How Google’s Social Search Shift Will Impact Your Brand’s SEO

In what could be hailed as the update that sparked an all-out Internet riot, Google has launched “Search, plus your World,” which pours personal social results into your public search listings. The catch is that it only factors in your Google+ social graph, leaving Facebook and Twitter, arguably the more active social networks, out in the cold.

This could prove to be an even bigger search engine development than Google’s infamous Panda update, which aimed to remove sites with low-quality content. Why? Because it’s easier to write good content (or at least, hire someone to write good content) than it is to get people to share your content.

The Impact on Brands

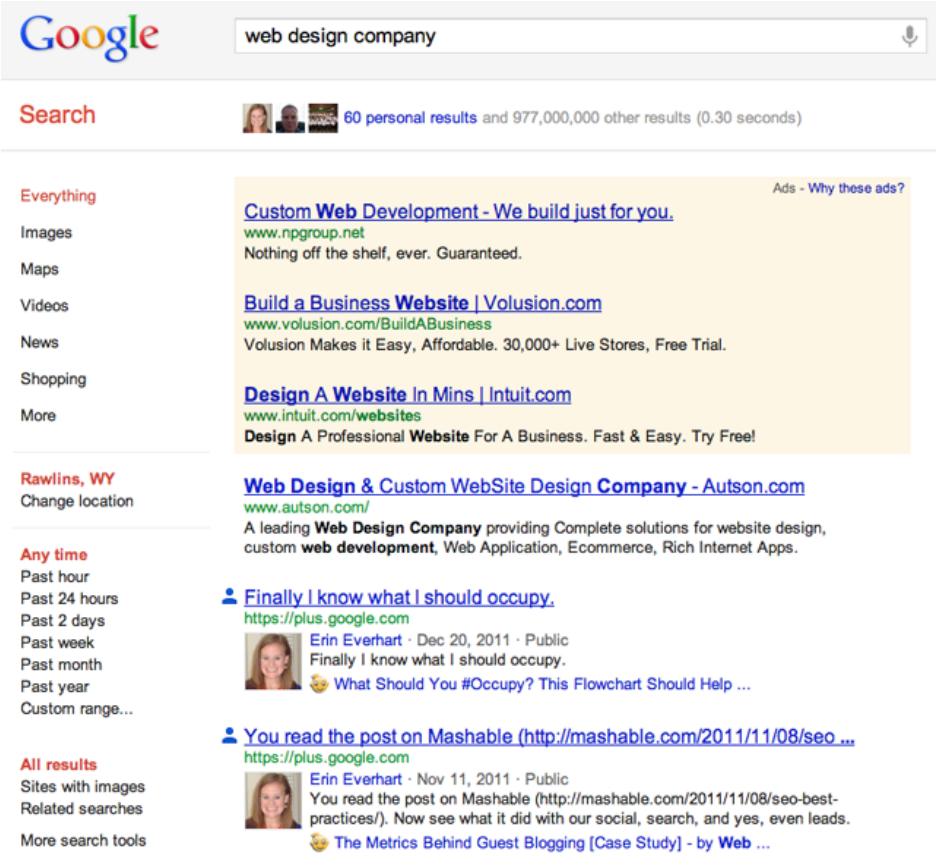
What does a change this big mean for businesses that depend on their Google rank for traffic and sales?

Personalized results are the default when users are logged into their Google account, so it will be harder to determine your rankings. It’ll also be harder for your customers to find you, and for you to get traffic from the same ranking because more often than not, Google+ results will be appearing before public listings.

But the biggest problem is, they’re not always relevant. While the savvy surfers know to switch between personal and public, you can’t assume all of your potential customers are going to know the difference.

I can use my own company as an example.

When I search for “web design company,” one of our top keywords in Google, it’s pretty clear what I’m looking for: A web



design company. But you wouldn't think that with the results I get:

Two out of three top results, traditionally coveted for clicks, are filled with social mentions. And social mentions that have nothing to do with a web design company.

Google's long been under fire for an algorithm that struggles to produce the most relevant results, and with Search+, it seems that they aren't doing much to head in that direction. Yes, it does add more trust and authority to your results, but not *relevance*.

What Can Brands Do?

You know that you can't have search without social, and Search+ reinforces it. Since Facebook and Twitter results aren't aggregated into public search, it's put an even bigger emphasis on not only creating a brand page on Google+, but being an active member. Sounds like Google's plan all along.

You then have to get your Google+ brand page into as many influential people's circles as possible. These people also have to be in many other circles if you have hopes of reaching people outside of your immediate network. This isn't an easy feat.

But there's more: Search+ essentially forces brands to use their Google+ pages much like their own website. That means brands should integrate their main keywords into Google+ posts to increase their relevance in important searches. But again, this must be done in a natural, non-spammy manner.

This is especially true because purely personal search is hiding a lot of public content, the biggest being local results, which SEO consultant John Doherty has pointed out. That doesn't mean that local SEO isn't as important as we originally thought: It means that you need to be relevant, well-found, *and* well-liked (or at least, well-shared) by influencers.

Finally, if guest blogging is a part of your SEO strategy, which it should be, you need to ensure that each site that publishes your content is using the **rel="author"** tag that leads back to your Google+ profile so you gain more clout and authority from Google.

As we learn more about "Search+ your World" and how users are interacting with it, we'll learn more about how you can work these changes into your overall SEO campaign.

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