5 Minute Guide ...

Wikis

What is a wiki?

A wiki is server software that allows individuals with an Internet connection and a web browser to browse, contribute or edit content. With the click of the edit button, a wiki turns a webpage into a document that can be modified. Saving the document turns it back into a webpage. This makes wikis a useful tool to coordinate information provided by a variety of individuals, as knowledge management tools, or by organizations as an easy to manage Intranet. Wikis can be hosted online, or you can have one set up on your own server.

How do wikis work?

A wiki is a type of database. When you click on a link the database displays in a web page the content for that record in the database. If you search for an article that does not exist, you can click a link to a simple text box that provides you with the opportunity to write an article on that topic. If you see an article that requires editing, you can simply click the link to edit the file, where a text box is displayed. In many cases, after an article is created or modified, once the file is saved, the web page is immediately updated.

Who uses wikis?

Wikis are useful for developing communities of knowledge and interest. They allow interested individuals to join together to share their knowledge of specific topics. Individuals can quickly learn how to use the tool and make contributions – regardless of their technical skills. As such, anyone can use a wiki – from the child down the street, to leading doctors or researchers.

Do wikis have drawbacks?

The collaborative nature of wikis can lead to its primary fault – the inappropriate modification of information. Wiki securtiy is an issue, whether intended or not. Wikis that are open to the public may need to be monitored for language, spam and misinformation. Another potential problem is the risk of "group-think" where biases can become entrenched in an article or an entire wiki. Both of these issues can compromise the authority and accuracy of wiki content. This is the key issue in the debate on whether or not wikis are an appropriate resource to use in reference work.

Why are wikis useful?

Wikis that draw a large community of users can often provide access to information that may otherwise prove to be obscure and/or difficult to find. Since wikis are easy to edit, they can provide timely access to rapidly changing information.

How can libraries use wikis?

Wikis are a comparatively inexpensive and easy-to-administer method for building a sense of community into a library website or activity. A wiki could be used to develop an easily editable library website. They could be developed by supplement book clubs, to develop subject guides or to generate buzz for upcoming events. The potential uses for wikis in libraries are limited only by your imagination!

did you know?

wiki comes from the Hawaiian word for quick.

alberta public library
electronic network

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CommonCraft: Wikis in plain English (video):
www.commoncraft.com/video-wikis-plain-english

How Stuff Works: Wikis:
http://computer.howstuffworks.com/wiki.htm

North Carolina State University:
Wikipedia: Beneath the Surface (in under six minutes)
www.lib.ncsu.edu/tutorials/wikipedia

Five weeks to a Social Library: Wikis:
www.sociallibraries.com/course/week3

Library Success: Wiki World:
www.libsuccess.org/index.php?title=Wiki_World

Library Examples

Library Success: A Best Practices Wiki:
www.libsuccess.org/index.php?title=Main_Page

LISWiki:
liswiki.org/wiki/Main_Page

Library Instruction Wiki:
instructionwiki.org/Main_Page

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Get a hosted wiki (for free)

MediaWiki:
www.mediawiki.org/wiki/MediaWiki

PBwiki:
pbwiki.com

Wetpaint:
www.wetpaint.com

Wikispaces:
www.wikispaces.com

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