

Beyond Access

How User Research in Online Communities Can Empower Libraries

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The Library in the Life of the User

Chicago, IL

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- ▶ I'm an empirical social scientist.
- ▶ I usually analyze trace data to understand how people use and contribute to public information resources online.
- ▶ Specifically, I focus on collaborative knowledge production, and sharing in free culture communities (like Wikipedia).

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...so I called Merrilee!





**What are the missions of
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Merrilee wrote a [great blogpost](#) in response.

What are the missions of libraries & librarians?



*We are librarians, technologists, researchers, writers, managers, administrators, leaders and learners. Together as OCLC, we transform **the way people engage with information**. We create connections between and throughout our **communities**. All with the goal of **making information more accessible and more useful**.*

What are the missions of libraries & librarians?



The foundation of modern librarianship rests on an essential set of core values that define, inform, and guide our professional practice...Among these are:

- ▶ *Access*
- ▶ *Confidentiality/Privacy*
- ▶ *Democracy*
- ▶ *Diversity*
- ▶ *Education and Lifelong Learning*
- ▶ *Intellectual Freedom*
- ▶ *Preservation*
- ▶ *The Public Good*
- ▶ *Professionalism*
- ▶ *Service*
- ▶ *Social Responsibility*

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- ▶ “The Mission of Librarians is to Improve Society through Facilitating Knowledge Creation in their Communities” (David Lankes)
- ▶ “The mission of librarians is to empower.” (Roy Tennant)

Beyond access

to serve, facilitate, transform, improve, & empower...

Connections to research:

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- ▶ The two-part mission of free culture communities:
 - ▶ **access to knowledge**
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 - ▶ Empowerment: **not so good** & not improving.
- ▶ **Why** the mixed results?
- ▶ **Strategies** and conclusions

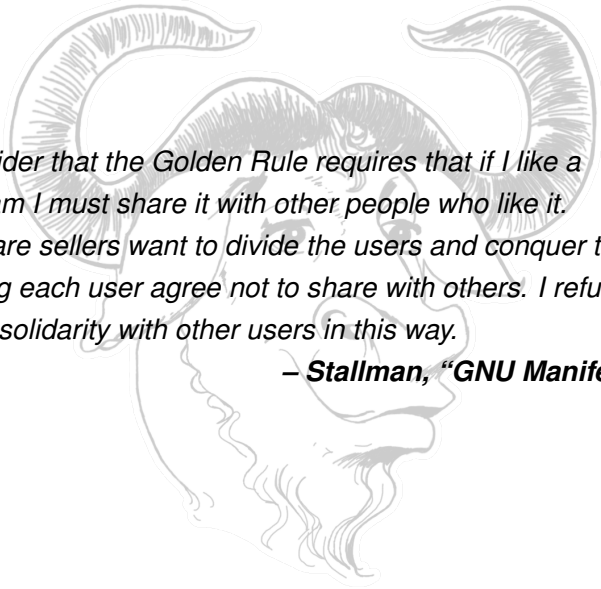
Free software...beginning with the printer story





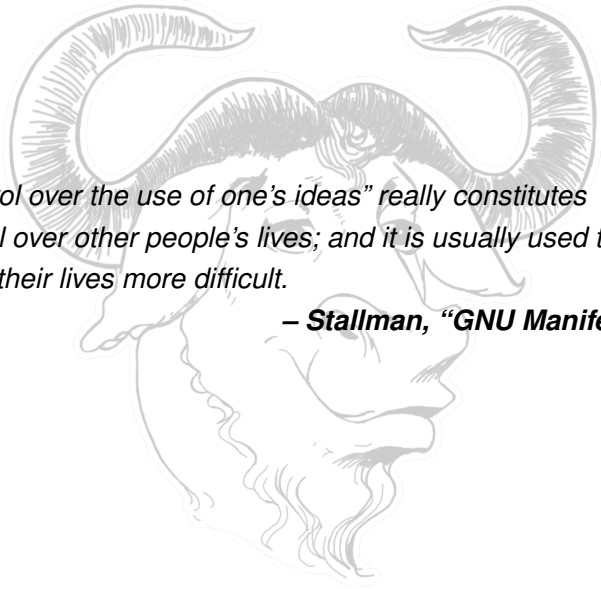
The Free Software Definition:

- ▶ The freedom to **run the program, for any purpose**
- ▶ The freedom to **study how the program works**, and **adapt it** to your needs
- ▶ The freedom to **redistribute copies** so you can help your neighbor
- ▶ The freedom to **improve the program**, and **release your improvements** to the public, so that the whole community benefits



I consider that the Golden Rule requires that if I like a program I must share it with other people who like it. Software sellers want to divide the users and conquer them, making each user agree not to share with others. I refuse to break solidarity with other users in this way.

– Stallman, “GNU Manifesto”



“Control over the use of one’s ideas” really constitutes control over other people’s lives; and it is usually used to make their lives more difficult.

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We need to launch a movement to develop a universal free encyclopedia, much as the Free Software movement gave us the free software operating system GNU/Linux. The free encyclopedia will provide an alternative to the restricted ones that media corporations will write.

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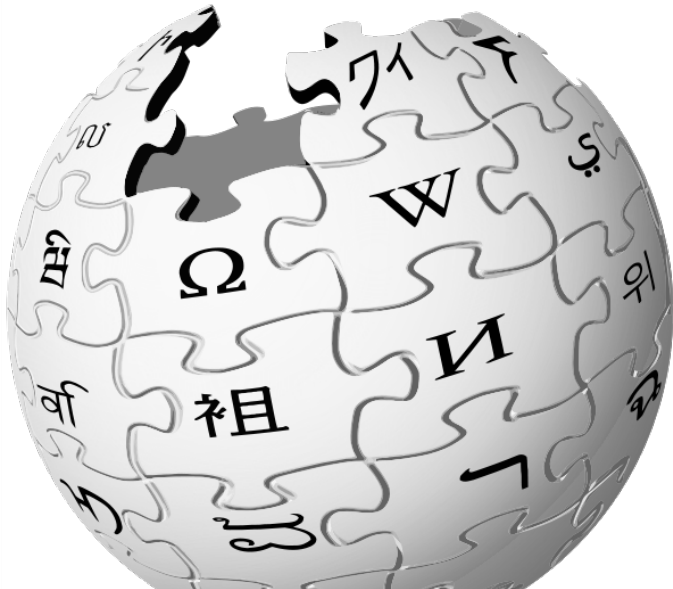
**Empowerment to engage in the creation,
appropriation, and critique of knowledge**

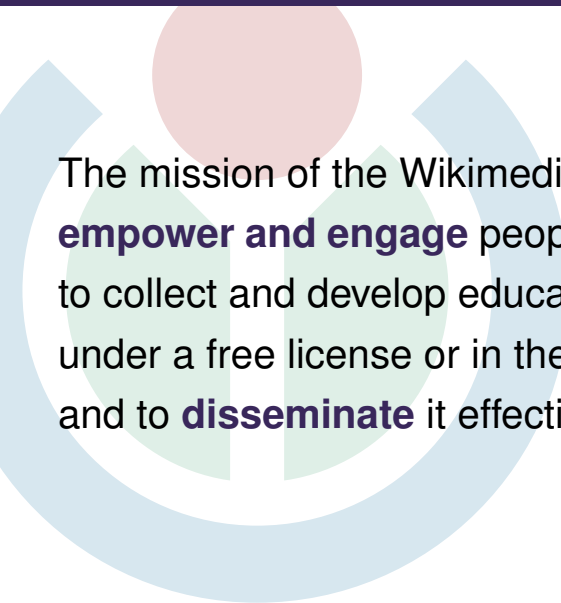


h2g2




TheInfoNetwork





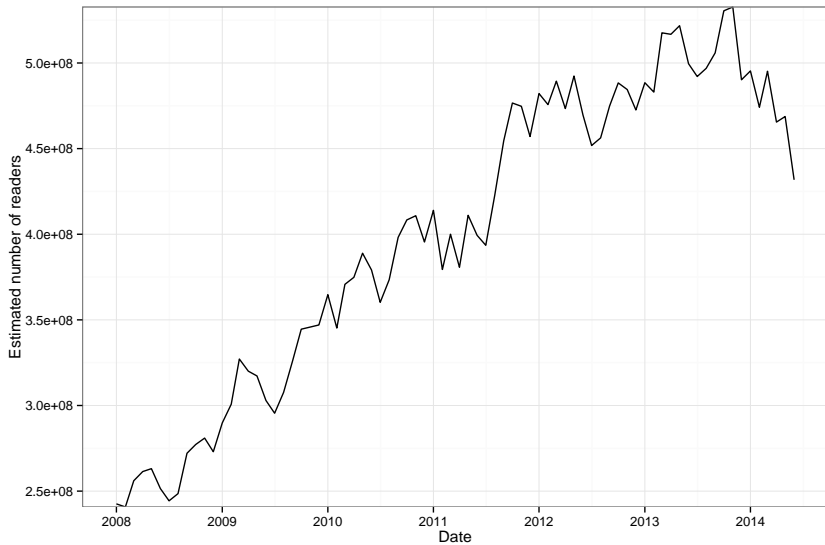
The mission of the Wikimedia Foundation is to **empower and engage** people around the world to collect and develop educational content under a free license or in the public domain, and to **disseminate** it effectively and globally.



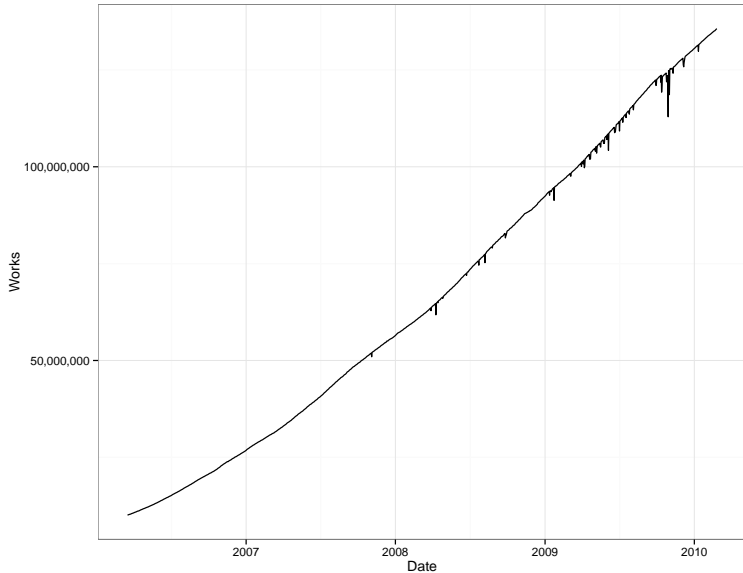
Controlling your **experience** of the world is not only – or even largely – about **software**.

Brief Progress Report: Access to Knowledge

Wikipedia :: Readers

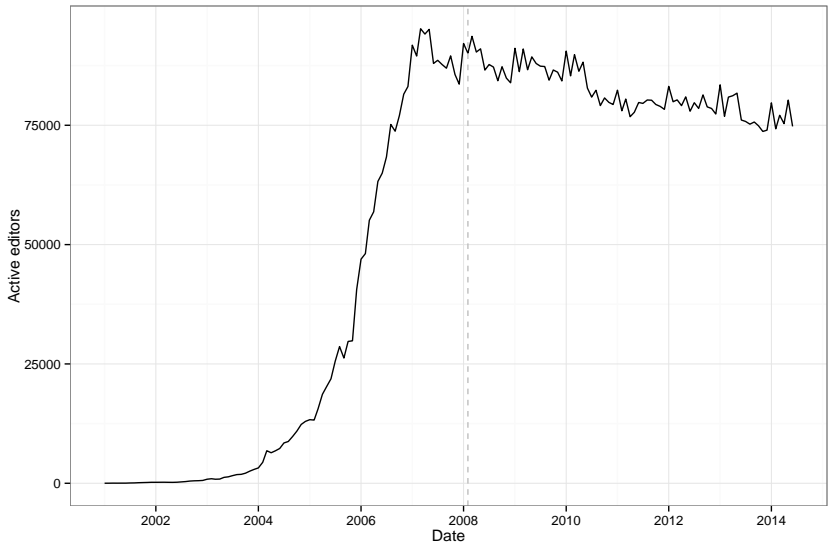


Creative Commons: Number of CC-Licensed works (Flickr)

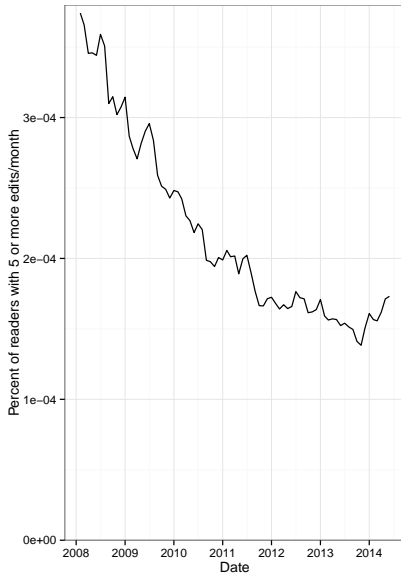
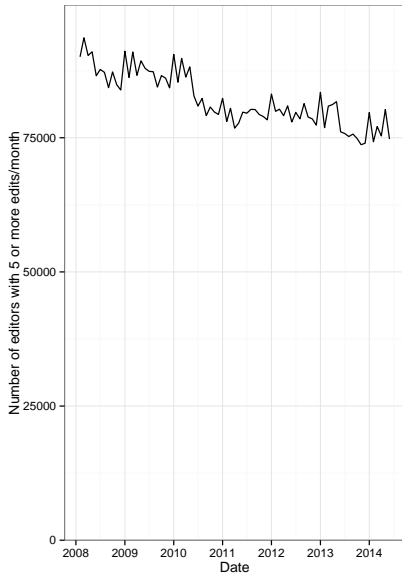


Brief Progress Report: Empowerment

Wikipedia :: Contributors



Wikipedia :: Proportion of Readers Who Contribute



So why is empowerment so hard?



1.

Access must come first

Access must come first



2.



Social & technical tradeoffs

(Research with Benjamin Mako Hill)

Social & technical tradeoffs :: page protection

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Biology




From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

For other uses, see [Biology \(disambiguation\)](#).

Biology is a natural science concerned with the study of life and living organisms, including their structure, function, growth, evolution, distribution, and



Social & technical tradeoffs :: page protection



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[← Biology](#)

You do not have permission to edit this page, for the following reason:



This page is currently semi-protected so that only established **registered users can edit it.**

Why is the page protected?

- Protected articles can be edited by anyone, **semi-protection** is sometimes necessary to prevent **vandalism** to popular pages.
- The reason for protection can be found in the **protection log**. If there are no relevant entries in the protection log, the page may have been moved after being protected.

What can I do?

- If you have a user account, **log in** first. If you do not yet have an account, you may **create one**; after **4 days and 10 edits**, you will be able to edit semi-protected pages.
- **Discuss this page** with others.
- For move-protected pages, see **requested moves**.
- **Request unprotection** of the page.
- **Find out more about how to get started editing Wikipedia**.
- If you have noticed an error or have a suggestion for a simple change, you can submit an edit request, by clicking the button below and

During a typical week, **only 0.37%** of articles viewed on English Wikipedia were protected.

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This tiny proportion of protected articles received **14% of total page views** to the site!

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Most visitors to protected pages **never see an “edit” button.**

Social & technical tradeoffs :: account login

Log in

Username

Password


[Forgot your password?](#)

☐ Stay logged in

Log in

Don't have an account? [Sign up](#)

Or

 Connect

Social & technical tradeoffs :: account login

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 **Connect**

Requiring account login resulted in:

- ▶ 55% decline in the probability of reverted (low quality) contributions.
- ▶ 62% decline in persistent (high quality) contributions.

3.

Second order digital divides

(Research with Eszter Hargittai)

Second order digital divides :: Web use skills & gender

The Wikipedia Gender Gap

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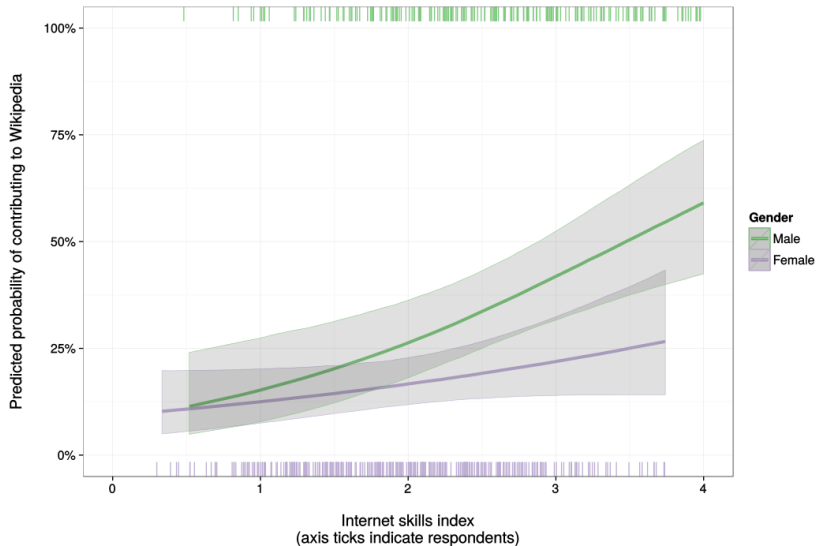
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- ▶ Need to understand **who does not show up** (non-users!).
- ▶ The importance of web-use skills.

Second order digital divides :: Web use skills & gender

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Read the paper.

Conclusions

Several options:

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Log in



Username

Password

[Forgot your password?](#)

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Or



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- ▶ Remove systematic barriers to participation.

Remove barriers :: User-centered design & evaluation



(Research with Sneha Narayan, Jake Orlowitz, Jonathan Morgan, and Benjamin Mako Hill)

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Several options:

- ▶ Do nothing.
- ▶ Make empirically-informed compromises.
- ▶ Remove systematic barriers to participation.
- ▶ Educate and include.

Educate and include :: Edit-a-thons



Image ©2014 Emily Temple-Wood cc-by 1.0

Educate and include :: Edit-a-thons



Image ©2015 ABsCatLib cc-by-sa 4.0 intl

What about libraries?

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- ▶ Create user-centered strategies.

Thank you.

Special thanks to Merrilee Proffitt, Benjamin Mako Hill, Eszter Hargittai, Sneha Narayan, Jake Orlowitz, and Jonathan Morgan.

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