



ETHICAL WIKIPEDIA ENGAGEMENT

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There can no longer be any question that Wikipedia is a critical public reference, with huge prominence in search engines and a very large base of frequent users (and an even larger set of occasional visitors). Along with this prominence comes an expectation that all information included on the site is accurate and without bias.

However, as brand stewards for our clients, we as PR professionals frequently find Wikipedia content that is factually incorrect or misleading.

The current Wikipedia policies for editing are detailed, yet conflicting, leaving the ethical PR professional in an awkward situation; largely stemming from an edict by Wikipedia founder, Jimmy Wales, clearly stating public relations/communications professionals should not directly edit the Wikipedia articles for their company or clients.

Instead, professionals need to engage in a waiting game, posting requested edits on the talk pages of the articles in question in hope that the appropriate members of the Wikipedia hierarchy will make the appropriate changes.

The objectives of this session are to:

1. Use academic research findings and expert observations to provide further detail into the current state of public relations involvement in Wikipedia
2. Discuss the potential outcomes if this issue is left unaddressed
3. Explain what attendees, as PR/Communication professionals, can do

Background Information:

Current State of Involvement

A survey with 1284 responses conducted with PRSA, IABC, WOMMA, IPR, and NIRI members Feb. 14-March 14, 2012 conducted by Dr. Marcia DiStaso found:

- 79% of respondents had a Wikipedia article for their company or recent client
- 60% of respondents who were familiar with the Wikipedia article for their company or recent client indicated it had factual errors
- 35% of respondents had experience in engaging Wikipedia (either by using talk pages, editing directly or both)
- 23% who had engaged said making changes was near impossible
- 29% who had engaged said that their interactions with Wikipedians were never productive
- 40% of respondents who used the Talk pages indicated that responses took days, 12% said weeks and 24% never got a response
- 74% of respondents who used the talk pages thought the rule should change

Why Wikipedia is Important

- Wikipedia articles for companies are in the top of search results
- 53% of adult online Americans use Wikipedia according to a Pew Internet and American Life Project survey in May 2010
- 61% of journalists use Wikipedia
- As of Feb. 2012, the Reuters Handbook of Journalism encourages journalists to use Wikipedia as a “good starting point for research.”
- 41% of the above survey respondents indicated that they believe the public use Wikipedia more than their company or client websites
- Wikipedia articles contain errors

What you should do

- Review the accuracy and balance of the Wikipedia articles for your company or clients!
- Establish a transparent Wikipedia ID disclosing your affiliation
- Use the Talk pages to request edits
- Refer to the [CREWE Wikipedia Engagement Flowchart](#) on Wikimedia Commons to navigate edits and for resources when Talk page requests don't work.
- If you foresee the need to make frequent multiple edits, consider joining the mentor program (see details at [Wikipedia:WikiProject Cooperation](#)).
- Become a member of the [CREWE Facebook group](#) to get more involved in the efforts to identify ways for public relations/communications and Wikipedia to work together for mutual benefit.

For more information see:

DiStaso, M. W. (2012). Measuring Public Relations Wikipedia Engagement: How Bright is the Rule? *Public Relations Journal*, 6(2), Available at <http://www.prsa.org/Intelligence/PRJournal/Vol6/No2Wikipedia/>

DiStaso, M. W. (2012). Exploring the Problems with Wikipedia's Editing Rule for Public Relations. *Institute for PR*, Available at <http://www.instituteforpr.org/topics/exploring-the-problems-with-wikipedia%E2%80%99s-editing-rule-for-public-relations/>