Wikipedia and the Communications Professional

A primer

WRITTEN BY WILLIAM BEUTLER, BEUTLER INK

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It's perhaps both ironic and fitting that the first widely acknowledged example of someone being called out for editing Wikipedia to enhance their own reputation is none other than Jimmy Wales, Wikipedia's famous co-founder.[1]

In a series of edits in late 2005, Wales adjusted the wording in his biographical entry to better match his own interpretation of his career. The changes were flagged by a prominent tech blogger, and the subsequent uproar led Wales to apologize. "People shouldn't do it, including me," he told *Wired* at the time. "I wish I hadn't done it." And yet the magazine also quoted him making the following entirely defensible point:

"IF YOU SEE A BLATANT ERROR OR MISCONCEPTION ABOUT YOURSELF, YOU REALLY WANT TO SET IT STRAIGHT."

Jimmy Wales

Almost a decade after Wales' controversial edits, the issue of self-interested editing remains unresolved. Wikipedia has long maintained a guideline titled ❶ **Conflict of interest**—also commonly referred to as **"COI"** which strongly discourages ❷ **companies and organizations** from editing articles about themselves. Because this guideline is primarily a list of *don'ts*, the site's editorial community later developed a set

of ❸ **protocols for engagement** by professional communicators. These rules are not widely known, nor are they always easy to follow, but they have been drafted, modified, and ratified through the daily work of Wikipedia editors.

This primer attempts to address the information gap between the Wikipedia community and PR professionals who want to engage with Wikipedia on its own terms. While the advice ahead will not answer every question you may have, it will put you on the right path to working with Wikipedia both ethically and effectively.

HOW TO READ THIS PRIMER

This primer is meant to be read from start to finish. Throughout, you will find "Wikipedia shortcuts" in the margins. These are simple phrases intended to help you find salient information on Wikipedia. Enter a shortcut into Wikipedia's search field, and you will be immediately taken to the relevant page. Several types of pages are included: mandatory site **policies**, widely recognized **guidelines**, generally accepted **essays**, as well as others, including **project** and **information** pages.

In addition, occasional snippets of Wikipedia's code, or markup language, are included. These will be apparent as such because they are rendered in `this typeface`.

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1. *Jimmy Wales: Revision history, Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia, October 20–November 9, 2005.*
http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Jimmy_Wales&dir=prev&offset=20050420070542&limit=500&action=history
2. *"Wikipedia Founder Looks Out for Number 1", Rogers Cadenhead, Workbench, December 19, 2005.*
http://workbench.cadenhead.org/news/2828/wikipedia-founder-looks-out-number-1
3. *"Wikipedia Founder Edits Own Bio", Evan Hansen, Wired, December 19, 2005.*
https://web.archive.org/web/20140101073245/http://www.wired.com/culture/lifestyle/news/2005/12/69880

WIKIPEDIA IN OTHER LANGUAGES

You should be aware that this primer was written specifically with the English Wikipedia in mind, and the rules of engagement may vary across language editions. While the advice contained herein can be considered a safe way to engage with editors of any language Wikipedia, the best thing to do is look for specific guidelines governing those communities and look to previous case studies to determine the best course of action.

ONE MORE THING

This primer is released under a Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 license and, like Wikipedia itself, is a work in progress. If you have any suggestions for improvement, please contact William Beutler at william@beutlerink.com.

02 Wikipedia's best practices—and why you should care

Just because any edit to Wikipedia is possible doesn't mean that any edit is advisable

🔗 Shortcuts

❶ WP:CONFLICT
Conflict of Interest
(guideline)

❷ WP:TALK
Talk page
guidelines
(guideline)

❸ WP:POLICYLIST
List of policies and
guidelines
(information)

If your goal is to contribute to Wikipedia in a professional capacity—on behalf of your own company or on behalf of a client—and maintain good standing with its community of editors, the best way to seek revisions to an article where you might have a ❶ conflict of interest is to request changes on the ❷ discussion page for the article in question.

The principal challenges to this approach include determining what types of changes are compatible with ❸ Wikipedia's rules, posing requests in a way that's persuasive and easy for editors to evaluate, and making sure your suggestions are reviewed in a timely manner.

Given these obstacles, you might wonder why you can't just edit a given article directly. After all, the simplest and quickest way to update a page is to make the edits yourself. In theory, Wikipedia can be edited by anyone at any time. In practice, you should be very careful when dealing with articles where you have a financial interest.

Here are two reasons to take the long view and follow the rules carefully:

1. The moral case:

Wikipedia is one of the most important information resources in the world. By respecting community norms, you will contribute to its overall success.

2. And the practical one:

Not only is any risk of "blowback" significantly reduced, you'll earn respect as an honest broker, leading to more productive discussions.

Another good reason involves taking an even longer view: if the broader dialogue between PR professionals and Wikipedia is to improve, it will require the industry to demonstrate that following the rules—and enforcing them—is in fact the recognized standard practice.

03 Why you should consider engaging on Wikipedia

Many organizations are wary of getting involved with Wikipedia, but here is why it should matter to yours

The case for Wikipedia's influence is simple: it is the fifth-most visited website in the entire world, with nearly 450 million monthly visitors accessing more than 20 billion pages.[4] It is arguably the world's most important reference website, following Google, which displays Wikipedia on the first page of search results more consistently than it does any other website. Although far from perfect, Wikipedia is an unrivaled resource for information on virtually every topic of public interest. For companies and organizations, it usually ranks in the top two or three search results. Wikipedia is simply too important to ignore.

To the extent that most companies have any rule for their employees about editing Wikipedia, it's usually to avoid it; the possibility of negative publicity outweighs whatever value there may be in getting changes made.[5] Likewise, Wikipedians have sometimes advised businesses and organizations that might be eligible for an entry but do not yet have one—or who would like to see a new initiative, product or service added to an existing entry—to be patient. As they say, if your subject is indeed worthy, someone will write about it before long.[6] Both of these views are understandable, but we suggest a further consideration.

Wikipedia editors gravitate toward articles of personal or academic interest, which typically excludes business subjects. This means it is actually quite unlikely that someone will write an article about your company, unless it is very famous—or becomes embroiled in controversy. A new article or addition may in fact objectively qualify for inclusion, but simply waiting for it to happen is not much of a solution. And even if an independent editor does so, the addition may not be accurate, comprehensive, or even neutral. It's very much in Wikipedia's interest that its articles meet these standards, and that includes entries about companies and organizations.

Yet Wikipedians tend to be concerned that contributors with a financial interest, or those representing clients, will privilege marketing goals over building an encyclopedia. This is not an unreasonable worry, but it's also not good enough reason to discourage them from getting involved. Rather, it's a reason to make sure these contributors understand their proper role.

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4. "Wikimedia Report Card", Wikimedia Foundation, August 2014. http://reportcard.wmflabs.org/
5. "Corporate editing of Wikipedia revealed", Katie Hafner, The New York Times, August 19, 2007 http://www.nytimes.com/2007/08/19/technology/19iht-wiki.1.7167084.html
6. "Wikipedia: What is the way to register your business name with Wikipedia?", Quora.com, http://www.quora.com/Wikipedia/What-is-the-way-to-register-your-business-name-with-Wikipedia

04   Why you might choose not to engage on Wikipedia

Frustrating as it may be, sometimes you'll actually be better off staying out of the way

🔗 Shortcuts

❶ **WP:RELIABLE**
Identifying reliable sources
(guideline)

❷ **WP:LOP**
List of policies
(summary)

WP:LGL
List of guidelines
(summary)

The "Streisand effect"[7] describes how efforts to conceal obscure but publicly available information only serves to amplify interest in the matter. (The phenomenon is so named because of Barbra Streisand's memorably unsuccessful attempt to remove photos of her Malibu home from the Internet.)

This effect is often cited as a reason to avoid editing—or attempting to influence the content of—Wikipedia articles in which one may have a personal or financial interest, especially about clients. When prominent organizations try to remove or change information on Wikipedia without a valid argument, or through means incompatible with Wikipedia's rules, it often makes headlines—just ask British PR firm Bell Pottinger[8] or the entire United States Congress.[9]

But the Streisand effect is hardly a *fait accompli*. If you have identified an error, inaccuracy, omission or similar problem—and you can demonstrate this by citing ❶ **reliable sources** and Wikipedia's ❷ **policies and guidelines**—you should not be dissuaded from seeking to change it through the proper channels.

However, you should probably leave well enough alone, if:

- You don't have a reliable source to back up your claim
- The correction is more trouble to explain than it's worth to you
- The change you want to make is incompatible with Wikipedia guidelines
- You don't have time to participate in a conversation about your proposed change
- Raising questions about existing content might lead to the addition of legitimate criticism not currently included

Although there are circumstances when getting involved in a Wikipedia entry may not help your cause, in most cases your expertise can help to improve Wikipedia. The rest of this primer explains how you can do that without creating unnecessary headaches.

7. "Streisand effect", Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Streisand_effect
8. "Wikipedia investigates PR firm Bell Pottinger's edits", Dave Lee, BBC News, December 8, 2011. http://www.bbc.com/news/technology-16084861
9. "WIth Twitter's Help, Watch Congress Edit Wikipedia", Derek Willis, The New York Times, July 14, 2014.
    http://www.nytimes.com/2014/07/15/upshot/twitter-wikipedia-and-a-closer-eye-on-congress.html

05

How to monitor for changes to Wikipedia articles

Why you should be monitoring Wikipedia, and three ways you can do it

🔗 Shortcuts

❶ **WP:READHIST**
Help:How to read
an article history
(information)

❷ **WP:WATCH**
Help:Watchlist
(information)

❸ **WikiWatch**
www.wikiwatch.net
(information)

Wikipedia is constantly changing, but changes to any one article are unpredictable and sometimes infrequent. This can make keeping track of new edits to Wikipedia articles a tedious effort, and consequently one that most organizations choose not to trouble themselves with.

Nevertheless, Wikipedia's open-editing policy means that the information contained in the online encyclopedia can change at any time. How long are you willing to go without finding out about false claims added to an article you care about, or true information removed from it?

Wikipedia's openness makes it vulnerable, but also makes it possible to keep track of these changes. This chapter provides some helpful information about different methods of monitoring Wikipedia pages:

UNDERSTANDING CHANGES TO WIKIPEDIA ARTICLES

The slowest and least efficient way to monitor Wikipedia articles is simply to visit them and ❶ **review the changes**. Start this by clicking on the "View history" link at the top of any page. This will show you a list of the last 50 edits. Each bulleted line represents one edit, and can be very hard to read. Here's what's most important:

When was this edit made?

Each edit shows the time and date the edit occurred following international (non-U.S.) conventions. Clicking on the timestamp will take you to the version of that article following that edit

Who made this edit?

To the right of the date is the name of the editor account account responsible for the change. Clicking on the username will take you to the user page, if one exists; next to each name you will also see links to the user's talk page ("talk") and list of recent edits ("contribs")

What happened in the edit?

Next the edit provides information about the size of the article and edit measured in bytes, first showing the total size of the article following the edit, and the number of bytes changed (plus in green, minus in red). Immediately to the right is the "edit summary" provided either by the editor, Wikipedia's software, or both. This can include a lot of jargon; see the list at the end for explanations of some.

Each edit also includes options to view what Wikipedia calls a "diff": a page showing the changes between versions. On this page there

are two: "cur" shows the difference between that specific edit and the current article ("cur") and a diff showing the changes between that specific edit and the previous version ("prev"). Usually, "prev" is what you want to see. There will also be a link to "undo" any edit and, if you are logged in, a "thank" button to send a thank-you message to the editor responsible for that specific edit.

USING WIKIPEDIA'S WATCHLIST

To use ❷ Wikipedia's built-in watchlist, you must have a registered account and be logged in. You can add any article to your watchlist by clicking the star icon at the top of the page. When the star turns blue, you will know it is added to your watchlist. You can remove a page at any time
by visiting the page and clicking on the blue star again.

To see recent changes, click on the "Watchlist" button in the top right corner of any page. Here you will see changes to pages you are following in reverse-chronological order, with headings separating edits occuring on different days. The watchlist allows you to change filters, namespaces, tags, and other options to adjust what you see.

Wikipedia's built-in watchlist is the most customizable option for power users, such as active Wikipedia editors, however it can be overwhelming for others. The watchlist also has options for email and RSS notifications, but these can be confusing and have limited support.

USING WIKIWATCH TO MONITOR ARTICLES

❸ WikiWatch is a commercial software solution providing a far more intuitive interface, customizable notifications, insights about edits and editors that Wikipedia does not illuminate, specifically designed around the needs of a brand manager or account executive.

A WikiWatch user can add any Wikipedia article to their watchlist from within the system, adjust their notification settings, and wait for real-time email alerts to come in to their inbox delivering a

quick assessment, which the user can choose to let pass or examine more closely. These notifications identify and explain what happened in the edit in simple terms intended to provide context for the edit itself.

Within the dashboard, WikiWatch offers three views: the Watchlist, providing a top-level view of all articles being followed; the Article View, displaying recent edits to that article plus traffic and editor statistics; and the Edit View page, explaining what happened in each specific edit, background on the editor account responsible, and a clear representation of how the page content changed.

To learn more about WikiWatch, visit www.wikiwatch.net or email help@wikiwatch.net

For a list of commonly occurring types of Wikipedia edits, see Appendix III.

06 How to work with Wikipedia

Are you ready? Let's get started

🔗 Shortcuts

❶ WP:USERNAME
Username policy
(policy)

❷ WP:SIGNUP
Why create an
account?
(information)

❸ WP:COI
Conflict of interest
(guideline)

❹ WP:RELIABLE
Identifying reliable
sources
(guideline)

❺ WP:NPOV
Neutral point of
view
(policy)

❻ WP:CLEANSTART
Clean start
(policy)

❼ WP:TUTOR
Tutorial
(project)

First, a disclaimer: the procedures described in this section are absolutely necessary—but not solely sufficient—for constructive interaction with the Wikipedia community. Each and every question about a Wikipedia entry is unique, influenced by factors such as:

- What has been written about the subject in reliable sources
- What Wikipedia currently says about the subject
- How Wikipedia's policies and guidelines apply

Understanding how these factors affect a particular article or topic makes all the difference in whether a request is likely to be successful. Remember that Wikipedia editors are looking to create (and approve) reference-quality information written from a neutral point of view.

GETTING STARTED

The very first step to participating on Wikipedia is the creation of a user account. While it's technically possible to contribute without creating an account, you will be well-served by establishing an identity within the Wikipedia community.

Creating an account

A very important rule to understand and follow is that Wikipedia requires each account to be controlled by ❶ **one person**. For this reason, you should be careful to choose a username that does not imply the account represents an entire company or organization. A username such as

BestComms is likely to be blocked for violating this rule. A better option is *Jane at BestComms*, or *BC Jane Smith*.

❷ **Creating an account** takes very little time. Although including an email address is optional, it is strongly recommended. If you lose your password and do not have an email on file, there is no way to recover your password; you will have to create a whole new account.

Setting up a user page

After you've created an account, it's time to create a user page. At a minimum, it should include your name and your employer. If you participate on Wikipedia on behalf of clients, list them here as you begin to do so. Stating your intention to follow Wikipedia's policies and guidelines, especially those about ❸ **conflicts of interest**, ❹ **reliable sources**, and ❺ **neutrality**, can also go a long way.

Previously existing accounts

You may already have a Wikipedia account, and wonder if you should start over. You certainly can do so, as ❻ **Wikipedia's policies** expressly permit. However, unless your previous edits are simply too embarrassing, just make a note of previous edits on your user page and recommit to following Wikipedia's best practices.

Getting your bearings

If this is your first time on Wikipedia as anything but a reader, two resources to help you get you get started are the ❼ **official tutorial** and a guided

🔗 Shortcuts

❶ WP:TWA
The Wikipedia
Adventure
(project)

❷ WP:SIMPLE
Simplified ruleset
(information)

❸ WP:CITET
Citation templates
(information)

❹ WP:CHEAT
Cheatsheet
(information)

❺ WP:MOS
Manual of style
(guideline)

❻ WP:EDITREQ
Edit request
(information)

❼ WP:SIG
Signatures
(guideline)

❽ WP:DEADLINE
There is no
deadline
(essay)

❾ WP:COI/N
Conflict of interest
/ Noticeboard
(project)

⓿ WP:TEAHOUSE
Teahouse
(project)

tour called ❶ **The Wikipedia Adventure**. Take some time to read the ❷ **Simplified ruleset** for a concise explanation of the community norms that Wikipedians observe.

PREPARING A REQUEST FOR EDITORS

Once you've established an account, you're ready to start seeking assistance. As complicated as Wikipedia can be, the process of asking for help is relatively straightforward:

- Identify your goals for a specific Wikipedia article
- Locate independent sources to support the point(s) you wish to make, and turn them into ❸ **formatted citations**
- Familiarize yourself with Wikipedia's ❹ **markup language**—the HTML-like code behind all Wikipedia pages—and its ❺ **Manual of Style**
- Write your own version of what you think should be added, or clarify what should be removed and / or modified
- Locate the discussion page for the article to which you wish to propose an edit—it's behind the "Talk" tab at the top of every entry—and make your best case for why the change would benefit readers
- Be aware that you may have to ask in more than one place before you receive help; take your time, look for editors who have already shown interest in the topic, and don't bombard numerous editors with requests
- Once a particular issue has been resolved, be sure to thank the editor(s) who helped you, and close any outstanding requests

TIPS FOR FOLLOWING THE ABOVE STEPS

Think carefully about what you ask for

Wikipedia has far too many rules for you to understand every nuance before you get involved. To improve your chances of making a quality suggestion, think about your proposed contribution from both the perspective of a reader seeking useful information, and of a volunteer editor

trying to serve the interests of that reader. If you can articulate how your proposed edits will benefit Wikipedia's intended audience, your proposed updates are more likely to be accepted.

The right way to ask for help

Writing an effective request requires a basic understanding of how Wikipedia works and a much better understanding of the subject you wish to address. Here are some key points to think about when seeking assistance:

- Make sure you're logged in before you start
- Keep the message as concise as possible
- Link to sources and guidelines that support your point
- Include a descriptive heading on your request message
- Disclose your professional interest and how it relates to the entry clearly
- Just below the heading, add an ❻ **edit request** template so editors can find it: `{{request edit}}`
- Don't forget close with the snippet of code to add a ❼ **signature**: `~~~~`

What if I need to ask for help again?

Trust us, you probably will have to ask for help more than once! Wikipedia editors are volunteers who prefer to spend most of their time working on topics related to their own interests, and are frequently busy offline as well.

Finding a balance between persistence and patience is key, and being respectful of volunteer ❽ **editors' time** is a must. A good rule of thumb is to wait 48 hours after your first posting to start looking for help again, and to limit any follow-up requests to one or two new messages every 5–7 days. You may find editors willing to help by visiting projects such as ❾ **Conflict of interest/ Noticeboard** or the ⓿ **Teahouse**.

07 How to deal with specific issues

The following pages provide a starting point for how to work through common Wikipedia questions

Shortcuts

❶ **WP:UNDUE**
Due and undue weight
(policy)

❷ **WP:RCP**
Recent changes patrol
(project)

WHAT IF I JUST WANT TO MAKE A FEW SIMPLE, FACT-BASED UPDATES?

It can be very tempting to make an edit that seems obvious or uncontroversial, such as correcting a spelling error. While it's entirely possible that you will face no immediate objections for making a small update, consider that, in the future, you may wish to make more substantial changes. If you wish to propose a new section or a rewrite of an existing article in the future, you will have an easier time if you don't face the possibility of volunteer editors asking why you did not use the discussion page previously.

In short, you're best served if you go above and beyond what is necessary to make sure not only that you've never engaged in direct editing but also that you've made no edits that might be construed as COI edits. "I've never edited the article directly" is a *much* stronger position than "I have, but only a little".

WHAT CAN I DO IF AN ARTICLE IS OVERLY NEGATIVE OR DEROGATORY?

To bring a biased article back toward neutrality, expect that you will have to explain your specific concerns and present solutions that would bring the article closer to Wikipedia's guidelines than its present state. Oftentimes "negative" information *belongs* in the article, but it may be given ❶ **undue weight**, in which case you will need to work with editors to find the correct balance.

Remember the "Streisand effect" and avoid seeking changes that might be seen as an attempt to "whitewash" the entry. Although the temptation to remove information that you believe to be misleading or misconstrued can be very strong—and the pressure you may face internally can be powerful—patience will pay off in the long run. Instead of trying to get it right immediately, focus on getting it right eventually. Eventually lasts much longer.

WHAT SHOULD I DO IN THE EVENT OF VANDALISM?

Unfortunately, Wikipedia's official guidelines and recommended best practices are at odds here. The former explicitly lists undoing vandalism as an "uncontroversial edit" that anyone can make. On the other hand, Jimmy Wales' advice—often called the "Bright Line"[10]—is that PR practitioners should never edit articles directly. You have a judgment call to make.

Consider the following:

1. If the edit has just appeared, give it about 15 minutes. Wikipedia editors are ❷ **always watching**, and may fix the problem without you doing anything.
2. If they don't, think hard about whether the material is "true" vandalism—e.g. nonsense or profanity—or merely inaccurate or contentious material. If the latter, find another editor to review it.

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10. *User:Jimbo Wales/Paid Advocacy FAQ, Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia.* http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/User:Jimbo_Wales/Paid_Advocacy_FAQ

🔗 Shortcuts

❶ WP:BLP
Biographies of
living persons
(policy)

❷ WP:DISPUTE
Dispute resolution
(policy)

❸ WP:3O
Third opinion
(process)

❹ WP:NOTES
Notability
(guideline)

❺ WP:Drafts
Drafts
(project)

❻ WP:AFD
Articles for deletion
(project)

❼ WP:ATA
Arguments to
avoid in deletion
discussions
(essay)

❽ WP:ARTDEV
Article development
(information)

❾ WP:IUP
Image use policy
(policy)

⓿ WP:COI
Conflict of interest
(guideline)

3. Decide how damaging the vandalism is, and whether it is worth risking a slap on the wrist for editing the page directly, even if editors eventually decide you are right. Wikipedians are extremely concerned about possible defamation, and the ❶ **Biographies of living persons** policy may apply. If you decide your best option is to go ahead, leave a note on the discussion page explaining what you did and why.

A WIKIPEDIA EDITOR DISAGREES WITH ME. WHAT CAN I DO?

Occasionally you may find an editor who, for whatever reason, strongly opposes a suggestion you have made. In such a scenario you have to decide whether a reasonable editor would take your side, and also whether it is worth pressing the point. In these cases, remain calm and try to find an acceptable compromise with the editor. You may find that it will be more constructive to modify your suggestion. However, if you find yourself stuck on an issue with a single editor, seek a ❷ **dispute resolution** forum such as ❸ **Third opinion** to find another viewpoint. Don't get stuck, get help!

WHAT IF THERE ISN'T PRESENTLY AN ARTICLE ABOUT MY COMPANY OR CLIENT?

Creating an entirely new article can be a significant challenge. Among the reasons why: Wikipedia's ❹ **Notability** guideline makes clear that not every topic is eligible for a standalone entry; writing a new article from scratch requires a substantial amount of work, not to mention expertise; and the process of submitting a new article can be confusing.

Outlining the steps for writing a new article would require more space than this primer allows. But let's say you have written one and believe it meets Wikipedia's content guidelines: you'll still need to find a volunteer editor to review and approve it. The good news is that Wikipedia has existing processes to assist you, such as the new ❺ **Drafts** project.

Before you begin, think carefully about whether you can provide a balanced, accurate entry that is sourced almost entirely to trade publication and mainstream news articles. Are you willing to include information that a reader may expect to find, even if it is not entirely favorable? Are you prepared for this entry to be forever available for anyone to edit at any time?

ARE THERE CIRCUMSTANCES IN WHICH AN ARTICLE MAY BE REMOVED ENTIRELY?

Typically, an article may only be removed when the subject clearly does not meet the Notability guideline. However, editors often disagree on this threshold, which is why Wikipedia's ❻ **Articles for deletion** process is both lively and unpredictable.

Just because an article may be outdated, biased, poorly written, or poorly sourced ❼ **does not mean** it should be deleted. In many cases, these shortcomings are ❽ **opportunities for improvement**.

WHAT IF I WANT TO ADD AN IMAGE?

Wikipedia is published under a Creative Commons (CC) license[11] and, in most cases, original images you wish to upload should be as well. You must own the copyright or receive permission from the copyright holder to do so. If you are unfamiliar with this license, think of it as halfway between "all rights reserved" and "public domain". ❾ **Image use policy** on Wikipedia is complicated, so make sure you understand how it applies to the type of image you want to add. In most cases, "Attribution" (or "CC-BY") is the specific license to choose.

WHAT IF I'VE MADE MISTAKES IN MY APPROACH TO WIKIPEDIA IN THE PAST?

Fear not: it is exceedingly common for an employee or representative to have edited a company or organization's entry without following—or even being aware of—Wikipedia's ⓿ **conflict of interest** guidelines. If you or someone you represent has made unconstructive edits in the past,

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11. *"Attribution 2.0 Generic (CC BY 2.0)", Creative Commons. http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/*

🔗 Shortcuts

❶ WP:NOTE
Notability
(guideline)

or otherwise have made substantial COI edits— even if well-intentioned—you'd be well-advised to acknowledge that fact when you ask for help on a discussion page, or ask a specific editor, for the first time. In our experience, most editors will be pleasantly surprised that you are up-front about the fact, and this may encourage them to assist you.

Certain kinds of mistakes are worse than others, of course, and historical obliviousness will be forgiven much more readily than repeated attempts to circumvent Wikipedia processes. If repeated attempts have been made to restore an article deleted following community review, for example, re-creating it once the topic has achieved ❶ **Notability** can be more difficult than it would have been otherwise.

DO "CONFLICT OF INTEREST" RULES APPLY ONLY TO ENTRIES ABOUT MY COMPANY?

These guidelines apply to any article that is materially relevant to your organization or client, not just the main profile, or articles about its products, services and employees. It also includes articles covering competitors, industry-related subjects, and any topic in which your organization may have a vested interest. Although it may not always be clear to you what counts, it's best to err on the side of caution by disclosing your interest and starting on the discussion page first.

CAN I JUST FIND SOMEONE I KNOW WITHOUT A PAID CONFLICT OF INTEREST TO MAKE EDITS FOR ME?

Wikipedia's COI guidelines cover not just paid but also unpaid potential conflicts. While unpaid conflicts are not as strongly discouraged, asking a relative, a friend, a customer, or a former intern to make changes is not a good long-term strategy. Not only is this approach ethically dubious, the pattern of edits may give editors reason to suspect an undisclosed COI, and similar problems may result. Bottom line: it just isn't worth it.

08   Wrapping Up

Remember that if you put Wikipedia first, you'll rarely go wrong

Although there is no way this primer can cover everything you need to know about Wikipedia, we believe the above should give you the knowledge and confidence to get started in the right way, and the necessary background to learn further, and to make more significant contributions over time. As complex as Wikipedia can be, engaging with it in a professional capacity simply requires the time and commitment to do it right. It also requires internalizing its mission and figuring out how you can help advance it.

This guide began with a quote from Jimmy Wales that he would perhaps like to forget. Let's conclude by invoking the one he is actually best known for:[12]

"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."

Jimmy Wales

Remember that your value to Wikipedia lies in helping it accomplish these core goals: to be an objective, accurate, and up-to-date collective information base. Look for suggestions to make not merely based on what your company or organization would like to see, but what the reader who comes to Wikipedia to learn about a subject would want to know. Think carefully as well about how to interact with the community that is already engaged in this practice, and how to have the patience to work with them in the collaborative spirit that makes Wikipedia unique. These are Wikipedia's best practices, and they will serve you well.

12. *"Wikipedia Founder Jimmy Wales Responds", Robin Miller, Slashdot, July 28, 2005.*
http://slashdot.org/story/04/07/28/1351230/wikipedia-founder-jimmy-wales-responds

I Appendix I

Among Wikipedia's most important rules

🔗 Shortcuts

❶ **WP:AGF**
Assume good faith
(guideline)

❷ **WP:NPOV**
Neutral point of
view
(policy)

❸ **WP:COPYRIGHT**
Copyrights
(policy)

❹ **WP:NOTE**
Notability
(guideline)

❺ **WP:RELIABLE**
Identifying reliable
sources
(guideline)

❻ **WP:VERIFY**
Verifiability
(policy)

❼ **WP:NOT**
What Wikipedia
is not
(policy)

One of the reasons Wikipedia can be so difficult to understand is the sheer breadth and complexity of the rules governing it. Even longtime Wikipedia editors do not know all of them, and they sometimes interpret particular rules differently. Here are some of the most important ones to familiarize yourself with:

❶ **Assume good faith:**
Wikipedia contributors have many diverse and divergent views, so it is imperative that they agree to get along in order for Wikipedia to work. As long as you act in good faith, others should extend the same courtesy to you.

❷ **Neutral point of view:**
Wikipedia guidelines require a given topic be covered by only one entry, so articles must e even-handed and consider all relevant viewpoints fairly.

❸ **Copyrights:**
Plagiarism and copyright violations are a big problem for Wikipedia, and you should be very careful that you avoid contributing to it. Always make sure that new material for Wikipedia is original at the time it is being proposed. This applies equally to copyrighted images.

❹ **Notability:**
One of the thorniest questions for companies and organizations is whether a company meets the requirements for a standalone entry. The general rule is that a topic must have "significant coverage in reliable sources that are independent of the subject" before it is considered eligible.

❺ **Reliable Sources:**
Trade publications, newspapers, magazines, academic journals, and government filings are the among the kinds of sources most useful in writing about companies and organizations, and they should be appropriately cited.

❻ **Verifiability:**
Closely related to the rule about sourcing, Wikipedia requires that any material added to Wikipedia be publicly verifiable. If a fact is true, but you can't demonstrate this to editors beyond your say-so, leave it out.

❼ **What Wikipedia is not:**
Wikipedia is an encyclopedia, but what does that mean? One way to explain this is by identifying what "is not". On this (very long) list: a dictionary; a directory; a mirror site; a manual; a textbook; a general repository for information.

II Appendix II

A glossary of Wikipedia terminology

🔗 Shortcuts

❶ **WP:VE**
VisualEditor
(project)

As you have surely realized, Wikipedia has its own jargon that can rival almost any technical field. Gaining fluency can take a long time, but this list will help you understand several of the most common terms:

Article: A Wikipedia page that is part of the encyclopedia portion of Wikipedia. Also informally called an "entry", or sometimes just called a "page".

Bright Line: On Wikipedia, the phrase has come to mean Jimmy Wales' advice for PR pros that one should never directly edit articles where one has a financial interest. It's not a policy or guideline, but we recommend following it.

Conflict of interest: Not a concept unique to Wikipedia, but one that you should always keep in mind. Financial relationships are usually viewed as the most critical.

Discussion page: Every article has its own forum for editors to discuss the content and development of the article, interchangeably called a "talk page".

Editor: Who is a Wikipedia editor? Pretty much anyone who decides they are. Another common term you will see in formal cases is "user" and, less formally, "Wikipedian".

History page: Every article is accompanied by a page where you can find all previous changes. Remember this: every edit made to Wikipedia is saved, forever.

Markup language: This is the term for the code underlying all Wikipedia articles, similar to HTML. While easier to learn, it still requires study to use effectively. You may also wish to try the ❶ **Visual Editor**, which you can turn on in your account's user preferences.

Templates: Snippets of markup that create more complex Wikipedia layout elements. Warning tags on articles and edit request templates are two of the most common you will run across.

User contributions: Similar to the History page for articles, every change to Wikipedia made by any user is visible in a list on a page associated with each user account.

User pages: Once you have an account, this is basically your "home page". If you wish to represent a company, organization or other type of client on Wikipedia, it is very strongly advised that you declare these interests here.

User talk: Just as Wikipedia articles have a dedicated discussion section, so do user accounts. When you have a question for a specific editor, the best thing is to find their personal discussion page and ask there.

Wikimedia Foundation: The nonprofit parent organization of Wikipedia and related projects such as Wikimedia Commons, abbreviated "WMF" or called "the Foundation". Know that it usually avoids getting involved in content questions.

WikiProjects: Self-organized groups of Wikipedians who are interested in similar topics, and cooperate on article-improvement projects. They might be a useful resource for you, if you can find one that's active.

III Appendix III

Common Wikipedia edits: Frequently occurring types of changes on Wikipedia

What follows is a list of issues, incidents, and other situations that one will encounter when monitoring Wikipedia articles. Some arise more frequently than others, but all are worth understanding:

Advertising / spam:

Content the editor believes promotes (or denigrates) a business, organization, or related brand such that the article is unacceptably close to marketing for the relevant subject. Common examples include promotional content in the body of the article and external links to commercial websites

Bot edit:

An edit made by an automated software program called a bot, typically these are maintenance edits or to revert vandalism

Category modified:

Addition, removal, or replacement of a category at the very bottom of the article. Categories are frequently updated by regular Wikipedia editors and are rarely noticed by readers

Citation needed:

The Citation Needed template is applied in the body of the article immediately following a sentence or phrase the editor believes to lack a reliable source

Conflict of interest tag:

The conflict of interest (COI) template is applied to the top of an article when an editor believes the article has been edited by an individual with a close connection to the subject, such as an employee editing a company's page. The template is intended to draw editors' attention to a problem, not to be a permanent "scarlet letter" although some editors have been known to use it in this way

Copyright violation:

Relates to concerns that the article content includes written material that is copied from another source, or is not properly attributed. Wikipedia considers copyright violations a major problem, and can result in deletion of content

Disambiguation:

Usually refers to changes made to an internal link, where an editor believes the existing link should be changed to point the reader to a more relevant page

Due weight:

Concerns about whether the content in the article properly represents all significant viewpoints, commonly described on Wikipedia as evaluating whether certain content is given "due weight" or "undue weight". Often used when an editor feels that a minority viewpoint is given more attention than the editor believes is appropriate. Factors affecting this consideration include the amount, placement, and length of minority viewpoints within the article

General cleanup:

Changes intended to improve the page in one or more ways, not limited to: spelling, punctuation, formatting, and the use of internal or external links

Infobox:

Changes made in the quick-reference table in the top-right of most articles. These changes are usually constructive, but the infobox is often a target for vandalism

Neutrality:

Relates to concerns about the presentation of facts in a neutral or impartial light. May or may not include the placement of a Neutrality template

Notability tag:

The Notability template is applied to the top of an article when an editor believes the topic does not meet Wikipedia's eligibility requirements. Oftentimes the editor will simultaneously open a discussion about the article on a page called "Articles for deletion", which will be linked from this template. If you see this tag, there is a serious risk that the article will be removed from Wikipedia

Page blanked / restored:

A type of vandalism where an editor, usually one without a registered account, deletes all material on the page. This type of vandalism is usually reverted and restored very quickly

Reference / citation:

Addition, removal, or adjustment to a reference used in the article to verify information. Maintenance edits to reference templates are frequently made without changing any visible text

Sourcing:

Relates to concerns that the references in the article are insufficient, low-quality, or have been used improperly

Unverified information:

Relates to concerns that information in the article is not supported by a reliable source