Google+

for Small Businesses

Lynette Young

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Trademarks

Warning and Disclaimer

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About the Author

Lynette Young works as a social technology specialist and a business strategist with focus on digital publishing and implementation services. She is an outspoken advocate of Google+ and sees it as a vital piece for business on the Web today.

Ms. Young's company, Purple Stripe Productions, has been the engaged by clients large and small for social media, technology and digital publishing training seminars since 2006.

Ms. Young is also the founder of *Women of Google+*, a community designed to educate and celebrate professional women embracing social networking to amplify their voice and message. She is also one of the most followed people worldwide in Google+ with more than 1.5 million followers.

An engaging and informative speaker, her specialties include social networking platforms with a focus on Google+, current and future technologies, digital communication trends, as well a women's empowerment, and motivational talks.

Dedication

To my husband Dave, who encourages me to stick to my vision and goals even when it disrupts his.

To my daughter Bailey and son Jackson, who inspire me to make the world a better place for "geeks" like us.

To my mother Christy, who was the very best role model I could ask for and showed me what it takes to be a strong woman who puts her family first, and really hard work a close second.

Acknowledgments

To Katherine Bull, my acquisitions editor, and Romny French, Que's editorial assistant, thanks for pursuing an uphill battle with my email inbox and all the roadblocks I threw in the way. You both have the patience of saints!

To Chris Brogan, thanks for your willingness to carve paths in the sides of mountains to help others like me make the trip just a little easier.

To Amanda, Amy, Bobbi Jo, Cecily, Chel, Christine, Daria, Dresden, Gloria, Jane, Liz, Marcy, and Whitney for being *fierce*—and making sure I stay that way too. We are changing the world ladies; let's keep up the great work.

To Ashlan, C.C., Carter, Chris, Christopher, Guy, J.C., Jason, Loren, Marc, Matthew, Peter, Seth, and Simon for unknowingly being the perfect mix of smart, inspiring, snarky, and chivalrous—online and off.

We Want to Hear from You!

As the reader of this book, *you* are our most important critic and commentator. We value your opinion and want to know what we're doing right, what we could do better, what areas you'd like to see us publish in, and any other words of wisdom you're willing to pass our way.

We welcome your comments. You can email or write to let us know what you did or didn't like about this book—as well as what we can do to make our books better.

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Introduction

Small businesses are at a unique advantage online when it comes to using social media, especially Google+. What works for some large corporations is successful only because of money and brute force. Unless a product or service is especially horrible (and even that doesn't matter with enough money), throwing weekly free iPad contests can "buy" you exposure, but it doesn't help customers find you when they need you. Google+ makes it easy for the small business owner with limited resources to be on an "even playing ground" with large corporations with seemingly unlimited budgets.

This book covers only ideas and tactics relevant to the small business owner. You won't find any large corporate case studies requiring a 12-person tactical team to implement. Small businesses are "do it yourself" when it comes to every aspect of their business, and figuring out how to use Google+ is no different. This book is designed to quickly and efficiently walk you through the basics of Google+ as they apply to your business goals and give you ideas on how to seamlessly incorporate Google+ into your busy day.

As a small business owner, you alone are responsible for attracting business, fixing problems, managing resources, stocking shelves, providing services, building products, and retaining customers. You have enough to do without having to make another profile on a social media network and spend all day listening to people talk about what they ate for lunch (unless, of course, that is what your small business does). Google+ can be different if you approach it differently and with a purpose. I'm here to show you how.

In this book, you discover a few practical uses for Google+, and you determine the best way to participate. You will learn ideas and tactics for focusing your efforts in Google+. Although there are many other small business uses for Google+, this book focuses on the big three: lead generation and conversion (marketing and sales), creating a great "buzz" about your products or services to get people talking about you in a positive way (public relations), and assisting your customers before, during, and after the sale (customer service and support).

What Is So Special About Google+?

As it turns out, there are a lot of great things about Google+. As you may have figured out, Google+ is a social media network and platform by online search and advertising giant Google. There are also a lot of Google products that you might already use, including AdWords, Alerts, Analytics, Android, Apps, Blogger, Books, Calendar, Chrome, Docs, Earth, Gmail, Groups, Images, Maps, News, Offers, Picasa, Places, Play, Reader, Translate, and YouTube—about 60 individual products and services in all. Combine this with the fact that Google Search and YouTube are the number one and number two most used search engines in the world, and you have a pretty powerful platform to reach people. Google's vision is to bring together a good number of its products by using Google+ to tie them together. What this means for you is one-stop shopping for reaching your customers no matter what they do online and where they spend their time online.

Why Does My Small Business Need Google+?

Google+ could turn out to be the perfect social media platform for small business owners. Why? Because it has everything small business owners need to grow their business online for a minimal investment of time and resources. That sounds like a big deal, and I think it is. Taking time now to understand Google+ and what it can do for your small business gives you the results you are looking for, but might not have found using Facebook, Twitter, or LinkedIn. I view Google+ as a nearly perfect platform on which to publish content. Although blogs are the ultimate online publishing tool as far as flexibility and customization, Google+ (and by extension, other Google products) has something that your blog doesn't—*billions* of collective page views a day. By learning how to successfully use the Google+ network, you directly inject your small business into the core of what people use the Internet for: social interactions and search.

The idea of using social media to grow business is something small business owners think about, but seldom have the time to actually do, or do well. The problem is small business owners already wear many hats. They rarely have time to devote to executing ideas, let alone learning and mastering the seemingly ever-changing

world of social media. The result is that they take on the responsibility alone or give the task to someone who is already juggling many projects. Both solutions usually mean jumping in without a plan or any idea of what they actually want out of the endeavor.

For many people, the only exposure to social media platforms they have is connecting to friends and family or to play games and unwind. At the other extreme, there are so many mega-corporations using sites like Facebook and Twitter that to attempt using them for their own small business seems impossible and expensive. Making the switch from "person and personal use" to "business owner and professional use" is quite a leap. It is made more complicated by throwing five large social media platforms into the mix: Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube, and now Google+. Luckily, you can gain all the advantages of the first four platforms by using Google+. Because small business owners are generally cautious of their time and money, this works out perfectly!

When your livelihood doesn't revolve around learning every little nuance of every social media network, it can quickly become overwhelming. After some experimenting and a little courage, many small businesses have found early success with Google+ and find that it can easily fit into their day and their business. I would like for you to have the same success.

There are so many aspects of being a small business owner (and especially a "solo" business owner) that never quite become second nature to some of us. Although it is easy to outsource tasks, such as bookkeeping, other functions require in-depth knowledge of products and services, which cost too much money for a small business to afford. Besides, who knows your products, services, or customers as well as you? *Absolutely no one.*

From this moment forward, *you* own the process of getting your small business the attention and customers that you need. Passive (and sometimes expensive) forms of finding and helping customers such as Yellow Pages, direct mail, 1-800 customer-service phone lines, or even word-of-mouth referrals are no longer the primary way to find customers. Business today is happening interactively, in real time, online. That means you need your small business to participate interactively, in real time, online. The expected caveat is that the Internet is *huge* and you are just a small business. Being a small business today is actually an asset, not a detriment. You are at the advantage. As a small business, you already know how to adapt and evolve. What you need now is a secret weapon. Luckily, the new social networking platform from Google, called Google+, gives you a way to quickly get your small business noticed with minimal effort, time, budget, and technical ability.

What Will You Learn in This Book?

Whether you read this book from beginning to end or just pick out the pieces you want to know, this book shows you information and ideas to incorporate Google+ into your small business. Even business owners familiar with using social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, or LinkedIn can benefit from new ways of reaching and servicing customers through the ideas shared in this book.

- Chapter 1, "What Can I Do in Google+?" This chapter contains some of the features, functions, and uses in the Google+ platform.
- Chapter 2, "What Should I Use Google+ For?" This chapter contains creative ideas on using Google+ to promote or support your business online.
- Chapter 3, "Should I Be Me or My Company?" This chapter discusses the differences between Google+ Accounts and Pages and helps you determine the best one to use for your business.
- Chapter 4, "Google+ Ideas for Lead Generation." This chapter contains ideas and tactics for using Google+ to market your business and attract customers.
- Chapter 5, "Google+ Ideas for Creating Buzz (Public Relations)." This chapter talks about ways to generate positive word of mouth discussions by your customers.
- Chapter 6, "Google+ Ideas for Making Your Customers Happy (Customer Service and Support)." This chapter discusses ways to use Google+ to proactively assist your customers.
- Chapter 7, "Planning Your Time." This chapter features ways to fit learning and using Google+ into your business schedule.

What Can I Do in Google+?

Before I show you all of the ways you can use Google+ to help your small business online, I think that it is important to give you a reference of the types of features discussed in this book. Although there is a lot of information, tips, tricks, and hacks you can get into with each of these features, this book focuses on creative uses for the tools for small businesses.

Posting

Posting in Google+ is easy, and it's similar to writing an email or blog post. Posting is at the heart of creating content in Google+. Some of the more useful things to know about a post in Google+ is that you can edit it after you post (no more typos!), attach a link, photos, or video to the post, tag people or pages, and set the exact security for the people you want to be able to view the post. Posts are also able to be +1'd, which is similar in function to a Like on Facebook or LinkedIn. Posts are where the bulk of the content is displayed in Google+ and a large part of what you will need to concentrate on. Content within posts are searchable (use those keywords!) from inside Google+ as well as Google Search, providing you or the general public have proper security to view the content.

The area where your posts show up in Google+ is referred to as your *stream*. You are the only person permitted to post on your stream, so no worries about spam! You are also able to write a nearly unlimited amount of text in a Google+ post, but it's rare to see someone try to use all 100,000 characters.

The post entry dialog box can be accessed either from your own Profile page or your main Google+ stream. From here, you can enter text, photos, pictures and video, and you can attach links. Figure 1.1 shows what the post entry dialog box looks like. Some basic text formatting options are available as follows:

- To bold text—put *asterisks* around the word or phrase
- To underline text—put _underscores_ around the word or phrase
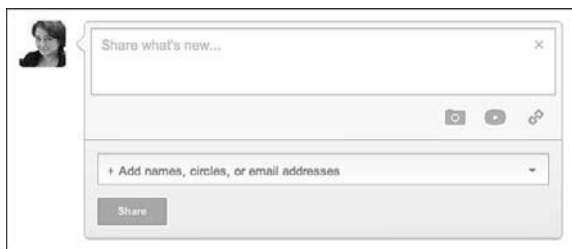- To strikethrough text—put —dashes— around the word or phrase

Figure 1.1   *Basic post entry dialog box.*

Figure 1.2 shows the options to attach a photo to your post. Content with photos tend to get shared and +1'd more often, but be sure you give a good description with supporting text.

- **Add Photos:** Lets you upload a single photo from your computer's hard drive.

- **Create an album:** Lets you upload multiple photos at once from your computer's hard drive and organize them in a single photo album.
- **From Instant Upload:** This lets you choose from pictures you have automatically uploaded from the Google+ mobile application (iOS or Android). You will need to configure this setting from your mobile device.
- **Take a photo:** This option will open a dialog window that opens the webcam on your computer to take a photograph. You must have a webcam installed on your computer to use this feature.
- **From Google Drive:** Any photo you have access to in Google Drive (formerly known as Google Docs) can be attached with this option.

Figure 1.2   *Post entry dialog box with the ability to attach a photo.*

Figure 1.3 shows similar options for attaching video to your post:

- **Upload Video:** Lets you upload a single video from your computer's hard drive.
- **YouTube:** Lets you link a video hosted on YouTube. You can insert the full URL and Google+ will insert the video attachment complete.
- **From Instant Upload:** Lets you choose from videos you have automatically uploaded from the Google+ mobile application (iOS or Android). You will need to configure this setting from your mobile device.
- **Record video:** Opens a dialog window that opens the webcam on your computer to record a video. You must have a webcam and microphone installed on your computer to use this feature.
- **From Google Drive:** Any video you have access to in Google Drive (formerly known as Google Docs) can be attached with this option.
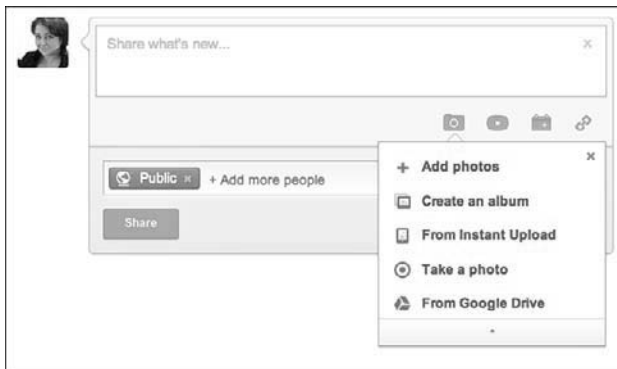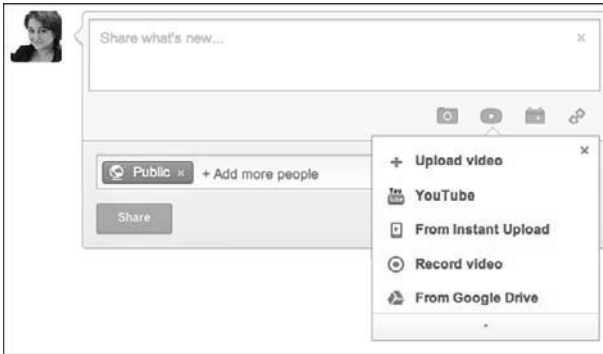
Figure 1.3 *Post entry dialog box with the ability to attach video.*

Typing a link starting with http:// in the body of the post text automatically con-
nects the link to the content and inserts any pictures or description text associ-
ated with that link. Figure 1.4 shows the basic Link Entry dialog box. Once you
click the Add button to attach the link, Google+ checks to see if the link is valid as
well as attaches a photo and description text that can be found. If more than one
photo is found at the link, you can select the one you want by using the left/right
arrow scroll when hovering over the photo. You also have the choice to remove the
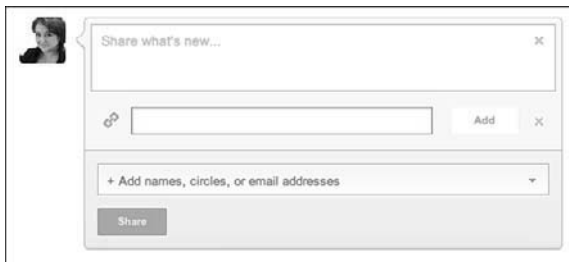photo, the description, or both from the link attachment.

Figure 1.4 *Post entry box with the ability to attach a link.*

A robust feature in Google+ is the Events post. The basic Events dialog box is
shown in Figure 1.5 and contains everything you need to schedule an event or
Hangout right from your Google+ stream. Following are the options:

- **Event title:** Name your event something attention-grabbing and informative.
- **Time/date:** Select the time and date your event will start. End time is optional.
- **Location:** You can select a physical location and Google+ will automatically embed a Google Map (optional). If your event is to be held online or via phone leave this option blank.
- **Details:** Enter a detailed description of your event here (optional).

Figure 1.5   *Event Options for publishing an Event in Google+.*

Advanced options for Events in Google+ include Hangouts and Hangout on Air as well as some additional input fields for event details. Figure 1.6 shows additional options for entering a website URL, ticket seller URL, a link for a YouTube video and transit and parking information.

Actions you can take on a post include +1, Share, and Start a Hangout (red box on left). You can see actions taken on any post (red box on right), including how many +1's and Shares. Click the numbers to view a drop-down box to see the names of the people as shown in Figure 1.7.
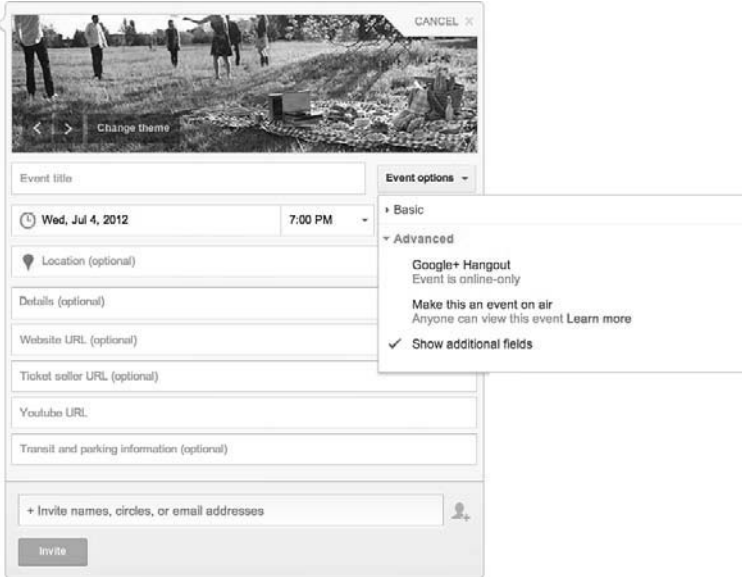
Figure 1.6 *Advanced Event Options for publishing an Event in Google+.*

Figure 1.7 *Sharing options available on a Google+ post.*

One of the best features of creating content in Google+ is the ability to set security on a post by post basis and edit text after you publish. To access the Post menu,

click the arrow on the right top corner of the post for a drop-down menu. Some options are available only to the account that created the post (Edit this post, Delete this post, Disable comments, Lock this post) but other options (Link to this post, View Ripples) are generally available on all posts you have access to view. Following is a description of all editing options as shown in Figure 1.8:

- **Edit this post:** Allows you to edit the text of a post after you have published it. You cannot change security (Circle) settings or alter links or media such as photos or video. Any shares of the post will remain as it was published at the time of the share.

- **Delete this post:** You can completely delete content you have created in Google+, including any attached comments. Note that any shares of this content will still be available.

- **Link to this post:** This allows others to easily copy the URL "permalink" to share just that post with others.

- **Disable comments:** As the post publisher you have the ability to disable other people from commenting on your posts. Any existing comments will remain.

- **Lock this post:** Once a post is locked, other people will not be able to share the post on their stream.

- **View Ripples:** Ripples are a visual reporting tool that allows you to see all public shares of a post.

Figure 1.8   *Drop-down arrow showing editing and security settings.*

Comments

Like most social media platforms, Google+ gives you the ability to leave comments on posts. Comments are able to be edited after posting and contain links and +Tags the same as a post. You cannot attach photos or videos to comments. To leave a comment on a post, just click the Comments Text link under the post and

type your comment. You cannot attach pictures or videos within a comment, but you can include links by starting with http://.

Each post is limited to receiving 500 comments. If you write a hot piece of content that gets that many comments, my suggestion is to keep the fire going by resharing your own post and inviting people to continue the conversation there.

Shares

Sharing is caring, or so the adage goes. By sharing content you find from within Google+, you provide the people interested in you a wider selection of great content without having to produce it yourself. Think of it as "curation." Shared content in Google+ behaves similarly to a standard post, but you cannot edit the content that is shared. You can edit only your additions to it.

External websites that have incorporated the +1 button can also publish information to Google+ in the form of a share that includes a reference to the original website and a picture and snippet of text taken from the site.

+1

"Plus Ones" are similar in function to a Like in Facebook or LinkedIn. Using +1 is a great way to indicate "I like this" or "I agree" on a post or comment without leaving a comment. +1'ing can occur on a post, a share, or a comment, as well as photos or videos.

Google+ has also given the ability to +1 an external website site by adding a bit of code to the website or blog. These +1s have the added benefit, if configured correctly, to quickly boost your search rankings in Google Search. Be sure to contact your website developer to have them implement the +1 button on your site. (Details on how to implement that are out of the scope of this book.)

+Tags

"Plus Tags" are a simple way to identify other Google+ accounts or pages in your content. +Tags provide the reader with a clickable "chip" where they can go to view the account or page of the person you are referencing. To use them, just type the + sign followed by the first few letters of the person or page you want to +Tag. Google+ should start to auto-fill the content and provide you with a drop-down box that includes names you can select. Frequently referenced accounts or pages will generally be listed at the top. The +Tag function works similarly to the @name in Twitter and Facebook. +Tags work for pages and personal names and accounts. As you can see from Figure 1.9, as you start typing the name, Google+ will first

go through your circles and then general Google+ profiles and look for matches (it looks at the beginning of the words, not just first names). Click the name you would like to tag to include it in your content.
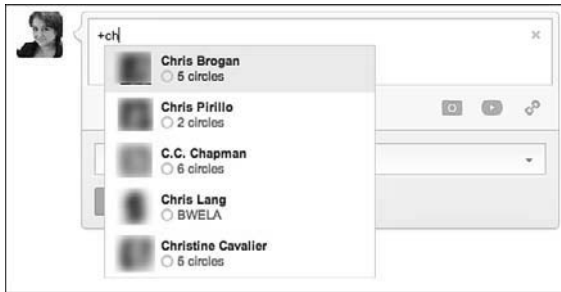

Figure 1.9   *+Tags in action.*

Hangouts

Hangouts are Google+'s ten-person video chat. This feature is considered a game-changer for Google+ and is a fairly simple tool that has almost unlimited possibilities. A few additional features inside of Hangouts, called Hangout Apps, allow you to interactively and simultaneously use services like Google Docs, Google Effects, YouTube, Screenshare, SlideShare, and Hangout Lower Third within Hangouts.

Hangouts have the same security abilities via Circles as you have with Google+ posts. You can select the people or Circles who are initially invited to the Hangout, but be aware that once someone is in a Hangout, they have the ability to invite in people on their own. No matter how many people or circles as you invite, once the Hangout fills up, no other attendees will be able to join until someone drops out.

To start a Hangout, click on the Hangouts icon on the right menu bar, then the red Start a Hangout button that appears in the top right corner. As seen in Figure 1.10, you will have a pop-up window appear that lets you invite people, pages, or Circles to the Hangout as well as enter email addresses of people you would like to invite from outside Google+. You will be presented with a visual list of recommended people from your Circles to invite, or can enter a telephone number to have a person join "audio-only" in a Hangout much like a conference call.

Hangout options available include "Restrict minors from joining this hangout" and "Preferred hangout language for this session." If you choose to make this a Hangout on Air (referenced below), you must select the checkbox at this point. Once a Hangout is in progress you can invite more guests if you want.
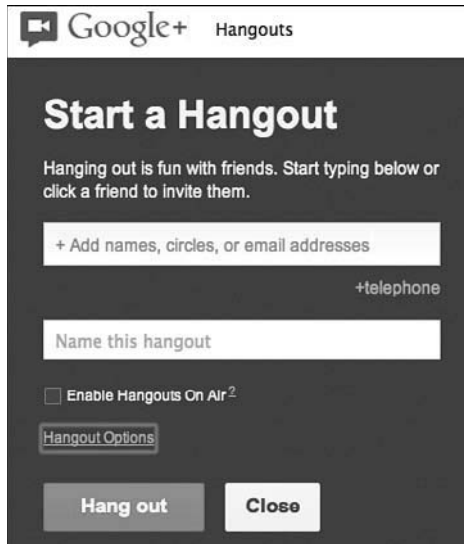
Figure 1.10   *+Tags in action.*

When you are finished making your Hangout selections, click the Hang out button to start the Hangout. Google+ will send invitation notifications with a clickable link to people you have invited, but members of any Circle you invite won't receive a direct notification, only the ability to see the Hangout on their Google+ Hangout page.

If required, you can change your audio and video settings for Google+ by clicking on the gray gear icon in the top right corner of a Hangout window. You will be able to select or change your webcam, microphone, connection speed, and audio quality from here. (Note: Most Hangouts will not require you to change the audio quality setting from Voice. The Studio setting will broadcast in stereo and is mainly used for musicians to broadcast. It uses a considerable amount of bandwidth over the Voice option.)

Hangout on Air

Hangout on Air (HOA) is a feature much like regular Hangouts that allow you to broadcast in "watch only" mode to a public audience without requiring viewers to participate in a Hangout. You start a Hangout on Air in the same manner you start a regular Hangout, but a few differences exist, including:

- HOAs start "off air" and only the HOA owner can choose to start the public broadcast.

- An "embed" link will be available even when the HOA is off air so that you can share to your Circles and contacts before the show goes live.
- As the account that initiates the HOA, you are the only person able to invite attendees even while the Hangout is in progress.
- HOAs do not have the ability to play YouTube videos.
- As the HOA owner you are the only person that can stop the broadcast.
- When a HOA is finished, the YouTube account connected to the HOA owners account is where the recorded video will appear. The video is in private mode until you visit YouTube and allow the video to be public.

To link your existing YouTube account to Google+, visit Support.Google.com and search for "linking my YouTube account to a Google account" and follow the instructions and conversion path. You must use the same email address for both Google+ and YouTube to make this work.

Profile

Your Profile is an important part of your Google+ identity and should not be thrown together in a rush. Your Profile information has become the center of your identity in Google+ and in several other Google products. Your primary account in Google+ must be as a person, not an entity, brand, or company. This topic is discussed more in Chapter 3, "Should I Be Me or My Company?"

Circles

Circles help you organize and categorize people and pages in Google+. Circling is the equivalent of friending in Facebook or following in Twitter. It is a one-way relationship (like Twitter), which means that you can circle someone, but they do not automatically circle you in return. Circles can be used for both listening and talking. If you choose, you can view only the posts from the people in one circle at a time to "narrow the stream." Do this by clicking the circle name on the left column of your Google+ page.

Circles can be used as a broadcast device by indicating that a piece of content is only available to be read by a specific circle, multiple circles, or a combination of this plus individual accounts.

You can circle a total of 5,000 people and pages combined. A person placed in multiple circles is only counted toward your quota once. Although no one can see the name of the circle you have added them to, or even how many circles you have added them to, my "best practice" is never to name a circle something you

would be embarrassed over if it was discovered. Figure 1.11 shows the basic Circle management screen. To see if you are circled by a specific person, visit their Profile page. If that person has circled you, you will see a gray arrow circle icon next to their name indicating they have followed you.
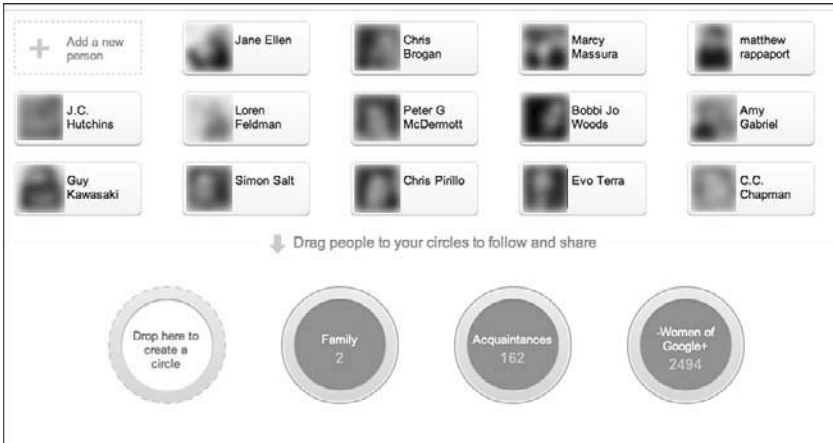

Figure 1.11   *The basic Circles page.*

Pages

Pages are a way for a non-person such as a brand, company, or group to communicate and participate in Google+ without breaking Google+'s Terms of Service. You have access to every feature and function within Google+ when using it as a Page, including Hangouts. Every action you perform in Google+ as a page is represented as the page, not your person and name. Pages can currently support one owner and 49 managers, and ownership is transferable.

One major difference between accounts and Pages is that Circles work a bit differently. The major difference being, as a page, you cannot circle someone that has not circled you first. It seems to be an anti-spam mechanism, which means you have to work harder to earn your followers. Pages are explained in detail in Chapter 3.

Ripples

Ripples are the only Google+ reporting and analytics tool available to us within the system for now. You can access Ripples by clicking the gray down arrow on the status line of any public post or share and select View Ripples. Here, you get

some basic information about the people that shared the post and some additional information, such as a timeline and additional link shares. When you view Ripples on a piece of content that contains a link, Google+ will show unrelated posts and shares that also reference the same link. In this way, you can view multiple communities and discussions around the same piece of content. The Ripples graphic also gives you a "you are here" pointer to show where you have affected the analytics. Because there is not currently an export function for Ripples data, my suggestion is to save the page in HTML format or print it. Figure 1.12 demonstrates what a Google+ Ripple looks like on content with hundreds of shares. It is very easy to see from this page who the "influencer" accounts are. Ideas for using Ripples are discussed more in Chapter 6, "Google+ Ideas for Making Your Customers Happy (Customer Service and Support)."
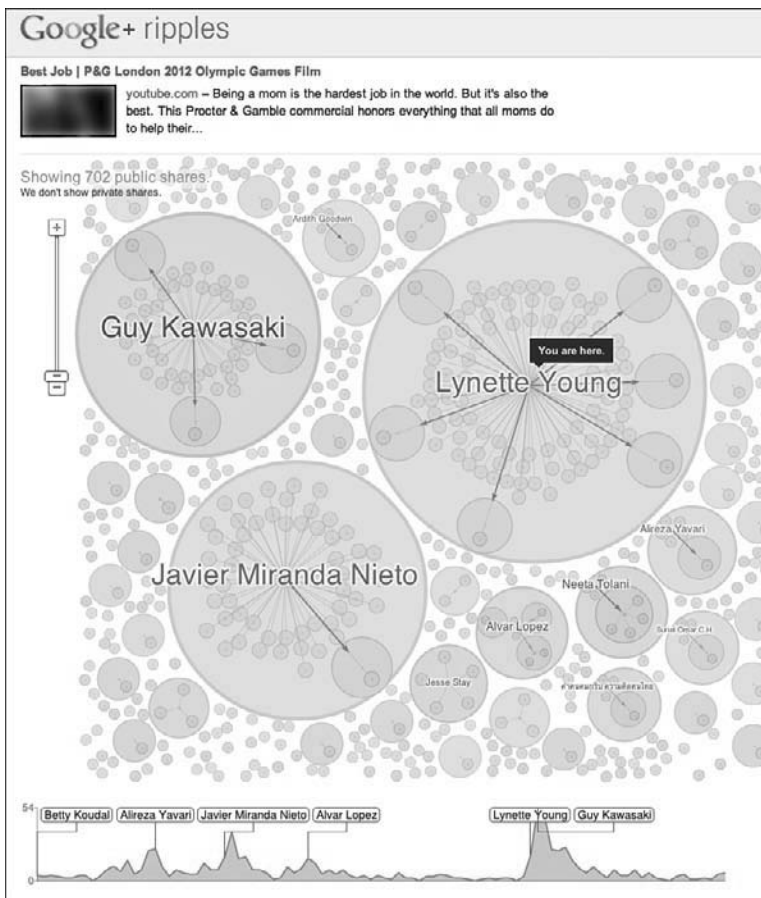

Figure 1.12   *A snippet of a Ripples page.*

As you can see, there are quite a few publishing tools available in Google+. With a little bit of practice you will become comfortable and proficient publishing content and engaging customers. This book will showcase some great ideas on how to best use the tools to grow social media presence in Google+.