

Google Buzz: Good for business?

What is Google Buzz?

Google, in their bid for world (wide web) domination, have added another weapon to their arsenal in Google Buzz. Launched on 9 February 2010, it is essentially an effort by Google to become more social, allowing Gmail account holders to share anything they find interesting, either publicly for the world to see or privately with a select group of contacts within their Gmail address book. Additional features include Google Buzz for mobile, which tags the location of the person who has just posted a buzz and the ability to integrate a Buzz with Twitter and Flickr.

Who is it for?

Seen by many as the Facebook/Twitter killer, Google Buzz operates on the same basic principles as its competitors: share your activities, follow other people's activities and share content from around the web. Like Twitter, Google Buzz is first and foremost another layer to our social skin, making it easier to find interesting information and allowing friends and strangers alike to have an insight into our lives.

As it is integrated into Gmail accounts, over 175 million people will automatically have access to it. However this doesn't ensure that it will succeed, especially with such stern competition in Facebook. With over 400 million active users, Facebook's popularity is booming and it is fast becoming a substitute for email and instant messaging. Web based email however, has become a virtual passport that is required to enter the various social worlds but is quickly becoming an obsolete method of communication.

Google Buzz & business

As with other media platforms, enterprises have slowly found a place to market their products, and social media is no exception. Companies have found a way to target specific audiences on websites such as Youtube, Facebook, Myspace and to a certain extent on various blog sites. Businesses are slowly learning to use Twitter as a marketing tool, with companies funding various high profile people to endorse their products or setting up their own profiles to promote themselves. This form of product placement is due to Twitter so far resisting the allure of selling advertising on profile pages. Twitter does allow advertisers to target its users based on their history of tweets, meaning a quick search of keywords and you have a ready made target audience.

The use of location tagging on Buzz adds an interesting twist to messages and postings. Users can post information about the location that they are in; creating an interesting read when looking at different locations and searching for interesting activities. It's foreseeable that businesses will use this feature heavily to promote their products, new shops, special events and special offers from their various stores locations. Marketing campaigns based on popular topics, user surveys and current events will also be utilised, much in the same way as they are used on Twitter.

A downside to Google Buzz is that a user must be a Gmail account holder to use it. Most companies now have their own 'corporate' email accounts and to have to switch to an unsecure email provider would be a massive obstruction to companies wanting to use the service. However given Google's quick reaction to user privacy needs last week, (Google had to roll out a major privacy update two days after the official launch), the creation of a business 'app' or an enterprise version in the next few months is likely.

The future

Despite having products in almost every other internet platform, Google Buzz is possibly their boldest effort to integrate into the social media world. However, with users and companies having already invested countless hours of time and money into the more popular social sites, it remains to be seen if there is room for yet another social site. The tagline for Google Buzz is "a Google approach to sharing", whether Facebook and the other giants of the social world are willing to share is another question.

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