

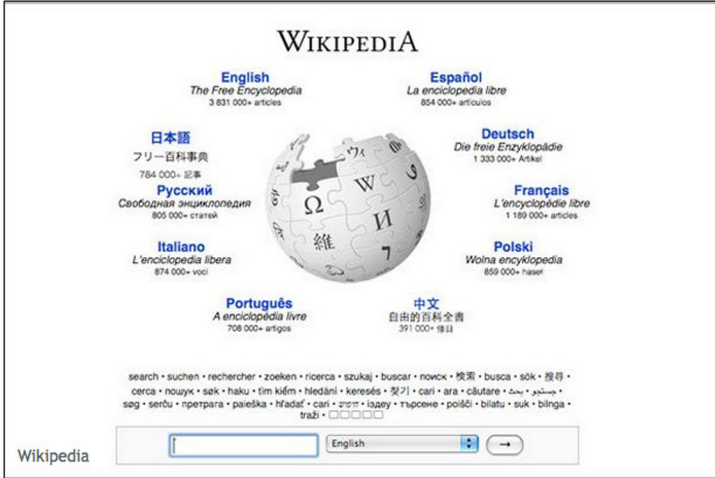
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By Rob Leigh | Comments | 17 Jan 2012 17:09

Wikipedia: Why it will 'black out' tomorrow - the background explained

Wikipedia will 'black out' tomorrow in protest at anti-piracy legislation under consideration in the US Congress.

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Wikipedia will 'black out' tomorrow in protest at anti-piracy legislation under consideration in the US Congress.

English versions of the website will shut down for 24 hours to register the objections of the Wikimedia Foundation to the "destructive legislation" associated with the Stop Online Piracy Act and the Protect Intellectual Property Act.

The legislation is designed to crack down on sales of pirated US products overseas. Critics say it could hurt the technology industry and infringes on free speech rights.

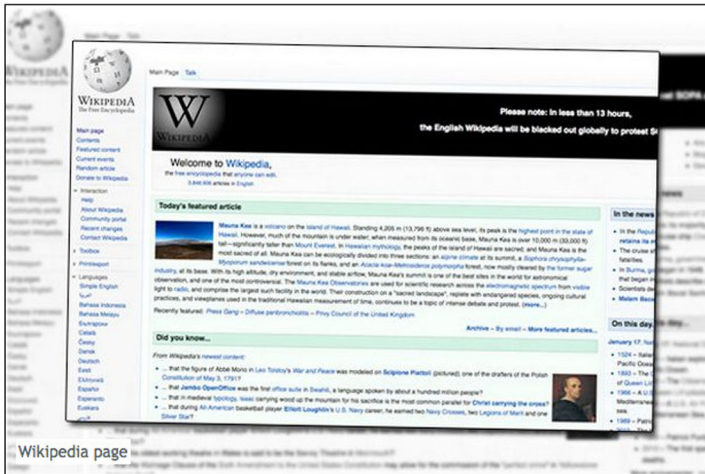
[Click here for 'Wikipedia blackout: How to workaround site shut down and continue to use Wikipedia'](#)

True to its participatory principles, it is claimed that over 1800 Wikipedians came together over three days to discuss a course of action that the online community might wish to take - reportedly the highest level of chipping in for a community discussion ever experienced by the site.

Founder Jimmy Wales yesterday tweeted a link to his statement to the press which insisted that such legislation "will harm the free and open Internet and bring about new tools for censorship of international websites inside the United States".



"This is an extraordinary action for our community to take - and while we regret having to prevent the world from having access to Wikipedia for even a second, we simply cannot ignore the fact that SOPA and PIPA endanger free speech both in the United States and abroad, and set a frightening precedent of Internet censorship for the world," he continued.



A further public statement from the three Wikipedia administrators who facilitated the community's discussion clarified the reasons why the black out would focus on English versions of the site.

It read: "On careful review of this discussion, the closing administrators note the broad-based support for action from Wikipedians around the world, not just from within the United States.

"The primary objection to a global blackout came from those who preferred that the blackout be limited to readers from the United States, with the rest of the world seeing a simple banner notice instead.

"We also noted that roughly 55% of those supporting a blackout preferred that it be a global one, with many pointing to concerns about similar legislation in other nations.



Sue Gardner, Executive Director of Wikimedia Foundation, has acknowledged that taking such a stand could be interpreted as "seeming to abandon neutrality to take a political position".

But she has also noted that "although Wikipedia's articles are neutral, its existence is not", highlighting the necessity of a legal infrastructure in order to operate.

"[W]e depend on a legal infrastructure that also allows other sites to host user-contributed material, both information and expression," she is quoted as saying as part of the same statement.

"For the most part, Wikimedia projects are organizing and summarizing and collecting the world's knowledge. We're putting it in context, and showing people how to make to sense of it.

"But that knowledge has to be published somewhere for anyone to find and use it. Where it can be censored without due process, it hurts the speaker, the public, and Wikimedia.

"Where you can only speak if you have sufficient resources to fight legal challenges, or if your views are pre-approved by someone who does, the same narrow set of ideas already popular will continue to be all anyone has meaningful access to."

Welcome to Wikimedia

Wikimedia is owned and operated by the Wikimedia Foundation, a non-profit foundation dedicated to bringing free content to the world. The various Wikimedia projects are listed below:



Gardner went on to discuss how the site's "public voice" is considered as well as the "good will people have for Wikipedia, as a resource that wants to be used for the benefit of the public".

"Readers trust Wikipedia because they know that despite its faults, Wikipedia's heart is in the right place," her comments continued.

"It's not aiming to monetize their eyeballs or make them believe some particular thing, or sell them a product. Wikipedia has no hidden agenda: it just wants to be helpful."

She concluded by emphasising that when the site does shut down tomorrow, she hopes that the users will understand that the approach is being taken on behalf of the good of the readers.

"We support everyone's right to freedom of thought and freedom of expression," she said.

"We think everyone should have access to educational material on a wide range of subjects, even if they can't pay for it.

"We believe in a free and open internet where information can be shared without impediment."

Available in 282 languages, Wikipedia contains more than 20 million articles contributed by a global volunteer community of more than 100,000 people.

It is not the first website to announce plans to shut down but is the most well-known, with an estimated 25 million visitors a day.

Reddit and Boing Boing are among other sites also planning to go dark.

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