

# **Using Wikis to easily and collaboratively maintain public websites**

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WikiWikiWebs, usually referred to simply as wikis, have risen in popularity in recent years. Sites such as the Wikipedia, which reports some 467,000 registered users and 752,000 articles in over 100 languages, attest to the exciting possibilities of wikis. A concept that grew out of the design patterns community during the mid-90s, wikis have most recently become a popular tool for project collaboration, intranets, and documentation. A primary factor in their popularity is the simplicity of creating and editing content, which is done entirely in the web browser while viewing the wiki itself. While most wikis use special markup for formatting, most content can be formatted using a very limited subset of markup that is meant to be intuitive and quick to learn even for those with limited technical savvy.

We adopted a wiki system for our Department to maintain several of our public websites. We have found that the same capabilities that make wikis ideal for uses such as collaborative project work and intranets also offer significant benefits in maintaining public sites. In addition to the ease of editing content, many other benefits are offered by wiki systems, including the ability to add custom markup and functional extensions (as most wikis are open-source and implemented in a server-side scripting language such as PHP or Perl), automatic revision history, and a feature known as "wikifarms" for maintaining several distinct sites using one set of templates, stylesheets, and functional customizations. Depending on the popularity and user community of a particular wiki system, one can often find a large number of "add-on" features and extensions, for example, RSS feed generators.

In this presentation, we will talk about the wiki system we use, PmWiki, some of its features, and the ways that we use it to simplify the maintenance of our public websites.