International Association of Chiefs of Police

Google+ Fact Sheet

What is Google+?

Google+ consists of many tools that help users share content and connect across the Web. The social networking aspect of Google+ allows users to put their contacts into Circles, defined by their relationships. Users can then determine with what Circles, and therefore with which people, they will share information. Google+ also has a group video chat function called Hangouts as well as a group texting function called Huddle. Sparks is the Google+ news aggregator; it allows users to set specific interests and then receive news based on those interests. Google+ brand pages allow organizations to create Google+ pages and use much of the functionality that is available for individual users.

How can law enforcement use Google+?

As with other social media platforms, Google+ provides law enforcement agencies with an opportunity to share information and engage with their community. With Google+, agencies can post photos, videos, and text updates on a variety of topics.

Creating Circles in Google+ allows agencies to segment their audience and share targeted content. You may create a Circle for local businesses where you share information pertinent to them. You can create separate Circles for Neighborhood Watch groups, Citizens' Police Academy participants, or other interest groups within your community. You can also create a group especially for officers and civilian staff in order to share internal information; however, it is important to note that this is not a secure forum, so sensitive content should be shared in another fashion.

The Hangout feature can be used to host question-and-answer sessions, take people on tours of your agency, or provide safety demonstrations. Using this video-chat technology, your agency's staff can connect with community members in a whole new way.

Another way law enforcement agencies can use these technologies is to let visitors use the +1 button to recommend content and share your updates and information. Adding this functionality to your Web site or blog (as well as the content you post on Google+) will allow your community to help you share information more broadly.

Start connecting

If your agency chooses to use Google+, be sure to let people know that you are there. A few ways to do this are to place a Google+ badge or link on your agency's Web site and other social media channels, add the link to your e-mail signature, or put out a press release. Individuals must first add your agency to their Circles before you can add them so encourage people to do so and let them know where to find you.

To create a Google+ page for your agency you must first create a Google+ account as an individual. You will use your individual account to administer the page for your agency. You can add multiple administrators to the page, allowing people to have access to the agency page without sharing a single log in. Go to http://plus.google.com to get started.

Measuring Google+

Users can take advantage of the measurement and analytical tools that Google offers. Google search, Ripples, and Google Analytics all provide measurement data. Using these tools allows agencies to understand who is receiving their information, how it is being used, and other data about their Google presence. This information will then assist agencies in refining their social media strategies. Additional tools are available commercially.

Personal use of Google+

It is important for law enforcement personnel to use Google+ safely and responsibly. Users should adjust their privacy settings and be cautious about what type of content they post and who they share that content with. Regardless of how privacy settings are adjusted, users should understand they are still posting content onto the Web and there is always a possibility that it will be shared.

Agencies using Google+

- Wichita, Kansas, Police Department

- Toronto, Ontario, Canada, Police Department

- Cambridge, Massachusetts, Police Department

- Hillsborough County, Florida, Sheriff's Office

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1-800-THE-IACP
socialmedia@theiacp.org
www.IACPsocialmedia.org

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