

# A CONCEPT FULLY REALIZED: THE BEAUTY OF DEVELOPING AN INTERNALLY-HOUSED WIKI SERVER

Mark Baggett and John Cyrus

Louisiana State University Health Sciences Center – Shreveport • Medical Library



## ABSTRACT

The Louisiana State University Health Sciences Center – Shreveport (LSUHSC-S) Medical Library first created a wiki in early 2008 as a place to store important information about the library, and to provide a workspace for group projects. The selected platform for this wiki was the externally hosted website Wetpaint.com. About a year and a half later, it was suggested that a new, more flexible wiki be implemented that would truly take advantage of the technology. With this in mind, librarians at LSUHSC-S selected to create a new wiki using the open source, internally housed Mediawiki platform. This poster will discuss: the differences between the two wikis, technological requirements for the installation of Mediawiki, some of the challenges we faced in implementing it, examples of how the wiki is currently used, and finally, the lessons we learned in going through this entire process.

## CHALLENGES

We faced numerous challenges to the implementation of our wiki. Most of these are predictable, but always seem to surface whenever a new system or technology is introduced.

**Misconceptions**  
Black hole effect – Information gets in, but it doesn't get back out. This is only true when the organization and scope of the wiki is poorly defined.

**Markup Language** – While it is true that Mediawiki is not WYSIWYG, the markup language is simple, and there are various extensions and applications that can be used to generate wiki text.

**Where to Start** – wikis, by their nature, can be expansive, complex repositories. Begin by adding content that will be easy to locate, and immediately useful to a number of users.

**Change/Adoption**  
90-9-1 Rule – wikis come with the expectation that because anyone can edit them, everyone should contribute. In reality, it has been found that with most wikis 90% access them, 9% contribute, and only 1% actively participates on a regular basis.

Because some of the first content added to our wiki stemmed from committee work, our participation rates are: 53% accessing the wiki, 20% contributing, and 27% actively creating and managing content.

**Overwhelming**  
Mediawiki is ready to use out of the box, but is limited to basic functionality. For many users this functionality will be adequate. For others, the problem becomes choosing from the myriad of available extensions created by users to expand functionality. These extensions range from linking to network files to embedding GoogleMaps mashups.

## MORE INFO

For more information about this project including a list of works consulted:

<http://bit.ly/aqnsq0>



## WETPAINT VS. MEDIAWIKI



- Free
- Web-based (external hosting)
- WYSIWYG Editing – What You See is What You Get, no markup language.
- Minimal administration – Does not require technical background.
- Well-Defined Features – does not require upgrading, or additional installations



- Free
- Extensible – Add extensions to expand functionality of your wiki.
- Established Support Base – Open source, with large, experienced user group for technical support.
- Intuitive Organization Tools – Automatic table of contents, divide pages into sections, add tags, simple internal linking.
- Highly Searchable – Search by page title or full-text
- Document Management – Link to network files.



- Proprietary – Free accounts have ads. Premium (pay) accounts for more features.
- Files only by Attachment – Cannot link to files on your local network.
- Poor Organization – Poor linking within wiki. Confusing table of contents.
- Limited Searching



- wikitext – Markup language that requires some practice.
- Requires Technical Administration – Requires at least one dedicated administrator.
- Too Wide Open (Out of the Box) – Difficult to determine what can do.

## IMPLEMENTATION

### Installation

One of primary benefits of Mediawiki is that it has minimal technical requirements. This software package runs on most operating systems including Linux, Unix, and Microsoft Windows.

However, Mediawiki requires that the following be installed and properly configured:

- A web server such as **Apache** or **IIS**
- PHP** version 5.0 or later
- Database Server: **MySQL** or **PostgreSQL**

Although not required, MySQL users may find it useful to install phpMyAdmin to manage and backup the database.

Due to the nature of our wiki, a few security measures were employed:

- The wiki is configured for intranet use and is only viewable by computers on the institutional domain.
- To provide additional security, the web server is configured so that only specified computers can access the wiki, ensuring that only library faculty and staff can view or edit the wiki.

Authentication on access could provide the same level of security, but we chose not to require this, as library staff stated username/password access to the previous wiki had discouraged use.

### Our Wiki Backbone



Operating System



Apache Web Server



Database Server



PHP Server

## CURRENT USAGE

### Document Management

One of the principle uses for the wiki that we created thus far has been for document management. For this we simply mean organizing, storing, and accessing shared documents. This includes instruction documentation (evaluations, notes, PowerPoint presentation) that is used on a continual and recurring basis. Other examples include the library disaster/emergency plan, basic systems documentation, and liaison program assignments and activities. The chief advantage of Mediawiki is that unlike some wiki software, Mediawiki allows users to link to documents on a shared network drive/folder. So, rather than simply attaching one version of a document for viewing, users can open, edit, and resave the document from within the wiki.

### Knowledge Management

Another benefit to using Mediawiki is that it can function as an efficient knowledge management system. One example of a wiki as knowledge management system is the Library Employee Handbook, which finally took off because of the wiki's creation. Meant to be a resource for new and existing employees at the library, the Handbook contains a wealth of information specific to the library itself and to the larger institution. The strength of using the wiki to accomplish this Handbook is that updates can be as easy as changing the URL in a hyperlink, adding or removing a word/sentence/paragraph/section.

### Collaboration

Collaboration comes with the territory when you work in a library, and the wiki provides an effective venue for cooperative work on projects. Most collaboration in our wiki currently stems from committee work. Here are some examples:

- Document Creation – Collaboratively draft and publish wiki-based documents.
- Discussion – Users can brainstorm and suggest wording, format, and division of labor.
- Resource Sharing – Collect, store and share articles, websites, and other helpful references.
- Collaborative File Sharing – Link, edit, and review files on the local network.

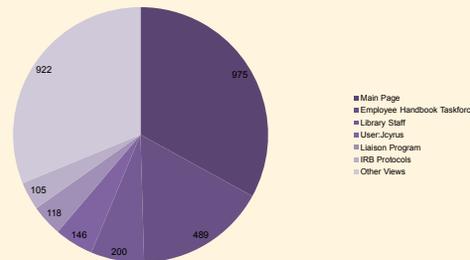
### Current Awareness

Staying up to date in our profession is both essential and difficult. Maintaining a section that addresses issues and trends in librarianship provides a central location for users to share and discover.

### Helpful Links for Library Staff

A section for websites and documents that answer recurrent information needs of the library staff. This space can serve as a repository for library-related, demographic, and statistical information used in the creation of grant proposals and administrative reports.

### PAGE VIEWS THROUGH FEBRUARY



## CONCLUSIONS

### Planning & Conversion

When we initially created the wiki, our first step was to transfer all of the data housed in Wetpaint over to Mediawiki. In terms of continuity and a starting point this made sense, but once the library started to actually use the wiki, we realized that transferring the existing information simply moved unused data from one location to another and maintained a less than adequate organizational structure. Wikis by their very nature are built to organize information, so take some time to sit down and think about how you will structure your content.

Things to think about include:

- Layout (overarching structure)
- Page Naming Conventions
- Tagging or Other Metadata

### Initial Presentation

You are going to have to pitch the wiki as a concept and as a system to either the administration or the entire library before it is actually put into place. Just remember to go the lowest common denominator route and stick to what it will require, what it will be used for, and a little bit about what it might be able to do. That's it. Wikis in and of themselves are not particularly complicated, but they can be overwhelming.

### Hook

The most difficult part of implementing anything new is getting buy-in, not only from administration, but from co-workers. The importance of drawing everyone into a project or a new system cannot be underestimated. When we put the wiki into operation, we assumed that the previous existence of a wiki and the general usefulness of Mediawiki would lead our co-workers to use it. Evidently, usefulness does not qualify as a hook in the adoption of new technology. It was not until our co-workers added content to the wiki through collaborative committee work that we saw increased interest in contributing on a larger scale. Figure out how the wiki will be most commonly and easily used, then base your pitch on that.