

READERS respond

POLL RESULTS

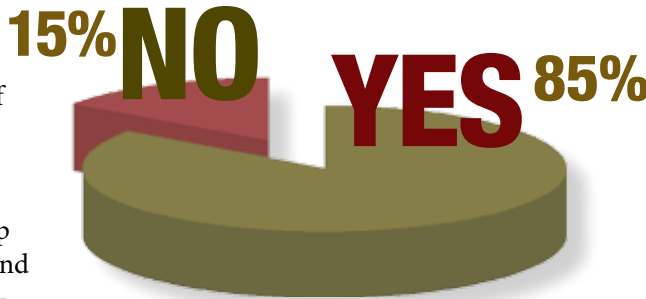
Are Wikis Worth the Time?

Wikipedia, and similar sites, carry that double-edged sword of convenience and connectivity. Students and others flock to the site for information; it is up to teachers, students, and consumers to acknowledge their own culpability in regards to checking for accuracy. Any encyclopedia entry is usually a broad overview or quick synopsis of information about the entry. Depending upon the user's need, it is usually just a starting point for research; thus, even novice researchers can quickly confirm the information. However, some users can get broadsided by Wikipedia if they don't thoroughly read and employ critical thinking along with a strong dose of common sense.

I think wikis are well worth the time, just heed this adaptation of an old adage which is still relevant for our open-source world: buyer beware and users be aware!

Susan Jellinger
Director of Library Services,
Hamilton College, Urbandale, Iowa

Carol Winkler's main problem with Wikipedia is the "bad information that is always present." It is well known that there are errors in Wikipedia, some added intentionally. There is also information that is



slanted to the author's point of view. This is true of most sites on the Web and also of traditional resources such as World Book and Britannica. One thing that Wikipedia brings to us is information about topics that are never covered in traditional print encyclopedias. Just check Wikipedia for information on "Zip to Zap," an event that happened in North Dakota back in the late 1960s (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zip%2C_North_Dakota). You couldn't find information on Zap, North Dakota (population 231), or this event in any traditional reference. Another thing that Wikipedia brings to us is current information, information that won't appear in print resources for several years. Check for information about stem cell research, cloning, podcasting, iPods, or Hurricane Katrina in a traditional encyclopedia, and see what you find. So, to answer the question: "Yes, Wikipedia is worth the time."

Craig Nansen
Technology Coordinator, Minot Public Schools,
Minot, North Dakota

LETTERS

I read "Hands-On and Online" (by Roger Martin and Dianne Smith, pp. 32–35) in the February 2006 issue with interest. I work at a small Catholic school with a small technology budget, and we cannot afford Blackboard. However, I can recommend Moodle, a free open-source course management system with many of the same features. I plan to implement it for teacher training and for teachers to use with their own classes: <http://moodle.org/>.

Linda Wallace
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Editor's note: *L&L* reviewed Moodle in October 2005 (pp. 42, 45). Find the review online at <http://www.iste.org/ll> (click Past Issues to get to the October 2005 issue, vol. 33, no. 2).

Coming Next Issue

Building a Millennial Middle School

All across the United States, school districts are scrambling to replace aging schools. *L&L's* J.V. Bolkan, Jennifer Roland, and Davis N. Smith take an inside look at how one public school district in Eugene, Oregon, tackled the challenge of building two high-tech middle schools.

Revisiting the Digital Divide

L&L columnist Don Hall's feature on the digital divide discusses how technology is an accelerant. In itself, it doesn't provide solutions, merely helps you move quicker in the direction you're already heading. Hall describes how to help ensure your district is heading in the right direction.

Attract Women to CS

Katie Siek and her colleagues from Indiana University describe a program they created to increase female representation in computer science careers. They took interactive lessons on the road to middle and high schools, just when many young women turn away from math, science, and technology. They also provide information on other such programs in the United States and Canada.



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