

Google + 1



Background

Whilst Google has dominated the world of digital marketing for most of its existence, in recent years many have argued that Facebook could overtake it. Where Google is built on algorithmically mining data, Facebook is built on the social graph. Google has had a number of attempts at making use of the social web and now it's trying again with +1. The release is consistent with Google's recent commentary on social, by building social "layers" into everything they do, rather than building a social network.

Details

Google is starting with a soft-launch of +1 which is, in layman's terms, its attempt to replicate the success of Facebook's *Like* button. As it rolls out it will appear next to all search results and, importantly, ads. Initially it will only appear for users in the US who have set-up Google Profiles.

When a user clicks on a +1 icon next to a search result or ad two things happen:

- People in that person's 'social network' (as defined by their Google Profile) will, if they do a similar search, see that their contact +1'd it
- Other users shown that search result will see that 1, anonymous, user +1'd

Google has stated that results which are +1'd, whether organic or paid for, will receive benefits because of this.

Implications

For advertisers, +1 brings social context to Google's products: in beta tests of +1, click-through-rates increased. Potentially even more interesting for advertisers is the fact that ads with good +1 scores will see CPCs drop, as it will feed into Quality Score. The context will also be shown anywhere the ad appears, meaning an ad +1'd in search results, will also appear as such when shown through the AdSense network.

This will mean that results are ever more personalized. Google are already ramping up roll-out of their Social Search product, and this will do the same on a bigger scale, and we could start to see *likes* replace *links* as the primary search signal, a move also highlighted by the partnership between Microsoft's Bing & Facebook.

The ability to gain higher volumes of free organic traffic by adding a simple +1 button to a webpage would be very appealing to any webmaster but the benefits to users might seem less obvious compared to the benefits of "*liking*" content. And without access to Facebook's graph, +1 could have limited reach and functionality, unlike Bing's Facebook deal.

But this could be the move that pushes Facebook to turn its Open Graph, a network of over 2 million sites utilising social plug-ins to bring social context and personalisation to users, into an ad platform. Giving social context to ads off of Facebook would be a massive boost to their revenues.

Summary

There's no doubt that the web is becoming increasingly social, and that advertising will be a part of this. And now, for the first time since the disappointments of *Wave* & *Buzz*, it looks like Google might just have a place in that world, and may even have stolen a march on Facebook.