



How to Harness the Power of Google+

Business consultant Gemma Johnson explains how to successfully use Google+ to add value to a clinic's existing digital marketing strategies

According to Search Engine Watch, which provides analysis of the search engine industry, 59% of consumers use Google every month to find reputable, local businesses.¹ If the business goals of your aesthetic practice are to actively engage existing patients, find new patients and to strengthen your position as a leader in your field, then I would suggest that including Google's own social media platform, Google+, in your social media plan is a simple, cheap and logical step.

This article seeks to highlight how incorporating Google+ into your existing or emerging social media and content strategy can deliver additional business benefits. Some basics around the reach of Google+ will be covered in this article, as well as what it is used for to give practitioners the general knowledge needed when deciding whether to integrate Google+ into the businesses' ongoing marketing efforts.

What is Google+

The simplest way to understand Google+ is to look at it as essentially a 'social network' that has a powerful search engine (Google) running behind it. Google+ is pretty much Facebook, Twitter, Reddit and Pinterest all rolled into one³ and delivers a very powerful tool when marketing your clinic. When you view it in these terms, you can see why

Google+ can add to your clinic's marketing efforts. Google loves data and what better way to boost your search engine rankings than to publish and share content on a Google platform. With more than 300 million monthly users, it sits just behind Twitter, which has 320 million users; although, it is noted that a question is often raised in terms of how many of these accounts are 'active'.² The main purpose of Google+ is to offer its users a simple platform for sharing content (whether created by you or by the people you follow) and a tool for building mini communities around particular interests. It also offers a way for connecting like-minded individuals and, if you strip this down to a basic level, who doesn't like to read content from people whose views are aligned with theirs?

Google My Business

Google My Business (GMB) is a relatively new feature, which separates Google+ and Google Business Pages into separate features on a single dashboard. GMB directly links you to customers, irrespective of what digital device they are using and whether they are looking for you using Google Maps, Google Search or Google+, which makes finding your business online easier.

By setting up your GMB profile to include your business hours, phone number and directions to your clinic you are providing not

only visibility of your business operationally, but it also links to relevant keyword content that you've published across the web. This therefore makes your business easier to search for on Google and helps it to rank more highly on searches related in your field.

Comparing Google+ to Facebook and Twitter

Google+ follows a similar process to Facebook and Twitter in regards to following people, sharing their content and liking (recommending) content with the '+1' button. For many, Facebook and Twitter are the main social media platforms of choice, and these two popular platforms certainly have their merits; but the beauty of Google+ lies in its communities and its link to Google search engine rankings and visibility.

Unlike other social media platforms, when using Google+ you can't separate your personal and professional pages as there is just one dashboard for a single account. If you had a separate gmail account for your personal use and for your business use then in essence you would be working from two separate dashboards. This makes it important that you pre-vet the type of posts you intend to share amongst your 'circles'. If potential customers were likely to search for you by your name, then one account is recommended because you want the search to go to your professional page. 'Circles' are also unique to Google+ and are people/businesses that you create around similar interests, philosophies and objectives. For example, if a particular interest was around dermal fillers or cosmetic surgery, then you could create a circle for each of these interests and add relevant people or businesses and publish or share content to that circle. This builds a niche community of people and content along particular themes. It's important to note that you should thoroughly vet any personal content such as pictures you use (in particular your profile picture), before you post to your circles.⁴

The Google+ dashboard also differs as it is almost a hybrid of other social platforms. It allows you to create, manage and optimise your clinic's page, publish content, share content into your niche circles and build photo collections in a similar way to Pinterest, all from one central place. This makes for a very smooth and user-friendly experience.

For me, the YouTube element is the fun bit. Google+ incorporates YouTube, which adds another layer to your marketing efforts



Key things to remember when using Google+

- Ensure you use the right keywords when setting up your profile so that you will appear in any search engine results, for example 'aesthetic practitioner', 'cosmetic medicine'
- Link your Google+ page to your website (this is a necessary step to allow Google to verify that you are the owner of that website)
- Serve your audience first with engaging and relevant content – seek to inform your readers
- Be mindful about what you share as content has a high chance of being picked up by Google search
- Be active and be helpful – try to schedule time to dedicate to Google+ regularly
- Set aside time to search for peers and leaders in your industry. Re-share their posts to increase the chance of them following you back, boosting your 'authority'

as you can create engaging videos on YouTube and then share them with your patients and communities via Google+. Google strives to give users the very best in search engine experience, so when users search for videos in Google it will also index YouTube video content, making it an even more streamlined experience for the user and publisher of content. Another feature is 'Google Hangouts', which is a communication feature that involves a 'group style' instant messaging and video chat facility (a bit like Skype) for up to 10 people. Hangouts are a great way to showcase your knowledge and experience to other industry professionals and patients whilst receiving feedback and questions in real-time. The beauty of a hangout is that it can be a cheap and sustainable part of your content strategy.

Google+ content

A content strategy should be part of your on-going marketing efforts if you want to increase your reach and drive traffic, as well as generate leads. As with all content, it's important to keep in mind those that you want to engage with. Ask yourself, is this content

useful, informative and relevant to my reader? By sharing content with your different 'circles' you have the ability to monitor and analyse what works best for you and your clinic. If you do have content you want to share to a wider audience (outside of your circles) then you can do that too, but you still need to consider your audience and business objectives. One way around this is to have a personal blog if the topics are very separate from your business objectives.

You can strengthen your clinic's online reputation by crafting relevant, informative and engaging content and then using Google+ 'circles' to distribute your content to closed groups. By following this mid to long-term strategy, your efforts should result in an increase in traffic, improved search engine rankings in Google and hopefully a direct increase to your bottom line, as you acquire new patients and retain existing ones.

Follow and be followed

Google+ does a great job at keeping your business at the front of people's minds and visible to your existing followers because when you '+1' your followers' content, your business/Google+ profile will then show up

in their search engine results. Be patient when building your follower list and spend a little time planning who to follow as this is a good way of getting a follow in return. You want to ensure your network for sharing and engaging is one of mutual benefit. When sharing other people's content, you can tag that person by adding a '+' sign before their name. This is a great way to show up in Google's search engine rankings when someone searches for that person's name. As Google is 'all about data' rather than sharing content, building up your follower list and engaging with your peers and patients can only be a positive step forward.

Conclusion

Aesthetic practitioners can take advantage of the many features of Google+ as they encourage and foster engagement with others, which in turn helps practitioners to educate prospective and current patients as well as re-enforcing their position as a trusted expert and thought leader in their field.

Establishing yourself as a trusted medical professional online should be part of your development as more and more people flock to the internet to search for healthcare professionals that can offer high quality treatment at a reasonable cost.

Google+ offers a rich experience for users that understand its many benefits and features, it's easy to set up and integrate into an existing content and social media strategy. If you have the time to set aside to create engaging and informative content, then Google will repay your time and efforts with search engine rankings, authority positioning and better visibility for your practice online.



Gemma Johnson is a business consultant with more than 10 years of digital marketing experience in assisting brands with their creative, content, social media and PR strategies. Johnson is also a media spokesperson for family finances and digital mastery (using digital technologies in a balanced and productive way) and frequently appears on Radio, TV and writes for The Huffington Post.

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