

Summary of interview

- Frank is currently the **Head of Public Outreach** for the Foundation, and before joining Wikimedia, he was an active contributor and Board member of the German chapter.
 - Other key projects include **Wikipedia Academies** (introducing Wikipedia to content experts like professors in an effort to get them to contribute) and **Bookshelf** (an effort to get outreach materials out to chapters.)
 - Frank thinks that it may be time to shift from worrying about article count to quality concerns. This is what the German Wikipedia has done, and **too intense a focus on growth may be missing the point.**
 - We talked at length at the **clunkiness of Wikipedia's user interface** and the lack of transparency into the editing process. For example, it's hard to identify who the 2-3 primary contributors to an article are, and it's difficult to find people with similar interests. **Instituting some social networking components**, like interest groups, "tracking" your friends, and the like could be huge steps forward.
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Background

Started as an editor in 2005. I remember it like a second birthday, as a lot of editors do—2/16/05. I began contributing to German Wikipedia, and I've done some work in some other projects, too. Since joining the foundation, still try to be an editor/administrator on German Wikipedia. But now most active on meta wiki.

I was not only an author but also heavily involved with German chapter. At that time, it was smaller in terms of membership and also in terms of budget. At that time, no employees. Today, German chapter has an office. I was a member of the board which hired the first CEO of the German chapter.

In terms of projects also heavily involved in German Wikisource. Restarted German Wikiversity project. I actually started Wikipedia Academies event series.

Role at the Foundation

Now my role is to facilitate the work of the volunteers. To develop new models. What I'm currently doing now is to get Bookshelf project started and to do high level planning for other new projects that haven't yet been announced too.

Tell us about Wikipedia Academies. How was it started? What is the goal?

I started Wikipedia Academies before I worked at the foundation. It's based on my idea: we need to improve the quality of Wikipedia. So look to people who are subject matter experts and try to make them participate. We've had these outreach activities in Europe, South America, India, and now the U.S.

Goals of Wikipedia Academies are:

- To increase attendees' understanding of Wikipedia
- To enable attendees to edit Wikipedia (in order to get more content from the scientific community)
- Change the perception of Wikimedia in the public
- Enter into dialogue with subject matter experts – two way dialogue

So there was a PR component to it, too. If you have a partnership with an academy, library, perception of quality is increased. Partnering with Academies of sciences gives huge boost of confidence in perception of quality and reliability.

Is Wikipedia Academies scalable?

What I do is develop a model, documenting best practices, try it and hand it off to the volunteers.

What about Bookshelf?

Right now... our bookshelf is empty. Our goal is to prevent people from having to reinvent the wheel. We can provide the outreach documents to help them out.

Goal is to provide educational materials and enticing materials to people who want to run Wikipedia workshops or other outreach events. E.g. we have "10 reasons why" series:

- Fact base: 10 things you should know about Wikipedia.
- Persuasive: 10 reasons you should edit Wikipedia. We know some people would like to edit, but they don't know what needs to be done. Don't know where to start, what are the different skills Wikipedia needs

Project starts next month; most materials will be printed. We need a welcome to Wikipedia brochure. FAQs, need to answer these.

We'll also have online learning videos. A person who explains something. More convincing than the help pages. Help system is not very good. We all know that. We're wanting to improve the online component.

We want to give models that could be picked up by the chapters. They take up materials, improve and distribute them. Biggest risk is that the chapters say, we don't like it. We want to make the volunteers part of the process – want to integrate them.

What other projects did you undertake in the past?

"Wikipedia in the classroom," which focuses on enhancing media literacy of pupils 16-18. A lot of people that age take Wikipedia for fact, think everything is true. We wanted to go to schools and teach these pupils media literacy. Taking content from Wikipedia is different than other sources. We are giving a look behind the scenes.

We also started a project to encourage older people to use—Wikipedia for senior citizens. Seniors who already had experiences in the online world are the ones we focus on. We organized workshops in internet cafes for these people.

What about the increase in reverts we're seeing?

No answers to the wikilawyering or reverting of edits of newcomers. I know it's happening. The community gets closer and closer, more homogenous. Social aspect of the group of Wikipedia authors – that they are getting more closed and creating own language, not as helpful to newcomers as they could be.

What about the plateau in contributors?

Article count is growing, but our core community, people with more than 100 edits per month, is not. If people write and create more articles, but the core community that looks after it, that has them on their watch list, if this doesn't grow, then fewer people will have more articles to watch. Ecosystem gets out of control.

No numbers but personal experience as a member of the German Wikipedia community, this community has been more focused on quality than quantity. Intentionally kept the number of articles smaller. Instead of 200 articles on evil characters in Batman, it's one article. Perhaps now our focus has to be more on quality.

What groups would you like to see more represented?

Would like to have more women, more older people. Retired scientists would be great. We had a retired academic contribute so many articles.

Focus on 2009 and 2010: First, we're doing a broad approach rather than focusing on a specific group. We did Bookshelf since it's most scalable with online videos, print materials for chapters.

German chapter is further developing the model of working with older people.

Any ideas for improving Wikipedia?

Add social networking features and remove technical barriers for participation:

- Make it easier to get a new user account; setting up your user page and uploading a picture as part of the account creation process (giving Wikipedia a more human face)
- Fight the "everything-is-done" impression: Let new editors specify their areas of interest during account creation. Then create an "articles of your interest area that need help today" feature
- Connect new users to others who are in that subject area – "People who are also interested in what I'm interested in." Hook people into parts of the community.
- Embrace non-tech savvy users: add WYSIWYG editing functionality
- Add features to keep track what your friends do – "Articles your friends improved in last X hours."
- Add a rating feature with an option to keep track of which articles your friends rated. Could be a reason for you to come back.
- Add a feature to invite people to Wikipedia (like Facebook and other sites have)

Improve the collaborative and social features of Wikipedia.

Any other thoughts about Wikipedia?

To get people excited, we need to reinvent the product itself. It looks like a website created in 2001. It feels like that. To increase participation we have to improve the platform.