

What's a wiki?

Wikis are collaboratively created Web sites that allow any user to add, edit, or delete content. They are an exercise in group content creation, with no software-imposed limitations on contributors or content. The concept and name originated with Ward Cunningham, who also created the first one — the Portland Pattern Repository — in March 1995. Wiki is Hawaiian for “quick.”

The most well-known example of a wiki is Wikipedia, which is shown in the following figure. Wikipedia (www.wikipedia.org) is a free encyclopedia created by anyone who cares to contribute, maintained and edited by anyone who wishes to take that role. Some popular wiki engines are UseMod, TWiki, MoinMoin, PmWiki, and MediaWiki.

The rules governing how a wiki works are set by the person who initially sets up the wiki, but generally wikis are open to the public. Any visitor to the wiki can choose to add or edit a

page — presumably to provide useful content — or even to delete one. Wiki software tracks and saves all additions and changes, allowing content to be rolled back or recovered if needed.

Sometimes “contributors” provide wrong information (consciously or not) to a wiki. The whole philosophy, however, assumes that wiki members self-police, self-censor, and self-edit; inaccurate contributions are caught and removed quickly and with little effort.

Wikis are great for creative projects involving large groups who bring lots of different expertise to the table. Use them for project management, planning, content, and more. They are better at collecting information that grows and keeps its value over time — a daily weather report isn't a good candidate for a wiki, but an earthquake-monitoring and experience-collection wiki might be quite interesting.



The screenshot shows the Wikipedia Main Page interface. At the top right, there is a link to "Create an account or log in". Below this are navigation tabs for "article", "discussion", "view source", and "history". The main heading is "Main Page" with the subtitle "From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia." A welcome message follows, stating that Wikipedia is a free-content encyclopedia in many languages that anyone can edit. It mentions the English edition started in January 2001 and that there are 416,227 articles. Links are provided for "edit an article" and "sandbox". To the right of the welcome message are links for "Other languages", "Sister projects", "Table free", and "FAQ". A "BROWSE" section lists categories: CULTURE, GEOGRAPHY, HISTORY, LIFE, MATHEMATICS, SCIENCE, SOCIETY, and TECHNOLOGY. Below this are links for "Browse Wikipedia", "Article overviews", "Alphabetical index", and "Other category schemes". The "Today's featured article" section features an image of a classical building and text about Palladian architecture, mentioning architect Andrea Palladio. The "In the news" section includes a list item about Hamid Karzai being inaugurated as President of Afghanistan, with a small photo of him, and another item about the United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan.