



Wikipedia and Global Development

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[TRANSCRIPT PREPARED FROM A TAPE RECORDING.]

P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. WITZEL: Good morning. I think we have all the technical glitches fixed and most everybody's made their way into the room. We may have a few more people sneaking in as the talk goes on.

My name's David Witzel. I'm with Forum One Communications. We're helping sponsor this talk with the Center for Global Development and the Brookings Institution. We are really pleased to see everybody here. Thanks so much for coming. How many Wikipedia users are in the room? Okay. Well, that's reassuring. And how many people have edited, made changes? Okay. Well, we've got a higher than average percentage of editors to users, I think, there. It's excellent to see.

I think this is a great opportunity. One of the things that was fun, to look through the list of RSVPs, was to see the interesting mix of the kinds of people that are showing up for this. I think CGD and Forum One were comparing notes about our normal audiences and, you know, there's the, you know, the hard core international development crowd, and then there's kind a your Web geeky crowd. And I think we've got a little bit of both. We've got folks from government as well as nonprofits and commercial enterprises here, a lot of folks with an international focus but also those with a strong domestic focus.

I think it's interesting to see that all of these groups think that the lessons from Jimmy Wales and Wikipedia have potential applications to the work that they're doing, and I think, in particular, have a lot of application to the social sector, broadly, and so I think that a lot of great opportunities for us to be working on these issues.

I wanted to thank you for coming and introduce Lawrence MacDonald, who's the director of communications and policy for the Center for Global Development. Lawrence is an old

friend and collaborator and it's always nice to be able to come to him with new things, and then he'll make them happen. So it's thanks to him that we're all able to be here in this room today.

Thanks, Lawrence.

[Applause.]

MR. MacDONALD: Dave and I have a mutual admiration society. Generally, if there is something new, I hear about it first from Forum One, and typically first from Dave, and that includes hearing about Wikipedia. And usually when I hear about something new from Dave, I think you know this is just "too far out," and then the next thing I know, about two weeks later I'm trying to persuade other people that this is the next big thing. And Wikipedia has been like that.

This event is part of a series that the Center for Global Development has been organizing to try and bring together the world of development and the world of new information technology which I like to think of, really, as new technology for the creation and sharing of ideas, which is really at the heart of the development process.

I want to thank Ann Florini from Brookings for generously cosponsoring this, and also Canada's International Development Research Center for helping to make this possible, and of course Forum One.

I'm also especially pleased to be able to welcome one of our cofounders and the chairman of our board, Ed Scott. Without Ed's vision of CDG, none of us would be here today.

Ed is a technology entrepreneur, deeply committed to development and had the vision to see what the center could be today.

Ed, would you just stand up for a minute, please. I want to thank you for what you've done for us.

[Applause.]

MR. MacDONALD: I think we're also joined today by Adam Waldman, a member of our board. I don't know if Adam's arrived yet, and our president, Nancy Birdsall is here today.

It's now my pleasure to introduce our speaker.

Every once in a while somebody does something that has never been done before.

Reinhold Messner climbed Mount Everest alone with oxygen. Chuck Yeager flew faster than the speed of sound, and Christian Barnard performed the first human heart transplant.

I think Jimmy Wales belongs on that list because he has done something that everybody thought was impossible. He has created the world's largest encyclopedia. It's written by volunteers. It's available for free and anybody can change any article on it, any time.

To give you an idea of just how impossible that sounds, anybody who has never used Wikipedia, when you tell them about this, their response quickly is "That's impossible."

As you'll hear today from Jimmy, it's not impossible. I've been very interested to see that one of his goals is to have a free encyclopedia available to everybody in the world, in her or his language, at any time, and also recently he's been talking about making it available to people who did not have Web access in print or CD-ROM or other forms.

We have an excellent audience here today. I've encouraged Jimmy to talk for maybe 45-50 minutes so we'll have time for questions and answers, and I see this is very much a two-way process, where we not only learn from him but he has an opportunity to hear from some of the expertise in this room.

Please welcome Jimmy Wales. Thank you.

[Applause.]

MR. WALES: Thank you; it's really nice to be here. So I guess, first of all, Reinhold Messner may have climbed Mount Everest alone. I absolutely did not do this alone. In fact my job is mostly to travel around the world, accepting people's thanks for all the work that other people have done. So that's kind of nice, I suppose.

In 1962, Charles Van Doren, who was later a senior editor at Britannica, said, "The ideal encyclopedia should be radical. It should stop being safe." But if you know the history of Britannica since 1962, it's been anything but radical. It's still a very safe, stolid, old-fashioned encyclopedia.

Wikipedia, on the other hand, begins with a very radical idea, and the radical idea is for all of us to imagine a world in which every single person on the planet is given free access to the sum of all human knowledge. That's what we're doing.

Oh, dear, my slides are messed up. Well, sorry about that. The Wikipedia logo has gotten on top a picture of Oleyu [ph]. So Oleyu Mamadou Yallo [ph] is--he knows something. Keira Wales, my daughter, also hiding behind the Wikipedia logo there, she wants to learn something. But Oleyu lives in Mali and Keira lives in Florida.

Gwaka [ph], who is a Wikipedia volunteer, is here to help.

The point of this story is Gwaka goes--he lives in Mali, on occasion, he's back and forth between there and Holland, where he normally lives, and he goes around in Mali and helps local people. He helps gather their knowledge and put it into the encyclopedia. He types it in for them in their local language, but they also write it in French and then it gets translated into English.

The point of this story is when you think about Wikipedia as a global movement, it isn't just something, in the developing world it isn't something that we think of as here's something that a bunch of rich white people made for you and here's a gift.

It's helping people to join the global conversation. We expect the knowledge to flow in both directions.

So what is the Wikimedia Foundation? The Wikimedia Foundation's the nonprofit organization that I founded. The aim of the Wikimedia Foundation is to distribute that free encyclopedia to every single person on the planet.

Wikimedia Foundation is responsible for Wikipedia and all of our sister projects, which I'll tell you a little bit about later on.

We're funded primarily by donations from the general public. So the vast majority of the money that we get is donations in the 50 to \$100 range. We occasionally have fund-raisers on the site.

We're also partnering with select institutions, so, for example, Yahoo donated some servers for our South Korea facility.

Kinesnet [ph], a Dutch educational consortium, has provided servers and other technical help for us in Amsterdam for our facility there.

So what is Wikipedia? It looks like everyone in the room, or nearly everyone raise their hand on the question of how many people have used Wikipedia, but I didn't see how many people said they had edited. So how many people here have actually edited? Oh, that's actually pretty good. You're beating out--I go to a lot of tech conferences and of course everybody there has used it but not so many have edited. So that's really good to see.

So the important thing that people usually understand by the time they started editing, but they may not have understood when they first seen the site, is really what the idea behind it is.

The most important thing is that we're a freely licensed encyclopedia. We're written by thousands of volunteers in many languages. But what do I mean by free? What I mean here is free as in speech, not free as in beer. This is an old saying from the free software movement.

So if you're familiar with the concepts of open source software, it's the same core idea. These four freedoms, the four fundamental freedoms of free software, were first put forward by Richard Stallman, many years ago.

The freedoms that you have, of what you can do with our work, you have the freedom to copy our work, you can modify it, you can redistribute it, and you can redistribute modified versions, and you can do all of this commercially or noncommercially. I think I want to answer this.

[Laughter.]

All right. And in fact I'll even go so far as to turn off my phone. I'm actually a very experienced speaker and I should know better but--okay.

So this is really important and I think this has a great deal of importance, particularly in the developing world. It has importance because you don't have to ask us permission for any sort of a project that you want to do with the content.

If you want to take this content and distribute it to schools, you can. If you want to take this content and have people translate it into another language that we're not strong in, you can. You don't even have to ask us. Of course it's much better if you do work with us but the point is all of our work is given away freely into the commons, and that's a really important part of our work.

So how big is Wikipedia? The English Wikipedia is the largest, it has over 500 million words. It's actually getting very close to one billion words now. I think in a few more months time, I'll be able to say we've got one billion words, in English alone.

The English encyclopedia is larger than Britannica and Incarta combined, and the German, which is the second large of the Wikipedia languages, is equal in size to Brockhaus. Brockhaus is the German equivalent of a traditional Britannica style encyclopedia. Globally, we're in many, many languages. We've got over 800,000 articles in English. We've got over 300,000 in German. We've also got over 100,000 in French, Japanese, Polish, Italian and Swedish, and in fact French is getting very close now to 200,000.

We've got over 50,000 in Dutch, Spanish and Portuguese. As you can see, we're really strong in the European languages and not so strong elsewhere. We're very strong in Japanese, is the only real exception.

We've got 2.5 million articles across 200 languages but I really feel like that the 200 language number isn't really a fair number for us to claim. Two hundred is the number of Web sites that we have set up. A lot of those are just sitting there waiting for someone to come along and even translate the interface.

The real numbers are we've got 30 languages that have at least 10,000 articles, and we've got 75 languages with at least a thousand articles.

So a 1000 articles isn't much of an encyclopedia but that's the point at which I say that's where we've got an active community. It's a small community, typically, five to ten regulars who are coming by and writing articles. But that's the point at which it starts to get critical mass because of course the first thousand articles that are written are typically on very big and popular subjects, so then those language editions start to get traffic from search engines and start to become better known.

Also as you'll see, as I continue to talk, the process of working in Wikipedia is a very social process. Most people, writing an encyclopedia sounds like a very lonely sort of task, but

in fact the way we do things, it's a very social task, and so once you have a thousand articles in a small community then things really start to build because there's more and more people to get to know and socialize with.

So we have several other projects under the umbrella of the Wikimedia Foundation. In addition to Wikipedia, we have Wikshinary. Wikshinary is the dictionary project.

All of these projects, for the most part, they grew out of social pressures within the community to do things.

In the early days of Wikipedia, people would get into some kind of arguments about things like etymologies of words, definitions of words, synonyms, antonyms. All that sort of stuff really belongs more in a dictionary, not in an encyclopedia. It's a fundamentally different type of reference work.

And so to ease those tensions, we realized, well, some people really are wanting to work on a dictionary, so we should provide them with a place to do that, and so that was the birth of Wikshinary.

Wikshinary is nowhere near as large as Wikipedia of course but it's just now coming into its own. If you think about the usefulness of an encyclopedia article, it's more or less stand-alone; but the way you see a dictionary, it needs to have a lot of words in it already. Otherwise, you don't think to go to it. And so those projects, all the different language editions of the Wikshinary are now just becoming usable.

We have Wikibooks. For me, personally, Wikibooks is the most exciting and important of our projects for the long run. We have this big picture vision, the mission of giving a free encyclopedia to every single person on the planet.

But a part of what we view that mission as, we don't only want to give people the encyclopedia but we want to give them all the literacy materials that they need to be able to get themselves to the point where they could actually use the encyclopedia.

So Wikibooks is an effort to create freely-licensed textbooks in all the languages of the world, a complete curriculum, kindergarten through the university level, and right now there are some 10,000 modules started there. It's by no means mature but it's a very exciting group of people who are really working away on trying to make that dream come true.

We have things like Wikiquote. Wikiquote is a place where people can put--you know, it's like Bartlett's familiar quotations. Again, this grew out of social pressure within the community. People were putting way too many quotations from famous people into articles and getting into fights about it, and so it was kind of nice to, you know, say, well, yes, we need two or three quotes from Benjamin Franklin, not three hundred, let's move those out somewhere.

And, you know, that's a case where there are people who are really excited and interested in collecting quotes, and that's what they do, and finding the sites and the references and verifying the quotes.

And so we wanted to have a place for that kind of work to proceed.

We have the Wikimedia Commons. The Wikimedia Commons is where we've decided to gather all of the media files from all of the different languages.

So the story I love to tell about this, to help you understand why we collect everything into one place like this is, if you were working in the English language encyclopedia and you decided that you needed a picture of the Eiffel Tower, you could probably guess that you could go and look in the French encyclopedia and find it there. That would be correct. You can go to the French Wikipedia and find several photos of the Eiffel Tower.

But if you were looking for a photo of something in Thailand, you probably wouldn't think to go look in the Dutch Wikipedia, but in fact there's a very prominent, very active Dutch contributor who happens to live in Thailand and he takes photos of local things in Thailand and uploads them to the Dutch Wikipedia.

Well, this is a problem because the media files were becoming disjointed, even though they're highly reusable across all languages.

So we decided to gather all that stuff together in the Wikimedia Commons.

And finally, Wikinews is our most recent really major project that went through a long process of community discussion before we launched it.

The idea here is we've gotten a lot of very favorable notice in the press and we know that we do a really good job on certain types of current events.

So, for example, when the London bombings happened, we had an article, within minutes, that was very quickly being fleshed out with a synthesis of news reports from lots of different places, and one of the things that we do really well with current events is filling in background information.

So when the tsunami happened, you could turn on CNN and see over and over and over again film of the wave coming in and people's vacation footage and screaming and so on.

But what you couldn't find out very easily from television is who are these people who live here? What is their government like? What's the history of the area? What's the culture like? All those kinds of things, all the details about the village that were affected. All that stuff is really filled out very well in Wikipedia, and so that's one of our real strengths.

So the idea was let's take that sort of thing, the current events reporting, and also have a site for that, Wikinews. And so there's a whole group of people, the Wikinewsies, who are working on building news resources there.

So how popular is Wikipedia. Well, obviously, in this room it seems to be reasonably popular. We're now a top 30 Web site by some measures, and Alexa.com, which is a Web site which ranks the traffic of lots of Web sites, or of all the Web sites out there, they say that we have a broader reach than the New York Times.

So by "reach," what that means is the number of unique visitors. So individual people who see our Web site in a given day, there are more people who see Wikipedia than see the New York Times. More people see us than the LA Times, The Wall Street Journal, Msnbc.com., the Chicago Tribune.

But the really interesting thing is that we have a greater reach than all of those outlets combined. So more people are looking at Wikipedia in a day than all of these things combined.

That means that when journalists ask me some questions about the mainstream media, I'm now able to say, Do you mean Wikipedia? And that's sort a fun.

[Laughter.]

We're doing around 2.4--and this is a little bit out a day number--but around 2.4 billion page views monthly.

So if you take a look here, this is a graph, showing our growth over time, and the fun thing about this graph and the reason I like to show it is about right in here somewhere, is when-- the Web site that's marked in red there is called About.com and it was purchased by the New York

Times for \$410 million. What's really interesting and exciting about this to us is that we are essentially an all-volunteer effort.

We now have three employees, we have our lead software developer, we have my assistant in the office, and my assistant has an assistant to keep my travel schedule straight, and those are the only three employees.

Everybody else, including me, is volunteers. We have over 10 servers in multiple data centers. We have servers in the United States. We have servers in Paris, Amsterdam and South Korea.

And all of this is managed daily by volunteers. Even the technical infrastructure.

So the people who are actually making sure that the servers are up and running, they're installing software, they're improving software, they're rebooting the servers when they go down, all that kind a stuff is all done by volunteers, and it's really a lotta fun for the volunteers to take a look at a graph like this and see, you know, where this ragtag bunch a lunatics on the Internet and yet we're really kicking butt on these major corporate sites. So that's a lotta fun for us..

Just to give you an idea of the complexity of the whole operation behind the scenes, and I know this isn't really a technical talk, but I just want to give you some flavor of what it's like or how this actually all works.

Out here is the Internet as a whole and people on the Internet request content and they request it from this group of servers up here, these cone-shaped looking symbols. Those are called squids. They're the caching server. So if they, if the squids have seen the page already, they store it in memory and they're ready to cough it up very, very quickly.

If they haven't seen the page before or within a certain period of time, or they have to customize it for you in some way, for example, if you're logged in and you have some special

preferences set, then they have to request it from the Apache servers, which there are now--this is a very old graph, there are now a lot more of those, over a hundred of those.

The Apaches actually compute the page and they do it by looking in the database, and again we have a lot more database servers than that now, and so they're able to get the page and then send it back to the user, and then there's some other--you know--a server for the images and we have a mail server, DNS, all those kinds of associated things.

So it's actually a very complex Web form but it's all run using free software. We have a very firm rule within our Web cluster, that we use only freely licensed software. So it's GNU [ph], Linux, Apache, PHP, all of the stuff that really runs the Internet is freely-licensed software and that's a really important point of pride for us. So that's a core part of our mission.

So now I want to talk about how Wikipedia actually works. How do we actually build the content? And there's really two views out there of how Wikipedia works. The first view is that Wikipedia is some kind of emergent phenomenon, that it's a pseudo Darwinian process, and there's a quote from a former editor of Britannica, a former editor in chief of Britannica who said--in a sarcastic way he said this, and he was being critical of Wikipedia.

"Some unspecified quasi-Darwinian process will assure that those writings and editings by contributors of greatest expertise will survive. Articles will eventually reach a steady state that corresponds to the highest degree of accuracy. Does someone actually believe this? Evidently so."

He's making fun of this view, and I think rightly so. The other view of Wikipedia is that we're a community of thoughtful users. So the best analogy I know of to explain the emergent phenomenon to you is the idea that Wikipedia is built by thousands and thousands of individual users

who don't know each other and they each contribute just a little bit to Wikipedia, and that somehow, as if by magic, out of this emerges a coherent body of work.

You'll see this view implicitly in a lot of criticism of Wikipedia and also in a lot of praise of Wikipedia, is this idea of the wisdom of crowds or swarm intelligence, that sort of thing.

The other view, and you can tell my bias as to which view I think is true, because I put pictures of a bunch of my friends on the slide, is that we're a community, a dedicated group of a few hundred volunteers who know each other and work to guarantee the quality and integrity of the content.

So when I first read this Britannica editor's critique of Wikipedia, I thought, well, you know, this is really interesting because for me, I've set a personal goal for myself. My goal in life is to give a free encyclopedia, free high-quality encyclopedia to every single person on the planet.

I really don't care anything about Wikis, I don't care anything about the community. And that's not completely true, I love the community because they're all my friends.

But, ultimately, my goal in life is the free encyclopedia. So if it turns out that the emergent view is true or the community view is true, there are actually implications for how I should run the project.

If the emergent model is true, then we probably should have some reputation mechanisms, like E-bay or slashdot [ph] has, that is to say, if the bulk of the work at Wikipedia is being done by thousands and thousands of anonymous people we don't know, then in order to track that, in order to figure out who's doing good work or not, we probably need some kind of a numeric rating system. This is what E-bay does, so you can go on E-bay and see that people have 500 plus ratings and no negative ratings, and that sort of thing.

In the community model, on the other hand, reputation is a natural outgrowth of human interactions. Within the community of Wikipedia, people gain reputations for doing good work or bad work, depending on a whole variety of rich human interactions.

Just as an example, you might have a user who you could say this person does really fantastic work in biology but don't, for God's sake, let him anywhere near Israel/Palestine because he goes berserk. And we have cases like this. We have cases of people who are good in some areas; not in others.

We have cases of people who do really good work but they're jerks. All those kinds of things which is exactly the kind of complex reputations that people have inside any ordinary organization. Inside a business or a church group or a family or any kind of human organization, you have this really complex web of associations about different people, that's very powerful.

The other implication is that if we're like ants in an anthill, then the individual users are tiny and have no power. Just like with ants, if you step on a few ants it doesn't really affect the overall growth of a colony.

Whereas in the community model, the individual users, the ones who are in the community and who are making a lot of noise and talking about the project a lot, are actually powerful and must be respected.

They have to be respected because they're the ones who are actually doing the work.

So I did some research into the edit histories of Wikipedia to find out which of these views is actually true.

I had expected to find something like an 80/20 rule, that 80 percent of the work was being done by 20 percent of the users.

But it turns out it's actually much, much tighter than that. Over half of all the edits to English Wikipedia, that's the example I have, although in all of the different language editions the basic distribution is very similar--over half of all the edits are done by under one percent of the users. That means 615 people are responsible for half of the edits to English Wikipedia. That's a phenomenal thing if you really think about the quantity of edits that these people are doing.

These are the people who are really working and really writing Wikipedia.

The most active 2 percent, which is around 1750 people, have done almost three-quarters of all the work.

So, again, this is the core community, these, this 2 percent of all the people who use Wikipedia is doing the vast majority of the work in Wikipedia and so that's a really important thing to understand when you think about how does Wikipedia get the level of quality that we do get?

The reason is there are a lot of people who know each other and keep an eye on each other, and have reputations at stake within the community.

So how do we ensure quality? What is it about the software that empowers people to do good work? I think the most important concept to understand is the concept of realtime peer review. Rather than using a gatekeeper model for who's allowed to edit, instead of using accountability model which says that every edit that people make is publicly accessible, so if you come in and you start making a lot of bad edits, we can just click on your name and see all your bad edits and revert them and then kick you out of the project.

That's very different from trying to vet people, up front, as to whether or not they should be allowed to edit. So every edit that goes on the site, every single edit that's made goes into a recent changes page, which is watched literally by hundreds of people daily.

In the smaller language, the recent changes page can actually be monitored, every single edit can be monitored by one person. In the old days, the very old days, nearly five years ago now, I used to track every single change to English Wikipedia. Nowadays of course the recent changes page moves so fast, no one could possibly, one person could not possibly keep up with it.

And so what has happened in the community, there have been tools that have evolved to deal with this. We take all of the recent changes and they get bumped into an IRC channel, like a chat room channel, and then people have written software which read the changes coming from that channel and analyze them for certain kinds of suspicious behavior.

So, for example, if you see an article that went from, you know, 20,000 characters down to six characters, then it's probably not good. It probably says "Hi, mom" or something like that. That's the typical type of quick vandalism that we get.

And then also users can set up their own personal watch list. So, for example, if you're an expert or someone who's, as an amateur, really, really interested in some particular topic, say, for example, dogs, you have a thing about dogs, and you know a lot about dog breeds, you can, as you go around editing, you can add all of those articles to your watch list, so then each day when you log in, you're able to see, you know, what's changed in your area.

Then we also have a new pages tool, where people can see all of the new pages that are created. That's a common place where nonsense could conceivably come in. A lotta times people make, you know, new pages, ASDF, ASDF, and, you know, the content says "Hi, mom" and obviously we delete that immediately because it couldn't possible become an encyclopedia article.

The page history that we have is a really important part of the way this works as well. We save every single revision of every Wikipedia article that has ever existed, with only a handful of exceptions.

We occasionally actually delete things from the revision history. If they're libelists or if they're copyright violations that somebody's complained about, that sort of thing. But by and large, for almost every single Wikipedia article, we have every version that has ever been there.

And what this means is if an article starts to go downhill, anyone can come and revert to the previous good version.

The other thing that you can do, as you can see here, you can compare two versions of an article very easily. Our software does a really nice job of making it easy for you to compare.

If you had to come in every single day and say, well, someone changed something about this article but I have no idea what, so I have to reread the article every single day, you would give up pretty quickly.

Well, with this tool you can actually very quickly see what changes have been made and decide whether you think those are good changes or not.

And so this is what the users who monitor particular topic areas, this is what they do. They come in, they look at their watch list to see what's changed, they click on the disk to see what's actually different about the article, and they can quickly, at a glance, decide if they think that change needs to be challenged or reverted or whatever.

The other thing that's really important to understand is that we have a very strong amount of organization by the community. One of the things that I like to rant about, particularly to technical audiences, is there's this notion of social software.

Social software is software that people use in some sort of social way, and I always joke that for some programmers, the point of social software seems to be to try to replace the social with the software, which is a really bad idea.

What we do instead, all of the--the software tries really, really hard not to make a priori assumptions about how people want to interact or how people want to get the work done.

An example of this is our vote for deletion page. So for various reasons, we want to delete certain articles. A new article is created and we want to delete it. One of the reasons could be if it's ASDF, ASDF is the title of the article, and the content is "Hi, mom," we can say this is never going to be an encyclopedia article, we might as well just delete it, and in a case like that, any of the administrators can just come in and delete it and nobody will say anything, and that's called a speedy deletion.

But in other cases, we need to delete things because it's a hoax or it's just not notable enough or there's no sources, that sort a thing, and for those it can be borderline.

And so whenever anything is borderline, we need a community process to figure out whether or not it should be deleted or not, and the process that's grown up organically in the community is the votes for deletion page.

This example that I'm showing you is a film called Twisted Issues. It says this is supposed to be an underground film from 1988 but it miserably fails the Google test. So what's the Google test? The Google test is if you look something up in Google and you can't find it, it probably doesn't exist.

[Laughter.]

It's not a perfect test. There actually are a handful of things on the planet which aren't at all in Google but it's a pretty good rough cut. I mean, it definitely raises your suspicion, if you look for the title of a movie and you can't even find it in Google.

So if somebody says yes, delete, please, delete, delete. But then somebody says, wait a second, I found it. I found it in the Film Threat Video Guide list of 20 underground films you must see; so it may be notable.

Somebody else says keep it, it needs a lotta work. Somebody says, oh, I found it at IMDB. Keep, keep.

And so this article ended up being "kept" and cleaned up and made into a legitimate article.

Well, as you can see, this is called votes for deletion, but the software does not enforce the voting mechanism. This is just a Wiki page. It's just a page that anyone can edit and you can write anything you want on this page.

What happens here is the social norms for editing the page are not enforced by the software. They're enforced by the community and so when administrators come through and look at this page, rather than it having to be a very rigid mechanism, they can actually make a judgment about what to do.

In a case like this, you could have 37 people who vote to delete and three who vote to keep, and the three who vote to keep could win because if it's near the end and they say wait a second, nobody knew this but I found it in a book and I'm going to clean it up tomorrow.

And additionally, these are trusted users, people who vote and we've never heard of them. The vote would carry less weight, in general, than somebody who we trust and know because they've done a lotta work on the site.

So the idea here is that it's really an important part of our work, that the software is very open-ended and does not force people into any particular mode of work.

So we have this really large community now and so there's always the question of how do we organize things. Who's in charge? How's the community actually organized?

And the answer is that we have a very confusing but a workable mix of consensus. So by consensus what I mean is we really, really strongly discourage people from voting on the content of articles. The reason for this, if you think about, suppose you look around the room and you see you've got 80 percent support for one position.

Well, if there's going to be a vote, then you can pretty safely dig in your heels and just ignore the 20 percent and not deal with their objections.

But given the nature of Wikipedians, if you've got 20 percent of Wikipedians who disagree about something, that's actually fairly substantial. That's a group of people who needs to be listened to. They're thoughtful, they're kind, they're trying to make an objection to the way the article is written. Something probably needs to be done about it.

And so particularly with text, there's almost always a better way to write it, a way that acknowledges the dissenting voice, a way that goes meta as we call it, and steps back from the issue and says, well, there's a legitimate debate here so we can't take a side on the debate, we're only going to describe the debate in a way that's satisfactory to more and more people.

This works very, very well in practice. There is of course also some democracy, some voting, and you saw an example for that at votes for deletion, but as I said, at votes for deletion, the voting is never, it's never rigidly enforced, it is never a binding vote.

Instead, most of the voting that we do is a means of gaining consensus rather than a means of enforcing some decision.

So to give an example of a case where we pretty much have to vote, suppose we have an article about the Eiffel Tower and we have two photos of the Eiffel Tower, one at daytime, one at night.

We want to put maybe both in the article, if we've got room, but the first photo in the article has to be either one or the other.

A decision has to be made and if people are disagreeing about it, one of the ways we can resolve the disagreement is to hold a poll, to hold a vote, because most people are very reasonable and they'll say, well, I think we should have the picture of the Eiffel Tower at night, it looks nicer, but if the majority goes against me I'm willing to drop it and let it go.

They're willing to go along. So the voting is actually a means of assessing community opinion in order to gain consensus in cases where a decision has to be made but people are willing to let it go if the majority goes against them.

There is a certain amount of aristocracy within the community. I alluded to this earlier when I showed you the votes for deletion page. One of the users who is on there, Rick Kaye, is a very famous Wikipedian who's done an enormous amount of high quality work on pages like votes for deletion, and so we would know. If Rick Kaye says it's an IMDB, it's in IMDB, period. You don't even have to question it because Rick has a stellar reputation.

Furthermore, he's been around for a long time, he knows the history of the votes for deletion page, he knows a lot of the traditional precedents and problems and things that have risen.

So as an administrator who's going through making a decision, you would tend naturally to listen to Rick Kaye more than seven people who you've never even heard of before, who may have just shown up for the purpose of getting this article to be saved.

One of the issues that we have would be, for example, a non-notable garage band, they play, you know, they play such important venues as their mom's house and the friend's garage, and they want an article about them in Wikipedia, and, lo and behold, when we try to delete their article, eight or nine people show up to vote to save it and tell us how important this band is.

We can just ignore them. There's a certain amount of aristocracy here. One of the examples of this that I like to give is of Angela Beasley. Angela Beasley was elected to the board of the Wikipedia Foundation from the community.

She had more than twice the number of votes of the person who wasn't elected. She's an enormously popular and enormously powerful Wikipedian and I always say that, particularly in the English Wikipedia, Angela could break any of the rules of Wikipedia and get away with it.

People would tend to support her. But the irony of that is is that the reason she has that kind of respect and influence is that she's the one person who you know would never ever ever break any of the rules of Wikipedia.

In fact I like to tease her. She's the only person who actually knows all the rules of Wikipedia. So there is that element of aristocracy or respect for people who have proven themselves, over time, to be good and valuable to the project.

And then there's a little bit of monarchy and that's my role in this whole process. I've given this talk before in Germany, and the next day in the newspaper the headline said, "I am the queen of England," which is not exactly what I said.

[Laughter.]

The point that I was trying to make there, is that in the free software world, in the culture of free software, there's a long tradition of the benevolent dictator model.

So if you look at what goes into the Linux kernel [?], you have Linus Torvalds who ultimately make that decision. You've got Larry Wall with Perl. You've got all these examples of the benevolent dictator.

Well, the reason for that is not that free software programmers have a tendency to tyranny. It's just that when you're running a volunteer effort and you're trying not to get too bogged down in formal decision making mechanisms, it's often better to have a decision by a thoughtful person than to have exactly the right decision, or to have a decision that's a 100 percent supported by everybody.

And so it makes a lotta sense in those contexts, that if there is a kind and thoughtful person who will listen to others, that they have a certain amount of social capital to be able to make decisions in an effective way, and the projects that have been successful, the free software projects that have been successful, have been successful, in part, because there's a certain type of personality who's really good at that.

If you're a real jerk, people just will stop working with you and so those projects tend to fail.

On the other hand, I completely reject the benevolent dictator model. I think it's deeply morally inappropriate for any one person, even me, to be the benevolent dictator of all human knowledge. I don't want the job; thank you.

But, rather, we still do have the need to make certain decisions, and so the comparison to the queen of England is that we are slowly evolving, much like the British system, away from the benevolent dictator model which we, in the early days, there was no other real alternative, and slowly but surely we're building institutions in the community and steadily reducing my power.

My goal in life is to just wave at parades, and things like that. We could celebrate my birthday, if you want, but, really, I don't want to be the benevolent dictator of anything.

However, even today, there is a certain amount of power that I have within the community which turned out to be very, very helpful for our openness and our democratic ideals.

So, to give an example, there was a neo Nazi web site which discovered Wikipedia, and they said, oh, this is horrible, they'd never seen such a terrible thing, it's some kind of Jewish conspiracy, it's awful.

But they discovered the votes for deletion page and they said, oh, look, look, look-- we can go in and delete the pages we don't like. All we have to do is go in and take over Wikipedia and vote down the pages we don't like.

They said, well, there's 40,000 of us, there's only a few of them, we're going to come in and take over Wikipedia. So they collected an article and they stormed in to take over Wikipedia. Eighteen of them showed up, so that's Nazi math, 40,000, eighteen.

And so in that particular case, there was no danger anyway. Eighteen people cannot affect Wikipedia. That particular vote ended up being something like 85 to 18, and as I said before, there is this aristocracy who could have just simply ignored them anyway.

But people said, okay, well, this is a real problem. What are we going to do if this group comes back and they're even more organized? What about another group, somebody who decides to subvert votes for deletion from its benevolent, good will sort of attitude now, into some kind of ideological power struggle over what goes in Wikipedia?

And I said this is still my role in the community. My role in the company is to defend the community from that sort of thing, so that we can feel comfortable and free, having things like votes for deletion and keeping it very open.

If Nazis come and try to take over Wikipedia, forget the rules, I'll just ban them, period. That's it. We're not going to allow Wikipedia to be taken over by Nazis. It's absurd.

[Laughter.]

And so, you know, it's a dangerous position for me to be in, or it isn't sustainable in the long run, and I don't want to be in that position in the long run. But for now, as we're still a very young project and a very young community, it's actually very helpful.

People know me, they know I'm thoughtful and reasonable. I'm not going to do anything insane. So it's helpful, that then the community can feel empowered to take decisions without worrying.

We don't have to overdesign our social processes to handle edge cases that aren't going to come up anyway, or if they do come up, then I'll just bang people on the head to stop it.

The final point, then, is that Wikipedians are very flexible about our social methodology. We value the results over the process. So we've never become too firmly fixed to any one method of making decisions because what we really care about is the quality of our work and the freedom of our work. So, thank you.

[Applause.]

So we have lots of time available for questions. I finished in about 40 minutes instead of 45, and we've actually got an hour and a half total, I think. So let's go. There's a couple of microphones, if people want to stand and ask questions, or--and here we have one. I thought she was getting up to leave.

MS. : No; no. I have a bunch of questions but one of the areas that I do work in is looking at how people use support groups for health information and there's a wonderful site called braintalk.org, about neurological disorders, and they're talking about making it a Wiki.

Do you see any limitations to Wikis? Do you see any sectors of the information society that should remain expert-driven? And my other question is what about subtler influences than Nazis? For instance, just last night, I asked my husband, who's an expert on civil rights and predatory lending, to take a look at some of the search terms on Wikipedia.

He said they're great, but he said, you know, the pay day loan page was written by somebody who's in favor of pay day loans.

MR. WALES: Oh, okay; interesting.

MS. : And I tried to get him to change it and he wouldn't.

[Laughter.]

MR. WALES: Try again!

MS. : So I have two questions.

Are there limitations to Wikis, in terms of expert-driven information, and number two, subtler influences in how to convince people to contribute?

MR. WALES: Right. So in terms of the limitations of Wikis, the first part of my answer would be to say there is a difference, a distinction we can draw between expert versus general public and Wiki versus non-Wiki. You can have a Wiki that is only editable by experts or preapproved people, and that's actually a useful technique for a lot of groups.

If you have a large enough group to sustain the effort, it's much easier for eight or ten experts in an area to get together and casually work together on a Wiki, where anyone can help improve anybody else's thing and fix minor spelling mistakes, and, you know, any kind of little typos or things like that.

The Wiki software is very useful for collaboration amongst small groups. This is why it's getting to be very popular within companies. People are using Wikis to build internal corporate knowledge bases.

But the real thrust of your question wasn't a software question, it was about what are the limitations of broad public participation and the generation of information resources. That's a much trickier question. It's one thing if you've got a general interest encyclopedia where if we get something wrong about Thomas Jefferson it can be fixed and it really isn't mission critical in a certain type of way. Versus there's a group of people within our community who are discussing and talking about the concept of an Emergency Medicine Handbook to be written by physicians for physicians.

Clearly, if this is going to be used by someone in an emergency room setting, the standard of what we accept for quality there is extremely critical and you don't want to just print a page off the Internet that may or may not have been edited by somebody who knew what they were talking about 5 minutes ago. So in a case like that, I think it's definitely important to think about who should be allowed to edit or under what circumstances might you ask someone to no longer edit. But that isn't necessarily to say that that particular book should be written only by MDs or Ph.Ds in that field.

So for example, there are lots and lots of people who work in emergency rooms who are battle-hardened veterans of that intense environment who may be nurses or respiratory therapists or all kinds of people like that with a really practical hands-on knowledge that's perfectly legitimate, they're professionals, they could contribute in some fashion anyway.

And then you also have just members of the general public who could come in and be helpful and thoughtful just in terms of doing copy editing and sort of all the back-end work that

maybe the doctors or esteemed professors are too busy to do. It's very difficult to think about how do you draw the line particularly when you've got a volunteer effort.

In this particular case, the Emergency Medicine Handbook, what I'm recommending that they do is be as open as they possibly can, but be fully prepared to confront people, to ask for their credentials and to kick them out if they do anything stupid at all. Whereas at Wikipedia we're a lot more relaxed about people doing something stupid. We try to really hard to help people find a better place in the community before we kick them out, and we wouldn't be able to do that if we were talking about the Emergency Medicine Handbook.

So now the second question was about more subtle types of bias. I can give an example. I haven't read the payday loan article, so I have no opinion about that, but the example I like to give is of two minority religions in the United States. One is Scientology, the other is Mormonism. The Scientologists are known for being litigious and combative on the Internet and there's been a long history of people fighting about Scientology on the Internet which means there are now a large group of activists and a large group of Scientologists who fight all over the Internet. What this implies for the Wikipedia articles is that they're very, very good. They're actively contributed to by Scientologists and by Scientology critics. They are mostly able to work together to present a neutral presentation of the debate, and that's all wonderful.

The pages about Mormonism on the other hand, I know it's a terrible stereotype, but it's true, Mormons are really nice people and they don't violate our social norms and they're not doing anything bad on the site and nobody else really knows all that much about the Book of Mormon. And so the articles about things and events in the Book of Mormon tend to not be looked at very much for people who are coming to it with a critical eye, and those entries are sometimes probably more one-sided than we might like.

Now, there are obviously aspects of the Mormon Church which have been controversial, of course. Every church has its controversies. But by and large, most of that sort of thing, that's an example of an area where nobody really cares except the Mormons because they're the only ones editing, and so that's kind of a problem. Somebody said they went through and edited several of the articles and they weren't happy with their own work because they said I don't know anything about it. All I could do is go to the front of each article and add "In the Book of Mormon," and then a whole bunch of stuff, right?

[Laughter.]

MR. WALES: And so that's an example. I mean, this is part of a broader issue of what we call systemic bias. It's a bias that may exist in our work because of the nature of who's editing it. And the most examples of systemic bias are if you compare our article on the USB standards, so this is the standard for the little things you can plug into your computer, it's a fantastic article. It's very approachable by nontechnical people which I'm not a particularly technical person, although I did fix the projector I must say. It's very approachable. USB, and I said, what is this? I'm plugging stuff into my computer. How does this work? I went and read the article. The first several paragraphs told me all I needed to know, but if you keep reading there's pen diagrams, very detailed technical information, so it's a really wonderful article.

That's because there's a whole bunch of tech geeks who use Wikipedia. If you go on the other hand to an article about someone who won the Noble Prize for Literature in 1957, actually that might have been somebody famous, but who is no longer read very widely, that article is going to be two or three paragraphs. It's going to be nowhere near as good as the Britannica article, and that's in part because of who's editing Wikipedia.

So our solution to that problem is, first, patience. Those issues have gotten a lot better over time. As we've gotten bigger and bigger and more and more known by more and more people, we've gotten a lot more well rounded in the community and a lot more different types of people editing.

And the other thing is we're trying to do outreach to people to say we want people to come and edit. One of the things that we want to do is in the software, right now when you click to edit you get this Wikitext. It's easier than HTML, but it's still a little bit scary for a lot of people. A friend of mine is a supersmart uber geek and she studies ancient Chinese literature. She's a professor in that field. And guess what, she's not a computer geek. So she looked at some of our articles and she said, I was actually surprised you had anything on some of these people, and it was pretty good but it read to her like some sweet Chinese man in San Francisco who loves poetry was writing it, obviously not an academic but had a love for the field. She wants to contribute to Wikipedia. My concern is if there's templates and all these other little squiggly bits, it's a little challenging.

So one of the things that we're working on is a what you see is what you get type of editor. So when you click on Edit you get a much more intuitive interface because there's no reason why there should be technical barriers for people contributing.

QUESTION: Thank you for coming today. I know I'm learning a lot already. My question actually would ask you to expound on the second issue you were just talking about right now which is diverse social communities. I think it would be interesting to know whether you're coming into issues that are for instance maybe revisionist history say between Europeans and Native Americans or the Japanese and the Chinese, and how a single bucket of information might be able to reconcile two very, certainly to the social community that it's written in, true but very diverse, say

again, the Japanese and the Chinese where the Japanese feel they were the victims and the Chinese feel the same.

MR. WALES: One of the uplifting and amazing things about Wikipedia is that it turns out that many, many more people are reasonable and thoughtful than are hard-core ideological in some fashion. So what this means is if we have some sort of an issue, some particular even in history where there are two sides that have very different viewpoints of what happened or what it meant, they are actually able to work together in describing those two viewpoints.

A good example of this, not from history, but would be an article on abortion. So an article on abortion, it could be edited by a Catholic priest who is very much representing the Catholic Church's point of view, and a Planned Parenthood activist who's very much representing that point of view. So you think, well, this isn't possible, they're never going to be able to agree on anything, it turns out they are able to agree. They're able to agree to say this is what the Catholic Church has said, this is what Planned Parenthood has said. If you cite your sources and describe the debate in a way that's fair, then both parties end up agreeing if they're reasonable people.

Now, of course there are a very small number of people who are so unable to reason well that they have to have the article be in their particular point of view. This usually ends up in behavioral problems and people can ultimately get blocked from the site. But for the most part that doesn't happen. For the most part, on controversial issues we are able to find some common ground that people are able to agree on.

I just recently met with the Vice Chairman of the Lithuanian Parliament and he's of course a very learned man and he speaks four languages, and he had actually printed out articles before he met me from English, Lithuanian, Polish and German Wikipedians and he was very interested in how the articles on the same topic differed. What he said was interesting. He said on the

topic of some particular battle in history having to do with Lithuania and Poland, the Lithuanian article tended to represent the Lithuanian point of view, the Polish article tended to represent the Polish point of view, but the English article was the best, and he said it contained both points of view and described it in a way he thought was perfectly fair and accurate to both sides.

So that's one of the interesting things that goes on is that English being the largest and, therefore, in certain ways the most diverse because it has lots of people from all over the world contributing to it, has probably the best perspective on certain local issues like that.

Another thing I always say is I'm not Aristotle or Plato. I'm not the next great philosopher for mankind, so I don't have any magic solution to the age-old problems of bias. We do a pretty good job. Within the community we adhere to very old-fashioned, traditional standards of neutrality and objectivity and try to get it right, but of course there's no guarantee any more than there is Britannica, for example.

QUESTION: You may have just answered this question but I'll ask it anyway and see if you have a different angle on it.

I've been interested by the fact that a lot of the controversial articles that are on Wikipedia have been resolved in a way that the debate is framed very well and you sort of get a whole picture of the diverse views that people hold. I was wondering in terms of just the very human side of conflict resolution if there are any tools or techniques or sort of methodologies that have emerged out of this community in terms of how to get that going. Because there's debates that I've seen where the resolution has been we can never agree on this thing so we just won't talk about it and it won't be included.

MR. WALES: Well, I speak a lot at tech conferences and I always like to say at tech conferences who's going to get up and talk about love. But love for our work, love for each other,

mutual human respect, is a really core value within our community. It sounds trite and almost embarrassing to say it so boldly, but it's actually true.

If you are working together with someone on an article and you don't agree with them, if you can step back from the issue and say this person is here, they're putting in a lot of hours, I believe they're here for the same basic motivation that I am which is to share knowledge and get it right, then it helps people to step back and say maybe we can find a way to compromise, and it generally works better than I would have ever imagined.

A part of it is there's a self-selection mechanism that goes on within the community. If you're the type of person who comes to write an encyclopedia in a collaborative fashion and you know other people going to be editing your work, if you really just cannot deal with that, you end up getting very upset and leaving. And the kinds of people who stick around are the kind of people who are fairly centrist in their own views or they're able to accept centrism from the article as a whole, but, there's really no magic answer. And some people are just impossible and we struggle with those issues.

QUESTION: I have two questions. One is about you had mentioned how Wikipedia is popular compared to some of the mainstream media. How can organizations that are here engage with Wikipedia in terms of what are your recommendations? Should they create a page for their organization? Should they chime in on issues that they're working on? What is your recommendation in terms of engaging with Wikipedia?

The second question is about the community and I think it's very powerful what you said about what a strong community that you have in Wikipedia. Are people able to find each other in terms of issues based on issues that they're interested in? So, for example, somebody in Mali who's interested in an issue related to water can find someone who is in India who is also working on

the same issue and share ideas? So is there a way for personal connection as well and a way for people to find each other? So those are the two questions. Thank you.

MR. WALES: I'll answer the second question first because otherwise I'll forget it.

On the website there are a lot of different ways that people can make communication with each other. So every article has a talk page, every user has a user page and also a user talk page. When you see someone editing you can click on their name and you get to their user page, you can see their talk page or you can click and see all their contributions, you can leave them a note, they can leave you a note. You can Email people if they've put their Email address into the system. All of that stuff is done to foster the community, to foster people having some kinds of dialogue. Yes, it happens a lot.

Unfortunately, there's a map of the world I have showing participation from people in different parts of the world. The amount of participation by people in Mali is so close to zero it's frightening, and in India it's almost as bad. So those two people won't meet through Wikipedia probably because they don't really have the right kind of computer access. On many, many other topics though, yes, of course, people meet.

As to the first question, organizations interfacing with Wikipedia, how should they do it, I think there's a couple things.

The first thing I would say is if your organization is notable, meaning it's been in the press or something like this, then, yes, if we don't have an article, you should create it. If your organization is not notable, it's a small one-person organization that was just started, you probably don't want to create it because it's going to be kind of embarrassing when the Wikipedians make fun of you for self-promotion. We try to not to make fun of people but it happens because of these garage bands and things like this.

The other thing is to come to Wikipedia fully aware of our strong ethic of neutrality and recognize that if you're thinking you're going to come to Wikipedia to turn it into something that's advocating for your agenda, you're going to be very disappointed because what's more likely to happen is you're going to draw a lot of people, a lot of attention to that you're trying to not edit in a neutral fashion. But if you come in and you say Wikipedia doesn't have enough background information on this issue, then, yes, absolutely, and being prepared to state things in a neutral way, I think it can be very, very valuable.

It's entirely possible for people from handgun control and the NRA to edit together on gun-control articles, but only if they come to it with this ethic of responsibility and sharing knowledge and basically saying at a fundamental level, whatever our political disagreements are, we do agree that people need factual, basic information. And obviously you're going to come to it with different perspectives, but you ought to be able to deal with that. So that would be my advice to everyone.

QUESTION: My question is not very clear in my own mind, but I want to push you a little bit to talk about the connection between knowledge creation and dissemination and global poverty reduction and development. You have this nice example at the beginning of knowledge sharing, but I'm also struck when I think about this wonderful slide show about the heavy metal umlaut, you have things discussed there which are really, while they're fun, they're ultimately trivial, and then you have concerns that are probably important to the 2 billion people who are in dire poverty that are less likely to be voiced because of the nature of inequality in connectivity and literacy.

So to some extent my question is unfair because obviously Wikipedia can't solve

that, but my question is what do you see of the potential of your initiative and of this movement to transform the world to make those problems less severe?

MR. WALES: One of the important things, for me what's really crucially important here, is the free licensing because the free licensing means that people can adapt our work to whatever their needs are, and we don't have to be asked permission. So if people want to build on our work to build something that's somehow more useful to people in Mali, then they don't have to ask us and that's something we fully support.

At some level, as you said, the question isn't fair in the sense that I actually don't know to get computers to people who don't have clean drinking water. Maybe Nicholas Negroponte with his \$100 laptop can help with that.

But at the same time, we have a role to play there. We have an important part to play in that, in particular as people come online to try to welcome them and draw them into this thing. From a very early stage we have a commitment to being in all these languages. We have 120 languages that at least have the interface translated.

One of the things that we're going to be done soon, Arabic Wikipedia has only 8,000 articles. It's about the same size as the Luxembourgish Wikipedia which is a very small European language.

In January for 6 weeks we're going to have an intern in the office, she's from Lebanon, and her job for those 6 weeks is going to be outreach and promotion for the Arabic Wikipedia. We're going to see how that goes. I think it can be very successful.

I just recently was in North Carolina and I met a guy who he's pretty much the only contributor right now to the Swahili Wikipedia. It has 75 or so articles. He writes articles there. He translates things from English. He's in Tanzania. He happens to live in the U.S. What we want to do

in a case like that for Swahili is hire someone to basically do outreach there, so contact professors who are bilingual and tag them to have their graduate students and even their language students to participate to have people build up the small community and have them reach out to expat communities everywhere who have computer access.

There are people who are a cab driver in Chicago from Tanzania who would love in his spare time to do something like this, write some articles about whatever, and we're very nonelitist in the sense of what kind of knowledge to people need. This is one of my complaints about a lot of NGOs. When I talk to NGOs they say people only want to read about football, they don't want to read about AIDS prevention. And I say, you know what? Let's let them read about football if that's what they want to do. If people want to write whatever, that's fine with us.

And so building those communities, then the health information will come out of it in due course and things like that. So that's part of what we're trying to do is to think of ways that we can actually reach out as an organization to help foster the communities in the smaller languages in whatever way we can in the hopes that eventually this can make its way somewhere that people will find useful.

QUESTION: I was actually curious, I really admire how Wikipedia is doing this small outreach sort of piece by piece. But I was curious what you were doing domestically in order to reach out to educational outlets and actually reaching out to probably lower-income schools in lower-income areas and sort of reaching out in that way.

And also Wikipedia as a reliable source I have also found to be sort of a big question. Can really somebody really consider it a reliable source like Britannica? Do you see it growing in that direction or more as an educational, you know, people go there to learn and to

contribute as opposed to actually using it to then corroborate more educational pieces in more established journals and things of that nature?

MR. WALES: So on the quality question, right now we don't generally achieve the quality level of Britannica, except in some areas we do. Most areas we still don't. On the other hand, if you take any group of articles, pick any 100 articles and look at them today, a year ago, 2 years ago, 3 years ago, you'll find almost unanimously they've all dramatically improved. So Britannica or better quality is our goal, that level of reliability and authority is our goal. Will we reach that? When will we reach that? It's very hard to say. We know that we're going to have to have some changes in our processes to be able to identify articles that have been vetted by the community in some fashion because, certainly, as long as I can call up an article and for all I know it was edited by some lunatic 5 minutes ago, that's always going to be a source of distrust perfectly reasonably.

So it's hard to say exactly how we're going to do that. We've got a lot of ideas in the community. We're going to introduce very soon some changes in the software to start collecting data on what's good and isn't good and things like that.

On the first question in terms of outreach, I think a big part of what goes in is very much at the grassroots level because we essentially are an all volunteer organization. We have our lead software developer and a couple of people working in the office, and me, I work full-time, but that's not really enough people to have a program of outreach in the way that we would like to.

There is a group of volunteers who just were Emailing me and they have this idea of really trying to set up maybe a speaking tour for me at historically black colleges in the U.S., for example, as a means of going out and making sure that those people have heard about it. The same thing could be reaching out into schools. There's tons of cool stuff we can do, so if anybody here

wants to give us a few million dollars, then we're ready to roll. But we just do our best with what we've got.

QUESTION: My name is Katherine Otwa [ph] and I'm the managing editor for the Web at Radio Free Asia. We have nine Asian-language Websites. The most important one is the Chinese one, of course, and we are about 80 percent blocked out of China. The Chinese government is remarkably successful at blocking content it doesn't like or preventing people from getting to the Website. So I'm quite interested in hearing how successful are you to reach out to China, particularly about Chinese affairs.

MR. WALES: So Wikipedia is currently blocked in China, and this is fairly new development. We were not blocked for a long time. We've been blocked twice before but for very short periods of time. We were just recently blocked in China, so the English Wikipedia and the Chinese Wikipedia and all the languages are blocked.

What we are doing about that is we are not making a big deal out of it or complaining to the Western press and whining and complaining about it because I don't think that does any good. Instead, we've got a strong community in Mainland China, the Chinese Wikipedians who love the site. There are 35,000 articles, a very active community. They have regular meet-ups in Beijing. They're of course quite disappointed and upset that their Website has been blocked, so they're working through various channels to try to get it unblocked. A big part of the problem in China is that it's a black box. I mean, we have no access to know we were blocked, we never got a complaint, just suddenly we were blocked.

There's a few things here that I think are important for us. One, we have our neutrality policy which we take very, very seriously. So the encyclopedia itself is not opposed to the Chinese government. We're not for the Chinese government, we're not opposed to religion and we're

not for religion, we're an encyclopedia. And in fact, the vast majority of our work really doesn't impact on Chinese political issues at all. If you have an article about the moon or something like this, it just really isn't controversial.

And what we have hoped is that the educational resource and the community would become large enough soon enough before they blocked us so that it would become seen as an indispensable resource. And then with our neutrality policy, if there's something that bothers them, they can just edit it. The edit may not survive, but I would say if there's a one-sided rant in Wikipedia, that's deeply inappropriate for Wikipedia, it's also none of the government's business anyway as a free speech advocate. However, it inappropriate for Wikipedia, so if they have a problem with a one-sided rant on Wikipedia, then they should complain about it. We're all about being neutral and fair and as boring as we possibly can be about such matters. So I'm hopeful that that kind of discussion will have an impact on somebody who cares there.

The other important thing to know is that in the past whenever we've been blocked in China, the participation even after the block was listed was markedly lower. In fact, the number of contributions total to Chinese Wikipedia dropped by about 40 percent after the block. What this means is actually something a little bit ironic, that the Mainland Chinese tend to write from a Mainland Chinese point of view. On any issues relating to conflict between Taiwan and China, the mainlanders tend to defend the Chinese government just on average.

By blocking Chinese Wikipedia and by blocking English, the same thing is true when they participate in English, they aren't keeping their people from hearing propaganda, they're actually keeping their people from expressing a Chinese point of view. And I am hopeful that that argument to say this is a tool that your own citizens would like to tell the world about China, to tell the

world about your culture, about your politics, about what's going on and in a neutral and positive way, so blocking us is a little bit silly if you want the Chinese point of view to be heard in the world.

QUESTION: My question is sort of a follow-up to the woman who was here before but from the parent perspective. As the parent of a child who comes home from school with a research project, the professor or teacher always says it's okay to use the Internet, but there all these caveats, it has to be an EDU, .GOV or whatever. So what reassurance would you have to a parent who maybe isn't very Internet savvy, may not have heard of Wikipedia? Is this something you would encourage the parent to encourage the child to use or are you saying that it's not quite up to the reliability standards of Britannica or something yet but it shouldn't be considered a reliable source?

MR. WALES: I think that's a really interesting question and I think it depends on large part on the specific context or the way that it might be used.

I get an Email about once a week from some college student who says I got an F on my paper because I cited Wikipedia. Can you help me?

[Laughter.]

MR. WALES: And I always say no. You're in college. What are you doing even citing Britannica? It's ridiculous. That's not what an encyclopedia is for. It's for gathering broad background information to be a starting point. So if you're supposed to be reading some French literature or something and there's some reference in there and you don't understand, you ought to be able to go to Wikipedia and find out what Versailles is. But if you're doing a research project about Versailles you probably shouldn't use an encyclopedia except as a basic starting point.

I would say that I would encourage people to use Wikipedia with their children and I also would encourage them to use it as a teaching opportunity to give people a little bit more media

literacy, media competence, to think about things like what does it mean to have review from The New York Times, versus a group of Wikipedians, versus no one at all on some random Website?

So in this area, one of the things I always like to say is that I think in the future people will look at an article from Britannica and they'll say this was written by two people and reviewed by three more? How can I possibly trust that? I want something that's been reviewed by a couple hundred Wikipedians because then I know it's really been gone over with a fine-tooth comb.

We're not to that stage yet by any means, but for the most part it's pretty good and I think to say there's information in the newspaper and you shouldn't treat it as the gospel truth, and there's information on Wikipedia and the same thing, and you should start to evaluate all sources of information. A lot of kids don't do that, unfortunately, and I don't know the real answer to that.

We have experience with a lot of people who seem to think that Britannica, and we aspire to Britannica quality, I have no problem with Britannica except to recognize that the number of errors in Britannica is substantial. People think I read it in Britannica, it must be true. Well, no. Actually, there's tons of errors in Britannica. It's the human condition. There's errors in everything no matter how good, and Britannica is certainly good.

QUESTION: My question is could you elaborate please on the Wikibooks project and what you see as its implications on the developing world? Is it anything like the Google print project, and do you see any proprietary issues in connection?

MR. WALES: I guess it's really nothing at all like Google print. All of the work that's being done at Wikibooks is all under free license. I'd like to go on at some length about the free license and why I think that's important. All of our software is under free license, all of our content is under free license. The idea is that when we say we're giving this to the world, we really mean it. We'll give you everything you need to make it run. It wouldn't be very honest of us to say it's a free

encyclopedia and you can run it on your computer for free as soon as you buy the software for \$20,000, and we won't tell you how to do it otherwise. So in terms of that, our work is completely nonproprietary.

There are huge issues with proprietary textbooks. These issues have deep ramifications in the developing world. Even in the wealthy West when you go to college and you have to pay \$120 for a textbook, that's staggering. It's completely unnecessary. The amount of money being spent by our school systems, the elementary schools and the high schools, for textbooks is staggering particularly compared to the alternative which can be done for a fraction of the cost.

I'm an advocate that school systems should start to demand that all of the textbooks being used are placed under free license. That's a pretty big change, but I think that some of the states like California, they actually have the market clout to be able to do this, to start insisting that if we're going to pay you millions and millions of dollars, we need better licensing terms so that we can do other things with this, and that radically changes the publishing industry.

Then coincidentally, it has radical implications for the developing world because now all of this content can be taken there. People don't have to say we just couldn't afford Britannica. You don't have to be able to afford Britannica. If you can afford the price of printing, then you're ready to go. Does that answer the question?

QUESTION: Yes, thank you.

QUESTION: Promoting the ideals of Wikipedia of neutrality, open inquiry, open debate, actually has political implications and social implications for countries where these values have yet to really stick?

MR. WALES: Absolutely. I'm a complete radical. What I always say about Wikipedia particularly if we're talking about something like China, I say we're not political. Of

course, to some extent, that's a little bit tongue in cheek. We're not partisan. Any of the sort of issues that grip American politics are of zero interest to Wikipedia per se, except that at this really deep fundamental level we're extremely political. It's a very political statement to say all human beings have a natural right to gain the knowledge that they need to empower themselves to make better decisions in their own lives and with respect to their government. That's a completely political statement despite the fact we have no opinion about socialized medicine or something like this or the amount of aid that the U.S. should be giving to the rest of the world. So, I guess, yes, to some extent, of course.

But we really shy away from political issues as an organization partly because we're trying to be as broad as we possibly can. That basic idea that it's morally good to give information to people, to freely write it and donate your time and give it to people for them to be able to use, that statement as an ethical statement is one that has extremely--I doubt if you could find more than one-half of 1 percent of the people in the world who would say that's wrong. Most of those people are dictators and things like that, and even they might say privately, yeah, they would be great if it wouldn't get me killed.

[Laughter.]

MR. WALES: There is an ethical component to it, but we try to keep it very broad and basic, and that's been a big part of the success of Wikipedia.

That's one of the reasons I personally don't edit Wikipedia other than just occasionally a little bit here and there. From the very beginning I wanted to make it clear that Wikipedia is not my view of the world. I'm a person with political opinions like everybody else. That has no bearing on the encyclopedia. It's supposed to be for everyone.

This will be the last question.

QUESTION: I was just wondering what are your plans and ideas when it comes to bringing Wikipedia to a non-Internet or non-Web-based audience? I think you mentioned books or DVDs. Is there anything relationship with like the \$100 laptop that Wikipedia could be part of it or a new type of interface where people have difficulties reading or cannot read images or those types of things? If you could elaborate a little bit on that.

MR. WALES: Yes, absolutely. Particularly with the \$100 laptop project, we feel a very deep resonance with that project. Nicholas Negroponte is a huge fan of Wikipedia. When he's giving talks about his project, he always gives Wikipedia as a specific example of the kind of thing that the \$100 laptop is going to be fantastic for.

The \$100 laptop is going to have wireless in it so people can access the Internet through it. That's really exciting to me because it isn't just--again, and I said this at the beginning of my talk, I don't view our global mission as being here's something a bunch of rich white people made and we're going to give you this gift. It's here's a communications platform and we want everyone to participate. So the \$100 laptop will enable people to do more than just us send out CD-ROMs for them to read it. They can actually begin to contribute. So that's something I'm very excited about.

Having said that, of course there is going to be a while until everybody has got their \$100 laptop, and \$100 is pretty expensive for a lot of people. I feel that there is a role for us in things, and some of these things are going on already at a grassroots level. There's a volunteer in South Africa who goes around to 20 schools. I think he goes once a month or once every 3 months. He goes to 20 rural schools that have computers and he mainly is a volunteer. His job is to fix the printer and see if the network is working and things like that.

But what he's been doing is he burns some Wikipedia content on a CD and he takes around the latest version of Wikipedia and installs it for them so that they can access it. Again, this is

where the free licensing comes in. He didn't have to ask me if he could do this. He didn't have to get a permission form or anything. He just started doing it, and that's fantastic.

If people give us things and they want to give us things and say I want to give you this but I want to give is under the condition that it cannot be used commercially, so a noncommercial only license as opposed to freely licensed, we turn those things down because one of the things that I'm really excited about is the idea that small-scale entrepreneurs all over the world can make a profitable, honorable business out of packaging Wikipedia and selling it, printing books and selling them.

There are lots and lots of people in the world who are at that level of wealth that they cannot possibly afford Britannica, but they can afford the price of printing for some books. And if we give all the content away, all that needs to be done is the printing. So Brewster Kahle has his Bookmobile project where they have this Bookmobile that has a full printing press inside it, basically. They can take a PDF file and through magic out the other end pops a book. One of the problems when I talked to Brewster, he said, it hasn't been all that successful. One of the problems is there's really not much content. So you can drive around in Africa and give people copies of Jane Austen novels and guess what, they really don't care.

What he's very interested in is what is our potential with the textbook project and with the encyclopedia itself to produce whatever it is people want, and this is where, like he, he shares the idea that he doesn't want to be elitist about it. He wants to take Wikipedia content and drive around in Africa and if people want to read about sports, that's fine. It's a dollar a book whatever you want to read. It's a great start. So the freely licensed bit is I think really important in that area.

Thank you everyone. Very good questions.

[Applause.]

MR. MacDONALD: I'd just like to add our thanks and really appreciate your coming and sharing your ideas with us today. It's very exciting. We'll all be watching it very carefully.

Those of you who don't know CGD, if you're here for the first time and got your invitation through some other way, you left a name care and we will sign you up for our invitations to future events. If you didn't leave a card, come and visit us at Google, Center for Global Development, and please sign up. We look forward to seeing you again.

Jimmy, thanks so much.

MR. WALES: Thank you.

[END OF RECORDED SEGMENT.]