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

• 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.

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 continuing and recurring basis. Other examples include the library disaster/emergency plan, basic systems documentation, and laxen 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/fileserver. So, rather than simply attaching one version of a document for viewing, users can open, edit, and rebase the document from within the wiki.

Knowledge Management

Another benefit to using MediaWiki is that it can function as an effective 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 collaborative 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 USAGE

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 recurring 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

WETPAINT VS. MEDIAWIKI

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WETPAINT

- Free
- Web-based (external hosting)
- Minimal administration – Does not require technical background
- Well-Defined Features – Does not require upgrading, or additional installations

MEDIAWIKI

- 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 titles or full text.
- Document Management – Link to network files.

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PAGE VIEWS THROUGH FEBRUARY

IMPLEMENTATION

Installation

One of the 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.

Our Wiki Backbone

Operating System
Apache Web Server
MySQL
PHP Server

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 do a bit of reorganization 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 employee body as something that is going to be a part of everyone's day-to-day routine. Be ready to give that pitch and think about how you will structure your content.

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 naturally. Unfortunately, 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.