

## Why We Want Wikis

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Your child (or in my case my husband) needs to find whether the planet name "Coruscant" is G-Canon, S-Canon or Non-Canon in the Star Wars Universe.<sup>1</sup> Does he Google it? No, too many hits and advertised pages. Try various official and unofficial Star War websites? No, again too much searching involved and who knows how good the content will be? Print? Forget it. It will be way behind. What he does is search on Wookieepedia --an all things Star Wars wiki and finds his answer in minutes.

What is a wiki? Wikipedia, perhaps one of the larger wikis on the Internet defines it as:

A type of website that allows users to easily add, remove, or otherwise edit and change some available content, sometimes without the need for registration. This ease of interaction and operation makes a wiki an effective tool for collaborative authoring. The term wiki can also refer to the collaborative software itself (wiki engine) that facilitates the operation of such a website (see wiki software), or to certain specific wiki sites, including the computer science site (and original wiki), WikiWikiWeb, and the online encyclopedias such as Wikipedia. The first wiki, WikiWikiWeb, is named after the "Wiki Wiki" line of Chance RT-52 buses in Honolulu International Airport, Hawaii. It was created in 1994 and installed on the web in 1995 by Ward Cunningham, who also created the Portland Pattern Repository. "Wiki-wiki" means "hurry quick" in Hawaiian. It also refers to a type of native fish of the islands.<sup>2</sup>

So essentially a wiki, whether through software or web is a tool that can be used by multiple parties to easily *share* and *update* information about a common interest or topic. This is different that a blog, which is generally moderated and updated by an individual.

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<sup>1</sup> I am no Star Wars expert, but will try to explain this. G-Canon is George Canon (as in George Lukas). G-Canon refers to anything Lucas says or does regarding Star Wars, such as interviews and behind the scenes material, not just the movies. C-Canon is Common Canon, which includes all G-Canon and the Expanded Universe--think of all Star Wars books and graphic novels that are not a product of George Lucas or his companies. S-Canon is Secondary Canon - the non-contradicting elements of what happens in video games put out by Lucas Entertainment are still canon and part of the Star Wars universe.

By the way, Coruscant was C-Canon (based on the books of Timothy Zahn), but became G-Canon when George Lucas adopted the name "Coruscant" in the prequel movies (SW Episode I-III).

<sup>2</sup> Wikipedia, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wiki>. August 15, 2006.

What are the benefits of collaborative authoring and updating on wikis? Well, if you've read any of recent publications regarding collective thought,<sup>3</sup> collaborative thinking often results in the "best" (correct, most comprehensive, most current) information. Many heads are better than one, as my mom always says. And collaborative updating not only keeps entries current, it keeps authors honest. If there is any disagreement, unsubstantiated claims, or grey area surrounding content posted, you can be sure there will be an entry and discussion about it posted on a wiki.

Wikipedia and Wookiepedia are public wikis-anyone anywhere can post content. I looked up the definition and history of bobby pins the other day and Wikipedia had the answer. But can wikis also serve a useful function when used privately by organizations?

Of course! We opted to use wiki software at Greenberg Traurig for the members of the Research Center to share information. Postings revolve around research resources, best practice search methodology and of course, vacation pictures, but postings can be about anything department-related. The main reason we chose a wiki over a blog for our internal research center communication is that you cannot search our wiki's content via the Internet. A somewhat important consideration when working for a law firm.

The entire staff can post content - and do. We have some excellent entries regarding local document delivery services in states our offices serve, tribal law and foreign patents—to name a few. We also post research guidelines as well, such as how to find non-billable numbers. To keep things from getting too disorganized, three of our librarians volunteered to be "moderators"—they set the basic category organization of the wiki and may add cross links from postings as they see fit. The wiki can be searched via the content tree, author, date or by keyword.

We are only into our fourth month of using our wiki, but have already found it to be a powerful knowledge management tool. We have successfully used it to quickly find information or department experts on a topic, update colleagues on new developments, train new staff members on resources and search strategy and, perhaps most importantly, determine where we want to go on our next vacation.

For more discussion regarding wikis and their uses, see the July 31<sup>st</sup> issue of the *New Yorker*<sup>4</sup> and Deborah Ginsberg's informative *Spectrum* article.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Try J. Surowieki, *The Wisdom of Crowds*, Doubleday, 2004.

<sup>4</sup> S. Schiff, *Know It All*, *New Yorker*, July 31, 2006

[http://www.newyorker.com/printables/fact/060731fa\\_fact](http://www.newyorker.com/printables/fact/060731fa_fact). August 15, 2006.

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<sup>5</sup> D. Ginsberg, *A Wiki Wiki: Learn How to Use this Powerful Content Management Application for Research and to Organize Projects*, AALL Spectrum, July 2006  
[http://www.aallnet.org/products/pub\\_sp0607/pub\\_sp0607\\_ProDev.pdf](http://www.aallnet.org/products/pub_sp0607/pub_sp0607_ProDev.pdf). August 15, 2006.