

8 WAYS TO SHARPEN YOUR COMPANY'S PRESENCE ON...

WIKIPEDIA

by Nick Scott

The internet's largest free-access encyclopaedia can offer big opportunities for

companies looking to expand their reach, as D'Arcy Myers of Wikimedia UK tells *Director*

The purpose, as proclaimed by founder Jimmy Wales – to create “a world in which every single person on the planet is given free access to the sum of all human knowledge” – is ambitious, to say the least. And while there are those who use it as their first choice for fact-checking, others approach it with caution – debating the actual reliability of many pages. What's undeniable, though, is that Wikipedia remains one of the web's biggest success stories. At the last count, it boasts 3 million articles in the English language alone, plus more than 18 million in over 150 other languages. According to research by Brighton-based digital technology company Intelligent Positioning, its pages appear on the first page of results for 99 per cent of all Google searches.

Making its reach even more vast, Wikipedia content self-replicates, as it is reported word-for-word into blogs, social media pages and so on (for example, its phrase “Jaguar was founded as the Swallow Decar Company in 1922”, searched in Google with quotation marks, throws up 3,800 results).

So what can your business do to optimise its Wikipedia entry? And what could you do if you are misrepresented in its pages? D'Arcy Myers, Interim chief executive of Wikimedia UK – the British chapter of the global Wikimedia movement and an independent charity, affiliated with the Wikimedia Foundation – offered *Director* some tips...

1. ASK: “SHOULD WE HAVE AN ENTRY?”

Guidelines as to whether your company is eligible for a profile are set out on the Wikipedia: Notability page. “It's best to think, ‘Would our company have an entry in a paper encyclopaedia?’ and work from there,” says Myers. “If it doesn't warrant one, it doesn't mean there isn't information you could contribute – perhaps relevant source material can inform articles about the field in which you work, or the geographic area.” If your company doesn't currently have an entry and you think it should, visit the Wikipedia: Articles for creation section.

2. NEVER WRITE YOUR OWN ENTRY

A great number of commercial enterprises throughout the world have unfortunately fallen foul of this particular rule – on some occasions, amusingly enough, even making their authorship obvious by employing the first-person narrative. “Let's be really clear about this,” says Myers, “in the same way you don't get to write your own press coverage, it's better to provide information and let a disinterested third party help decide if it merits inclusion in an encyclopaedia entry.”

3. USE THE ASSOCIATED TALK PAGE...

Accessed by clicking the “Talk” tab at the top of any Wikipedia entry, this is a forum where editors discuss potential improvements to articles. “It's the right place for you to put links to content you

think needs to be included, or will address imbalance or correct errors,” says Myers. “Taking this approach is much more likely to lead to a balanced entry about your organisation than self-editing. It may be less direct than making a change yourself,

but negative news stories about companies ‘doctoring’ their articles favourably inevitably end up being reported in the Wikipedia entry itself.”

4. ...EVEN IF YOU SEE A GLARING ERROR

“If you see a mistake in an article, don't correct it yourself – instead, create an account and post on the talk page flagging it up and, if possible, linking to a source which evidences why it is incorrect,” says Myers. “The account you create should also be clear about your connection with the company whose article you are looking to improve. If you have an immediate concern that an article contains a defamatory statement, you should email info@wikimedia.org.uk to get an experienced editor to look at the problem.”

5. PROVIDE INDEPENDENT SOURCES

“Generally speaking, claims made on a company website are not considered neutral enough,” says Myers. The policy is to use sources that have already been scrutinised by someone independent, like news coverage – there is a lot of national and regional trade press to draw upon – or annual reports or statements which have been reviewed by auditors.”

6. CONSIDER APPOINTING A WIKIMEDIAN IN RESIDENCE

The British Library, the Royal Society and Cancer Research UK (Cruk) all have someone on staff who liaises with Wikimedia in order to sharpen up entries. “In the case of Cruk, the focus has been on training staff how to edit and to improve the quality of articles about cancer, because for many families they're a first point of reference when a relative is diagnosed,” says Myers, adding that Wikimedia is looking to roll out this scheme into the corporate sector in the near future.

7. ASK NOT (ONLY) WHAT WIKIPEDIA CAN DO FOR YOU

There are ways to get involved in the Wikipedia cause which can help your business through the enhancing of information-sharing. As Myers explains: “Wikipedia pages are translated into multiple languages and linked by a meta-data project Wikidata. Many businesses rely on common specifications for parts, chemicals, units, measures, shipping rates, weights and so on, and it's sometimes very difficult to convert between countries. It could really help business if there was a willingness to curate a central standard reference list all businesses could refer to.”

8. FIND OUT MORE

The Chartered Institute of Public Relations (www.cipr.co.uk) has written a set of Wikipedia best practice guidelines for communications professionals, accessed in PDF form by typing ‘Wikipedia Guidelines’ into the search field on their homepage. “If you have any questions about Wikipedia and how it works, you can always contact Wikimedia UK, the charity that supports and promotes Wikipedia,” says Myers.

www.wikimedia.org.uk

