

## Exploring the Google+ API

Anyone with a Gmail account can trivially create a Google+ account and start collaborating with friends. From a product standpoint, Google+ has evolved rapidly and used some of the most compelling features of existing social network platforms such as Twitter and Facebook in carving out its own set of unique capabilities. The best way to learn is by creating an account and spending some time exploring. For the most part, where there's a feature in the user interface, there's an API that provides that feature that you can tap into. Suffice it to say that Google+ has leveraged tried-and-true features of existing social networks, such as marking content with hashtags and maintaining a profile according to customizable privacy settings, with additional novelties such as a fresh take on content sharing called circles, video chats called hangouts, and extensive integration with other Google services such as Gmail contacts. In Google+ API parlance, social interactions are framed in terms of people, activities, comments, and moments.

The API documentation that's available online is always the definitive source of guidance, but a brief overview may be helpful to get you thinking about how Google+ compares to another platform such as Twitter or Facebook:

### People

People are Google+ users. Programmatically, you'll either discover users by using the search API, look them up by a personalized URL if they're a celebrity type, or strip their Google+ IDs out of the URLs that appear in your web browser and use them for exploring their profiles.

### Activities

Activities are the things that people do on Google+. An activity is essentially a note and can be as long or short as the author likes: it can be as long as a blog post, or it can be devoid of any real textual meaning (e.g., just used to share links or multimedia content). Given a Google+ user, you can easily retrieve a list of that person's activities.

### Comments

Leaving comments is the way Google+ users interact with one another. Simple statistical analysis of comments on Google+ could be very interesting and potentially reveal a lot of insights into a person's social circles or the virality of content. For example, which other Google+ users most frequently comment on activities? Which activities have the highest numbers of comments (and why)?

### Moments

Moments are a relatively recent addition to Google+ and represent a way of capturing interactions between a user and a Google+ application. Moments are similar to Facebook's social graph stories in that they are designed to capture and create opportunities for user interaction with an application that can be displayed on a timeline. For example, if you were to make a purchase in an application, upload a photo, or watch a YouTube video, it could be captured as a moment (something you did in time) and displayed in a history of your actions or shared with friends in an activity stream by the application.

