

Social Media Quick Guide

Google+



About ChurchTechToday

ChurchTechToday was born out of the need to find a place to discuss how technology can truly impact the Church in positive ways, whether it be reducing administration with a church office, allowing para church organizations to connect with their members online, or simply to share the Gospel message through non-traditional channels.

About Lauren Hunter

Lauren Hunter is a church technology PR consultant (<http://lhpr.net>) and founder of ChurchTechToday, the #1 Church technology blog for pastors, church communicators, and leaders.

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Google+ was born from Google as a new opportunity to data. The mission of Google has always been to be the place to find data and up to this point, they have been great at finding it. They can find facts all over the place with their complex algorithms and coding as well as web bots that have been to every part of the Internet.

But social networks presented a new kind of data that was less scientific and objective and more personal and subjective. But this personal data that we give out on social media sites is no less valuable. In fact, in some brief moments in the months and years, it can be the first news before it ever hits any website blog. And opinions many times can be a better resource than some single fact that we find on a website.

The Network's Persona

Google+ is the new social network on the block. They wanted users to know that they were not another Facebook clone because they wanted to do it differently, even going so far as to say that they are not a social network (though they are). Yet, the implications of Google+ are far reaching and powerful.

In this social media town, Google+'s place is in the business district. It is not just a place to post your opinion or network, though you can do both of those too. It is a place for personal and professional people and content as well as a site for churches to get their message out to current and future visitors.

Because of the short lifespan of Google+ to this point, there is a lot of shaping still happening. We do not know how much more maturing there will be before it begins to plateau. Every social network to this point has impacted the social media world for the better and Google+ is in the midst of its revolutionary moments.

*Only 8% of Americans 12 and older
have a Google+ profile page.*

*343+ Million active Google+ users
across Google product integration.*

*The game changer for Google+ is
AuthorRank. Becoming a trusted
G+ user that can increase your
website's rank to the top of the first
page is worth millions.*

The Network's Lingo

- **Status** – the question “*Share what's new...*” prompts for you to post content onto your profile
- **Circles** – organized lists of the people you want to follow and the people who follow you
- **Reshare** – sharing another user's single status post to your followers
- **+Mention** – (styled with the @ symbol) citing a specific user in a status post that automatically links to their account
- **#Hashtag** – (styled with the # symbol) used to mark a phrase that will allow for marketing or searching
- **+1** – a way to give positive feedback and connect with things you care about as well as affect SEO through AuthorRank
- **Chat** – private message to only someone that follows you
- **Hangout** – private video chatting with between 1 and 9 other users
- **Hangout On Air** – public hangout that records to YouTube

The Network's Downside

Because Google+ is relatively new, the active user base is small compared to what the future could be. The dichotomy of the user base is that people are either hyperactive and vigilant for the network (Google+ can do no wrong and all other social networks are worthless) or have not bought into the network at all and do not engage or post.

Unfortunately, while we will share a lot of great things about the network, it was very late to the game. In some regards, they have to “play by the social media rules” to garner and attract new users instead of have already defined them. At this point, they are fighting an uphill battle (though doing it rather well).

Google+ Is Full Of Active People

Social networks are full of all sorts of people. Facebook has grown the stigma of being the “old people’s” network because of the wide age range of adoption from 13 to 99 year olds. It started out as a place for college students on individual campus to connect and evolved from there. Twitter has maintained a networking ideology within its development from the early years as an SMS substitute, but with only 140 characters, it has become more of a place to initiate conversations that have long, drawn out ones.

Then Google+ pops into the social networking world, some would say late to the game, and offers something for the working person. Unlike any other platform out there, Google+ has an array of web applications available to it that other social networks can only dream of. Remember that Google’s model is to integrate everything, including Gmail, YouTube, Google Search, Google Docs, and more so that every part of the Google experience is enriched. With the unveil of Google+, it was announced that it would be intended as the central hub for everything Google.

Because of this integrated and wide variety of resources and it being new to the social media work where only early adopters had been present for a long time, the percentage of active users has been amazing. Unlike Facebook with the constant barrage of game invites, photos pressuring you to reshare if you love Jesus or hate the war, and spam from all ends, Google+ has developed a short-term identity of people that want to engage with you as well as encourage you to engage with them. Imagine a church getting onto this social network with a daily blog post about some theological issue that will be discussed that next Sunday, receiving a great amount of engagement, and connecting with other like-minded groups, all within just a couple of weeks. You can build your own communities, offer sermon ideas, ask great questions, and share your burdens when struggles come, knowing that they will be reading this and actively praying for you.

How To Use The Network Effectively

Churches have a unique opportunity to put themselves in front of a lot of people and use Google+ unlike many other businesses. With Google's normal search, they use a search of complex rules, web bots, and algorithms called PageRank. With Google+, they have a new source of information unlike anything they have tapped into before and have developed AuthorRank. The idea is that people who are seen as important, credible, and respecting on Google+ will be given higher search ranks. Therefore, the more comments, +1's, and reshares you receive, the higher your AuthorRank will be.

Along with the digital version of AuthorRank, you can use the Local feature in Google to receive reviews of your church, have people rate the physical, face-to-face part of your ministry that will also speak into your AuthorRank. Therefore, your social network influence can reach every single person that uses Google.

Finally, many churches have found that they can use Google+'s Hangout On Air for many different video options. Pastors can use it to record video blog posts or network with other ministry partners that may be hundreds or thousands of miles away. Churches can invite missionaries they support from all over the world to speak to their congregations or individual Bible studies. And the most innovate feature is that churches have begun to use it to live stream and podcast different parts of their church, including Sunday sermons, for those that are in some way unable to attend.

The Google +1 button is used 5 billion times per day.

Websites using the +1 button generate 3.5x the Google+ visits than sites without the button.

Google+ active users spend over 60 minutes a day across Google products.

Five Google+ Ideas for Churches

We want to set you up for success on Google+, so we have come up with some great Google+ ideas for your church to use it well. Note that some of these ideas are perfect for large churches and others setup for small ones.

1. **Stream Your Church Service Over Hangout**

You may think of Google+ Hangout more as just a video chat feature, but over 340 active million people are on that social network and it is a great platform for transmitting video and audio to a huge audience. If you have thought about wanting to stream your church's Sunday service but do not like the cost of the streaming services out there for the few people that may see it, you may want to consider doing an alternative with Google+. While you are limited in total options for streaming, (i.e. smaller resolutions) it is a free service to hit a huge population of people and test out if you want to move to more corporate solutions or simply stay cost effective with the hangout option.

2. **Increase Your Google Local Awareness**

Simply being on Google Local is not enough anymore and a positively viewed account (many +1s, comments, and reshares) can actually help you get found more on Google's Local feature meaning more bodies through the door. Create your Google+ page for your church, fill out all of the About Us section thoroughly (including your address) and let your congregation know you are on there. When people leave +1s, comments on posts, and give you different ratings on Google Locals, you will begin to quickly climb in search results. So when a new visitor first goes online to find out about your church or someone just moves into your area and looks for churches, they will see the good words about your church or know what it is you believe and teach, thus getting a few more feet into the church doors.

3. **Bible Study Hangouts**

Numerous churches have begun to break down the barriers of distance or inconvenience for their Bible studies or small groups. Whether it is a single mother that cannot attend because of their sick child, a snow storm that makes traveling dangerous, or distances too far to drive for a one hour Bible study, we now can do more. Have a pastor or church leader lead a meeting/bible study and broadcast it via Google+ Hangouts on Air and YouTube. If you like you can have up to 10 people who can actually interact with the pastor during this broadcast in addition to watching. Invite special speakers to do a quick 10-minute talk or a missionary to join their home church. Other churches have introduced Hangouts for the elderly who want to continue participating but simply cannot make it. The possibilities here are immense.

4. **Find A New Community**

The Google+ network has fully embraced the understanding of working within a community, helping others out, inspiring each other, and encouraging each other when times are not easy. As we discussed above, Google+ has a full host of active people, including pastors and church leaders. Encourage a group of people to connect on the community to discuss similar problems you may have about your areas of ministry, equip others with great resources, and just be present while others are present with you. I created a group called Church Tech that at the time of this writing has over 1,200 people with posts and replies every single day. We network, get new, creative ideas, and support each other when problems come up.

5. **Become An Authority**

This social network is just coming into its own and with the previously discussed AuthorRank and active community, your church and church leaders have the opportunity to become an authority on any and all things Christian. Whether it is improving your search engine optimization and getting push further up on the Google Search results or the premiere group that discusses theological issues, the opportunity is just waiting for you to claim it. Go make a strong presence within communities, on like-minded people's posts, and your own entries to be a great Christian both online and when you log off too.