Google Maps becomes more ‘social’ with Local Guides follow feature

Google’s Local Guides program has more than 120 million members in 24,000 locations globally. They are a largely invisible but indispensable part of the Google Maps experience, providing reviews, images and other content as well as answering questions (Q&A) about local businesses and places.

Local recommendations. Now the Guides are about to become more visible. Maps users in a number of cities will soon be able to follow Local Guides and see local recommendations of places and things to do.

The test cities are London, Mexico City, New York, Bangkok, Delhi, Osaka, Tokyo, San Francisco and São Paulo. Top Local Guides — determined by points and levels based on contribution activity (i.e., incentivized reviews) — will be presented under the “For You” discovery tab at the bottom of the Google Maps app.

For You is essentially a local discovery feed, like other Google content feeds. It’s not clear how widely used it is; Google hasn’t released any data to my knowledge.

5 million to 120 million in 3 years. When users follow a Local Guide, they'll see that person's recommendations. This essentially mirrors the local business follow feature in Google My Business and the lesser-known follow Lists feature

in Maps, which lives under “Your Places.”

If adopted, I’m sure it will also yield interesting and valuable data for Google.

The Local Guides program began as Google’s response to the Yelp Elite Squad – Yelp might argue Google nakedly copied the program. It had 5 million participants globally in 2016. The following year that number grew to 50 million and to 95 million by 2018. Now it’s 120 million, as stated.

This army of local volunteers has enabled Google to eclipse all other local platforms in review volume.

Why we should care. Google has made numerous attempts to build social networks or social products over the years, most visibly Google+. All have essentially failed, unless you consider YouTube a social network. Now Google is layering social features into successful, established products. But will those features be adopted? That’s the relevant question.

Regardless, Google Local Guides are in some respects the secret success factor powering one of Google’s most successful products – now the largest driver of local search volume.

About The Author

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