

First interview: August 11, 2009

Key Takeaways

- Business development's main role and also challenge is to both generate revenue and also developing business deals that make the site more relevant and get community excited about the site
- Major questions that the foundation and the community need to answer:
 - o How could Wikipedia stay relevant in an environment with fast-evolving technologies and user needs/preferences?
 - o What is a sustainable model for Wikipedia to stay in the game without sacrificing its original mission?

Role of business development

- Get business revenue
- Generate business deals that make the site more relevant and get community excited about the site
- It's not all about getting money. Also important to leverage others' resource to develop Wikipedia. E.g. the Orange deal also includes an joint experiment on building open proxy, open platform for Wikipedia

Major challenges

- Currently licensing is the only asset that's monetizable. Not sustainable in the long term
- Wikipedia doesn't have its own developers for new applications for mobile, etc
- With so many stakeholders, doing business is extremely difficult. In any other organizations, business development usually has the green light to just go out and execute. Aligning the desires of community and mission with other business desires and user needs makes it a very complicated process. A typical business professional would not succeed in this environment.

Business deal filtering guidelines

- Generates revenue
- Builds strategic value. E.g. the deal with Orange helps Wikipedia expand into mobile platform, and Orange also has a global footprint which enhances Wikipedia's reach
- Supports mission

Priority

- Key trend is going mobile. Need to focus on the way people use and access information whenever and wherever they want, and stay relevant
- Develop deals to fund more developers to create better tools and communications

Potential opportunities

- Expand into other media channels – TV? Wikipedia discovery channel?
- What's our role in the value chain
 - o What's the best model?
 - o The community is very concerned with processes
 - o If Wikipedia continues down the current path, it will become an archive
- Other movement in the landscape
 - o Anyone can potentially do it too but they don't understand community and Wikipedia has a pioneer advantage (at least for now)
 - o Other top internet properties, and newly developing ones, wants to hold content & monetize

Second interview: September 21, 2009

Past/current partnerships

- General technology:
 - o Apple: integrating Wikimedia properties in desktop (i.e., Wiktionary)
 - Marketing/messaging
 - Education market
 - o Microsoft: beta version of Internet Explorer 8, Microsoft wanted to make it more powerful, pull content from remote sites, they needed to cooperate with content partners
 - We don't have proprietary technology; needed to create open source code on our server to allow them to pull that
 - Allowed us to do licensing deal, control our messaging
 - People use Google and Yahoo as search; Wikipedia also has the mindshare to be a separate vertical search (i.e., in Knowledge)
 - o Mozilla
 - o NTT (Japan)
- Mobile providers and manufacturers:
 - o Orange: integrating Wikimedia projects on network
 - Orange is focusing on content, trying to find new ways to bring new value to services; want better experience on mobile, integrate Wikipedia w/ other properties Orange controls
 - No telco, cable company, etc., wants to be relegated to being a "dumb pipe"; Orange wants to integrate into other content
 - Value to Wikimedia: Orange is willing to help w/ meta data, building a stronger presence in areas that Wikimedia needs to grow such as West/Sub-Saharan Africa (education, services, data center, etc.)
 - o Deutsche Telekom
 - o Palm
 - Marketing/messaging
 - Mobile geotagging
 - Mobile application developer network
- Content companies:
 - o Spiegel
 - o Others currently being explored further

- Hardware and product companies
 - Currently being explored. Not brand licensing but product development that includes offline Wikipedia readers, etc.

Other work being undertaken/considered

- Licensing business line that I'm exploring – reason to do that is revenue, to get chapters engaged
 - Branding thing in the right way benefits community members
- To defensively manage your trademark to prevent brand dilution
- Content pushes: could see companies/organizations investing developing content on Wikimedia projects in the future
 - E.g., Subject-specific content such as medical content where partners would get their professional communities engaged as content contributors and also might want to invest in events such as Wikipedia Academies

Difficulties in creating partnerships

- We have to create new business models that are counter to the way businesses normally do business among and within their business units. This takes numerous meetings to educate and requires buy-in from the highest levels of the partner organization
- We can't sign boilerplate agreement because of how unusual we are; requires close examination of every agreement and complete rewrites
- Every situation requires customization therefore not easily scalable. Requires business people from our side to be well-versed in multiple areas (business modeling, marketing, technology, community management, legal, licensing, user experience, etc.)

Process in choosing partners

- Expanding reach and improving functionality of the projects--there is no way we can do that alone, so we look to partnerships to some extent for this
- With Orange, because it's such fragmented market, multiple platforms, people access differently, they were more willing to share with us to improve our project
 - Orange was a strategic assessment on our part: reaches multiple countries (international presence)
 - Did not choose U.S. partner because most of the U.S. telecoms only have a presence in the U.S.

- Need to find a partner that can deal with our culture, and Orange appears adaptable and willing to learn together
 - Still, get frequent e-mails that criticize mistakes that partner makes
 - Partners put under “microscope” by community, and often I have to monitor this

Other roles that Kul undertakes

- Community service functions – I am also the product and relationship manager, brand management
- There are some things with our open ticket response system
- Full time job doing deals – doing a couple now, have to structure, negotiate
- Heavily relied on by partners/potential partners as the expert
 - Have to educate them on free content
 - Community
 - Tech/open source
 - Business models
 - User experience
 - Marketing
- Get buy-in from community members
- Work with PR
- Develop and manage sponsorships
- General business duties throughout the organization (negotiating contracts for other departments, review and provide advice on issues that affect other departments in multiple areas)
- Take on several non-business duties as well (support fundraising, evangelism, product development, corporate citizenship initiatives, etc.)
- Analyze and respond to numerous business requests (both inbound and outbound, and solicited and unsolicited). Deal with many non-department related requests as well and general community requests in several areas (trademark issues in China, product development by chapters, community development in Japan, etc.)

Lessons learned from partnerships before Kul’s arrival

- Past partnerships not as successful as current ones:
 - WMF gave companies unfettered use of the trademarks, but didn’t service the deals; these deals may not have been profitable for WMF

- Perspective was that any money was good; not a strong focus on expanding technology or functionality
- That said, T-Mobile deal does appear to have been valuable
 - Tried some experimental things
 - Integrated Wikipedia within one of their platforms
 - Tagging/searching functionality expanded (but T-Mobile kept this proprietary—still, proved that there was space to grow)

Threats and opportunities for business development

- Challenge to find the business model: with Web 2.0, most people are giving content away for free, and then charge for premium service—but this doesn't seem consistent w/ philosophy of WMF; unclear that these models are sustainable as key revenue source
 - Will need to spend more on R&D if want to try out new/innovative things
- Technology is very much “1999 technology”; there are many barriers to contribute—but Wikimedia projects have been very successful for various reasons
 - People are empowered
 - Overwhelming goodwill with users
 - WMF is not typical company
 - This is influencing other organizations/companies—if there's too much of a hierarchy to begin with, can't use Wikis to collaborate (which perhaps highlights need to change hierarchies)
 - If small fraction of revenue comes to WMF, and WMF handles all legal/etc issues, then it might be a “win, win” situation
- There's not much that's scalable about the way that partnerships are formed at present
 - Every agreement must be customized given unique standing of WMF
 - Difficult to customize for many different subject areas (e.g., offline, mobile); requires time and expertise
 - However, spending a lot of time developing these models and partnerships at the beginning will hopefully pay off down the line with long-standing strategic partnerships that benefit us on multiple levels