

CART 351 - Presentation (MediaWiki)

Presentation Link: shorturl.at/lzFZ2

Presentation:

- MediaWiki

Hello and welcome,

Today our presentation is going to be focusing on MediaWiki.

Initially we were tasked with discussing MediaWiki CORE REST API specifically, but after some research we found it more interesting and easier to understand if MediaWiki as a whole is explained as the REST API is only one part of something much larger.

Anyways, let's begin.

- What is it?

Well, MediaWiki is a free server-based wiki software, meaning it is "an online hypertext publication" that can be "collaboratively edited and managed by its own audience" without extreme knowledge of code and simply using a web browser.

It is "an extremely powerful" [and] "scalable software" that uses PHP to "process and display data stored in a database."

"When a user submits an edit to a page, MediaWiki writes it to the database, but without deleting the previous versions of the page, thus allowing easy reverts in case of vandalism or spamming." [This can be done with image and multimedia files too]

MediaWiki REST API itself serves as a symbolic key to the door that is MediaWiki, allowing users to perform actions with the data made available by MediaWiki.

"You can use the API to build apps and scripts that search and display wiki pages, get media files, and explore page history."

MediaWiki ACTION API differs from the REST API as instead of searching for preexisting data or creating new data for MediaWiki, the ACTION API allows users to edit and delete pages.

- Who made it?

Launched in January of 2001, Wikipedia originally ran on an existing wiki software system named UseModWiki which was written in Perl (a high-level, interpreted, and general-purpose programming language originally developed for text manipulation that borrows many features from C and Shell script) and stored all wiki pages as .txt files.

As the site grew in popularity, this software quickly proved to be limiting and thus in mid-2001, an editor named *Magnus Manske* began working on a replacement software specifically designed for Wikipedia.

Written in PHP and storing all of its information in a MySQL engine database (an open-source database management system), this new software was referred to as "the PHP script", and later as "phase 2".

With Wikipedia's popularity still growing after phase two's launch in January of 2002, another rewrite of the software began with *Lee Daniel Crocker* at the helm. This rewrite would become known as "phase 3" and kept the basic interface of the previous phase but with added functionality on a wider scalability.

A year later after phase 3 went live in July of 2002 on Wikipedia, "the Wikipedia software" was officially renamed by *Daniel Mayer* as "wordplay" [...] 'on the Wikimedia Foundation's name" to MediaWiki with its first official release (1.1) in December of 2003.

Thus, our topic of our presentation, was born.

- [VIDEO]

This is just a short and very old video showing off how MediaWiki functions when making a site on Wikipedia.

I've sped up the original video for the purposes of this presentation and added music but you can find the original video pretty easily by simply searching "media wiki" on YouTube.

As you can see the person in the video is making their own page on Wikipedia and editing it, all of which is rather simple to do thanks to MediaWiki.

- (Lastly) Why is it used?

Well, "MediaWiki helps you collect and organize knowledge and make it available to people."

Meaning that MediaWiki allows groups of people to communicate large pools of data by collectively altering and expanding upon it.

A physical(/non-digital) and historical example of something similar to MediaWiki would be a library, as you can share a collection of information all in one place that anyone within the community surrounding it can access with MediaWiki REST API representing the card or number search.

However, where they differ, is that MediaWiki allows visitors to become the authors and edit the texts to hopefully simply fit a modern perspective or understanding through its ACTION API.

>DEMO<

- How is it used?

Specifically designed for (and most well known for being used by) the Wikimedia Foundation and its numerous websites such as Wikipedia and Wiktionary, MediaWiki is also used by other popular sites such as:

1. WikiHow
2. Fandom
3. Moodle
4. Metapedia

>EXAMPLES<

- Metapedia

So, this one is a different and a bit more complex but I wanted to discuss it because it shows a darker side to this freedom given by MediaWiki which we've been discussing, in my opinion it's necessary to talk about the bad when discussing the good.

Anyways, Metapedia (in as few words as possible) is essentially an alt-right, anti-Semitic, misogynistic, homophobic, racist, and down right awful version of Wikipedia.

There are so many topics covered in this online encyclopedia—pretty much any topic you can think of that might have room for an alt-right twist to it is present.

One of the clearest examples of the sites true motivations/intentions is their page dedicated to race and crime statistics; it's overtly racist and xenophobic.

- What cant it do?

Now that you've seen some possibilities of what it CAN DO, I think its important to equally explain what it CANT DO.

Due to the fact that MediaWiki was specifically designed for open content, it's

often not suitable for situations where you want to restrict access to certain parts of the wiki.

[A fix to this would be to host on an internal network, restricting it to only be viewable by insiders]

Additionally, since it was designed to serve high-traffic websites like Wikipedia, it's not really suitable for smaller sites—where disk space and or memory are bigger concerns than bandwidth.

- (And now for the) Questions:

1. What was your first engagement with MediaWiki like? What site were you using, and why were you using it?
2. What problems can you see from allowing free and relatively open access to edit as well as delete large community-driven collections of information?
3. Do you think sites using MediaWiki are good representations of their respective ages/time in history?

- Clarification of question 3

To add some clarification to the third question, I thought I would show an example.

Using the Wayback Machine, I've taken a screenshot of the Wikipedia page on World War Two from 2008 and paired it with one taken just a few days ago.

If you look closely you can see what I meant by "good representations of their respective ages/time in history", as you see that the introductions are fairly different with the one from 2004 describing the war as "the most extensive and costly armed conflict in the history of the world" where as the modern variant just describes it as a "global war that lasted from 1939 to 1945".

ALSO, the primary images that are meant to summarize the subject have drastically changed—with the 2004 version only using an image of the Battle of Stalingrad with the modern having its own gallery representing several key-points in the war.

- DISCUSSION OF QUESTION 3