Chapter III
Weaving a Knowledge Web with Wikis

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ABSTRACT

This chapter introduces wikis in the context of social software, focusing on their powerful information sharing and collaboration features. It begins by defining the wiki concept and then discussing the evolution of wikis, explaining how they first emerged and how they have evolved over time. The social software aspect of wikis is then analyzed, examining how wikis can engender collaborative efforts. It investigates ways in which wikis help to develop communities of users, and finally some of the features that enhance the appeal of wikis as social software. The authors hope that by examining a software tool that users may have already encountered, that they will be better able to understand the basic concepts and value of social software. Further, as future trends are discussed, it is hoped that readers will be able to see the value of incorporating social aspects into both existing and as yet undeveloped software applications.

INSIDE CHAPTER

This chapter explores the wiki, an emerging media concept that allows collaborative content creation on the web. Wikis are a form of social software because they facilitate collaborative work. The objective of this chapter is to explain what a wiki is, how it evolved, and how it can be used in education, government, and business to promote collaborative efforts and knowledge sharing. When a wiki is used for content creation, no longer is a single individual responsible for the
information provided by a site. For additional readings on wikis the authors recommend a search of Wikipedia, the most successful example of knowledge sharing through wikis. When perusing the history of the incarnation of the wiki concept, readers should bear in mind how the vision of a single individual can lead to new tools that greatly increase productivity.

**INTRODUCTION**

A wiki is a collaborative and interactive website whose contents can be created and edited using a web browser by anyone granted access. It is one of many software tools that comprise Web 2.0, the emergent generation of web tools and applications (Adie, 2006). Web 2.0 complements, enhances, and adds new collaborative dimensions to social networking. Web 2.0 technologies such as blogs, wikis, podcasts, and RSS feeds are commonly referred to as “social software” because they are characterized by a high degree of connectivity, affording users an opportunity to collaboratively develop web content (Alexander, 2006).

Web 2.0 tools are designed for ease of use and rapidity of deployment, making possible powerful information sharing and straightforward collaboration (Boulos et al., 2006). Further, these tools do not require advanced technical skills to use their features, allowing users to focus on the information exchange and collaborative tasks themselves without first mastering a difficult technological environment (Kirkpatrick, 2006). Such “transparent technologies” (Wheeler, Kelly, & Gale, 2005) allow the user to concentrate more on the task because they can “see through” the technology with which they are interacting.

As shown in Figure 1, the objective of this chapter is to explain the concept of wikis, how wikis evolved, and how wikis work. Once those concepts are understood the social aspects of
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