

Things to Consider Before Adding Google+ to Your Organization's Online Strategy

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Google's recent expansion of Google+, the Internet conglomerate's newest attempt to establish a foothold in the lucrative social networking field currently dominated by Facebook and Twitter, has many media organizations wondering whether they should join this newest online community. Although Google+ is currently only available to consumers, some media entities have already created profiles, while others are considering whether to do the same. Once Google offers Google+ for businesses (a service that it promises to launch before the end of the year), this question will become even more important for many media organizations.

While Google has not provided details about how Google+ for businesses will work, the company has indicated that the service will include "rich analytics and the ability to connect that identity to other parts of Google that businesses might use, like AdWords."

As your organization decides whether to participate in Google+ or other social networking sites, there are several things to consider.

First, it is important to ensure that your organization's use of the online social networking site is consistent with your organization's existing privacy policies. That means understanding how the social networking service collects information, how a user's interaction with your organization's page might contribute to that information collection, and what access your organization will have to user information. This will be especially important if you partner with the social networking site to offer advertisements either directly on the service or on other Internet sites based on the information that users provide on the social networking site (i.e., through behavioral advertising).

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Second, it is important to ensure that your organization's participation does not violate children's privacy laws. Under the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA), it is illegal to collect personal information, without first obtaining parental consent, on a website directed to children or where the operator has "actual knowledge" that it is collecting personal information from a child (where a child is defined as a person under the age 13). While sites like Facebook and Google+ have filters to prevent registration by children, your organization could still be liable if it has actual knowledge of the child's age (such as through comments by the user or from other data that your organization may have about the user).

Finally, organizations should make sure that their use of a social networking site does not infringe upon any intellectual property. This will be especially important on Google+, which offers close integration with YouTube, another Google platform. Just because the infringing content on your site was posted by a user does not automatically mean that your organization is immune from liability.

Google+ offers a potentially exciting new way to reach and engage with media consumers. By ensuring that your organization adheres to certain guidelines in its social networking endeavors, your experience will be more likely to be a "+1".