

Expert interview

Case: wikiHow
Interviewee (IE): Adriana Baird
Interviewer (IR): Anja Ebersbach
Date: 2020-07-02, 11:00am
Location: Skype

	[Welcoming]
1	IR: Ok, let's start. I've sent you some questions... #00:02:56#
2	IE: Yes, I have them in front of me now. I'm not sure if I can answer all of them, but I will do my best. #00:03:03
3	IR: It is ok, if you don't know. First question is: how has the development been concerning multilanguage motivation of wikiHow? You started probably with English? #00:03:11#
4	IE: Yes, we started with English. I'm not exactly sure of the exact timeline of how the international sites developed, but I know, Spanish was one of our earliest sites, probably French, maybe Italian and I want to say Portuguese, but I'm not sure. WikiHow is 14 years old. I've been at the company for three years now, and so these sites started long before I was here, and they, I think, originated out of community members. So, wikiHow community members who were in other countries and wanted to branch the company out to their own languages. I am not 100% sure. I could probably get more information about that, about how they started, for you, but I am pretty sure that is how it started #00:03:47#
5	IR: Now there are 18 versions, therefore 18 languages? #00:04:52#
6	IE: Yes, 18, including English. #00:04:57#
7	IR: And when you started, there were also 18? #00:05:01#
8	IE: In the last three years we have launched Turkish, so it was 17 when I started. #00:05:09#
9	IR: Are there statistical data concerning article development, user number or something like that, do you know? #00:05:19#
10	IE: Yeah, I am not sure about the exact numbers but across all of our sites we have over 150 million users monthly, so that is English and all of other languages as well. #00:05:33#
11	IR: Wow. And the data is public, somewhere? Can I see it? #00:05:54#
12	IE: No, it's actually not. But we track traffic and we look at things that are popular on the sites and what are not. If you look at our websites, I'm pretty sure... let me see... #00:05:58#
13	IR: I wonder if I can see in the special pages how many articles there are? #00:06:18#

14	IE: Yeah, there is information on the site as well. If you go to an article and you scroll to the very bottom, I can't pronounce it in German, but it says, this page has been viewed X amount of times, so you can get that information as well. I can send you a screenshot of it. #00:06:25#
15	IR: I know what you mean. But can I see somewhere the users, the authors? #00:06:58#
16	IE: Yes, so if you are logged in and you go to the history of a page... #00:07:01#
17	IR: Yes. Of one article... But of the whole community? #00:07:17#
18	IE: I would say that a lot of these pages are not super built out on our international pages, so if you want to get more information on the English side of things, I'd say that English special pages are more built out. #00:08:04#
19	IR: OK, good. The use case of your platform are Howtos. Do you have any relevance criteria? #00:08:23#
20	IE: For the content of a „Howto“- page? #00:08:42#
21	IR: Yes. #00:08:48#
22	IE: Not necessarily. I would say, from an international perspective, and I work only on international sites, I'm not involved in our English content process. And on our international sites the majority of our content is translated from English. So, when an article goes through review in English, they have a separate review process, and by the time it gets to us, it has already gone through a review process on English. #00:08:50#
23	IR: Ok, but what about cultural difficulties? I mean, we have a very free culture, and I can imagine that there is a lot of content that maybe Chinese people, especially the authorities, don't like. How do you cope with this? #00:09:26#
24	IE: So, there is certainly content on the English site that is like „How to get a driver's license in the state of Minnesota“, and so that is so very specific to the United States, and most of the time we will not translate those. We have kind of a manual review process, where we actually look through all of the titles and take out things like that, that we don't think should be translated. We use data on the articles as well, so we prioritize articles that are more popular in English and we can decide, kind of prioritize based on that. There are always exceptions. I like to make exceptions for, if you were to say: „How to get a driver's license in California“, and in California there are lots of people whose first language is something other than English, so people are searching for that kind of stuff in Spanish or Chinese and what not. In terms of content, your question about China, I take more of an open stance, if it's created and we can translate, that is ok. We can publish it in Chinese, we are not hosted on a Chinese server, so I think it's ok. #00:09:50#
25	IR: Have you ever had a conflict with legal authorities there? #00:11:25#
26	IE: In China? No. #00:11:32#
27	IR: In China or any other country? #00:11:34#

28	IE: I think we do sometimes run into issues with our Russian site. And if anything comes up, we just work with them and take it down or adjust things. #00:11:38#
29	IR: I understand. And in English, where does the content come from? From the community? You don't have any kind of text donations or something like that, do you? #00:11:54#
30	IE: So, we have community written articles, and we have a lot of those that are really, really great. We have a really strong community, which, even though I don't work on the English site, I've definitely been able to see the strength of the community. I have even meet some of the people who work on the site, which has been really awesome, a really cool experience. And then we also have the content team, who works on specifically editing and helping out our articles. If you go to this page [pastes link], you can see a little more information on our content team as well. If you scroll all the way down to the bottom, where it says wikiHow wiki content team managers. #00:12:04#
31	IR: And what is their main task? #00:13:18#
32	IE: So, you will see here, they have, like, Carry here. She coordinates our writers and editors and basically who works on content or does our hiring or training for researches and editors. And then Julia and Rosalin worked on different parts of the site. So, Julia managed the article summary project, and Rosalin managed the quiz project and tag project. #00:13:24#
33	IR: Ah, I understand. And then we have the English articles, and then? You come and you select which ones you want to have translated into, I don't know how many languages, or how does it work? #00:14:02#
34	IE: Yeah, so we usually make them available for all languages to translate, and we have translators who work on them, and they can choose the articles that they want to translate. #00:14:19#
35	IR: Oh, they can choose, really? #00:14:34#
36	IE: Yeah, yeah, and then... I keep pretty close eye on things, so if I see something like, we are not going to translate an article that says „How to say hello in Spanish“, we are not going to translate that into Spanish. So, we take things out that are very language specific along the way. #00:14:35#
37	IR: Ok, what about the pictures? I have seen that the pictures are the same in every language version. So, you have someone who does the illustrations? #00:14:59#
38	IE: Yeah, like we have content creators, we have illustrators as well. #00:15:15#
39	IR: They are employed, or are they community? #00:15:22#
40	IE: Employed, yeah. #00:15:27#
41	IR: Because they are very professional and very helpful. #00:15:31#
42	IE: I am also not involved in our visual process either, but they are definitely instructive and they've changed a lot over the years, It's cool to see how our

images kind of evolve with the way people use articles as well. I don't know if you have seen but we have recently started adding videos to our articles. There are videos in the step-by-step, but there are also videos at the end of this article. We just started Youtube channels as well for all of our international sites, so we have it in German... #00:15:34#

43 IR: So, if the English community member writes an article, then he just has to wait, I don't know how many days, and then somebody will illustrate his article. #00:16:22#

44 IE: Yeah, yeah, I am not involved in that process, so I'm not sure exactly how that would work, but community members can also upload their own images as well. #00:16:37#

45 IR: Ok. And content translation is always done by human beings. You don't have bots or machine translation? #00:16:49#

46 IE: No, we don't use machine translations. #00:17:00#

47 IR: Ok, not even bots for small things? #00:17:03#

48 IE: Nope. #00:17:06#

49 IR: No? Ok. And the master language is English? #00:17:08#

50 IE: Yeah, the source is always English. #00:17:12#

51 IR: And, I saw at the end of the articles, there you can switch to other language versions by link. Who does the linking? #00:17:15#

52 IE: So, that is a part of the MediaWiki platform. We use MediaWiki as well, and so when something is translated, it's linked automatically. #00:17:30#

53 IR: Is it automatic? Really? On which base? I mean, somebody has to know that this is the translation, or that this is the same topic. You know what I mean? #00:17:41#

54 IE: Yeah, so it's... I believe it's linked through Wikimedia, MediaWiki code, or it's an internal tool that we have, but it's in our databases, that these two match up. #00:18:04#

55 IR: And this is also true for articles that have the same topic, but there is no translation? Does this exist? You know what I mean? It's the same how to, but a different story. #00:18:21#

56 IE: So, that I think you would find in terms of categories. If you were to go to the categories page, and open up something, you would see two different.... they would be in the same language, but if you were to find... like go to German, open up a category, find category on like... recipes, two different recipes might be very different, but within the same kind of cooking category, so they would be grouped together like that. #00:18:39#

57 IR: And what about the lemma, the title of it? What happens if it's the same title, for example „How to make a chocolate cake“, but the recipes are different? #00:19:13#

- 58 IE: Ah, yeah, so it's not possible, if you look at any of our articles, and you see the URL, the title is actually in the URL. So, you cannot create two pages with the same URL. If somebody has already created „how to make a chocolate cake“, and you have a slightly different recipe, you will come up with a different title, you might say: „how to use chocolate cake with chocolate chips“, and that would differentiate you from the other article. #00:19:36#
- 59 IR: Ok. We already have the content part. You say that there is an English community. Is there also a German community or is there only the English one and there is translation to the other languages? #00:20:16#
- 60 IE: No, no, there is definitely some amount of German community activity. Each language of wikiHow is treated as a completely separate website, so if you are in Germany or in different German speaking country, and you go to the German website you can create an account there. You can comment on articles, you can create a new article, you can do anything that you need to do on the German site, anything that you could do on the English site. But you as a German internet user, you don't have to go to the English site at all. #00:20:34#
- 61 IR: And can I see from my perspective if an article in German is translated from the English one, or if it's written by a German? #00:21:19#
- 62 IE: You see that... it's not explicitly said, but if you go to the article and you see that the things are linked, and you take a look at the English one and you see it's a very direct translation, that will kind of show you. #00:21:31#
- 63 IR: And do you have community people in Germany - just take Germany as an example - that translate from English, or other languages, because they don't want to write it from the scratch? #00:21:50#
- 64 IE: We do have some community members, I don't know if we have any in German as of late, but we definitely have some community members in other languages who like to translate, and so they will translate something and send it to our community manager in Spanish, she will review it and edit it, and then she will upload it as a translation. #00:22:10#
- 65 IR: I see. #00:22:31#?
- 66 IR: So there are multilingual community people at WikiHow? #00:22:35#
- 67 IE: Yeah, and there are some people who really enjoy it. They pick a topic that they really want to translate about and they work on that, which is cool. #00:22:40#
- 68 IR: Yes, it is. Somewhere I found the concept "go-betweenes". I don't know where it was, so those are people that switch between communities. Sometimes they write for the English wikiHow and then they write for the German wikiHow. I found it somewhere on your platform, that you call those people "go-betweenes"? #00:22:52#
- 69 IE: I am not familiar with that term, I think we have had people who are community members on both sites, but it's not very frequent. That is actually the

first time I have heard the term "go-between", but it makes sense, so...
#00:23:46#

70 IR: And I also read on your page there is a new language... #00:24:07#

71 IE: The new language project sheet. I don't remember exactly what that page is, but let's say you live in the Philippines, and would really like to see wikiHow in Tagalog, you can go on that page and comment on it, and say: I like wikiHow, I would like to see it in my language, and then, if someday we were to say: wow, there is a lot of people who want wikiHow in Tagalog, we will take that into consideration. And we will have these community member's contact information there, we can reach out to them if we have that language. I think it's a nice place, I haven't used it very frequently, but I'll check in every couple of years or so, and say oh wow, a lot of people are asking for Farsi, or a lot of people are asking for this language... #00:24:17#

72 IR: And do you have any kind of language check or kind of hurdle they have to pass before a new language version starts? What is the policy on this?
#00:25:23#

73 IE: It's more like if we have the resources to do it, so we need to make sure it's a reasonable business decision. The difference between us and the Wikipedia, one of the big differences, is that Wikipedia is non-profit and we also have... we call it here a double bottom line... so we are mission driven, but we are also a profitable company. So, we do want to make sure we are making the right business decisions when making new languages. #00:25:45#

74 IR: Because it costs a lot to manage such a wiki? #00:26:23#

75 IE: And a lot of time also. #00:26:27#

76 IR: So how is the internal process for this? You sit together and discuss it? Or you need to have numbers of a market observation or anything like that?
#00:26:31#

77 IE: I am not sure how much detail I can go into about that, but definitely just kind of understanding the market... I would say, just in general, for opening something new in a new country, understanding the market. There are so many languages in the world, and some of them don't have any internet access, or very little internet access, and so, opening up an internet product in that language might not be best use of that time, so just understanding the context and the landscape is really helpful. #00:26:49#

78 IR: Ok, next questions, are there some virtual or real meeting places for multilingual users? Where do you organize yourself? You have translators in different countries, right? And how do you manage this? #00:27:32#

79 IE: We can use wikiHow in terms of the multilingual community members. We have the talk pages and discussion pages as well. And then we have community managers for every language as well, who interact with them more regularly. And in terms of having a remote team with translators, email is really helpful. Skype, like you and I are communicating right now, it makes distances much smaller this way. #00:28:03#

80	IR: And the translators, they write into the wiki directly? #00:28:38#
81	IE: Yes. #00:28:43#
82	IR: So, but I cannot see if it's a translator or a community member? #00:28:45#
83	IE: I guess you could check it out again. If you look at the history of an article, you will see users that say the translation is a wikiHow translation. I don't know how to pronounce this in German, but it's wikiHow Übersetzungen, I assume that means translations, so... you can see from that. But I think the biggest indication is that it's linked to an English article. #00:28:52#
84	IR: Ok. How do you check the quality of the translated text? Can you do that, or do you have to trust your translators? #00:29:32#
85	IE: I put a lot of trust into them. We also have, like I've mentioned, community managers on every site. They review our content as well, for language quality. They are someone who has been with us for a while, really understands the wikiHow language and the way we write and then they are able to review our content and make edits. #00:29:48#
86	IR: Are there certain language policies and measures undertaken by wikiHow? Do you want to have certain languages from the enterprise perspective... I mean, you are kind of a hybrid organization and you make something for profit and you also have your ideals, and I ask myself if your ideals sometimes make you open versions in Third World countries? #00:30:17#
87	IE: Yeah, I'd say, in terms of language standards, I'll refer to Spanish, because I know Spanish much better than German, Spanish has different forms of speaking, one is more formal and one is less formal. And if you read the English wikiHow, language style is less formal, and so we tried to kind of translate that and transfer the informality to the Spanish as well. So, we only use the informal way of speaking in Spanish wikiHow. I think German is similar, I'm not exactly sure of different forms, so something like that. If a community member comes in and writes something that is formal, it's pretty simple to have the community manager to go in and.... it's the kind of beauty of the wiki system, is that article can be edited as many times as you want. I think, a community member will come in and start something, and then our community manager can go in and edit. #00:31:11#
88	IR: Ok, and are you the only one who has an oversight over all the versions, or are you a team? How do you work? #00:32:22#
89	IE: Small team, we are a small company. There is another page on wikiHow, where they have little bios about everybody who works here, which is nice. #00:32:27#
90	IR: I don't want to have the enterprise secrets, only the harmless things. #00:32:59#
91	IE: Absolutely, it's an easier visualization of people who work here, we are a very small team. So I do have somebody else I work with on the international sites here, who, I think she's been here for about almost a year. Historically, the

international team is pretty small, but the way we work is: small team with a big impact. #00:33:06#

92 IR: And how do you decide on the promotion of other language versions. I image you have kind of a budget. And then how do you decide to say: well, we give more to the German version, or we give more to the new, I don't know, Turkish version. How do you deal with this, is there a certain goal, or...? #00:33:40#

93 IE: I don't know if we have a specific goal, because I think that... even on English, I don't think we will ever gonna stop creating new content, so it's kind of a constant flow. The languages where there is more content on the site, versus Turkish, which launched last October, there is a lot of growth that this site hasn't seen yet. There are a lot of possibilities there, whereas like Spanish or even German, we have a lot of content that's on the English site already. #00:34:09#

94 IR: And have you thought about fostering the communities? It is the easier way to say, we just translate, then we know what the quality is, and we have kind of control, versus we tried to start a community, I don't know how to do this, but it would be a different approach. Is the latter a policy that is attractive to you? #00:34:57#

95 IE: Yeah, I mean, it's a similar strategy to our English site, and the way that other wiki sites work, like Wikipedia. We don't actively go and try to find people to contribute, but we do make it easy for them, and we really appreciate it. So it's really easy to create an account, really easy to start editing a Spanish article or a French article. If we see someone who is putting an effort in, or somebody reaches out to us, we have a lot of people email us, like, hey I want to write an article, how do I do that, we are really happy to answer those questions, and if we see somebody making good edits on the French site, our French community manager will reach out and talk to them and really engage them, which, I think, really fosters... instead of trying to find people, having the people who are there because they want to be there is really helpful and is a much stronger connection. #00:35:44#

96 IR: And what is the difference between the versions? The rules are the same, the look and feel, I think, is the same, the category system is the same? #00:37:00#

97 IE: Yeah #00:37:13#

98 IR: The pictures are the same, if it's a translation? #00:37:16#

99 IE: Most of the time, yeah, there are some images on our English site that have a lot of English text on the images, so sometimes we will take those out, because it's not helpful for a Japanese speaking user, for example. The only things that are different, we don't have community functions on internationals, since we don't have the same volume of people who work as community members #00:37:20#

100 IR: What do you mean? Do you mean the dashboard? #00:37:49#

101 IE: Yeah, so we have a more basic, smaller dashboard than the English does. #00:37:56#

102 IR: But it works the same? #00:38:02#

103	IE: Yeah, you can do all same things. It's just not as built out, like I mentioned earlier, it's more basic, I'd say. #00:38:06#
104	IR: So, if I write an article in German, then is there somebody who reviews my article? #00:38:20#
105	IE: Yeah. #00:38:26#
106	IR: So, it's almost the same? Maybe not that fast? #00:38:29#
107	IE: Maybe not as thorough, but yeah, somebody will review and help you publish it. #00:38:33#
108	IR: Have you ever seen a translation from German into English? #00:38:44#
109	IE: I have not, I don't know if anybody is doing it. #00:38:55#
110	IR: Ah, ok. Good. Then we are already finished. Just a few questions about technology. You already said, you use MediaWiki, but I think it's strongly customized, isn't it? #00:39:01#
111	IE: I am not sure, I can probably find out a little more about that, but I'm not really involved in the engineering side of things. It seems like you looked at a lot of different pages but if you were to look at this page I just sent you, this explains how we use MediaWiki, and this is about as much as I know as well. #00:39:18#
112	IR: You don't use a translation extension, I guess? #00:39:52#
113	IE: As far as I know, I don't personally use it, no. #00:40:03#
114	IR: Ok. Do you have an IT team? #00:40:07#
115	IE: Yeah, we do have engineers. #00:40:12#
116	IR: And they do the programming and the maintenance and something like that? #00:40:15#
117	IE: Yeah, again, I can find better answers for you later, but that is as much as I know. #00:40:21#
118	IR: That is ok. Then, the last questions: do you know of other studies that have wikiHow as their topic? #00:40:48#
119	IE: There is one, let me see if I can find it, there was an article on... somebody who used to work on our international sites... if I cannot find it right now, I will send it to you. #00:41:04#
120	IR: Perfect. #00:41:23#
121	IE: Yeah, I don't see it right now, but I will make a note to send it to you. And it was on their work setting up, I think it's much more informative than me. #00:41:33#
122	IR: Another question about technology: what about the user authorization system? How many user groups do you have concerning the rights management? #00:41:45#

- 123 IE: Good question... #00:42:00#
- 124 IR: You have an administrator probably who can do anything, on any wikiHow wiki probably? #00:42:03#
- 125 IE: Yeah, we have different kinds of levels, administrators, staff, translators... And then there are a lot of other ones that I don't use at all on international, so I'm sure they are used in some way for community members on English, but from my end I don't use them at all. #00:42:15#
- 126 IR: And for the community, are there different levels of rights? #00:42:42#
- 127 IE: I believe so. On international we don't use them, but if we go to the community dashboard on English (here is the link), I believe those who work on these different things might have different user labels. #00:42:47#
- 128 IR: Ok. What are your plans for the future? Are you happy now with this situation, or do you have big goals within the next years? Is there something that bothers you, or are the problems? Is there anything you want to add to the topics we had? #00:45:15#
- 129 IE: No, I mean, that all the things that we have gone over, highlight the fact that we've done so much, but there is a long way for us to go. There is always something new to do or try, so I think... the English site is a good example of this, there is always going to be more content to be translated, so there is huge potential for community members in the future on international sites. So, I think, just continuing to go along those lines as we go can really help. I think a lot of our decisions are driven by our mission, of the changes we do, of anything that we try to grow, is because we are trying to make the site more helpful and effective in helping people. #00:45:45#
- 130 IR: You said it's a small company, it's about twenty people? #00:46:44#
- 131 IE: Yeah, I'm not sure of the exact number... #00:46:48#
- 132 IR: So, if you come into your office, its twenty people around in the office #00:46:53#
- 133 IE: Yeah. #00:46:57#
- 134 IR: You don't count the translators, they are not included? #00:47:03#
- 135 IE: No. #00:47:09#
- 136 IR: How many translators are there, or people within your ecosystem somehow? #00:47:10#
- 137 IE: There is good amount. I don't think I can give you an exact number, because we have, some people do one article and some people do a lot, and some are community managers, so there is a big range #00:47:20#
- 138 IR: And there are communities where you have more translators, and there are countries where you have less, probably? #00:47:38#
- 139 IE: Yeah, definitely. #00:47:46#

140 IR: And probably I can see this from the article number? #00:47:49#

141 IE: Yeah, this is also probably related to how long we've had the site in existence, like the Turkish site, again as an example, will have fewer articles on the site, because it's our youngest site. #00:47:55#

142 IR: Ok. Yeah, good. Now I'm through, thank you very much. #00:48:18#

143 [Goodbye]