Delivering Open-Source Technical Documentation via a Wiki

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OpenDS Documentation

Why a Wiki?

- A low-barrier collaboration tool
- A means to engage the community of users
- A doc repository that can be corrected and updated immediately
- A corporate direction

An example: Wikipedia

- Accuracy compared favorably to Britannica
- Noted for both expert and non-expert contributors
- Noted for vandalism
- Thousands of contributors

OpenDS

- An open-source directory server
- Open documentation as well as open source code
- Documentation developed and distributed via a wiki

The documentation is available all day, every day.

- Any registered user can edit almost every article.

- Registration is fast and simple.

- The documentation is written in wikitext, a relatively simple mark-up language, and a GUI is available.

We evaluated six wiki engines.

- We began evaluating the first week of February 2007 and finished the following March.

- We held a brainstorm with four other writers to determine requirements.

- We installed the wikis and tested how they met our requirements.

- We chose JSPWiki.

Basic requirements

- Active development
- Easy-to-use syntax
- Rich text formatting
- Control over contributions

Extended requirements

- 508 compatibility for accessibility
- PDF generation from wiki pages

Advantages of JSPWiki

- It's open source, so we can change the code to suit our needs.

- We could see it used successfully elsewhere.

- All we wanted was a wiki.

- We could administer it ourselves.

- It's free.

Presenting the OpenDS Doc Wiki

- www.opends.org/wiki

- Three full-time Sun writers (including one lead writer) plus one manager

- Non-doc contributors mainly Sun employees

Limitations of wikitext

- Complicated list items
- Hard copy generation

How to make a hard copy

- No wiki engine offers a satisfactory solution
- A promising solution uses tools available on most platforms
    - > wget: Retrieves copies of specified HTML files
    - > sed: Used to files in batch to remove extraneous wiki matter
    - > HTMLDOC: Converts specified HTML files into a PDF

Where's Release 1.0?

- Most wikis provide all historical versions of articles.
- We plan to make a separate,static, and restricted 1.0 wiki composed of the versions of articles that have been tested and approved by QA.

Administrative Concerns

- How do I deal with:
  - > Unlinked pages
  - > Unused pages
  - > Vandalism
- Most wikis offer administrative tools that help with these.

How do others contribute?

- Complete articles
- Requesting new articles by inserting stubs
- Correcting existing articles technically
- Editing existing articles

Scared yet?

- The old way
  - > The old way lets us work in private and with limited interference.
  - > The old way lets us put our personal stamp on our work.
- The new way
  - > The new way makes us work out in the open.
  - > The new way lets anyone edit our text without notice.

Why not resist this fad?

- Removing barriers to input from SMEs greatly improves the documentation.

- These docs will get even better with feedback and input from real users.

- We writers have no less control over the content than before.

- A wiki has as much or as little structure as you impose on it, the same as a book.

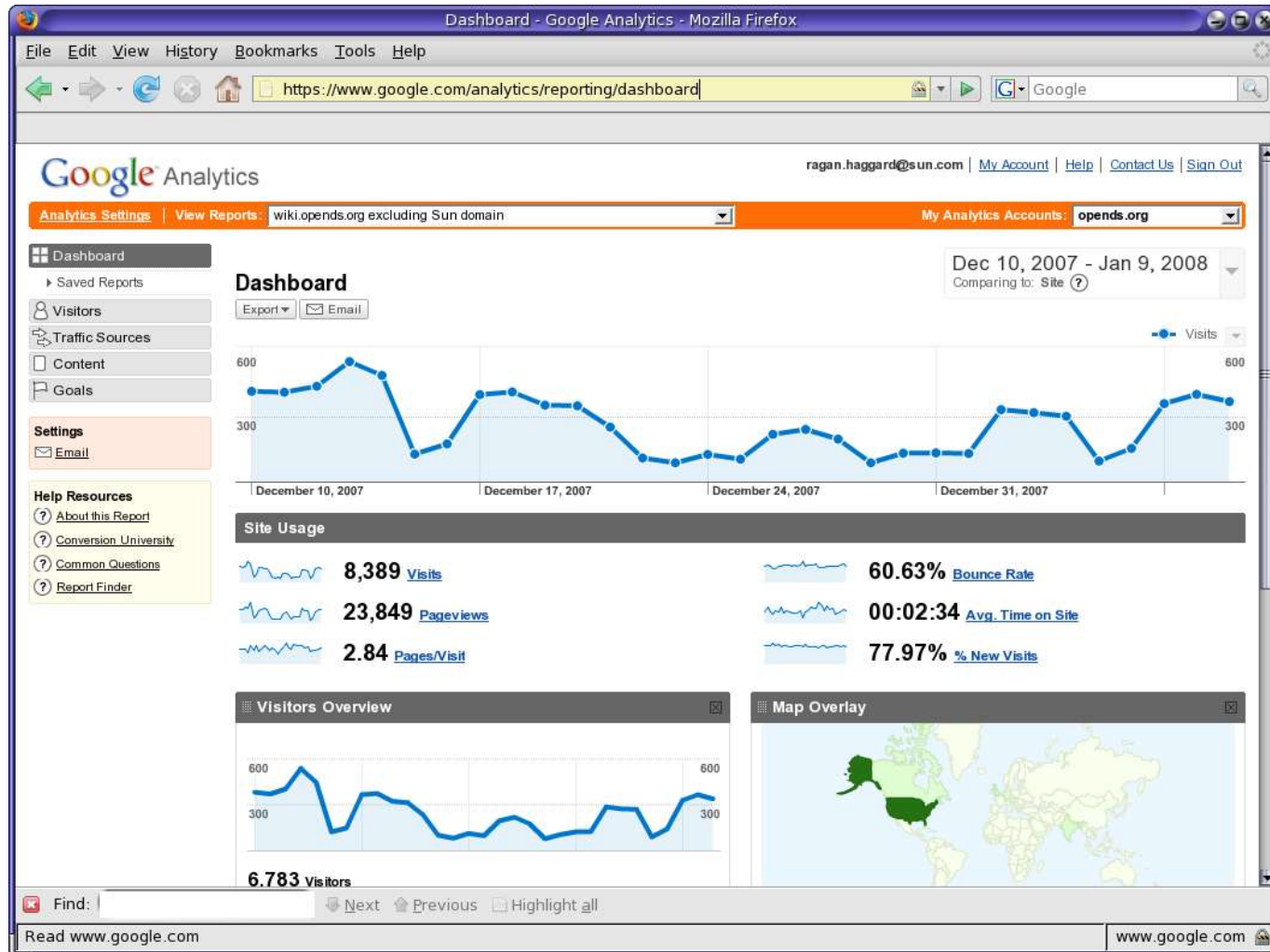- I don't think this level of collaboration is a fad.

Our open source position

- OpenDS is a new project with no previously closed documents. No copyright issues prevent us from being open source.

- How open is the wiki?
    - > Q: What is the community *not* allowed to change?
    - > A: The copyright notice, the Terms of Use, and the list of Reserved OIDs

Success or failure?

- We succeed if the community collaborates in producing the wiki.

- We fail if the only contributors to the wiki are Sun employees.

Google Analytics

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