



Meet Google's 14 'unsung rockstars' who insiders say are about to blow up

Greg Sandoval Jul. 28, 2018, 8:00 AM

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Zak Stone, Justin Steele, and Mary Ellen Coe. Punahou School; Oakland Digital; Google; BI Graphics

It seems as if Google is everywhere.

And it is.

Google and its parent company, [Alphabet](#), are major players in everything from consumer electronics and self-driving cars to high-speed internet access and video entertainment — and of course, there's the search engine.

But while everyone knows the marquee names like [Google CEO Sundar Pichai](#) and YouTube boss [Susan Wojcicki](#), there's an incredible surfeit of talent one layer below that's driving some of the company's most influential projects. Business Insider spoke to Google insiders, partners, and rivals to get a sense of the most buzzed-about names within the 80,000-person tech giant.

From programmers to designers, Google veterans to new hires, we rounded up a roster of Google's unsung rockstars. These are the names you may not have heard of yet but might just become the next Pichai.

Rishi Chandra, vice president of product management and general manager of home products

YouTube

Google has high hopes for home products.

The living room [is an important battleground](#) for Google and its rivals Amazon and Apple. To spearhead the efforts there, Google turned to Chandra.

Amazon's Echo got to market first and was undeniably a hit, but under Chandra's leadership, Google Home has closed the gap. In review after review, Home and Echo are neck and neck.

Management apparently has enough faith in Chandra to continue adding to his responsibilities. Two weeks ago, the Nest division, which makes smart thermostats, smoke detectors, and security cameras, [was folded into his unit](#).

Chandra has been in Google's home area for three years and before that worked on Chromecast, the popular streaming-media gadget. Before that, he helped launch Google TV, now known as Android TV.

Here's a tip: If you have to pitch Chandra, say something nice about the Philadelphia Eagles.

Elizabeth Hamon Reid, vice president of engineering for Google Geo's local team

Google

Reid was [the first female engineer at Google's New York headquarters](#).

Google relies on her to oversee the company's engineering efforts that are focused on helping people discover and find information about the physical world.

She helped develop the earliest version of the Google Maps "search by location" feature. From there, she

was selected to lead development across various products for maps and local search.

Eric Baczuk, designer for special projects at Google

Digital Health Summit

In his four years at Google, Baczuk has been tapped to work on several super-secret programs.

A designer with roots at the iconic Frog industrial-design firm and MIT's Senseable City Lab, Baczuk now identifies himself on LinkedIn as a designer for "special projects" at Google. According to a source, he is now part of Daydream, Google's virtual-reality project.

Up until a few months ago, Baczuk was a designer in residence at Sidewalk Labs, Google's urban-planning unit. His work exploring new concepts in urban housing and other critical issues plaguing cities across the globe attracted attention within the company and led to his current assignment. We can't wait to see what he dreams up in the virtual world.

Nick Fox, Google's vice president of product design

Greg Sandoval/Business Insider

Fox heads up Google's product management and design for Google Assistant and search.

These are two vital areas for Google. Search is Google's main moneymaker, and Assistant, the digital valet that competes with Apple's Siri and Amazon's Alexa, is the most visible incarnation of artificial intelligence, a technology that's [incredibly important to the company's founders](#), Sergey Brin and Larry Page.

That Fox works in two marquee areas for Google is probably the best testament to Google's trust in him.

He was on hand last month when [Google offered reporters](#) a chance to play around with Duplex, the digital assistant designed to understand and speak in natural language well enough to briefly converse with humans. So far, the technology can do little more than reserve tables at restaurants or book appointments at hair salons, but the future appears wide open.

Before this, Fox led Google's communications product area and worked at Project Fi, the company's wireless-cellphone service.

Mary Ellen Coe, president of Google Marketing Solutions

Google

Coe helps build bridges from Google to Main Street.

As president of Google Marketing Solutions, Coe oversees Google's worldwide midmarket and small-advertiser business, a growth area for the company. That means Coe must look out for millions of customers and thousands of ad agencies.

One of her responsibilities is to help businesses — even tiny mom-and-pop enterprises — embrace the internet and digital technology. Google tries to help customers attract their own customers locally.

She has the right background for the job. Her parents operated a plumbing and heating business, while her grandparents ran a general store, [she told The Business Journals](#).

Additionally, she was on the board of Whole Foods, leaving shortly after Amazon, one of Google's top competitors, bought the grocery chain last year.

Justin Steele, Americas lead at Google.org

Oakland Digital

Steele is a principal at Google.org, where he's responsible for the grants given by the charitable organization in the US, Canada, and Latin America.

He also is involved in the company's contributions to areas that focus on bringing about racial justice nationally.

Before arriving at Google, Steele worked as a management consultant at Bain & Company and the Bridgespan Group creating strategic plans for companies.

In [an interview on one of Google's blogs](#), he said about his work with Google.org: "We empower [social entrepreneurs] to be bold in their pursuit of social change and bring about a better world, faster. More locally, we want to give local nonprofits the resources and support needed to be similarly bold in their approach to our region's toughest social challenges."

Martin Shelton, user-experience researcher at Google Chrome

Geoffrey King

Journalists across the globe have an ally in Shelton, a user-experience researcher within the Google Chrome unit.

He searches for ways to improve privacy and security, especially for at-risk groups. Those would include journalists who work in countries such as Mexico, Turkey, and Egypt where reporters have been killed by criminal organizations or tossed in jail by governments that don't value a free press.

Google and Shelton deserve credit for trying to help them learn how to protect themselves while online.

Before arriving at Google, Martin worked with The New York Times as a Knight-Mozilla OpenNews fellow. While there, he studied the security practices of journalists and civil-society groups.

Google has promised to offer more assistance to help news organizations during a time of falling revenue and seismic shifts in their business brought on by technological change.

Sanjay Kapoor, vice president of corporate development

Google

Kapoor has a lot of experience managing big deals for Google.

He oversees [Google's mergers and acquisitions](#) and corporate development, as well as the company's investments.

In May, he was one of the people who [helped launch a new investment program](#) for startups that work on new features for Google Assistant.

A 15-year veteran of the company, Kapoor was for five years the chief of global business development for Google's ads and commerce business, including payments, shopping, travel, and measurement.

He also has led many of Google's most complex and strategic partnerships with advertising, tech and payments partners.

Ben Gomes, vice president of search

Flickr

In April, Apple [hired away John Giannandrea](#), the Google exec who oversaw search and artificial intelligence, leaving a big hole.

Google's management turned to Gomes to take over search. He also now leads Google Assistant, image search, and its news division.

Previously, Gomes was vice president for the search group's engineering department. In his 18 years at Google, he was instrumental in the building of search that has helped turn Google into the colossus it is today.

Gomes has also found a bit of fame for [a video he appeared in](#) that attempts to answer some popular questions asked of Google search. The clip has more than 1 million views.

Avni Shah, product manager for a new, undisclosed initiative

Google

Shah is a product manager for a new and undisclosed initiative at Google. But if her experience is any guide, it's something Google has big plans for.

Her latest gig was chief of development for Google Chrome, which now has more than 1 billion users. And before that, Shah was a product manager for Google Maps and local efforts for Europe, the Middle East, and Africa.

Whatever job she's held, she's long been involved with efforts that [encourage young women](#) to become engineers and join the tech sector. A superb public speaker, Shah is often asked to [appear at conferences](#).

Asked by Forbes to give some advice to her younger self, [Shah said](#): "You have a unique opportunity to try out different disciplines, activities, and classes to discover interests you didn't even know you had. Don't worry so much about what it means for your 'career' — this exploration will ultimately open doors, not close them."

Aparna Chennapragada, vice president of product for augmented-reality, virtual-reality, and vision-based products

Justin Sullivan/Getty Images

Chennapragada has helped develop some of Google's most innovative search features and is now pushing the boundaries in the next frontier.

As vice president of product for augmented and virtual reality, Chennapragada is responsible for Google Lens, the mobile app that lets users point their phones at an object in the real world and instantly get information about it.

Chennapragada came to Google's YouTube in 2008 from Akamai as a product manager. At the video-sharing service, Chennapragada guided research into new user features and from there went on to become a senior product manager for Google search.

After a three-year tour with Google Now, the predictive-search mobile software, she eventually became technical assistant to the CEO, where, according to her LinkedIn page, she helped "drive cross-company product strategy." In March, she became a board member for Capital One.

Derek Slater, senior public-policy manager at Google

Screen shot from FORA.tv

Slater is Google's champion when it comes to public policy.

As a senior public-policy manager, he's now working on the Future of Work, an initiative funded by Google.org to help prepare people for the "[changing nature of work](#)."

Before that, Slater led Google Fiber's efforts to persuade cities to adopt fiber-friendly regulations. In one of the tech sector's most famous policy triumphs, Slater helped lead Google's efforts several years ago to [kill a bill called the Stop Online Piracy Act](#) that was heavily supported by the entertainment industry, his LinkedIn page says.

[SOPA](#) was designed to simplify the process of removing pirate sites from the internet. Google, Wikipedia, and others said it would lead to online censorship. Nonetheless, the bill had broad bipartisan support and looked like a shoe-in to become law.

But seemingly out of nowhere there came a massive online protest as well as a raucous street demonstration in New York. The bill's support in both houses of Congress evaporated, and it was a

stunning defeat for the film and music industries.

On his LinkedIn page, Slater [took credit for organizing a big part](#) of these efforts.

Zak Stone, product manager for Google's TensorFlow

[Punahou School](#)

After working at Apple as a machine-learning strategist for 20 months, Stone jumped to Google, where he's become a product manager for TensorFlow and Cloud tensor processing units.

TensorFlow, the open-source artificial-intelligence system developed by the Google Brain team, is designed to simplify the process of training models, obtaining data, and generating predictions.

At Google Brain, Stone is charged with "making hardware acceleration for machine learning universally accessible via cloud TPUs" according to his LinkedIn page. TPUs are microprocessors designed to work on AI tasks within a company's data center.

At this week's 2018 Google Next conference, Google unveiled a small AI accelerator to handle machine-learning tasks in internet-of-things devices. Adding more machine-learning and AI capabilities to its offering is vital to Google's cloud efforts.

Google, the No. 3 player among the top cloud platforms, is trying to make up ground on No. 1 Amazon and No. 2 Microsoft.

Vivek Raghunathan, vice president of engineering for YouTube's monetization

[YouTube](#)

Raghunathan is a baller.

In his decade at Google, Raghunathan has stood out from the pack for his coding skills. He was named principal engineer in 2013 and became a "distinguished engineer" in 2016. These are [prestigious titles](#) at a place teeming with engineers.

In April, he was tapped for one of the company's most critical roles: vice president of engineering for monetization at YouTube, the world's largest video-streaming site.

It's a big job, and Raghunathan will be under the spotlight.

YouTube is considered one of Google's most important businesses. Though Google has never revealed YouTube's financial performance, [analysts at Morgan Stanley estimate](#) that if the service were a standalone entity, it would be worth more than [General Electric](#), [IBM](#), [PepsiCo](#), or [Comcast](#), and roughly the same as the [Walt Disney Co.](#)

This may be YouTube's and Raghunathan's time.

Get the latest Google stock price [here](#).

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