

Google+ Is an Emerging Star for Media-Savvy Body Shops

“What’s this Google+ thing I’m hearing about?” or “Should my business have a Google+ page?” and “We just figured out this Facebook thing and now we have to worry about doing Google+?” are among the comments I’ve heard recently at CAA meetings.

I’ve been paying close attention to Google+ for more than a year now, watching it to see how it evolves and grows and reading blogs about it. The consensus is that Google+ is quickly becoming a go-to site for companies of all sizes. People and businesses like it because it offers exposure and interactivity without sacrificing security and privacy.

Instead of Facebook which has “likes,” Google+ allows the user to create “Circles,” which can be broken down into separate groups. You can create as many Circles as you desire, including your college classmates, softball team members, co-workers, or relatives, for example. Each message or interaction can be focused and tailored to each Circle. It’s more targeted and more importantly, you’re not bothering people with news or photos of things that probably won’t interest them.

Google+ also has an interesting feature called “Sparks” which are essentially a list of the user’s favorite hobbies, activities or organizations that interest them. Once these Sparks are selected on the user’s profile, Google+ will automatically suggest appropriate content to the user. These include links to pertinent and timely articles, videos, photos, podcasts and sound files that are directly related to the individual’s or company’s particular interests.

Google+ also has a very popular video chat feature called “Hangouts” that enable the user to conduct video chats within their Circles. There are also “Huddles,” an online chat feature similar to what you might find on AOL or Skype. All of these features work together to engage people and keep them involved, which is the main goal of social media in general.

To find a body shop that used Google+ extensively, I found *Marina Auto Body*, with two locations in Los Angeles. When I talked to the owner **Tom Williamson**, he had nothing but

positive things to say about his experience with Google+ and his results. He told me about *Pixel Motion*, a company in Orange County, CA, that he contracted to do his web and social media work.

Pixel Motion is a boutique digital agency that does marketing and web development with a focus on the automotive industry. Most of their clients are automotive manufacturers and car dealerships, but they also work extensively with a select number of collision centers and body shops.

I contacted the agency’s Director of Social Media **Natalie Ricker** to pick her brain about social media and Google+ for automotive companies and body shops specifically.

“My mentality when approaching any form of social media always is the same—will it keep people’s attention?” Ricker said. “So, I post what people want to know, which can include anything from the weather, local events happening in their area, links to articles that are related to car safety, quotes of the day, or maybe just a picture of an adorable dog. My posts vary, so the fans never see the same thing every day. When fans come across the page, they will want to like it because of how people-friendly it is. We aren’t pushing promotions. We’re showcasing the fact that we love our customers and employees; we love to have fun and keep you informed and entertained. That’s the message we want to convey.”

With people getting into accidents every nine years on average, social media like Google+ is valuable for body shops that want to stay in their customers’ minds when the unfortunate does occur.

“When the next collision does happen to them or someone they know, what shop do you think will be the first to pop in their head?” Ricker said. “We use this same approach with Google+. If a potential customer is searching on the web for a premier collision center near Los Angeles, will they choose the one that has a complete profile with pictures and fun posts, with people in their Circles, or will they choose the one that has an incomplete profile that didn’t bother

to personalize their page?”

It’s all about the presentation with any type of social media, Ricker explained. “Body shops need to have an attractive Google+ page, no question. Organically, they will rank next to other business listings that have Google places, so they need to stand out. If someone sees a picture of just a map, they move on. They want to see a picture of the body shop. It makes it feel more legitimate and professional.

“One of the biggest differences between Facebook and Google+ is Google Hangouts,” Ricker said. “Body shops can use this tool to their advantage with other Google users. Let’s say a customer wants to see the progress of the repair of their vehicle. With Google Hangouts, they can email an invite to their technician to “hangout” or video chat with them. They can then see the friendly smile of the technician and interact with them face-to-face. Should the techni-

cian have time, he can also even give them a virtual tour of the progress of their vehicle with a company laptop.”

Another great thing about Google is they offer amazing data that can help body shops to find out what’s working and what isn’t.

“We recommend that our clients keep track of their Google+ page’s progress through Google Analytics,” Ricker said. “It’s easy to track where their visitors come from, (cities, search engines, social sites, etc.), how long they are staying on the site and which pages are the most popular. We track these analytics every month and send a report to our clients with screenshots of different data. We then provide an in-depth analysis with recommendations on how to improve. We also recommend Google Webmaster Tools, which is also full of insightful data and metrics. A lot of this information can be overwhelming, so we simplify it and explain it to our customers.”

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