

## Background

Last week Google launched its long awaited answer to Facebook. Google+ is a new social network platform that it believes will make sharing and connecting easier for consumers. Google's view is that "online sharing is awkward" due to the virtual worlds inability to emulate the real world's social norms, particularly our ability to intuitively manage privacy and sharing. Google+ solves this by integrating a number of new social features, including allowing consumers greater control over whether their shared content is public or private. A year in the making, the platform is currently only available to a limited invitation-only "Field Trial" audience across 44 languages.

## Details

New Google+ features include:

- Circles: the foundation of Google+. It allows you to easily drag-and-drop your friends into manageable groups called Circles, e.g., family, friends from college, a running group. At first glance, a much more attractive and user-friendly version of creating a Facebook Group.
- Hangouts: a tool that lets users broadcast their location, like Foursquare or Facebook Places. What makes it unique is it allows you to broadcast your location to a select group, or Circle.
- Instant Upload – a photo-sharing feature. Again, the difference from Facebook Photos being that you can select specific Circles or individuals to share specific images.
- Sparks – a cross between Search and Google Reader, which allows a user to add interests and topics that Google then uses to feed users content in which they may be interested. Capitalizing on the increasing relevancy of social search, Google+ will likely integrate the Google+ social graph to rank and recommend content, services and products.
- Huddle – a way to send group messages, similar to Facebook's existing Messages.

## Implications

Initial buzz suggests that Google's biggest challenge will be persuading consumers to migrate over to the site. In short, Facebook users will have to abandon or find a way to extract years of life-streamed content, photos, and data. Plus they will need to create a Google account to join.

However, Google+'s ability to simplify sharing and managing your privacy may be its most attractive feature given Facebook's repeated misfires, poor reputation, and constantly-changing customer terms when it comes to privacy and personal data. Some consumers may finally be ready for an alternative solution.

From a marketer's perspective, Google has not yet announced any advertising or branded profile opportunities. Google may wisely be focused on building critical consumer mass before exploring ways to commercialize the platform. However, at some point in the future Google will surely enable brands to use the new Google+ social graph and data to target across their search, online video, display, mobile, and soon social inventory.

## Summary

Google+ is the company's biggest effort to-date to challenge Facebook and other social platforms. However, Google+'s success will only truly be known once it is opened up to more consumers. At that point it will either gain mass appeal or remain another failed effort similar to Buzz and Wave. Mounting criticism of Facebook coupled with a sudden loss in members in markets like the US and UK may give Google the opportunity it needs to lead disaffected users to a platform with superior privacy and sharing capabilities.