

With Google+ Appliances Online achieves meaningful connections with customers while dramatically improving search performance



About Appliances Online

- Founded in 2000
- UK's largest online kitchen appliance retailer
- Headquartered in Bolton, UK

Company objectives

Established in 2000, Appliances Online is the UK's largest online kitchen appliance retailer. When the company started hearing about Google+, it wasted no time in giving it a try. "As a forward-thinking company who like to try innovative marketing strategies and put a lot of effort into spicing up what can be quite a mundane set of products to shop for, we saw Google+ as yet another way to reach and engage with customers on a different level," says social media executive Kate Barton. With such unique features, a world-class brand behind it and huge SEO benefits to boot, we saw no other option than to give it a go and get stuck in."

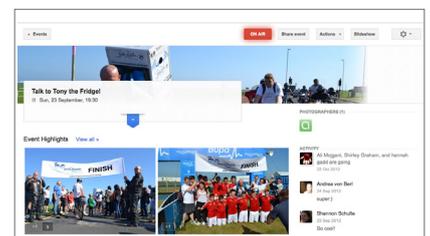
Appliances Online was clear about the objectives from the start. "Showing social extensions to searchers in Google is proven to add massive changes to the click-through rate on a search, so increasing the number followers on Google+ to aid this is our number one priority. Second to that, it adds value to our brand in being one that engages on another level with its customers. We like to give a little bit extra, and it's a great way to do so."

Content strategy

These objectives provided foundations for the company's Google+ content strategy. "After a few weeks of testing which categories got the most engagement from our followers, we concluded that focusing on food, technology or household – all with a slice of humour – would make for the best day-to-day practice," Kate says. Pictures were found to generally achieve the best response, so the team decided that every post should be accompanied by an image. From here, Appliances Online plotted out activities to complement national events such as Halloween, British Sausage Week and Christmas. Through inventive posts and its own scheduled events, Kate explains that "our brand will keep appearing in hot topic streams and Google searches".

Hangouts, for face-to-face engagement

Hangouts, the high-quality video chat feature on Google+, have become a cornerstone of Appliances Online's work on the platform. "We love hangouts! We've hosted a few, and plan to host a whole lot more." Kate elaborates on the brand's first hangout, which featured local hero Tony the Fridge. "The week previous to our hangout, Tony had run his final half-marathon (out of 30 in a row) at the Great North Run – with a fridge on his back! He had become somewhat of a celebrity in a short space of time, so we brought his newfound 'fame' to Google+. It had a really great response, with over **200 people watching live**." At the time, the brand had just over **2,000 followers** on the platform, but the online event attracted **200 new followers**. "With loads more ideas in the pipeline, I can see hangouts being a common occurrence on our page. The excitement, energy and buzz that come from attendees of a hangout couldn't possibly be captured in any other way – and that's a powerful thing."



"One of the most exciting things about Google+ is their constant change and development, and to grow and evolve with it is a real experience that gets us energised to keep making and pushing out new and exciting content."

- Kate Barton, Social Media Executive, Appliances Online

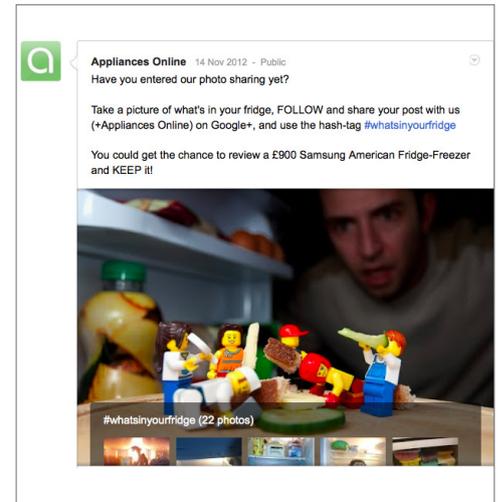
The Appliances Online Google+ strategy

- Prioritised cross promotion on other social channels
 - Emphasised strong email campaigns
 - Embraced hangouts
 - Have taken on a full time member of staff to look after Google+
-

Rich media, for an immersive experience

The easy-to-use rich media functionality of Google+ has been another key feature. “Finding interesting photos to share is a daily activity for us, whether it be sharing from someone else’s profile, our blog, others’ blogs or generating our own,” Kate says. “So long as they stand out and fall into a category or relevant topic, they’ve been successful. Our most engaging photo posts seem to be those that include food or behind-the-scenes office snaps.” In terms of video, content tends to cover appliance reviews, how-to videos and trending videos.

In another inventive use of rich media interaction, Appliances Online drives engagement with followers by asking them to post pictures with the hashtag #whatsinyourfridge. When users take a picture of their refrigerator contents, follow the brand and share their post Google+, they get the chance to review a fridge freezer. “The ability to create live events with photo sharing and ‘party mode’ is something we’ve all been waiting for a social network to do,” says Kate. “Allowing guests to add their own photos to an event allows much deeper engagement than just looking at photos from a host. The constant live streaming comments from an event are a great way to keep everyone involved too.”



Circles, for tailoring messages to key groups

In order to group followers and then address tailored relevant content accordingly, Appliances Online has been making use of another key Google+ feature, circles. “Being able to post to specific demographics can be extremely powerful for any campaign. In addition to this, the ability to be able to email circles directly with a post share is by far superior to any other social network. It allows you to be selective with targeting at different levels of importance.” The brand’s circles – which are constantly being expanded and refined – include ‘Customers’, ‘Active followers’, ‘Hangout attendees’, ‘Influencers’ and more. “I spent a lot of time browsing on our followers’ pages, and tracking ‘Active followers’, which is what prompted me to create this as a circle,” Kate says.

Appliances Online also uses circles to develop and understand their audience. “We’ve found offering up exclusive circles is a good way to incentivise following “We also found circles an inventive way of monitoring different campaigns. For example, when we held our hangout with Tony the Fridge, we sent out waves of invites through the event page, then through Twitter, then through different waves on Facebook. Before starting each wave, I would circle all followers who weren’t already in our circles, knowing that they would have come from that campaign. We could then see from each circle size which was the most successful campaign strategy.”



Appliances Online measures the benefits

- More than 1,000 additional followers thanks to hangouts
 - 200 live hangout views
 - 33% CTR uplift, 8% CPA decrease, 7% CPC decrease in search¹
 - 300 new followers per day on Google+ as a result of competitions on other social networks where the Google+ badge is featured
-

Developing community with ripples and cross promotion

Ripples – a feature unique to Google+ – have further helped to develop an understanding of followers' behaviour. Ripples demonstrate how posts spread through the network. "The visuals of ripples make it so easy to identify our influencers, which is great! Once we know who has the biggest influence to our page posts, we have the opportunity to connect direct with them, and work with them."

Appliances Online reveals how it developed its community, which involved tapping into the audience it had already established on other channels. "Firstly, we targeted those in our email database who had a gmail address – that way they may already be on, or would be easy to get on Google+. We then pushed this on a Facebook posting, using Facebook Ads to display this as a sponsored story. That way our Google+ campaign would show up in people's newsfeeds, encouraging them to take a look at Google+. Additional to this, we run a bi-weekly giveaway on Facebook involving a fun game on a Sticky-tacs platform. Just by integrating the Google+ badge onto the end of this competition, we've seen a great uplift in followers. This competition is also placed into Facebook Ads, meaning our follow button has a phenomenal reach." And whenever a competition goes live on other social networks, Appliances Online usually sees approximately **300 new followers a day** thanks to the Google+ badge. The cross-promotional activities don't end there though. "In order to build a large number of followers, we have been hosting activities on an external site to push followers onto Google+. When we have held hangouts and competitions, we have pushed this across all channels."



The results and outlook for the future

Due to the growth of the platform and its importance in the company's social media strategy, Appliances Online decided to assign one person to exclusively manage its Google+ activity. According to Kate, decisions like these have paid off. "Having a Google+ page has meant that we're able to reach across the internet population even more than we already do. Our followers on Facebook just correspond to one type of audience. Google+ hosts a number of communities we wouldn't usually be able to connect and engage with, in ways that we wouldn't usually use. We are able to send a much more personal, less business-focused message through to followers, conveying more of our personality rather than banging on about what we sell."

The brand's involvement in Google+ has achieved its other initial objective too; incorporating social extensions into Appliances Online's AdWords advertising has had a hugely positive influence on search performance. "We've seen a massive improvement in click-through rate from those searches shown our social extension, in some case up to five times higher!" Overall, implementing social extensions has produced an **uplift in click-through rate of 33%**, as well as the **cost-per-acquisition decrease of 8% and cost-per-click decrease of 7%**.



About Google+

Google+ brings the benefits of personal recommendations to Google search and ads, delivering recommendations when people need them most and making it easy to start conversations with those that care about your brand. Linking your site to your page unifies your +1's across, search, ads, your Google+ page, and your homepage. Google+ pages let you share your content with new audiences and connect with them in more engaging ways.

To learn more about Google+ pages, visit www.google.com/+business



¹ The CTR uplift calculation of social extensions is based on a week over week comparison of the same campaigns. With this methodology, some extraneous factors may impact the numbers slightly, but in all cases we attempted to correct for those factors.