GooglePedia

By Mike Stopforth

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One of the many reasons I like Firefox - the free, open source web browser - is that the community supporting Firefox continually comes up with little applications, called extensions, that through a simple installation process add great functionality to my browsing experience. One such extension, a very recent addition to the stacks of existing Firefox add-ons, is GooglePedia.

GooglePedia takes the powerful search functionality of Google and combines it with the formidable content of Wikipedia, so that when you run a search on Google half of the page displays Google search results, while the other half of the page shows Wikipedia search matches.

In case you've been hibernating for the last few years and don't know what I'm talking about when I mention Wikipedia - Wikipedia is the world's first online, open-source encyclopedia. It's an enormous resource built by a community of volunteers - people like you and I - who have expertise and knowledge to share and do so, for the benefit of something much bigger than them, without remuneration.

Here's a great snippet from a recent Fortune article off CNNMoney.com about the Wikipedia community:

> **How to motivate - and control - an army of 30 000 volunteer workers.**_Daniel Mayer doesn't complain that he's underpaid. That's because he is happy being unpaid._

"I enjoy contributing to a product that I think of as having great value," he says. "I like the idea that I am part of something bigger than myself."The 30-year-old, who lives in Atlanta, is referring to Wikipedia, the vast, reasonably reliable online encyclopedia that has one million entries in its English-language edition alone. Operated by the nonprofit Wikimedia Foundation, it has a payroll of four. But there are 30 000 active volunteers.The trick is making them work together for the common good. Since its launch in 2001, founder Jimmy Wales has made it easy for contributors to monitor one another's movements. Wikipedians are alerted when any changes appear on pages they've worked on. Every edit can be traced to its maker, and most versions of each entry, along with online conversations about it, can be retrieved."Being very

transparent encourages good behavior," says Wales, who's based in St. Petersburg.Vandals strike anyway. But Wales, 39, has never had to switch the entire site to read-only status to save it. Virtual vigilantes are always on patrol. Volunteers who misbehave risk eternal banishment.Mayer recalls one person who was kicked out for insisting that Wikipedia compare fluoride to rat poison - and not just because of its taste.Official Wikipedia policy requires that entries stay neutral and that members treat one another civilly. Any serious dispute can move through three stages of appeal - the last one involving an elected 12-volunteer arbitration committee. After that - and only after that - your unpaid job may be history. ,,

Go download Firefox. Do it now. Install the GooglePedia extension. Experiment a bit. Tell someone else. Have some fun. Take back the Web!

ABOUT MIKE STOPFORTH

Mike is the founder and CEO of Cerebra, a specialist in social media and social business consulting, education and implementation for corporate brands. Now as part of the Wunderman Group following its acquisition in 2013, Cerebra provides support to one of the largest digital agencies in the country...

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