

Wikis FOR DUMMIES®

by Dan Woods and Peter Thoeny

Foreword by Ward Cunningham
Inventor of wikis



Wiley Publishing, Inc.

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Published by
Wiley Publishing, Inc.
111 River Street
Hoboken, NJ 07030-5774
www.wiley.com

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Published by Wiley Publishing, Inc., Indianapolis, Indiana

Published simultaneously in Canada

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Library of Congress Control Number: 2006927774

ISBN: 978-0-470-04399-8

Manufactured in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1



About the Authors

Dan Woods has a background in technology and journalism. He has a BA in Computer Science from the University of Michigan. He was CTO of both TheStreet.com and CapitalThinking, led development at Time Inc.'s Pathfinder, and created applications for NandO.net, one of the first newspaper Web sites. Dan has a MS from Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism. He covered banking for three years at *The Record of Hackensack*; was Database Editor for three years at the *Raleigh News & Observer*; and has written more than ten books on various technology topics, in addition to numerous white papers and magazine articles. Dan Woods founded the Evolved Media Network to offer services in technology communications using the Communication by Design methodology.

Peter Thoeny is the founder of *TWiki*, the leading wiki for corporate collaboration and knowledge management. Managing the open source project for the last seven years, Peter invented the concept of *structured wikis*, where free-form wiki content can be structured with tailored wiki applications. He is a recognized thought-leader in wikis and social software, featured in numerous articles and technology conferences including LinuxWorld, *Business Week*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and more. A software developer with more than 20 years of experience, Peter specializes in software architecture, user interface design, and Web technology. He graduated from the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Zurich, lived in Japan for eight years working as an engineering manager for Denso building CASE tools, and managed the Knowledge Engineering group at Wind River for several years. With StructuredWikis.com and TWiki.net, Peter is now offering services, support, and training for enterprise wiki deployments.

Dedication

The authors dedicate this book to Ward Cunningham, whose vision for what wikis could be and generous spirit in sharing his invention have made the world a better place to live.

Co-author Peter Thoeny is dedicating this book to all contributors of the open source TWiki over the past eight years who, with their hard work, helped propel wikis into the workplace.

Authors' Acknowledgments

The authors would like to thank Ward Cunningham for inventing wikis and for his generosity in sharing the concept with the world. Ward helped us write the book by providing his thoughts in several interviews and writing a wonderful foreword. What the world needs now is not only more wikis, but more Wards as well.

This book was written using the Communication by Design methodology of Evolved Media Network in which a group of people, using a wiki of course, creates this book using a division of labor. Dan Woods and Peter Thoeny played the role of editor/analysts who designed the book, performed the research, and invented and captured the content. The writing team included Dan Woods, Peter Thoeny, Noah Robischon, Deb Cameron, Deb Gabriel, John Biggs, and Erin Schulte. We offer our sincere thanks to them all.

This book would never have happened without the support and *For Dummies* wisdom of Katie Feltman, Nicole Sholly, Teresa Artman (all of Wiley), and Keith Underdahl, who was brought in to help us. We authors bow and tip our hats to you.

Many people in the wiki world were interviewed for this book or contributed content in various ways, including interviews and e-mail. We thank them for their enthusiasm and positive attitude. This generous group of people includes: Jimmy Donal Wales, founder of Wikipedia; Adam Frey and James Beyers of WikiSpaces; Joe Kraus of Google/JotSpot; Ramit Sethi of PBwiki; Ken Tyler of seedwiki; Matt Wiseley of EditMe; Sam Obio of BluWiki; Steven Marder of Swicki; and several others who chose not to be named.

Many, many wikis are described in this book, but many great wikis are not. Given that hundreds of thousands (if not millions) of wikis thrive on the Web, covering them all would be impossible. We attempted to capture a representative sample, but no doubt we have failed. For example, because of the deadline for this book, we weren't able to include screenshots from Google's JotSpot, which will no doubt change the world of wikis when it officially launches as part of Google's application toolset. We tried to include wikis in each of the broad categories we defined: content-focused, process-focused, community, and ease-of-use wikis. We are certain, though, that more categories will emerge, and perhaps the ones that we have defined will morph into new ones. If you know about good wikis that deserve attention or have comments on the book, we do want to keep the conversation that resulted in this book going in any way we can. Peter Thoeny would love to hear from you at www.structuredwikis.com and Twiki.net and would be overjoyed to help you build a wiki of your own. Dan Woods will be continuing research and reporting on wikis at www.evolvedtechnologist.com. Please visit us in either place to share your thoughts.

Publisher's Acknowledgments

We're proud of this book; please send us your comments through our online registration form located at www.dummies.com/register/.

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Foreword

Foreword by Ward Cunningham

You have a thought. You want to write it down. You're thinking your computer might be pretty good for that, but, surprise — it's not.

You need two things when you want to write. You need the words to say what you are thinking, and you need a place to put them.

Before wikis, computer writing was all about the words. The computer could help you type them, spell them, hyphenate them, size them, shape them, and align them. But when it came to developing your thought, well, you were on your own.

Now, with wikis, you have a place to write. A wiki is a place to write in the same way that a party is a place to talk. There are thoughts all around you. Some are interesting, some less so. At a party or on a wiki, a word or two will be your trigger. Ideas start flowing. Talking or writing, you're among friends, the stage is set, you say your piece, it fits in, your words trigger the next thought: conversation.

A wiki is like a party that doesn't have to stop. It's a party that doesn't get crowded because new rooms appear when needed. It's a timeless party where you can try each conversation over and over until you get it right.

You might be wondering how a page becomes a party. Maybe you've typed pages and pages before, and it never seemed like fun. "Where do words go if not on the page?" you might be thinking.

That's what this book explains. It shows you in plain English and with many examples just how powerful your computer becomes when you're at a wiki. Dan and Peter show you big ones, little ones, noisy ones, and quiet ones. They show you wikis that are for work and wikis at play. You're going to love this book. Party on.

Ward Cunningham
Portland, Oregon
2007

Introduction

Wikis, born in 1995, had a quiet childhood. Now, as wikis approach their teens, they are having a heck of a coming-out party as they are used absolutely everywhere for everything imaginable. *Wikipedia*, an online encyclopedia created by using a wiki, is one of the most-used reference works on the planet. United States (U.S.) federal intelligence agencies — the CIA, the NSA, the Defense Department, and others — use a wiki to help gather, share, and analyze information. Google, IBM, Motorola, SAP, Sun, Yahoo!, and tens of thousands of other companies run important parts of their businesses with wikis. Hundreds of thousands of families, clubs, schools, and scientists use wikis for every sort of task. We even wrote this book with the help of a wiki. All these examples are just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to prominent use of wikis.

The number of ways how wikis are being offered and hosted is also exploding. In October 2006, Google (the famous search engine company) purchased *JotSpot*, a commercially developed wiki, which will be added to Google's core offerings of mail, calendar, and shared documents sometime in 2007. WikiSpaces, wetpaint, Wikidot, Wikia, XWiki, BluWiki, seedwiki, PBwiki, Ritters, StikiPad, Central Desktop, and others offer free, hosted wikis that are ready to use over the Internet. Companies such as Socialtext and Atlassian offer wikis that can either be installed or hosted. By far, the largest number of wiki sites are run by open source wiki engines, such as TWiki, MoinMoin, MediaWiki, and a number of others.

Boggles the mind a bit, doesn't it? You're probably looking at this book because you heard about wikis and wonder whether they can help you get where you want to go. They *can* help you, and the *how* is really quite easy. We wrote this book because wikis changed our lives and how we work. With just a bit of effort, we suspect that wikis will do the same for you, just like they have for millions of other people. So read on.

About This Book

In *Wikis For Dummies*, you will find a top-to-bottom guide to understanding what wikis are and how to use them. Unlike many other types of technology

you might encounter, you need to realize that wikis aren't a product or a brand or a company. Rather, *wikis* are collections of Web pages that anyone can edit — a style of Web site invented by Ward Cunningham. This book introduces you to the basics of the style and shows how they're implemented with minor variations in specific products. The sorts of skills and knowledge that you can acquire with this book include how to

- ✓ Edit wiki pages by using wiki markup or WYSIWYG (What You See Is What You Get) editors.
- ✓ Format the information on a wiki page.
- ✓ Link wiki pages.
- ✓ Organize the pages in your wiki so people can find them.
- ✓ Choose the right home for your wiki.
- ✓ Attract users to your wiki.
- ✓ Manage your wiki.

Foolish Assumptions

In *Wikis For Dummies*, we don't assume any prior knowledge of HTML (Web markup language), wiki markup, programming languages, or system administration skills. However, we do assume that you have surfed the Web. We also assume that you have a working knowledge of personal computers and have used browsers to go to Web sites. If you've used a Web mail system such as Yahoo! Mail, Gmail, or Hotmail, you'll find that editing a wiki page is just about the same as writing and sending an e-mail.

Conventions Used in This Book

By *conventions*, we simply mean a set of rules that we employ in this book to present information to you consistently. When you see a term *italicized*, look for its definition, which is included so that you know what things mean in the context of wiki creation and maintenance. Web site addresses and e-mail addresses appear in `monofont` so that they stand out from regular text. Wiki markup and HTML appear in a separate font, set off from the rest of the text, like this:

```
----+ My First Wiki Page
```

What You Don't Have to Read

We structured this book *modularly* — that is, it's designed so that you can easily find just the information you need — so you don't have to read whatever doesn't pertain to your task at hand. We include sidebars here and there throughout the book that contain interesting information that isn't necessarily integral to the discussion at hand; feel free to skip over these. You also don't have to read the paragraphs marked with Technical Stuff icons, which parse out uber-techy tidbits (which might not be your cup of tea).

How This Book Is Organized

Wikis For Dummies is split into four parts. You don't have to read it sequentially, you don't have to look at every part, you don't have to review each chapter, and you don't even have to read all the sections in any particular chapter. (Of course, you can if you want to; it's a good read.) And the Table of Contents and the index can help you quickly find whatever information you need. In this section, we briefly describe what each part contains.

Part I: Introducing Wikis

Part I shows you what wikis are and what they are not. You can read the history of how Ward Cunningham created the idea of wikis and how wikis slowly propagated from engineering departments to the mainstream. You get your feet wet by seeing the basics of creating and adding content to a page. We then take you on a tour through examples of what wikis are used for and show you the most famous wiki of all — Wikipedia.

Part II: Making Your Own Wiki

Part II assumes that you've gotten the bug and are ready to dive into the detailed mechanics of designing and creating wiki pages. No matter which choice you make for creating your wiki, by putting content on a wiki, you enter a new world. It all begins with your first page. Usually, people get started by going to one of the many hosted wikis described in this part. Read along there to follow the instructions on setting up your new wiki — there it is! A blank wiki page! In this part, we also give you the details of formatting wiki pages, linking them, and the principles of wiki design.

Part III: Promoting, Managing, and Improving Your Wiki

Part III focuses on meeting the challenges of promoting a wiki as well as choosing and installing your own wiki engine if that's what makes sense for you. You can read how to manage and protect your wiki as well as the possibilities for adding advanced functionality by using the structured wikis concept. (*Structured wikis* add advanced features to make wikis work like spreadsheets, databases, or automated tools for managing complex step-by-step processes.)

Part IV: The Part of Tens

The Part of Tens covers wiki attitudes and roles as well as ways how wikis are used at the office. This part also provides a list of innovative and exotic wikis that are worth a look.

Icons Used in This Book

For Dummies books are known for those helpful icons that point you in the direction of really great information. This section briefly describes each icon used in this book.



Tip icons point out helpful information or key techniques that save you time and effort.



Remember icons are used to note particularly important things in the text to greatly help you understand the technology.



The Warning icon is synonymous with, "Hey, you! Be careful!" When you see this icon, pay attention and proceed with caution.



This icon denotes that techie stuff lurks nearby. If you're not feeling very techie, you can skip this info.

Where to Go from Here

If you're new to wikis, read Chapter 1 to get your bearings and Chapters 3 and 4 to get an idea of what can be done with wikis. If you want to get your feet wet right away, go to Chapter 2, which gets you started creating wiki pages.

If you're pretty familiar with wikis and want to deepen your skills, start with the chapters in Part II. If you're running a wiki and want more advanced advice, Part III will be the best first stop, and you can reach back to the other chapters as needed.

Part I

Introducing Wikis

The 5th Wave

By Rich Tennant



“It was supposed to be a simple sleep potion.
That’s why you can’t always trust the
information you get off of ‘Wiccapedia.’”

In this part . . .

In this part, we show you the world of wikis in all its beauty and complexity. In Chapter 1, we explain that wikis are not just one product but a style of product that has many exemplars. You can see how and why Ward Cunningham invented wikis. And you can read how wikis are not blogs, forums, or other styles of Web sites.

Chapter 2 is where newbies can get their hands wet and type an initial wiki page. Chapter 3 shows how wikis are used for all sorts of reasons. Chapter 4 surveys *Wikipedia*, the most famous wiki in the world. We wish you good wiki-ing.

Chapter 1

Understanding Wikis: From Ward's Brain to Your Browser

In This Chapter

- ▶ Finding your way to wikis
 - ▶ Understanding what makes a wiki a wiki
 - ▶ Comparing wikis with blogs and other Web sites
 - ▶ Examining the history and future of wikis
 - ▶ How to start using wikis
-

When Ward Cunningham started programming the first wiki engine in 1994 and then released it on the Internet in 1995, he set forth a simple set of rules for creating Web sites that pushed all the technical gobbledygook into the background and made creating and sharing content as easy as possible.

Ward's vision was simple: Create the simplest possible online database that could work. And his attitude was generous; he put the idea out there to let the world run with it. The results were incredible. Ward's inventiveness and leadership had been long established by the role he played in senior engineering jobs, promoting design patterns, and helping develop the concept of Extreme Programming. That a novel idea like the wiki flowed from his mind onto the Internet was no surprise to those who knew him.

The wiki concept turned out to have amazing properties. When content is in a shared space and is easy to create and connect, it can be collectively owned. The community of owners can range from just a few people up into the thousands, as in the case of the online wiki encyclopedia, Wikipedia.

This chapter introduces you to the wonderful world of wikis by showing you what a wiki is (or can be), how to find and use wikis for fun and profit, and how to get started with a wiki of your own. We even take a brief look at some possible futures for wikis.

Finding Your Way to Wikis

How does one usually enter the wiki world? So much is made of the community-enabling aspects of wikis that the everyday value of wikis can get lost. You don't have to be on a mission to create the best encyclopedia in the world, build a winning startup, or organize the ideas of thousands of people for wikis to be useful. Wikis are amazingly helpful for simple tasks. Say you want to set up a carpool schedule for your hockey team, or arrange a food chain for a sick friend, or share ideas about the latest fashions in opening moves from members of your chess club. For all these scenarios, wikis are frequently the fastest way to do it. Part II of this book focuses on the mechanics of getting a wiki up and running, creating and linking pages, and organizing information — all the techniques and skills to serve the needs of individuals.

And you can't predict what happens when a wiki hits a group of people. Whatever happens, though, those groups are generally never the same again because wikis rarely start as a top-down decision. Wikis succeed because someone found his way to a wiki, created some pages, and let the world know. A few people get the idea and start changing and adding pages. Usually, many others use the information on the wiki. For every one person who writes content on a wiki, tens or even hundreds read it. For large public wikis, that ratio might be more like 1:100,000.

Wikis invade organizations when one team starts using them and then other teams find out about it and learn how to solve their problems with wikis. Pretty soon, the whole company is using wikis. Part III of this book focuses on the special challenges encountered when using wikis in businesses and other large organizations, or when a wiki created for any purpose becomes popular and used by thousands of people.

No matter who you are, finding your way to wikis and figuring out how they can help you doesn't come by overanalyzing the subject. To get value from wikis, you must start putting up pages with information you want to share with others. Relax; making a wiki successful is not a problem that you must solve by yourself. Everyone you invite to use your wiki will help you get it right.