

Google to kill Buzz, focus social efforts on Plus

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Google is getting ready to press the mute button on Buzz, an online social networking service that turned into a massive faux pas.

Buzz will be shut down within the next few weeks, according to a Friday post on Google Inc.'s blog.

The 20-month-old service probably won't be missed. If anything, Buzz is destined to be remembered as Google's botched attempt to build a social network to rival Facebook's online hangout.

Google now is focusing its social networking efforts on Plus, a 3 1/2 month-old service that has been catching on quickly. Plus already has more than 40 million users, and Google CEO Larry Page seems confident that it will become an effective weapon for fighting the threat posed by Facebook and its audience of 800 million users.

In a conference call Thursday to discuss Google's third-quarter earnings, Page promised the company will be weaving more of the company's products into Plus to ensure that users get an "automagical" experience.

Many of Buzz's early adopters felt betrayed.

Buzz got into trouble because of the way Google tied it to its email service. After it was activated, Buzz automatically created social circles that exposed users' most frequent Gmail contacts for everyone to see. That kind of transparency didn't go over well with people whose contact

lists included secret lovers, ex-spouses, doctors and prospective employers.

Google overhauled Buzz to give people more control over their information, but the changes came too late to placate outrage users and privacy watchdogs.

The uproar triggered an investigation by the Federal Trade Commission, which reprimanded Google for violating its own privacy policies. Google apologized for its lapse and entered into a settlement requiring Google to submit its privacy program to independent audits every other year for the next two decades. The company, which is based in Mountain View, Calif., also agreed to give \$8.5 million to Internet privacy and policy organizations to settle a class-action lawsuit filed by Gmail users.

"Changing the world takes focus on the future, and honesty about the past," Bradley Horowitz, a Google vice president, wrote in Friday's blog post. "We learned a lot from products like Buzz, and are putting that learning to work every day in our vision for products like Google Plus."

Buzz will join more than 20 other products and services that Page has closed since he replaced Eric Schmidt as CEO in April. Page says he wants to "put more wood behind fewer arrows" as Google tries to maintain its dominance of Internet search and advertising while it duels with Apple Inc. for supremacy in the increasingly important smartphone market.

The strategy seems to be paying off so far. Google third-quarter earnings rose 26 percent to \$2.7 billion to blow past analyst estimates. The performance lifted Google's stock price by \$32.69, or nearly 6 percent, to close Friday at \$591.68.

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