

Wiki, Wiki: The Future in Fast Information

With "fast" becoming the word of the century, it is little wonder that easily editable online encyclopedias, such as Wikipedia, are increasing in popularity daily. These encyclopedias are known as "wikis" and were named as such by Ward Cunningham, creator of WikiWikiWeb, during a trip to Hawaii. According to Cunningham, he was traveling on the Change RT-52 shuttle bus in the Honolulu International Airport, and found the line was also known as "Wiki Wiki", Hawaiian for "fast". This encounter inspired Cunningham to name his quickly updated site with the same name. The Hawaiian term's double meaning "what I know is" also worked perfectly for Cunningham's educational site.

Many already know wikis are fast, but what exactly is a wiki? Wikis are defined as a site that permits those viewing it to add to, or remove from, the site. Wikis may require registration, but some of the most popular wikis, such as Wikipedia, are able to be edited without registration.

Wikis are generally broken into three types: public, protected and private. Public wikis are those that allow anyone to edit pages within the site without registration. If registration is required, it is free, still allowing anyone to edit content. Protected wikis differ in that they can be seen by all but changed by only a few. These wikis have an administrator that grants permission to certain users to add to or delete from pages. These administrators also make and enforce rules to ensure that content is correct and reputable. Private wikis are not visible on the open web, but are instead confined to a certain company or organization's server. Only those within the company can view these wikis. Editing of these wikis is usually confined to a few administrators and those who gain permission from administrators to edit.

The most popular type of wikis, public wikis, operate on server-side systems that allow for users to edit each page with little to no knowledge of HTML. Users simply type what they wish to add into a "wikiengine" that quickly and easily converts each message into HTML format to add onto the page. This easy process is popular because it allows those with no knowledge of HTML to contribute to the site. Also, the unrestricted access makes changes quick since users do not have to go through any type of screening process as would be necessary with internet forums or other online chat sites.

The advantages seen with wikis can be seen as disadvantages as well. Many worry that unrestricted access allows for false information or spamming, known as "wiki vandalism". Some say this is remedied by a dedicated community of users that watch each page individually, but critics say these users are only human and can easily miss such vandalism. Also, excessive spamming can be caused by automated "bots" that may be used to continually add content to a wiki. Although some sites can block such bots, there is no guarantee that all wiki sites are 100% vandalism free. If a certain page experiences intense problems with vandalism, this page can be cut off from editing or restricted to certain users if necessary.

Besides the concern with false information and spamming appearing on wikis, users still desire the quick source of knowledge provided by wikis. Wikis can be used for a variety of things from business research in business wikis to school projects researched on Wikipedia. Wikis are on a one-way street to fame, and no one seems to mind.

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Source: <http://www.articlecircle.com>

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