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## How Google+ Is Like Twitter—but Not in a Good Way

Like Twitter, Google's social network has yet to solve some challenging problems. Among them: the "noisy stream" and how to find interesting content

By [Mathew Ingram](#)

Tech blogger Robert Scoble, the king of the early-adopter crowd, has [posted some thoughts about what he likes and doesn't like about using Google+](#), and some of his points hit home with me as well. And the more I thought about the new social network and the things it doesn't do very well, the more similar it seemed to the issues that have also been dogging Twitter for some time. Like Twitter, the Web giant has to figure out how to solve some pretty challenging problems—including the "noisy stream" issue, the problems of search and discovery, and, of course, how to keep people from going away and never coming back.

As more than one person (including Scoble himself) has noted, he isn't exactly the average user of social tools. As someone with hundreds of thousands of followers, who jumps on every new Web or social tool that comes along—in some cases dominating those new services to the point where they become almost unusable, as some found with FriendFeed—Scoble is definitely an "edge case." But at the same time, that makes him a little like the canary in a coal mine: He can highlight problems that may only become obvious for others much later.

### The "Noisy Stream" Problem

In his post, he mentions a couple of things that I've also noticed, as someone who has used Google+ since it launched, including the fact that over time a stream of activity on the network can become noisy to the point where it's hard to follow at all. That is especially true if one follows—or "circles"—people who produce a lot of content (like Scoble). But it's also true if you follow someone whose content gets a lot of comments, as is the case with users such as Myspace co-founder Tom Anderson, or even Google ([GOOG](#)) co-founder Sergey Brin (and yes, I don't use Circles as much as I probably should).

My stream on Friday, for example, was dominated by [Brin's photos from his trip to the Galapagos](#)

[Islands](#), each of which got hundreds of votes (or +1's) and comments. That's because Google+ moves posts that have more activity to the top of your stream, which is a way of highlighting newer or fresher content. But it can also become incredibly irritating when there is a lot of volume. As Scoble notes in his post: "Already for high flow users, like me, notifications are useless there and finding the good stuff, and good people, is very difficult (getting rid of people who don't add value is also too difficult)."

Twitter doesn't have this problem in quite the same way as Google+, since it doesn't move content around in your stream based on activity, but it has been [trying to identify activity that might interest you with its new tabs](#)—which show when people favorite or retweet your messages, and also show the activity of people you follow. The idea seems to be that this will appeal to users and keep them engaged, but it could also create a noise problem. (Facebook doesn't have as much of a noise problem because it is a "symmetric follow" model, in which you can only friend people who agree to the relationship.)

## The Problem of Discovery

All of this points to what might be the biggest issue for both networks, and that is the problem of discovery. In other words, how do users find people to follow and how do they find content that interests them? Highlighting content that gets lots of responses is one way, and notifying users about this is another, but both of those features can also be irritating. Google suggests users to follow based on who is in your Circles, just as Twitter suggests people you might be interested in, but these approaches are also flawed in many ways (one user complained about Google repeatedly suggesting her ex-husband).

You might think that Google, being a search company, would have great ways of searching for new topics or users or content—or even seeing the content that you have already voted up or +1'd—but you would be wrong. You can search for specific users through the toolbar at the top of a Google+ page, but you don't see related topics or streams or content. On your profile page, there is a tab that shows you your +1s, but it doesn't show you the posts from Google+ that you have voted up, it only shows content that you have voted for within Google's regular search results, which is largely useless.

This is a problem that Twitter has also struggled with, and still hasn't really solved. The network has never really had a good way to search for either tweets or users, despite having acquired Summize two years ago, and [newer enhancements to the search engine haven't really helped](#). I have tried repeatedly to search for specific tweets I know exist, and found nothing—in part because Twitter's search apparently only goes back a week. Anything else requires a dedicated engine like [Topsy](#).

None of these are easy problems to solve. Indexing and making sense of [hundreds of billions of](#)

[tweets a day](#) isn't something that just happens overnight (and for what are probably competitive reasons, Twitter seems to have decided to do this on its own and recently [cut Google off](#) from providing real-time results). And the issue of discovery, both of users and content, is a complex one as well: too much and it becomes noise, too little and your fancy social network [looks like a ghost town](#). And providing tools for filtering noise, like Twitter lists and Google+ Circles, is great—except that they take time, and many people are simply [never going to use them](#) properly.

As difficult as they may be, both Google+ and Twitter are going to have to figure out how to solve these kinds of problems, or their dreams of mass adoption for their social networks could remain just that—dreams.

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