

Wales on Wikis

Wikipedia co-founder Jimmy Wales discusses the potential of wikis to build communities.

by Tricia Bisoux

Wikis—online, open-source documents that anyone can review or revise—have become go-to tools for collaboration. Wikipedia, the online user-generated encyclopedia run by nonprofit Wikimedia Foundation, is the force that put wikis on the map.

Jimmy Wales created the first wiki with Larry Sanger in 2001. They founded a peer-reviewed online encyclopedia called Nupedia in 2002, a venture that evolved into Wikipedia. Wales' work on the project would prompt *Time* magazine to include him on its list of the "world's most influential people" in 2006.

Today, Wikipedia includes 13 million articles written in more than 30 languages. Its open-source nature has spurred some critics to question the accuracy of Wikipedia. However, Wales points to the collective oversight of its legion of user-editors, who spot and correct wrong or malicious insertions. That process, he notes, makes Wikipedia a self-correcting "living document." In many ways, he adds, its ongoing revision may make it more up-to-date and accurate than many printed resources.

In a conversation with *BizEd*, Wales discusses his plans to bring Wikipedia into the world's emergent markets, and his belief in the potential of wikis to educate, inform, connect, and inspire.

Does the openness of wikis concern you, in terms of the accuracy—or inaccuracy—of user-generated content?

Not really. The point is having a

strong and healthy community. Wikis are far better than other Internet media in terms of protecting people's privacy and generating good, quality work. When there are errors in a wiki, people find and correct them over time.

Is it difficult to convince people of the value of wikis as a resource—in the way they value more traditional sources of information?

That's a good question. But I would suggest that if people think that the *Encyclopedia Britannica* is fact, they actually misunderstand traditional media. I think it's important to recognize that we now have new tools available that are generating higher quality information than we've ever had before. It's completely false to say that this new medium isn't as good as the old medium. It's much better. I think that many people just fail to grasp how bad things were before.

How bad were things before wikis?

When you take a look at a good book, it's been written by one person and checked by one or two editors. But when you look at a good wiki entry, it's been carefully crafted by dozens of people. It always

remains open to revision if an error is found. That's a completely new process that I think is vastly superior to the old process.

Do you think wikis have the potential to change how people think and work?

In the languages of many parts of the developing world, a new information source is often the first information source. For example, last September we launched Swahili



ALEX McKNIGHT

Wikipedia. It was the first encyclopedia to exist in Swahili. That lack of a cultural resource is true for many languages around the world. It's pretty remarkable to think about the change and transformation that's going on as knowledge becomes accessible to more people.

What do you think business students should know about wikis?

They should view them as practical and valuable tools for rapid collaboration and knowledge sharing. In addition, they should realize that social information technology is flattening the hierarchy in companies. For people just entering the workforce, this trend provides huge opportunities much earlier. But it also presents risks—they must use the information carefully.

What is your message for business leaders?

Most of the hierarchical communication in a company is outdated, slow, and inefficient. Business leaders can't expect that when a plant in Idaho produces a report, it will just naturally bubble up through the management hierarchy and trickle back down to another plant in Minnesota.

Peer-to-peer communication is much faster. A system of open communication helps employees share knowledge across the entire enterprise. It's important to empower frontline workers, no matter what their field, to share knowledge with each other.

One of the biggest things business leaders need to recognize is that within any business, good ideas can come from anywhere. They can come from inside or outside the company. Wikis provide a way for the best ideas to be circulated around the world.



Are Virtual Worlds Good for Business?

A multidisciplinary team of researchers from Indiana University in Bloomington and North Carolina State University in Raleigh has begun a study to determine whether online virtual worlds aid business collaboration and increase corporate productivity.

The researchers include Anne Massey, Dean's Research Professor and professor of information systems at IU's Kelley School of Business; Jeanne Johnston, assistant professor of kinesiology in IU's School of Health, Physical Education and Recreation; Mitzi Montoya, Zelnak Professor of Marketing Innovation at NCSU's College of Management; and Michael Devetsikiotis, professor of electrical and computer engineering at NCSU's College of Engineering. They will conduct the study with the help of a \$203,549 grant from the United States' National Science Foundation.

The quality of a virtual world is measured by the degree to which users feel a part of that world and by the richness of their interactions with others, a quality the researchers call Collaborative Virtual Presence (CVP). They plan to conduct a series

of experiments that will help them develop a scale to measure CVP in a variety of circumstances and assess its relationship to performance.

In addition, Johnston will measure users' physiological responses as they experience virtual world environments. "In the real world, people can have physiological reactions, such as increased heart rate, to events," says Johnston. She wants to discover whether experiences in a virtual world produce similar responses.

More businesses are logging on to worlds like Sun's Wonderland or Linden Lab's Second Life to connect geographically distributed employees and experiment with marketing, product development, and group collaboration. Business schools are setting up virtual courses, campuses, and alumni events. It's important to know whether these efforts are worthwhile, says Massey.

"Many unanswered questions remain, including whether virtual worlds improve the performance or the experiences of remote collaborators," Massey says. "Being able to measure and understand the role of virtual presence in collaborative processes is an important foundational step to assessing real business impact."

■ UWA Builds Virtual Campus

Last fall, the University of Western Australia in Perth began its own educational experiment within a virtual world—it recreated elements of its real-life university campus in Second Life. Launched in October, the SL campus incorporates versions of UWA's most prominent buildings and landmarks—including its clock tower, art gallery, and Sunken Gardens—and supports a variety of curricular, collaborative, and social activities.

The launch marked the culmination of two years of work on the UWA Second Life Project, led by Jay Jay Jegathesan, manager of UWA's School of Physics, and Chris Thorne, an honorary physics research fellow.

Jegathesan acknowledges that UWA will face the same challenge that all organizations face when trying to create a collaborative online environment—how to make a virtual world a true community, one conducive to learning, research, and interaction between wide-ranging groups of people.

“We know we need to be comprehensive in our offerings. We need to engage not just with our own university community, but with the Second Life community,” he says. “We want to strike a good balance between real-life and fantasy elements to appeal to our various audiences—alumni, prospective and current students, educators, researchers, and international visitors.”



A course in electronic communications strategy meets in the Sky Theater on the UWA's Second Life campus.

Several UWA professors are using the SL campus to teach courses. Wade Halvorson, assistant professor of marketing in the UWA Business School, holds his second-year undergraduate course in electronic communications strategy in

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■ PODCAST SERIES

MBA Podcaster has launched a series of videos aimed at MBA applicants. The video series, called MBA PodTV, features one-on-one interviews with admissions directors, MBA students, and alumni. A series of “Day in the Life” videos focuses on the life of MBA students at business schools worldwide. Viewers are encouraged to submit questions for upcoming segments on MBA Podcaster's Facebook page. The videos are available at www.mbapodcaster.com.

■ BLACKBERRY AT LAURIER

The Laurier School of Business and Economics at Wilfred Laurier University in Ontario, Canada, has teamed with wireless service providers Research In Motion and Rogers Wireless to equip more than 100 of its full-time MBA students with BlackBerry

handheld devices. The pilot project has two goals, say school officials: to familiarize students with mobile learning and working environments and to simplify collaboration for class projects. Students and faculty communicate on the devices via Mobile Chalkboard, a messaging platform owned by Research In Motion. Eventually, administrators hope that students will embrace the new technology to develop their own educational applications.

■ AWARDS FOR TECH

Two business educators have received a lifetime achievement award and an academic achievement award from the International Association for Management of Technology (IAMOT). Michael Badawy, professor of management of technology and strategic management at Virginia Tech University in Blacksburg, received a lifetime achievement award for his significant contribution in academia. Thierry

Grange, dean of the Grenoble Ecole de Management in France, received the Academic Achievement Award for his achievements in the field of management of technology.

■ ACCOUNTING ONLINE

The American Institute of Certified Public Accountants is tapping into growing interest in accounting with a complete redesign of its Web site, “Start Here, Go Places,” at www.startheregoplaces.com. Geared to both students and educators, the site now includes a feature called “Future Me,” which asks potential students a series of questions to help them customize their potential career paths. Users also can hear CPAs talk about the field, access job shadowing opportunities, and search for scholarships by state. Educators can interact in an online forum, find testimonials from practicing CPAs, and link to accounting resources.

the fantastical “Sky Theater,” a virtual outdoor auditorium that floats on water. Halvorson also uses the SL environment to meet and collaborate with faculty from universities overseas.

In addition, the virtual campus will be a place for research into the function and impact of virtual worlds. A large section of the space will be devoted to collaborative visualization research led by Paul Bourke, a senior research fellow in the West Australian Supercomputer Programme.

The school also has invited artists and architects worldwide to enter a yearlong competition to create three-dimensional art and buildings for the campus.

Jegathesan is working to establish memorandums of understanding with different educational institutions, to encourage other schools to send their students and faculty to UWA’s SL campus.

“The education sector within Second Life is growing rapidly. We feel that we are at a stage where this is akin to the early days of television,” says Jegathesan. “I am convinced that within 15 years 3D virtual environments will become an integral part of our lives.”

Texting Still Rules

A survey jointly conducted by the Participatory Marketing Network (PMN) and the Lubin School of Business at Pace University, both in New York City, has found that while members of Generation Y enjoy social networking, most will give up their Facebook pages before abandoning e-mail and texting.

PMN worked with the Lubin School’s student-run Interactive & Direct Marketing Lab to survey 203

young adults between the ages of 18 and 24. These Gen Y-ers were asked which they would be least likely to give up for a week—social networking, e-mail, or texting. Only 9 percent most wanted to keep social networking, while 26 percent wanted to keep e-mail. Similarly, 26 percent wanted to keep their texting.

The survey also showed that Gen Y still has little interest in mobile marketing—only 20 percent are currently receiving targeted promotional messages.

PMN is particularly interested in Gen Y’s communications because its business is to help organizations make the transition from “push” and “permission” marketing to “participatory” marketing, which actively involves customers in a company’s marketing and brand-building efforts.

Says Michael Della Penna, co-founder and executive chairman of PMN, “As long as e-mail remains the collection point for social networking updates, it will remain a powerful force in marketing.”

TOOLS OF THE TRADE

Two Professors Work to Build a Better Textbook

Traditional printed textbooks may be the most common tool for learning on the university campus, but they simply do not offer students the most up-to-date picture of their subjects, argues Vince Mitchell, professor of consumer marketing at City University’s Cass Business School in London, England. That’s why he teamed with Bradley Barnes, professor of international management at the U.K.’s University of Kent, to create the first European edition of the textbook *Marketing: Real People, Real Decisions* in an interactive digital format.

Published by Pearson Education Europe, Middle East and Africa, the book is designed to pull students into real-life marketing scenarios taken straight from European companies, explains Mitchell.



Each chapter also features a section called “discuss, debate, disagree,” which includes ethical “pop-ups.” As students read about certain cases, they are presented with pop-up boxes that detail ethical marketing dilemmas designed to provoke discussion.

A distinctive feature of the book is “My Marketing Lab Online,” where students can access additional interactive chapters, pop-up videos, and study materials. The book’s Web site also includes a collection of marketing-related YouTube videos

for lecturers and students to use, as well as a frequently updated list of the top 20 marketing and advertising viral videos. Lecturers have access to slides, seminar materials, multiple-choice questions, and essay questions with model answers.

For more information, visit www.cass.city.ac.uk/research/newsletter/videos/Marketing_RealPeopleRealDecisions.html. 