

FP TECH DESK

Wikipedia raises record \$20M in annual fundraising drive



ZARA McALISTER | Jan 2, 2012 6:02 PM ET | Last Updated: Jan 5, 2012 5:31 PM ET
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Sue Gardner, executive director of the Wikimedia Foundation | Lane Hartwell/Financial Post Magazine

Even a global economic downturn couldn't put a damper on Wikipedia's fundraising efforts this year.

On Monday, the Wikimedia Foundation — the not-for-profit organization that oversees the online encyclopedia Wikipedia and other sites — announced its annual fund raising campaign raised more than US\$20-million, a new record for the organization.

As a result, the online encyclopedia that relies on a community of editors for curation, is once again banner free. Wikimedia had placed banner ads at the top of some articles asking readers to donate to the fund raising efforts.

Sue Gardner, the Canadian-born executive director at the Wikimedia foundation, thanked donors in a blog post Monday morning for helping the non-profit organization reach its fund raising target.

"We've taken down our fundraising banners, because we've hit our target," Ms. Gardner wrote in a blog post.

"Thanks to you. Over the past few months, more than one million people have come together from all over the world to keep Wikipedia and its sister sites alive and flourishing for another year."

Contributions from users have risen each year since the annual holiday campaign began in 2003, growing from about US\$8-million in 2009 to \$16-million in 2010.

"The number of Wikimedia Foundation donors has increased ten-fold since 2008 and the total dollar amount raised in the campaign has risen to over \$20 million from \$4.5 million," said Jay Walsh, head of communications at the Wikimedia Foundation.

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"We're never certain we'll be able to hit our goal but we know that hundreds of millions of people love and support Wikipedia and its sister projects. If just a fraction of a percent of those folks make a donation, we feel confident we'll hit our goal."

Mr. Walsh said the organization is currently working on a report to break down the number of donors and from where those donations were received.

Most of the foundation's 2011-2012 planned spending of \$28 million was raised through the annual campaign. The remainder comes from grants from various institutions, such as the organization's largest supporter, the Sloan Foundation, and other small year-round donations.

Mr. Walsh said the latest proceeds will be used to "buy and install servers and other hardware, to develop new site functionality, expand mobile services, provide legal defense for the projects, and support the large global community of Wikimedia volunteers."

He attributes this year's success to changes in the Wikimedia Foundation campaign.

For the first time, donors were not only asked to volunteer money but also their time. More than 100 volunteers translated banners on Wikipedia entries and appeals to support Wikimedia into dozens of languages.

Unlike in past years when Wikipedia founder Jimmy Wales was the face of the donation campaign, this year, volunteer editors from several countries posted testimonials on the Wikipedia website.

While the organization hopes to double its monthly readership by 2015—as it now has 470 million users compared to the 300 million it had last year, it's now focusing on increasing the number of active editors.

Mr. Walsh said the annual campaign will continue into 2015.

"We're planning to steadily increase our revenue targets ... we'll continue to turn to our annual fundraiser for the bulk of that revenue," he said.

Wikipedia is the largest encyclopedia in human history, with more than 100,000 volunteers working on 20 million articles in 282 languages. The website continues to rely on donations from users rather than support from advertising.

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