stay on the cutting edge. To me, that's reason enough to jump in and pick up this book.*

*Google+ is a social network created by Google with features that might remind you of Facebook. If I said just that, you'd shrug it off and decide this probably wasn't worth your time. But there's more to it. Google+ is a social network that Google uses to better understand the human aspects of sharing information (like pointing people toward specific links) and as such, Google uses information gathered in Google+ to improve search rankings and findability of information. Being that Google is the #1 search engine in the world, you might now have another reason to consider picking up this book.*

When writing a book around a specific technology, it is impossible to get everything perfectly right. Things change so fast that this book might have some outdated information by the time it's in your hands. As best as I can, the majority of this book is based on the concepts and the business values of these tools more than it is based on any how-to information pertinent to the features and functions of the software. I'll leave a lot of that to other books and blog posts. You and I will talk more about how to consider these tools for your business applications, no matter if you're a small business with only a few employees, or if you're part of a large corporation.

## Who Am I?

My name is Chris Brogan, and I've been involved with various online communities and social media tools since I was a kid growing up in the '80s. My background before doing this was mostly in the telecommunications industry, starting with an old Bell company and then joining a wireless company.

In 2006, I co-founded an event called PodCamp, which explored how podcasting could impact businesses and organizations. From there, I worked with Vonage co-founder Jeff Pulver on his Video on the Net conference and helped him with a startup called Network2. I started a marketing company called New Marketing Labs in 2009 with Stephen and Nick Saber, and merged it with their new company, The Pulse Network, in 2011.

Along the way, I co-wrote a *New York Times* bestselling book, *Trust Agents*, and started another company called Human Business Works, which provides tools and smarts for small businesses. I'm a professional keynote speaker for corporations and conferences and have my fingers in lots of other pies as well.

My blog, [chrisbrogan.com](http://chrisbrogan.com), is in the top five of the *Advertising Age* Power 150, and beyond that, I'll just say that I'm quite active in understanding how to help humanize business, and how to help others build sustainable, relationship-minded businesses. I'm quite passionate about how community building and being helpful drive business value, as you'll see throughout this book.

## What's in This Book

In this book, you learn how to use Google+ for your business. Consider it a bunch of serving suggestions. Some of these ideas can immediately be useful to you. Others won't match your needs. You might need to modify some things to better suit your needs. Don't fret. You and I are both learning about how this new social network tool can benefit your business. We'll get there together.

Following is a peek at the upcoming chapters:

- **Chapter 1, “How Did I Get Here?”:** The idea of joining yet another social network is about as exciting as asking for 200 more emails a day. And yet, Google+ is worth your time and you need to jump into it now, if you want to use it to grow your business.
- **Chapter 2, “The Opportunity of Google+”:** Millions of people are already using Google+ in what feels to be an organic and referral-based ecosystem: The more people who like what you share, the more they’ll want to engage with you about your business.
- **Chapter 3, “A Day in the Life”:** What do you *do* when you get on Google+? You can observe a few versions of a day in the life of a Google+ user, for the small business, the large business, the owner of a company, and an employee on a team.
- **Chapter 4, “First Moves with Google+”:** Setting up a personal profile is step 1 to becoming involved with Google+. You walk through the basics and then talk through some of the tricks and tips you might not normally consider but that give you value.
- **Chapter 5, “Circles”:** The most important feature that Google+ has brought to social networks is a much better way to organize contacts and interactions. Setting up your circles can make or break your experience with using the product.
- **Chapter 6, “Posting in the Stream”:** Creating interesting posts that draw attention and spark conversations is the “coin of the realm” with Google+. Learn how you can add video, photos, and interesting links to build relationships before the sale.
- **Chapter 7, “A Simple Content Strategy”:** You’re a publishing company, whether you’re willing to believe it. How do you decide what to post on Google+, what to share, and how can it help you build business connections?
- **Chapter 8, “The ‘Warm’ Sell”:** Selling via a social network isn’t the same as pushing offers into a stream. Google+ more than any other social network has some established norms that make an outright direct sale effort far less favorable. How do you keep your prospects’ ears and eyes in an opt-in universe?
- **Chapter 9, “Growing an Audience”:** Marketing, at least, is often about the numbers. It’s not so easy to discern the way that social networks can drive business. It’s definitely not the same as direct marketing pieces in



the mail (under 1% response), but there's a nuance to it. How do you grow an audience, and what is your best bet for building value before you sell?

- **Chapter 10, “Sharing”:** If creating good content and posting in the stream is the coin of the realm, sharing is part of the marketplace. Sharing other people's good information builds a following for you, establishes you as someone who finds interesting and helpful information, and makes that balance discussed in previous chapters possible.
- **Chapter 11, “Power Plays in Google+”:** You've figured out the basics already. This chapter includes some experiments, tips, and tactics that might work well for you in your quest to build business value with Google+.
- **Chapter 12, “Setting Up Your Business Page”:** You've mastered the personal profile, and now it's time to move to the business page. There aren't many differences, and yet, the way you use both is varied and different. This chapter includes your first steps.
- **Chapter 13, “Feeling Lucky?”:** Google+ is a clear signal that Google, a company that dominates search, thinks that social platforms send important information that validates and verifies the importance of specific links. Said another way: You're likely to get better search rankings and results if you appropriately use Google+.
- **Chapter 14, “Next Steps”:** You've gone through everything. But what can you *do* with this. This final chapter includes some thoughts on actions to take, if you've not yet taken the plunge, plus an invitation to connect and talk even more about what you read in this book.

With all that said, let's begin.



# How Did I Get Here?

*You should be a bit skeptical about starting with yet another social network. And it's not like I know every person picking up this book, but some of you just started figuring out Facebook not too long ago and maybe still don't understand what all the fuss is about Twitter. And here comes another living-in-his-own-world marketer/business guy telling you that Google+ is where it's at, right?*

*I've decided to make the first chapter of this book a bit of an answer to the question "why?" because I think it's important. Whenever you hear the buzz about something new, that's probably the first big question that rushes into your head. Why should I have to know about this? Why must I spend even more time typing into yet another box? What can all this mean for my business?*

Another reason I wanted to start this book with some answers to your potential skepticism is because I've felt that, too. I started blogging in 1998, when it was called journaling, which might be reasonably early for blogging, but isn't that early for someone having a web presence, meaning, I wasn't much of an early adopter.

In 2006, I was reasonably early (but not bleeding-edge early) to Twitter, which I came to believe, with all my heart, was going to change business communications and marketing. Because I started so early, I was right about that. It made a great difference to my business, and I helped lots of other companies (and some individuals) figure out how Twitter could add business value.

But for the last few years, I've been asked at every keynote presentation and corporate meeting I've spoken at: What's the next big thing? I haven't been able to answer that question. In every single case, I've answered in a kind of mumble that "I don't actually know what's next, but I'm quite convinced that mobile platforms are big, and uh, I would never bet that either Twitter or Facebook would be forever." I haven't had a good answer to "What's the next big thing?" until now.

I'm just as surprised as you.

## Why Is Google+ the Next Big Thing?

I'm not a Google insider, by the way, so this all comes from a passionate user's seat outside the Googleplex. I know nothing more than most users. I have no secret in. What I *do* have, in abundance, is the ability to extrapolate and speculate, and that's part of what fuels my answer.

First, the easy stuff. Google+ is a social network indexed by Google. In recent years, Google searched for ways to amplify the way humans pass links and data inside social networks, which is different than how one page references another page for a search. Stated more simply: Google+ is tied to Google search, so by using it well you can improve your primary website's findability for folks searching for it.

Second, what's probably the least obvious but most powerful part of Google+ is how much of it is built toward making it easy for people to discover you and connect with you, on the one hand, and how simple it is to choose to limit what you share and with whom you share on the other hand. When you choose to follow new people, you can see who follows them, and often, you can see who that person has chosen to follow. (And by "follow," I'm talking about the act of opting to receive updates from someone inside of Google+.)

Facebook and LinkedIn are somewhat more closed. If I'm not your Facebook friend, you have to make special effort to see what I share on my wall. If we're not connected via LinkedIn, you don't receive updates from me. Twitter is more like Google+ from an inclusivity perspective.

## Speculating on the Future

The reason I think that Google+ is the next big thing has less to do with the previous information and much more to do with speculating on where things might go. Google, over the past many years, has created several applications that don't exactly line up logically. I think that with Google+, there is a huge potential to link together some of the disparate things, which can create some useful business applications from that linkage. Following are a few thoughts along those lines:

- Google Places enables businesses to add more information to search results. Integrating Google Places data into a Google+ business page means that your customers and prospects can have more information built into search results from Google, which can drive more potential discovery.
- Google Docs is a decent collaborative application, enabling you to create and share documents, spreadsheets, presentations, and more. Adding the communications, sharing, and distribution powers of Google+ to Google Docs means that in-company workflow and collaboration has a new powerhouse tool.
- Google Calendar added event functionality on top of its existing meeting, appointment, and task functionalities. Posting events as a business inside of Google+ enables integrated scheduling and improved findability of events that matter to your prospects.
- Google Checkout is Google's payment solution, which competes with PayPal and Amazon Payments, to name a couple. Integrating payment management into Google+ would permit businesses to execute transactions inside this social network without requiring the user to leave the Google+ ecosystem. (People might be more likely to complete a transaction that stays inside the social network.)
- Google's Android mobile platform has many location-aware features, where your Google searches take into account where you're located, and Google+ is built to accept, post, and share location data. Commerce and marketing options are huge in this "buy where you are" system. This isn't so much speculation because the tools are already in place. It's just up to you to use them as such.
- Google Analytics integration with business pages on Google+ means that not only do you understand the analytics of your primary websites, but now you also have visibility into how people on this social network find your information and what they do with it. This improves your ability to move people toward what they want, not only on your primary website, but also on this social network.

- YouTube is already integrated with Google+. As the #2 search engine, this should be interesting to you. Take it a bit further and you can see that using YouTube as part of your business communications and marketing efforts is a powerful tool when coupled with the sharability and social aspects of Google+.

In speculating, risks always exist. I'm not good at predicting the future—to be quite honest. However, because Google has built dozens and dozens of properties that don't immediately go well together, and because Google+ looks more and more like a potential “communications backbone” to all these various touch points, I think there are some big opportunities to consider, and those who are early to use and master Google+ can be best positioned to take advantage of these potential futures as they arise.

## **Facebook Is Better. Twitter Is Better. LinkedIn Is for Business.**

In the first few weeks of Google+, what I saw more than anything else when I started proclaiming how I felt this would be a powerful new social networking tool (and also important to business) was something along these lines: “All my friends are on Facebook, so there's no way Google+ can become the next big social network.”

For a lot of people, that's true now. But as I've said earlier and will say often, it was also true that everybody was on AOL back in the '80s. Systems change. Networks change. You're not still rocking your fax marketing program, are you?

Twitter is excellent at providing rapid, real-time information. It's a great source for news people (who have reported repeatedly that Google+ doesn't give them the same benefits as Twitter does). There's a place and a value for Twitter.

LinkedIn is a great business networking tool. Facebook is wonderful for connecting with people. But as mentioned throughout this book, there are reasons why Google+ trumps them for potential business building—at least for most users.

## **My First Touch with Google+**

Let me be clear: I don't work for Google, nor do I have any particular business relationship with them at the time of this writing. Google had nothing official to do with the making of this book; although, I most certainly asked Google+ team members for thoughts and ideas when it was at all possible.

Google+ became available as a limited “field trial” at the beginning of July 2011. I wasn’t given any kind of special access. (I know a few folks at Google, but it’s not like people shout, “I’ve gotta tell Chris Brogan about this!” when they invent something. I’m not that guy.) I just signed up when someone sent me an invite, and I started poking around the moment I had a chance.

What I noticed right away was that, because I was starting at zero, I had the chance to think through how I wanted to interact with this social network. I decided against connecting with everybody, and instead, I started to build small, tight circles of value. I grouped people by whether they represented a business value to me, a personal connection, or were people I wanted to follow to learn from. This process felt a bit like organizing books or a DVD collection, or like building playlists in iTunes. I say this in a positive way.

Right away, it was an addiction. I started “sneaking” Google+. If one of my kids ran off to play, I looked back in and started finding new people to connect with, seeking out people I knew at first, and then *surfing* their connections (I’ve coined this *friendsurfing*) to see who else I should follow.

What I liked was that I suddenly saw more interesting information because my circles were organized according to my interests. If Danny Sullivan from Search Engine Land shared something about how search rankings were altered by Google+, I could read that, experiment with it, comment back and forth, and become informed. If Jacqueline Carly shared her daily “going to Yoga” photo, I could see that and wish her well.

In other words, because I could organize how the information came in to me at a granular level (if I wanted), I could interact in a more nuanced and interactive way and derive more value from the communication.

Later, when my kids were asleep, I’d get back on Google+ and look around. I logged a lot of hours inside Google+. I’d experiment with posting information. I’d share other interesting things I’d come across. In the early days of Google+, a lot of this sharing was information *about* Google+, such as, “Did you know that if you put an underscore around a word like `_this_`, it comes out looking like *this*?”

As time went on, people started opening up about what their passions were, inside and outside of work, and this drove even deeper connections of value. I say this as a business person, but also as someone who believes that relationship-minded business is far more valuable than transactional business. If you’re looking for “quick fix” sales and marketing methods, Google+ might not be the tool, but if you think there’s some value in fostering a community of interest, it works really well for that purpose.

## This Sounds Like Other Social Networks

Does Google+ look and feel like other social networks? Yes and no. The closest “feel” to how this compares with other social networks is the way that Google+ allows you to connect with people of interest instead of simply with people you already know in some capacity. Unless you protect your tweets (meaning you’ve set the privacy such that people you’re not following can’t see what you’re saying), Twitter enables people to discover what you’re saying, either by learning about you via a retweet (when someone shares your original message) or by being found via a search.

Google+ does a lot to foster this kind of findability—this discoverable feeling. As you’re reading this, you might be thinking, “Facebook does this already.” You might say, “LinkedIn is much more businesslike.”

But it’s different. Google+ is more “open” than Facebook. It is more “deep” than Twitter. It’s more rounded than LinkedIn, in that it shows off your personal interests along side your business interests, depending on what you choose to share and post. And, as a business person and a marketer, I saw immediate value in what Google+ can do for your business.

## Why Is Google+ So Interesting?

Let me be clear: I’m not usually in the “oh shiny!” tribe. I’m a fan of business and business communication. I love tools that improve business, and especially what I call “human business,” which means that it’s relationship-minded and yet sustainable. I’m not a “kumbaya” kind of person in that I think, “Let’s enjoy everything and keep it free and let’s be in a commune together.” I have mouths to feed, and when I evaluate a new technology, it’s often through the lens of “how can this grow my business?”

Social media and social networks are powerful tools to connect people. Period. This is true, no matter the motive. This works for big businesses I’ve spent time with, such as General Motors, Pepsico, and Microsoft. Social media and social networks are great for small businesses such as AJ Bombers (burgers) and Glynne Soaps. It works well for solo businesses, such as Joel Libava, the “Franchise King,” and Carrie Wilkerson, the Barefoot Executive. Google+ is a great tool for accomplishing all of this.

Google+ is so interesting because it’s tied to the number 1 and number 2 search engines in the world (Google and YouTube, respectively). It’s interesting because the sharing patterns in there reveal (even without any complicated tools) how information moves, who cares about it, and who’s connected to it. With just a handful of

clicks and some note-taking, you can see who cared (or didn't care) about the unveiling of a new car.

Speaking of cars, I saw Scott Monty from Ford on Google+ on the second day it was open to the public. I asked Scott why he jumped on Google+ right away:

“This is the first time we've truly been able to watch a social network being born, and it's kind of like watching the birth of a rare wild animal or a star in another galaxy. The difference between other networks that were born from within is that Google already has a vast presence across the web: platforms and services for mail, calendar, search, analytics, e-commerce, blogging, video, photo, IM, voice, etc., so that Google+ has the potential of being a connector between them all, allowing you to seamlessly move from one to the next, all while connected to the network. For businesses, the attractiveness of Google+ is the prospect of being able to deliver highly relevant content that is tailored specifically to consumers.”

## The Sharing Culture Grows and Grows

Over the last few years, sharing and self-reporting have become a way of life for hundreds of millions of people. We use social media and social networks to give opinions, to seek advice, to report on our experience. A few scant years ago, it would have seemed strange to take a picture of your food at a restaurant. But wow, how the times have changed.

For example, I was at Legal Sea Foods in Boston one night and my server delivered my order of bourbon lobster to the table. When she put it down, she said, “Nice, huh? Take a picture!” So, I did. I shared it on Google+ and within 10 minutes, I had seventy comments about lobster.

This is a relatively new thing, this sharing of daily moments. Some of it is frivolous and silly, and yet, it's in those moments that serendipity takes over and business value can happen. I'll tell you another story that explains that.

I once sent a tweet that said the following: “If I think the Cadillac CTS is sexy, does that make me an old man?” I got about 200 replies over the span of 30 minutes. (For the record, about 198 people said it didn't make me an old man.) What I didn't expect, however, was that someone from GM would see the tweet, would see the replies, would take an interest, and then would invite me to GM headquarters to meet with the guy responsible for the Cadillac CTS.

This meeting would've been cool if it stopped there, but it didn't. I ended up getting to meet Fritz Henderson, then chairman of General Motors. Think about that: I'm a blogger and small business owner. I'm not the kind of guy the chairman of a huge auto manufacturer gives 30 minutes of his day to, for nothing more than a chat



about how social media is reshaping things. The benefits of that meeting and other interactions continue to resonate to this day.

The culture of sharing is a strange one, and it's not immediately apparent how this translates to business, but I can tell you that it does. It happens all the time, and almost always from serendipitous interactions.

When I talk about social media, I like to say this: "Social media is like a multifaceted phone, mixed with an awkward television, mixed with a publishing and media company." What I mean is that you can use it to communicate, to consume interesting content, and to share information with a larger potential audience than what is traditionally available to the average business person. This culture of sharing is what makes using Google+ both challenging and ultimately rewarding.

## Another Social Network to Manage? Really?

I hear this often: "*Another* social network to manage? *Really?*" The word "really" in this outcry is often as long and whiny as a teenager being told they can't go out on Thursday night.

Don't think like that. Unless you're still managing your AOL page and your Prodigy profile, it's quite likely that you've moved from one social network to another over the last 3 to 5 years. Are you still active on MySpace? Justin Timberlake's rescue mission notwithstanding, I think that's a risky venture, given the stats.

So yes, I'm telling you that you need to consider and get on Google+, and you have to do it now. You might not need to open up shop and be fully engaged in Google+ as a social media outpost just yet, but you should at least have a few personal profiles built and work to understand the way people interact on the service.

## What Do People Do on Google+?

People do a handful of baseline activities on Google+, as explained from a business-minded perspective.

- **Fill out your profile:** A blend of Google's previous Profile functionality, now married to Google+. You can add location data, contact data, links to whatever URLs matter to you, photos, videos, and much more. Not filling out a profile on Google+ as a business professional is like handing out blank rectangles of cardboard and calling them business cards.
- **Organize circles:** How Google+ enables you to organize who you follow, who you share with, and who can see certain posts. If I add you to a circle, I'm giving you permission to see something that I post. If you

haven't chosen to follow me back, you won't see my posts, even though I've added you. Circles, in the business sense, enable you to message people internally and externally in different ways, and it's a powerful concept, after you get it set up.

- **Post:** People share information about themselves (photos, video, text, links, and location data) and about what interests them. You can post pictures of new products or a video tour of your new restaurant, for instance.
- **Share:** Other people post interesting things. If it relates to your constituents, you can share their posts with people in your circles of connections. If you're a real estate agent in Austin, Texas, you might share upcoming events that locals post. You might share school news or anything else that ups the "community" feel for the people you court for business.
- **Comment/Plus:** Located below posts and appear in the order they were submitted. You can type out a reply, share a link, or just press the +1 button to indicate that you agree with the sentiment of a post. (Subsequently, you can also +1 other people's comments, showing that you agree with them.) Commenting might be as simple as answering a customer complaint and helping that person find the easiest way to get a swift resolution. You might also comment on your own posts, answering questions from people who've taken the time to comment.
- **Hangouts:** A powerful video chat feature. It enables up to 10 users simultaneously to talk back and forth on video. Michael Dell has already started looking into ways to use Hangouts as a way for Dell to interact with customers. Others use it for simple collaboration among team members.
- **Chat:** Google+ takes Google Talk's chat and integrates it into the sidebar. You can use it as an instant messenger client, and as an open chat room with your circles. (This is how Google+ enables you to organize the people you choose to share information with.) If you've used any kind of instant messenger or chat client, you know how this works.

These are the main functions people interact with on Google+. If it sounds a lot like what you can do on Facebook, LinkedIn, or Twitter, you're not entirely wrong. From a technical standpoint, the experience feels *cleaner* in Google+, in that they work better, and it is structured for a more inclusive feel (if you're not already following me and I post something to the general public, you're much more likely to find it than on other social networks), and these add up to *some* of what makes me so bullish on Google+.

So, with this chapter as your backdrop, you can get into Google+ to see how it can help power your business. Along the way, we'll talk about some of the how-to aspects, but more often, we'll discuss the why-to parts and what you can do to take advantage of this powerful social platform. You'll do some step-by-step things from time to time, but that will be the exception and not the rule. You can pick up that information simply with just a few Google searches. I'd rather share the good stuff, if that works for you.

Now let's dig in.

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