Google Wave: Changing the World as You Know It

While you may not have a Google Wave account yet, it may be just a matter of time before you’re invited to join in on this new and exciting personal communication and collaboration tool. No matter if you’re already involved or waiting to join in, you can pick up on some quick tips from this article.

The Deepness of the Wave

My invitation to join Google Wave came from a friend who was invited by one of his friends. When you get an invitation to Google Wave, you have the ability to invite eight other individuals and so on and so on; so the Wave is gathering strength in increments. If you have not yet been invited to Google Wave, your invitation may come shortly, and you may be confounded by what you’re facing.

Google Wave is not easy to understand. It is so different from the way that the average computer user comprehends daily Internet communications that it may falter simply because of that complication. However, developers usually “get it” quickly, as Google Wave was built directly through the Google Web Toolkit, which allows developers to quickly build and maintain complex yet highly performant JavaScript front-end applications in the Java programming language.

Google Wave represents a new way to email, collaborate, instant message, share photos, translate, discuss, create wikis, develop and play games and much, much more. But, since I can approach only a few topics at a time, this article will focus on a brief introduction to this tool. Then, you will need to watch a lengthy video before you can grasp fully where I’ll take you from there.

Sorry, but Google Wave is just that way – very intense, but worth the effort.

In the Beginning...

For the past two years, two men in Sydney, Australia worked diligently on a tool that may change the world as you know it. Lars and Jens Rasmussen, along with a team of engineers, created an open source product that represents that product – but, it also represents a platform and a protocol. If you recognize Lars and Jens, it is because you know those two men also developed Google Maps.

Lars introduced Google Wave at the 2009 Google I/O. If you did not get to attend that conference, you can catch the entire introduction to Google Wave through this YouTube video (almost 1.5 hours). It is important to note that video as it is the only tool so far – other than a handful of articles (which I will share in this article) – that can show users what to expect from Google Wave. I would suggest blocking out some time to watch the entire video. If you don’t watch the video, some of the information I share below may make no sense to you whatsoever.

While Google Wave can be used by anyone with an Internet connection, your viewing may be altered somewhat by your browser choice. I use Firefox, so the images you’ll see in this article are gathered from that browser interface.

The Interface

When you receive an invitation to Google Wave and sign in, you will see the following interface:
The interface is divided into three columns:

1. **Left column**: Holds the menu at the top and your contacts at the bottom (from Gmail or from Google Wave additions you can make yourself through a “Manage Contacts” link).
2. **Middle Column**: Holds all the “Waves” that you create.
3. **Right Column**: Holds a “Wave” that currently is active. The one showing above is from the introduction to Google Wave that each user receives. Notice that, in the middle column, the green highlight shows which Wave I currently am viewing. That Wave happens to be at the bottom of the list, which shows the order that Waves are listed in the hierarchy - from latest down to the earliest Wave.

The columns shown above can be expanded or removed by using the + or - links in the upper right header to each column as shown below:

I wanted to show you that very simple aspect to this product, as part of the genius behind the Wave is that its interface is fairly intuitive in look and feel. What may not be so intuitive is how you can use this product. Once again, I’ll beg you to watch the introductory video so you can gain a grasp on the basic concept. Once you do, then the following information will make more sense to you. I’m going to pick up where the video leaves off...

**Grasping the Wave**
Basics

If you watched the introductory video, then you know the possibilities that the Wave presents as a product, as a platform and as a protocol. Those developers who do not know about the Wave (and I doubt there are many) can begin by learning more about how to develop APIs through the Google Wave API centre. Companies that want to implement this tool – or, something similar based upon Wave’s open source code – can begin to implement the Wave or a similar product as a private enterprise within that company.

Introducing a new product similar to Wave before everyone gets a chance to try Wave seems risky – but don’t count on getting cosy with Wave even if you can wrap your head around its current possibilities. For instance, Google just purchased AppJet, which makes the EtherPad real-time workgroup collaboration application. This tool will expand upon Wave’s current collaboration possibilities. I’m sure that Google will acquire even more products and change the Wave’s capabilities even further. The Wave that you learn today, I’m certain, will not be the same Wave that you encounter in a few weeks.

With that said, you still can comprehend the Wave’s uses as well as its current possibilities. The issue is that engineers develop and use this product...therefore, the average user – like myself – needs to hunt for things that engineers might already use on a daily basis. For instance:

- Although the video shows users how to interact both in real time and through email, or “pings” in Wave, Lars does not mention that you must first log into Wave before you can interact with those applications. Currently, there is no way to know if you have a new “ping” (contact much like an email) from a user or a new Wave unless you log in to Wave. An email notification may be added shortly to allow users to know when their Wave or Waves have been updated.
- Lars also does not mention that it takes at least one other person to interact in a Wave (although this seems clear in the video). He also does not mention that the Wave also can play well with just one person (I’ll show you one example in a moment).
- Since Google wave was designed by nerds, there’s little chance that non-nerds can follow along with ease. Google Wave really is in a raw state, and it will take some time to roll out a complete product that is easy for the average user to comprehend. On the other hand, I’ve seen where some non-engineer types have caught on to the Wave quickly, so there’s no telling who will “get it” and who will struggle.

For more complaints about Google Wave and some possible resolutions, visit eWeek.

Extensions

If you already have a Google Wave account, you may already know where to find extensions. If not, when you log in to Wave, your introductory message will contain a link to Google extensions in the right column:
Click the links below to open waves with more information.

**Getting started with Google Wave**
A wave with quick tips on the basics of using Google Wave, including some how-to videos.

**When to use Google Wave**
Explore example waves and watch a video (English) to see how you can use Google Wave with friends and colleagues.

**Google Wave extensions**
Browse the extension gallery wave to install extensions that bring rich content into your waves and integrate with other systems.

For more tips and troubleshooting, visit our Help Center
(Will open in a separate window)

When you click on that link, you’ll see the following page:
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Linda Goin

Watch the video and then scroll down to learn more about which extensions you can add to your Wave site. These extensions include maps, games and more. Some extensions, or robots, that were mentioned in the video without any hint as to how to find them include the following:

- **Yes/No/Maybe Gadget**: You can find this one in the Extensions Gallery shown above. You also can find Trippy (for planning trips), the actual Map Gadget, Accuweather, Conference (by Ribbit) and Soduko through that same page above.
• **Spellchecker**: It’s built in. No need to worry about this one. That said, don’t expect this spellchecker to have all the words you need to correct your misspelled word. It will, however, draw attention to the fact that you may have a misspelled word.

• **Bloggy**: To add the ability to add your Wave to your Google Blogger page as shown in the video, you need Bloggy. To get this app, simply add the address, blog-wave@appspot.com, to your contact list (I’ll show you how to do this in a moment).

• **Twitter**: To add the Twitter app to your Wave account, simply add the address, tweety-wave@appspot.com, to your contact list. **NOTE**: Be very careful about using this Twitter app in Wave. **DO NOT** add other users to that Wave, as they will be able to Tweet in your name. Horrors! Additionally, this app currently does not update, so I have not found it to be very useful in its present state.

• **Rosy Translation**: Although the translation app is not fully developed as shown in the video, you can drop the address, aunt-rosie@appspot.com, into your contact list to use something similar. The translation used in this app is the same one used for Google Translate. So, while the world can be flattened through a tool such as this (especially in real-time!), remember that the syntax may not be perfect.

To add a new contact to your Wave, go to the bottom of the left column and click on the + sign in the corner of your contact list. When you click on that + sign, you’ll see the following:

![Add a new contact dialog box](image)

You can now add the Bloggy or Twitter or Rosy address to that address space. When you add the address, the “Submit” button will activate and you can save that address.

Once you have that address saved, you’ll see the icon in your address contacts. To use the app, drag it to the right column at top so you can begin to use that app. Or, you can click on that contact and the interaction will open a box where you can begin a new Wave or visit a previous Wave:
New Tools

If you think you’re limited to the tools shown in the extension page, then you’re sorely mistaken. You can add new gadgets to a Wave if you have the URL for that gadget. Just be sure that the app is an .xml file. Here’s how to add new gadgets:

1. Close any wave in the right column by clicking on the X in the right corner. When you do this, a blank slate is created with the link “New Wave” in the middle. Click on that link:

2. A new Wave window will open when you click on that link. Once that Wave window is open, find the Gadget application and click on it.
When you click on that green puzzle piece, a window will open that asks for the URL of the gadget. But, first you need to find a gadget and get the URL. In this instance, I went to Google Gadgets and picked a gadget that seemed appropriate for a page of search gadgets that I want to build for myself (this is an instance where a single user can use Wave to develop a solitary tool within Wave for personal use).

When you find a gadget you want to use at Google Gadgets, click on the gadget and go to the bottom of that app. You will find a link that says, “View Source.” Click on that link to grab the .xml address from the address box at the top of your browser.

**NOTE:** Sometimes when you go to “View Source” you may see this message: “This XML file does not appear to have any style information associated with it. The document tree is shown below.” When this message occurs, you may not be able to use that .xml address to add the gadget. The only way you will know if the gadget will work or not is to grab the address anyway and add it to the new Wave. If it does not work, you’ll see a broken puzzle piece in the Wave.

I grabbed a YouTube search address and – while it contained the message shown in the above note – it still worked. That address is: http://throttled.org/googlegadgets/youtubesearch.xml. I added that address in the box that popped up when I clicked on the Add Gadget button.
After you add the address to the “Add gadget by URL” box, click on the “Add” button in that box and a puzzle piece will appear in your Wave window. If the puzzle piece does not break, the gadget will show in the Wave window:

You might wonder how this gadget can be useful. I can add more search gadgets to this Wave and tag it or organize it (like Lars shows in the video) so I can find it easily. The ability to use a page that contains a number of search engines on it is valuable to me as a writer. You probably can think of other uses as well.

In a collaboration effort, you can add more users who might be able to use the search pages, too. However, if you want to keep this Wave pristine for personal use, do not add any other collaborators to this Wave.

Another way to use this YouTube gadget in Wave is to built Waves based upon obsessions or projects. For instance, I’m currently obsessed with Tom Morello (guitarist for Rage Against the Machine). When I typed his name into the YouTube gadget in that Wave, a Tom Morello video appeared in the Wave. I clicked on the video and was able to listen to his music while I typed this paragraph.

Oh sure, I could go to YouTube and do the same thing – but why do that when I can log into Google Wave and select this Wave for my personal amusement? If I wanted to change that music to another artist, I can type a new artist into the YouTube search engine and a new video will replace Tom Morello (Tom Morello Wave shown below):
The image above also provides you with a good view of the Wave window utilities, such as the ability to change font colour, style, add lists, links and more, all located in the bar below my pen nib avatar.

**NOTE:** when you click on the “Done” button shown at the lower right of the Wave window above, a list of your contacts will pop up for you to pick some contacts for collaboration. To avoid adding anyone to a Wave collaboration, just close the contact list with the x in the upper right corner of that window.

**Add Another Gadget**

If you want to build upon a search page like the one I’m building, simply mouse over bottom green line of that original Wave window. A blue line will appear, and you can click on it. A new Wave window will appear, and you can continue to add gadgets in this manner.

For instance, I wanted to add the FoodieView Recipe Search Engine at [http://www.foodieview.com/tools/foodieview_google_gadget.xml](http://www.foodieview.com/tools/foodieview_google_gadget.xml). I repeated the steps above in the new Wave window, and the results are shown below (note that I changed Tom Morello to Peter Gabriel):
Now I can find food while listening to music – all on the same page. While this may not seem revolutionary to you, try adding a few folks to help you collaborate on this page. You cannot do that anywhere else.

**NOTE:** While YouTube allowed me to ‘embed’ a video on this Wave, a search for food in the food engine took me away from the Wave page to another site.

### Conclusion

One current problem with Google Wave is that the invited folks still are trying to wrap their heads around how to use this tool. In the meantime, other folks still remain uninvited. But, I’ve already started a project with a collaborator, and I’ll report later on how much ground we can cover through the process later.

One project that garnered some attention was the public manhunt Wave created by the Seattle Times to help catch a killer. That link will work only if you have an account with Google Wave. For those who do not have an account, this is what that page looked like at the time of this writing:
Currently, approximately 500 users have logged into this Wave to see what happened. It was a great way for me to test the “Playback” option that Lars talks about in the Wave introductory video. The playback option worked – I was able to visualize the Wave from its concept to its current state, allowing me to see the changes made along the way.

The public option in Google Wave, as well as the options for privacy, are amazing. The public option might help you visualize how Wave pages can replace wikis. You also might be able to visualize how a page such as this can benefit a company team effort or a brainstorming session.

Google Wave is a work in progress, but it’s exciting to be in on the front end of this project. Like I mentioned previously, if you have not received an invitation yet, never fear. It’s probably just around the corner.