

Chapter V

CoolWikNews: More than Meets the Eye in the 21st Century Journalism

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INTRODUCTION

In the last years, the new developed technologies have changed the way in which the Web is used, turning it into a place for promoting the collaborative work (Castillo, 1999). Even though this new way of working does not imply any technological aspect, it is true that without the use of new Web technologies it would be impossible to take this approach in global terms.

In the mid-1940s, Vannevar Bush (1945) predicted some of these current collaborative Web technologies, such as wiki environments. The “wiki” word was coined in Leuf and Cunningham’s work (2001), related with a server-based technology for collaboration, formed by a collection of Web sites connected via hyperlinks. Users

can visit, navigate, and edit hypertext pages in real time, besides revising information, and benefit from the access to other users’ knowledge.

However, Bush (1945) also foresaw the problems arising when the amount of information starts growing without a clear structure, far away from the actual computer capabilities to take benefit of it.

This information-managing problem is getting notably solved with the new formal techniques proposed by the Web Community (<http://www.w3.org>), known as a whole as the Semantic Web, which is not a separate Web, but an extension of the current one, “in which information is given a well-defined meaning, better enabling computers and people to work in cooperation” (Berners-Lee, Hendler, & Lassila, 2001, Expressing Meaning,

para.3). Applying the Semantic Web principles in traditional wiki applications helps to increase the efficiency in the retrieval of this information. This fact becomes specifically crucial as far as news publishing applications managing big newspaper archives are concerned.

This chapter deals with a semantic wiki application devoted to news publishing, CoolWikNews. This semantic application offers the functionalities of a traditional wiki, but enhanced with semantic data. It focuses on the simplicity of both use and browsing, the accurate retrieval of information, and its flexibility to be applied in any domain apart from news publishing. In this chapter, definitions related with this topic will be explained, apart from describing the steps taken so far and the problems still to overcome. Inwards and advantages of CoolWikNews will be presented, paying more attention in how this application overcomes the problems arisen. The chapter concludes with future work and several remarks.

BACKGROUND

Vannevar Bush (1945) predicted the new vision of computer technologies, including hypertext, the Web and, in short, knowledge management systems with online cooperation. This chapter made also clear the fact that the human mind worked by means of associations and that the mind itself learns through them.

As Bush foresaw, the Web is indeed undergoing significant change with regards to how people communicate. A shift in the Web content, where consumers turned into “prosumers,” is making the Web a means of conversation, cooperation, and mass empowerment. Emerging killer applications such as Flickr or Blogger combine sharing information and social dimension, undermining the old principles related to the content, such as the ones stating information asymmetry and top-down content delivery.

Among these new technologies, wiki applications stand out exceedingly. Wikis are new tools for collaborative information management. The success of this new paradigm does not only lie in the facility of creating and editing documents in a very easy way, but also in being a perfect tool for the collaborative work (Alier, 2006).

The first time the wiki word was introduced was in Leuf and Cunningham’s (2001) work. A wiki is essentially a collection of Web sites connected via hyperlinks. Edition and creation of documents in a wiki system are Web-based and the results of these actions can be seen in real time. Every user can provide their knowledge, revise information, and benefit from the access to other users’ knowledge.

Ward Cunningham was the creator of the first wiki application, known as Wiki Wiki Web (<http://c2.com/cgi/wiki>), written in Perl (its name served as the official name for the rest of these tools). Cunningham produced this wiki in order to allow programmers in his company to exchange ideas in 1994.

In 2001, the encyclopaedia project Wikipedia (<http://www.wikipedia.org>) was created; currently, the biggest wiki site is the English version of this project, with more than one million and a half of documents (number retrieved in December, 2006).

The advantage of the simplicity in wikis (and the rest of the Web sites) leads to a great drawback; the current Web copes with the increasing number of information without a clear structure, far away from the actual computer capabilities to take benefit of it. With this traditional Web, there is no possibility for the machines to reason. Because the Web is human-language written, new formal approaches are needed to make computers “understand” the Web content (Berners-Lee et al., 2001). The Semantic Web paradigm is based on this idea, where the traditional Web is enhanced with formal knowledge placed below the current information. The information is no longer usable just for humans, but for the computer itself.

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