Why Wikis Work

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What’s a Wiki?

“The smallest on–line database that could possibly work” – Ward Cunningham
No Really...What’s a Wiki?

- A group editable Web space
- A collaboration tool
- A knowledge management database which leverages the Collective Intelligence AKA Wisdom of Crowds
H.L. Mencken was Wrong

“No one in this world, so far as I know, has ever lost money by underestimating the intelligence of the great masses of the plain people.” — H.L. Mencken
Collective Intelligence

• Google — PageRank and Markov Chains aside, what Google actually does it to measure the “goodness” of a search based upon how good others think the page is. This may be one of the best examples of how the many in aggregate determine what others are looking for.

• Who Wants to be a Millionaire? — The crowd was right 91% of the time; the “experts” were right about 65% of the time.
More Examples

- Open Source — Open Source Software (OSS) projects leverage the knowledge of many to create software which in many cases works better than the corresponding commercial product. The real power of OSS is that “Many eyes make all bugs shallow.” The result of this is that often bugs in OSS are fixed much more quickly than those in a commercial product.
Wikipedia

Wikipedia is a Web–based, free–content encyclopedia which is edited collaboratively by volunteers. It is actually a collection of hundreds of independent language editions, with the English language edition having over 940,000 articles (01/25/2006).

- How it works — MediaWiki
- Why it works — *The Wisdom of Crowds*
- Who cares about this stuff? Why would anyone do this?
Why Wikis Work

The MoinMoin Web site has four reasons Wikis work:

- Any and all information can be deleted by anyone. Wiki pages represent nothing but discussion and consensus.
- Wiki is not WYSIWYG.
- Wiki is far from real time. Folks have time to think, often days or weeks...
- Wiki participants are, by nature, a pedantic, ornery, and unreasonable bunch. So there’s a camaraderie here we seldom see outside of our professional contacts.
What needs to be done?

- Single sign-on integration → MediaWiki login/account
- How do we “export” a read-only copies?
- How do we “moderate?” Who “moderates?”
- Do we integrate it with the LDAP directory?
Where are we Using Wikis?

• Project Sites — Let the developers flesh out ideas (*e.g.* The LionShare Wiki)

• English Composition (*e.g.* Rich Doyle’s Composition classes)

• Professor Mary Beth Oliver’s Media Effects Study Guide/Dictionary

• ITS Knowledge Management Prototype
How Does ET Use Wikis?

The ITS Emerging Technologies Group has been *eating our own dog food* for about ten months now.

- The ITS/ASET Annual Report
- Our Web presence
- Meeting/trip reports
- Knowledge Management/Tips–and–Tricks
- Group procedure manual
- Project Management
- Group reporting
Student Involvement

I’ve been the Linux Users’ Group (LUG) advisor since it was approved in 2001. It has a very active e-mail list and its own Web site. What I’ve observed in my years as club advisor:

- We have many of the same deadlines from year to year
- We do many of the same activities from year to year
- We engage of the same people/offices in Student Affairs year to year

Why, then, can’t we learn from our mistakes and successes?
Case Study: The LUG 2005/6

This year’s highlights:

- We missed the deadline for the Student Involvement Fair
- We applied for and obtained a HUB LateNight HotSpot
- Last week I learned a few things about Student Affairs, HUB LateNight, the Events Office...
- The result was positive — we obtained both network connectivity and a cable TV connection.
LUG Continuity

As the LUG Advisor:

- How do we avoid the learning curve next year?
- How do we make the deadlines next year?
- How do we avoid making the same mistakes next year?
- How do we preserve continuity in the transition from this year’s officers to next year’s?
- This year, we will use a Wiki to record LUG lore

This year will be different!
Organizational Continuity

My observations:

- Having some of the same officers helps
- Our club Web site helps
- Preserving lore helps
- Having the same advisor helps (maybe?)
Questions?

Some URLs:

<http://www.wikipedia.org/>
<http://slashet.aset.psu.edu/>
<http://lionshare.its.psu.edu/cgi–bin/twiki/view/Main/WebHome>
<http://moinmoin.wikiwikiweb.de/WhyWikiWorks>
<http://google.com/>