

# Google co-founder 'pretty happy' in stealth role

MICHAEL LIEDTKE - AP Technology Writer - Associated Press

Google co-founder Sergey Brin took a break from his work on the Internet search leader's secret projects to make a surprise appearance at a technology conference Wednesday.

Although he shared few specifics, Brin said remains as busy as he was during a decade-long stint as the company's president of technology. He switched to a stealth role earlier this year as part of a shake-up that ushered in his longtime partner, Larry Page, as Google's CEO. Brin has kept a low profile since the changes.

"I am pretty happy," Brin told the audience at the Web 2.0 Summit in San Francisco.

Brin said he spends one day a week in meetings with other executives at Google's Mountain View headquarters. The rest of his time is devoted to a series of "infrastructure and research and development" projects, Brin said. The only one that has become public so far is Google's work on driverless cars, which the company revealed a year ago.

In an interview with reporters after he left the conference stage, Brin said his work on another project might be blended into an existing Google product by the end of the year. "Stay tuned," he said.

Brin applauded Page's performance as CEO, both on stage and in his meeting with reporters. He is one of the few Google employees who worked at the company during Page's first go-round as CEO. Page held the top job in Google's early days before the CEO job was taken over in 2001 by technology veteran Eric Schmidt.

"Larry has done a really good job rallying the company together," Brin told reporters.

Brin also praised Google Plus, which the company introduced nearly four months ago as an alternative to Facebook's popular social network. Plus has gotten off to a fast start with more than 40 million users, but remains far behind Facebook's audience of 800 million people.

That gap could narrow if Plus lives up to the expectations of Brin and Page, both 38, and worth nearly \$17 billion apiece, according to Forbes magazine's latest rankings. They believe more people will gravitate to Plus as they realize the service makes it easier than Facebook to sort friendships into different circles and see the additional features Google plans to add during the next few months.

As more pieces are added to the puzzle, Brin believes Plus could become a way to unite Google's expanding array of products.

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Published on Electronic Component News (<http://www.ecnmag.com>)

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Besides the search and advertising services that generate most of Google's revenue, the company has become a force in online video with YouTube, in mobile phones with its Android software, in email with Gmail and in Web browsers with Chrome.

"We wanted a thousand flowers to bloom, and once those flowers do bloom, you want to create a coherent bouquet," Brin said.

Plus hasn't been universally embraced within Google. Just last week, Google engineer Steve Yegge mistakenly shared a scathing critique of Plus for everyone to see on the service before he deleted it. By then, the 3,700-word missive had already been passed along by other Plus users. Among other things, Yegge described Plus "as a prime example of our complete failure to understand platforms from the very highest levels of executive leadership" and "a knee-jerk reaction, a study in short-term thinking."

Google didn't fire Yegge because he meant the post to be available only to other company employees. Brin brushed off Yegge's criticism when he was asked about it Wednesday, saying he hasn't bothered reading the whole post because he thought it was too long.

"Sometimes, I use it as a night-time aid," Brin joked.

**Source URL (retrieved on 03/11/2014 - 12:35pm):**

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