

INTERNET

Will Google +1 News have any effect on luxury brands?

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By RACHEL LAMB

Google +1 News, Google's solution to the Facebook "like" epidemic, could potentially act as a ranking system for brands looking to increase their prominence on the search engine, but it will do little to help a brand's presence if consumers are not on board.



When consumers put a search in Google, they will have the option to "like" any paid search ad or organic result. There will also be a social media component where users are able to see what their friends "like" on Google pages.

"Google is making everything more social, and doing it in a way that is an alternative to Facebook likes," said Kristine Segrist, managing director at MEC Search, New York. "The other is, ultimately, Google has indicated that if more people like or give a thumbs up to content, it will have an impact on how prominently it ranks.

"It the idea of whether or not it's going to matter at all as far as brands are concerned," she said. "I don't know how the general public is going to know about this because Facebook is the accepted way of managing this."

Numbers game

Luxury consumers are passionate about the brands that they like. This could be why

Google's new system could be perfect for upscale brands.

"People are more likely to respond to things that they are passionate about," Ms. Segrist said.

Brands can also start to implement the "plus one" or "like" feature on their Web sites so that they can see which products, lines, colors and styles are the most accepted by their customers.

Retailers could also benefit from the friend option.

Brands will not only see which demographics "plus-one" their pages and products, but consumers can see what their friends like and will therefore be more likely to check out the brands or "plus-one" them.

However, there are some glitches.

Consumers must be willing to upload their entire friend network and put it onto the Google network for the social aspect to work, which most will not have the stomach for, according to Ms. Segrist.

Also, there is the idea of promotion.

"It comes down to adoption," Ms. Segrist said. "Consumers may not even know about this option for a while because I don't know what Google is doing to market it."

Nonplussed 1

Although in theory this is a good idea, Google has taken a swing at the social plate before – and struck out.

"They've tried to launch a lot of social things and they haven't been able to get traction from a social perspective or from social giants," Ms. Segrist said. "If this is not widely adapted, it would not have a major impact on brands."

Therefore, brands would be advised to consider their own SEO strategies to maintain prominence on Google.

For instance, brands should realize that Flash-based and image-rich sites are not SEO-friendly, as organic search results are the most commonly used resource to navigate to Web sites ([see story](#)).

It should also be noted that brands that use SEO can even drive customers in-store ([see story](#)).

This way, brands will not need to rely on the compliance from their customers to drive them to commerce locations.

"The big unknowns are how important this will be to consumers," Ms. Segrist said. "We may need to watch out for brands who try to change the system and click on plus ones to gain recognition more thoroughly."

“If Google isn’t on top of it, it could undermine results and become biased,” she said.

Final Take

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