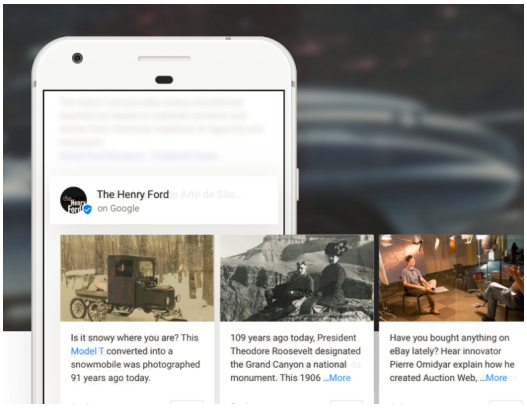
Interview: Why marketers shouldn’t waste their time with Google Posts

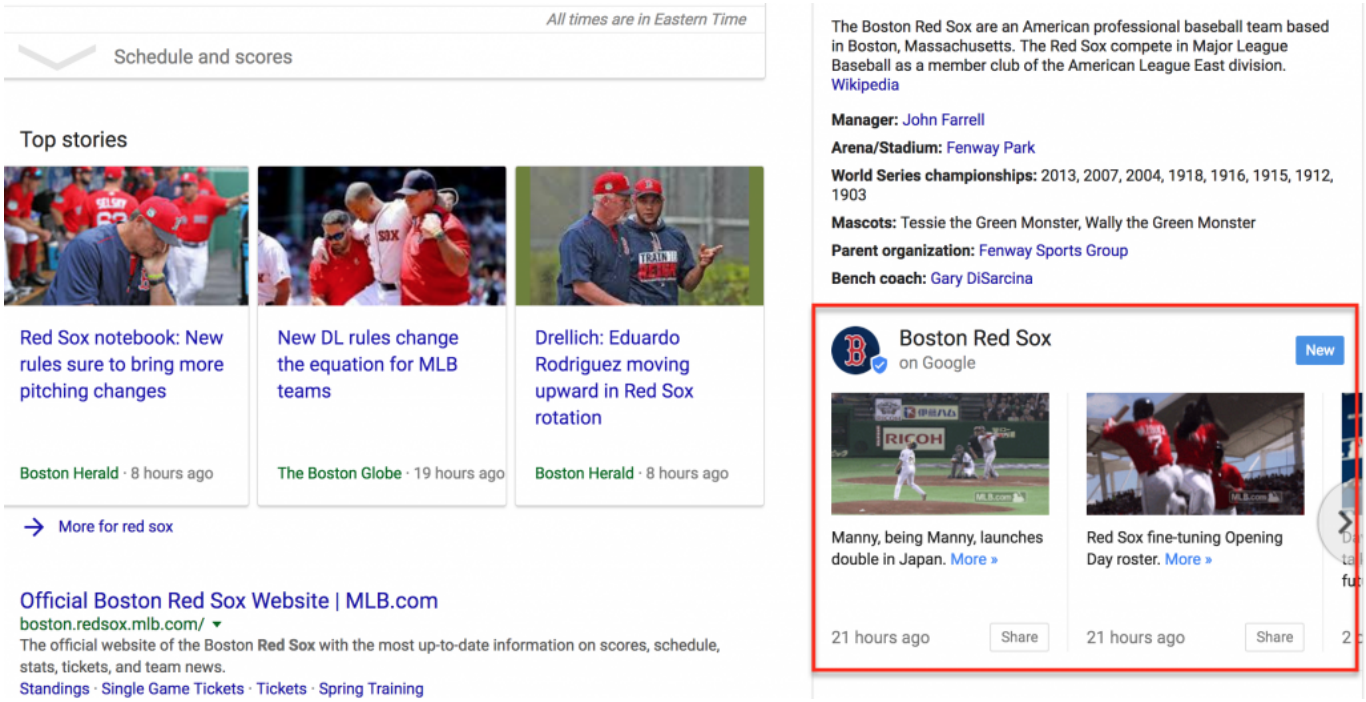


The search engine results page recently saw the return of Google Posts, the part-social, part-publishing feature that was launched by Google a little over a year ago during the US Presidential Election.

Billed as “an experimental new podium on Google”, Google Posts has attracted a lot of attention from marketers, search specialists and Google enthusiasts thanks to its prominent place on the SERP – appearing in the form of an eye-catching carousel of cards – and its mysterious deployment.

Over the year since it was first released, it has appeared in and disappeared from search results a number of times with no apparent pattern or explanation. Brands who wanted a shot at being part of Google’s new podium were forced to “Join the waitlist” and cross their fingers.

But last month Google suddenly announced that it would be opening up Posts to “museums, sports teams, sports leagues, and movies” in the United States, and all of the above groups along with musicians in Brazil – prompting a renewed flurry of interest from marketers. At the same time, the relaunched Posts became more visually eye-catching with the addition of embedded GIFs and videos.



One person, however, doesn't believe that Google Posts is worth the hype. Michael Bertini, Online Marketing Consultant and Search Strategist at iQuanti, told *Search Engine Watch* why he thinks that Google has gone off half-cocked with Posts, and why marketers would be better off expending their energies elsewhere.

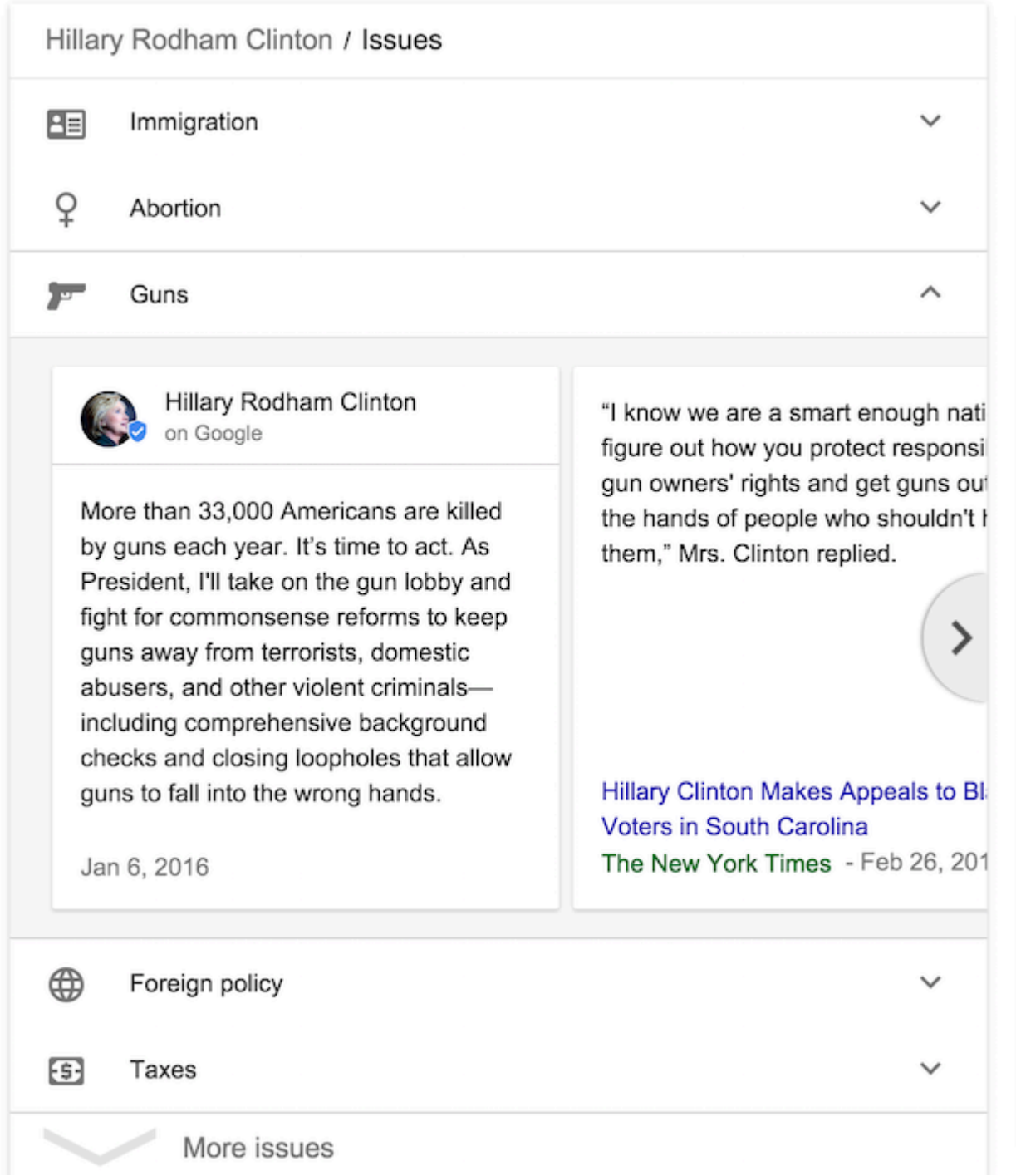
Google Posts: where is the value?

"I don't think Google will admit that they made a mistake with this whole Posts thing," says Bertini.

"Google already has a lot of great products and search results features on the page; to add Google Posts to that clutters up the results page unnecessarily. And I don't think it offers much value to the end user."

It's true that while there has been a lot of excitement from brands and marketers around the prospect of publishing directly to the SERP, few of us have considered its usefulness to users. Google is still first and foremost a search engine; when users enter a search query, they are presumably looking for information.

While people Googling candidates in the run-up to the US Presidential Election would undoubtedly have been interested in what those candidates had to say about certain issues, subsequent versions of Google Posts have moved further and further away from a feature that is useful to the end user.



Few people searching for "Boston Red Sox" are looking for pseudo-social updates from their favorite sports team; they're more likely to be looking for match scores, game tickets, or

perhaps a link to the team's website.

A lot of the interest around Google Posts thus far has been driven by sheer novelty, with people Googling 'Andrews Jewelers' or 'Escape Pod Comics' simply to see how the businesses had been using Posts – rather than because they featured useful information. In and of itself, how much value does Posts provide to the searcher?

"I don't think anybody should put a strict focus on getting into Posts – or any one Google feature," says Bertini. "What I've noticed throughout my career is that people who make it a specific focus to get into an area of Google – let's use Google's Answer Box as an example – ultimately, they're left with content that doesn't fit the end user's needs. And then it dies."

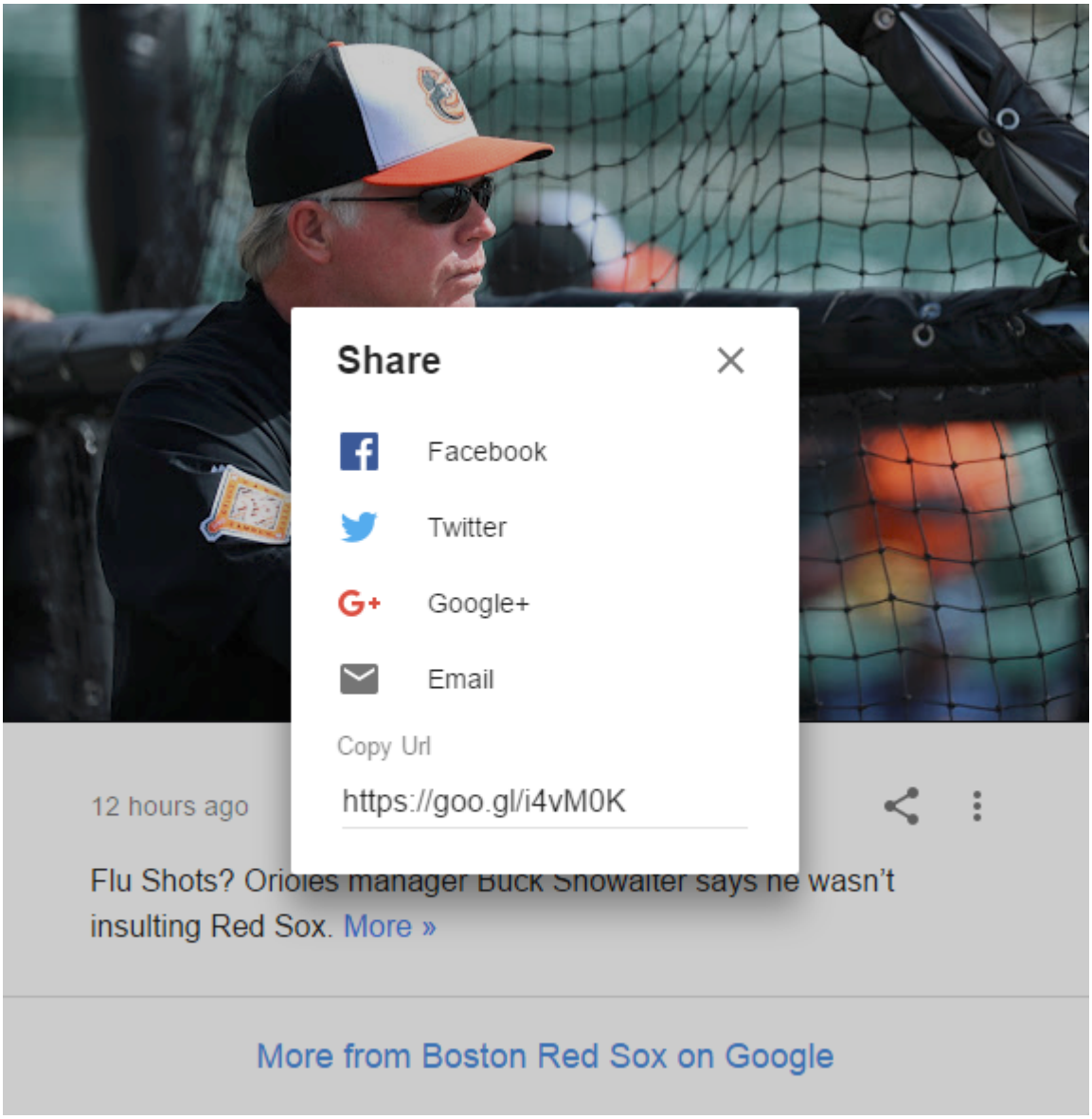
"If someone did want to get involved with Google Posts, they should write content that really answers the search query, and then of course request access on posts.withgoogle.com. But that's all."

Everything is a test

Based on the fact that Posts has already come and gone from the SERP several times before this most recent, wider launch, does Bertini think that Posts is finally here to stay?

"Everything Google is about testing," Bertini replies. "Even after they launch it to market, what they would consider 'permanent' is not really what we would consider permanent. Personally, I think it'll last up until the third quarter of 2017, and then they'll mix it up with something else.

"If Posts get a really high CTR, then Google might invest more in it and add more features. But at the moment, it's still very much in testing. It still lacks features – there's no real social interaction, for example."



Google Posts currently allows for limited social sharing, but doesn't provide a way for users to truly interact with or respond to Posts.

If Posts, ultimately, is still in testing, it explains why it has disappeared and reappeared with so little fanfare – Google doesn't want to attract a lot of attention to a feature that may not even be launched on a wider scale.

Bertini agrees that the lack of promotion speaks volumes about Google's intentions – or lack thereof – for the feature. "If Google had complete confidence in this feature, they would be promoting it more."

He goes on: "If I ran my own business, and I wanted to get

more searchers to my site, there are better ways to do that than to focus on GIFs and videos to get into Google Posts.

“For example, if I were making videos already, I would create pages for my videos, transcribe that content, and optimize it for search – that would be a better use of resources than focusing on getting into Posts.

“Ultimately, people are going to invest time and effort into Posts, when Google itself has not yet perfected this feature.”

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Given the pseudo-social nature of Google Posts, a lot of comparisons have understandably been drawn between Google Posts and Google Plus, Google’s last ill-fated venture into social networking. And it could be that Google Plus provides a blueprint for what to expect from the future of Google Posts.

“If we look back at Google Plus – when it first launched, Google’s idea of what Plus would be is not what it is today. And like everything Google, Google will never admit that they made a mistake, or that the product didn’t turn out the way they wanted it to be.

“But I think the search marketers who used Google Plus as a social platform are very disappointed today – if they invested a lot of time and money into building up their profiles and optimizing their Google Plus. It’s not used the way it used to be used, any more. I think it’s going to be the same with Google Posts.”



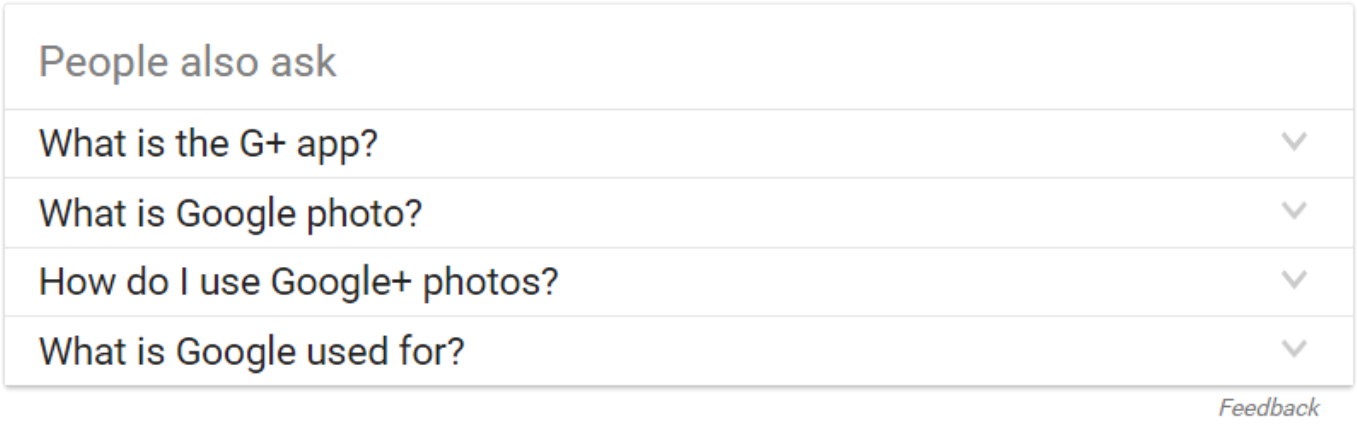
Remember when Google Plus was a big deal?

Bertini believes the aim of introducing Google Posts to the SERP is to encourage more user interaction with the search engine results page. This would tie in with the recent addition of rich results for podcasts to the SERP, allowing searchers on smartphones and Google Home to play podcasts directly from the search page.

“Google is trying to make a different version of social [with Posts], which is social interaction with the search engine results page, where a user can interact with the search page itself. It’s just very early on at the moment.”

If Google can succeed in expanding the function of the search results page in this way, it would definitely be a means of keeping users inside its own walled garden for longer.

But without value to the end user, Google Posts could be a Plus-style flop, and Bertini thinks that Google would be better off focusing its attention on perfecting existing features of the SERP that have more value to searchers.



“Google is constantly trying to mix things up, when – once again, personal belief – I think that they should focus on good products that they’ve launched like Answer Box, which is already effective. Or ‘People Also Ask’ – they launched this section, and it’s still not perfect, but it’s good.

“I think this is what Google should devote its energy to, rather than – I don’t want to say get rid of Facebook or Twitter, because I don’t think that will happen – but rather than trying to make the search results page a social platform.”

The future of Google Posts

Google Posts, as it stands, still lacks a lot of functionality. So an ideal world, what would a fully-featured Google Posts look like?

“One, people search for something; two, a Post feature comes up; three, there would be a rating system for whether or not the Post matches the search query.

“Then there would be a sharing function where the user can share the Post via social media. You could also have a Hangouts-style feature integrating chat into Posts, allowing people to chat about what they’ve just read.”

It remains to be seen whether Google will try to keep integrating more functionality into Posts or whether it will

once again disappear quietly from the SERP.

But one way or the other, marketers should keep sight of the importance of catering to the end user – not just to the newest Google feature.

Rebecca Sentance is the Deputy Editor at ClickZ and Search Engine Watch.

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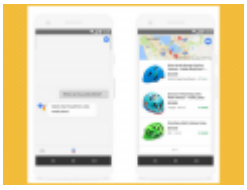


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