

Wikipedia: A Guide for Journalists

Tools of the Trade · By Simon Townsend · 1 min read

Wikipedia (trust it or not?)

Students constantly ask me: "Can I trust the internet encyclopedia Wikipedia for facts and background information?"

Well . . . I don't.

But then I don't trust any ONE source for my information.

I might log into Wikipedia and read what it has to say on a topic or person I'm researching.

I make a few notes, and then go elsewhere to double- and triple-check the information I might use.

There has been a lot of criticism of Wikipedia, including the story below.

Cash-for-kindness scandal rattles Wikipedia

By Asher Moses The Sydney Morning Herald

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THE toughest two weeks of the career of the Wikipedia co-founder, Jimmy Wales, just got tougher, with a former chief scientist at one of the world's biggest technology companies claiming Mr Wales traded Wiki edits for donations.

Jeff Merkey, a former computer scientist at Novell, claims Mr Wales told him in 2006 that for a substantial donation from Mr Merkey, he would edit his Wikipedia entry - which included details of lawsuits involving Mr Merkey including one brought by Novell alleging misappropriation of trade secrets - to make it more favourable.

Mr Merkey made a \$US5000 donation in 2006 and the edit history for his Wikipedia entry showed that, about the same time, Mr Wales changed the entry after wiping it out and ordering editors to start over.

Mr Merkey's claims were published in a statement on a Wikipedia mailing list. On the same mailing list, Mr Wales called the allegation "nonsense".

The claim is the most damning yet against Mr Wales, who was last week accused by a former Wikipedia executive of improperly using the non-profit organisation's funds for his own lavish recreation.

Danny Wool, effectively Mr Wales's right-hand-man for two years before he left the donor-supported Wikimedia Foundation last year, said Mr Wales had tried to claim the cost of a visit to a Moscow massage parlour and expensive bottles of wine.

Earlier, a former girlfriend, Rachel Marsden, leaked messaging transcripts purporting to show Mr Wales using his influence to improperly change Ms Marsden's Wikipedia entry so he could continue "f----- [her] brains out".

Mr Wales, who is going through a divorce, publicly dumped Ms Marsden via a statement on the online encyclopedia, leading her to retaliate by releasing the transcripts and auctioning some of his clothes on eBay.

On the Wikipedia mailing list, Mr Wales said he would "never offer, nor accept any offer, whereby a donation would buy someone special editorial treatment in the encyclopedia".

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