# Wikimedia values education, not advertising

▶ WIKIMEDIA
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### 'Now we are competent'

Gardner said she selected San Francisco as the place to further the mission of Wikipedia — and its lesser known sister sites Wikiquote, an online quote depository; Wiktionary, a multilingual dictionary; Wikiversity, a project to create educational materials; and Wikinews, a news site — for its tech talent, not its IPO wizards and venture capitalists. Hired in July 2007 as a management consultant and named executive director in December, she was brought in to restructure and expand an organization that had just nine employees but millions of readers and contributors.

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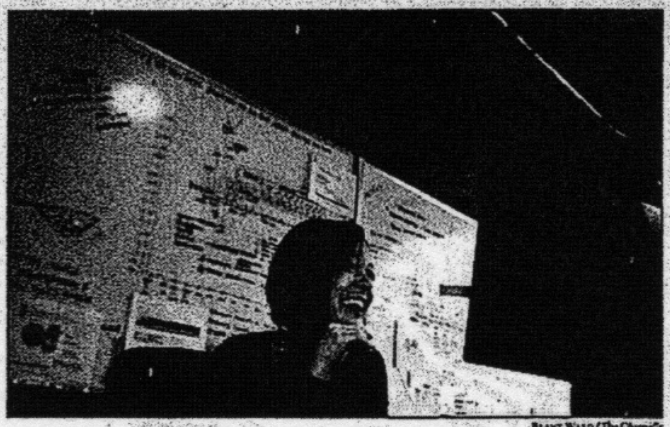
So far, so good. Gardner and her team have secured an average of $35 from about 45,000 online contributors for a total of $1.5 million through a Web-based pledge drive, along with an annual donation of $1 million for the next three years from the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation. Other donors include Vinod and Neeru Khosla, Sun Microsystems' founding chief executive officer and his wife, who gave $500,000, and the Stanton Foundation, which gave $262,000.



BRANT WARD / The Chronicle

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SUE GARDNER, *Wikimedia Foundation's executive director*

Gardner also has instituted a code of conduct for employees of the foundation, outlined a travel and reimbursement policy – Wikipedia co-founder Jimmy Wales was accused this spring of improperly handling foundation funds, though he and the foundation categorically denied the claims — and introduced criminal background checks for prospective employees. The foundation made headlines last year after news broke that Carolyn Bothwell Doran, its former chief operating officer, was convicted of theft, drunken driving and fleeing the scene of an automobile accident before she was hired.

"Sue Gardner has really been key in professionalizing the Wikimedia Foundation," Wales told The Chronicle. "Before Sue, we operated as a community club. Now we operate as a community club with sound management."

### Open-source strategies

Though she finds herself at the top of one of the world's most popular Web sites and thus the de facto leader of a huge community, the 17-year journalist remains keenly interested in newsgathering.

"Everybody is grappling with what to do about the decline in the newspaper industry," she said. "When I was in the conventional media, we all spent a lot of time wondering what we were doing wrong. I don't see it that way at all. There's amazing journalism going on at newspapers and at NPR. To me, it's a market shakeout or a market correction."

Because Wikipedia in all of its 200 languages is open source — meaning the sites rely on the skills of hundreds of computer programmers to improve the free, adaptable software and about 100,000 content providers to edit the 2.5 million articles — the foundation is committed to giving back to its contributors. Gardner envisions a community-administered grant process to bolster the depth and quality of the encyclopedia and news entries and to enable the foundation to pay volunteers for projects ranging from community outreach, such as group lectures and tutoring, to investigative reporting. But such plans, she said, are still rough.

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Contributors range from volunteer editors, who create and proofread articles, to elected administrators with the power to block users, lock articles (mostly because of tampering or disagreement within the community) and cancel entries altogether. To help smooth the process and ensure quality, the foundation is exploring a feature on the English-language Wikipedia called "flagged revisions," which allows trusted editors to affix quality labels to articles that are true and vandalism free.

Ed Chi of the Palo Alto Research Center is the creator of WikiDashboard, a social dynamic analysis tool created independently of the foundation that allows readers to analyze all of the edits made by their peers. In October, Chi discovered a huge drop-off in the number of edits, to the point that 1 percent of editors were editing 50 percent of the content. While Wikipedia remains strong in page views and overall ranking, Chi said the waning interest among editors does not bode well for the site or community.

"The edits have leveled off and remained steady," Chi said. "We don't yet know a reason for the decline, but we suspect it is due not to the wisdom of crowds but to the increased level of conflict among community members. Often it is not the one with the right answer who has their say, but the one who sticks around the longest and is best able to argue his case."

### Seeking a new model

For the immediate future, Gardner is focused on three goals: increasing participation; improving quality; and making much of Wikipedia's content available in the form of DVDs, and a new portable data file feature that will allow users to compile articles as a single file, export them as a PDF, and send them to a printer. Wikipedia also plans to offer video-editing capabilities, so that users can combine sound and image.

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"I think our next challenge is figuring out how to really support and facilitate their work," said Gardner, referring to the projects' contributors. "The bills are getting paid, the servers are running, there's stationery, people have business cards. This is a really new model, something the world has never seen. It deserves new approaches."

*E-mail Chris Cadelago at ccadelago@sfchronicle.com.*

### Wikipedia by the numbers

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**2,523,321** total articles

**245,995,447** total edits

**17.19** average number of edits per page (since July 2002)

**805,614** media files

**7,701,965** registered user accounts

**1,585** administrator accounts

*Source: Wikipedia*

# Wikimedia pegs future on education, not profit

Chris Cadelago, Chronicle Staff Writer
Published 4:00 a.m., Sunday, August 24, 2008

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Sue Gardner talks about the future of Wikimedia in a nearby office at the Wikimedia Foundation. Sue Gardner is the new executive director of Wikimedia located here in San Francisco Thursday, August 7, 2008. Photo: Brant Ward, The Chronicle / SF

Sue Garner laughs as she talks to co-workers at the Wikimedia Foundation office. Sue Gardner is the new executive director of Wikimedia located here in San Francisco Thursday, August 7, 2008. Photo: Brant Ward, The Chronicle / SF

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Google has its Googleplex, Craigslist has a Victorian flat, and the seventh-most-popular Web site in the world has this: a 3,000-square-foot nondescript loft situated in San Francisco's South Park below Interstate 80.

In many ways, the rented office befits the Wikimedia Foundation, the 5-year-old nonprofit group that runs Wikipedia, and an organization rich in dichotomies.

Until its headquarters were moved to San Francisco in January, the foundation worked in obscurity in St. Petersburg, Fla., while its crown jewel, Wikipedia, the "encyclopedia anyone can edit," flourished. The English-language version of the encyclopedia boasts about 300 million page views a day, making it so popular that if the site were to seek advertising, it would attract record profit.

Analysts have pegged Wikipedia's value between several hundred million dollars and $7 billion, the latter by Silicon Alley Insider, a technology blog known for its list of the World's Most Valuable Digital Startups. But its keepers have thus far refused to sell ad space. They are adamant that the encyclopedia's value is tied up not in potential advertising revenue but in something much loftier - its ability to positively affect the news industry, educational publishing and the nature of open-source knowledge creation and dissemination.

"When we got (to San Francisco), I was totally surprised by the misconceptions that people had about Wikimedia," said Sue Gardner, Wikimedia's recently appointed executive director. "It's a charity. Nobody is making any money from the organization. Nobody has made any money, and nobody will ever get rich from it because we're never going to sell it. We're not open for business; we're not looking for investment."

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