Improving the Wikipedia desktop experience

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Hello :) 

We’re Olga and Alex from the Readers Web Team at the Wikimedia Foundation and we’re here to talk about improving the desktop experience.
Session agenda

This is a 40 min session

● Looking back: how has the desktop site improved over time?
● How can we continue that trajectory of improvement to meet the new challenges we face?
● Brainstorm
● Discussion
Capture your thoughts and questions

https://w.wiki/7Cf
A history of improvement

2002
- Classic

2004
- Monobook

2010
- Usability initiative
- Vector

Ongoing
- Beta features, gadgets, user scripts

(focus on mobile)

2014
- Winter

2016
- Timeless

2019
- AMC

2020
- What’s next?
A solid starting point, the DNA of which still remains today. This is the initial appearance of MediaWiki, before skins were introduced.
The first MediaWiki skin. Attempting to ensure that key elements are prominent, showing messages and alerts, and article titles are clear. Also behind the scenes work on templates and HTML/DOM structure[1].
Following the Usability Initiative, the goal of Vector was to increase the usability of Wikipedia for new contributors by reducing barriers to public participation. Improve visibility of common navigation elements and reduce visibility of less common ones[^2][^3].
Tightly couple page actions and views to the page content itself, reduce interface clutter to focus on content, make search available at all times, synchronize design direction across devices and platforms[4].
Intended to be a fully featured skin that emphasises both content and editing tools. Timeless is responsive and was based on Winter\(^5\).
What's next?

How do we continue the trajectory of improvement to meet new challenges and new audiences?
New challenges & changing context

- **Diversity and inclusion:** more people are using Wikipedia from all over the world

- **Welcoming new editors:** we need to welcome editors from all backgrounds

- **Mobile + desktop:** desktop is still approximately 49% of the 19.9 billion page views each month (en.wiki)

- **New patterns:** new web patterns and capabilities are available to us (e.g. responsive web)
Imagine you’re reading or editing a Wikipedia article on desktop for your first time...
Where's the search bar?

What are all these links?

Is Wikipedia only in English? Can I read this in Hindi?
Make Wikipedia feel more welcoming

Currently:

- The experience **does not match current expectations** of the modern web
- It feels **disorienting and disconnected** to people who are not used to Wikipedia
- This can cause readers and editors to have **less trust in Wikipedia** and to use the site less

Focusing on making Wikipedia more welcoming will **allow new readers and editors to join our movement** and contribute to the projects
Can you think of usability improvements that would help readers and editors alike...
The table of contents would be helpful right now.

I want to search without scrolling all the way back to the top.

I want my user tools.

Where did the language switcher go?
Make Wikipedia easier to use

If you’re a newcomer or a casual reader:

● Basic functions can be difficult to find (e.g. switching languages)
● Important features are not highlighted while less important features are prominent
● The structure of the navigation distracts from the content itself

If you’re a new or experienced editor:

● Basic features like creating an account or viewing important article information are difficult to find
● Features that are important do not always have the visibility they deserve
So, how do we improve it?

What we want to do:

- Focus on the content
- Provide easier access to everyday actions (e.g. search, language switching, edit)
- Put things in logical and useful places
- Increase consistency in the interface with other platforms - mobile web and the apps
- Eliminate clutter

What we don’t want to do:

- Touch the content
- Remove any functionality
- Drastically change the layout
- Redesign the site
A helpful metaphor

As any good librarian would keep their library well-organized as it grows, so must we with our website. This gives us a better foundation on which we can continue to grow and introduce new features.
What might this look like?

(we’re not sure...but here’s some thoughts)
Stockholm

Stockholm ([ˈstockːholːm] listen) is the capital of Sweden and the most populous urban area in the Nordic countries. 966,232 people live in the municipality, and approximately 1.6 million in the urban area, and 2.4 million in the metropolitan area. The city stretches across fourteen islands where Lake Mälaren flows into the Baltic Sea. Outside the city to the east, and along the coast, is the island chain of the Stockholm archipelago. The area has been settled since the Stone Age, in the 6th millennium BC, and was founded as a city in 1252 by Swedish statesman Birger Jarl. It is also the county seat of Stockholm County.

Stockholm is the cultural, media, political, and economic centre of Sweden. The Stockholm region alone accounts for over a third of the country's GDP, and is among the top 10 regions in Europe by GDP per capita. It is an important global city, and the main centre for corporate headquarters in the Nordic region. The city is home to some of Europe's top ranking universities, such as the Stockholm School of Economics, Karolinska Institute and Royal Institute of Technology (KTH). It hosts the annual Nobel Prize ceremonies and banquet at the Stockholm Concert Hall and Stockholm City Hall. One of the city's most prized museums, the Vasa Museum, is the most visited non-art museum in Scandinavia. The Stockholm metro, opened in 1950, is well known for the decor of its stations; it has been called the longest art gallery in the world. Sweden's national football arena is located north of the city centre, in Solna. Ericsson Globe, the national indoor arena, is in the southern part of the city. The city was the host of the 1912 Summer Olympics, and hosted the equestrian portion of the 1996 Summer Olympics otherwise held in Melbourne, Victoria, Australia.

Stockholm is the seat of the Swedish government and most of its agencies, including the highest courts and the major political institutions. The Riksdag building houses the parliament, and the Royal Palace is the residence of the Swedish monarch. The city includes many government departments and ministries, including the Ministry of Defence, Ministry of Finance, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Other major government buildings include the Ministry of Enterprise and Innovation, the Ministry of Education and Research, and the Ministry of Employment. The city is also home to many international organizations and representation offices, including the European Parliament, the United Nations and the EU Commission. The city is a major hub for international trade, finance, and business.
Easier access to everyday actions: search
Easier access to everyday actions: Edit & Languages
Putting things in logical & useful places
Increase consistency in the interface with other platforms - mobile web and the apps
Putting things in logical & useful places
Other considerations and constraints

How do we approach defining and building these updates? What social and technical considerations should we think about?

Social Considerations

● Not altering the experience on existing skins
● Staying true to our roots, improving while staying recognizable
● Be considerate of the needs of various audiences: newcomers, experienced readers, new editors, experienced editors

Technical Possibilities

● Creating a new skin
● Making gradual tweaks to Vector (current default desktop skin)
● Making gradual tweaks to Minerva (current default mobile skin)
● Something else...
Breakout groups (brainstorm/feedback)

**Group 1:** how might we make Wikipedia more welcoming? (Alex)

**Group 2:** how might we make Wikipedia easier to use? (Quiddity)

**Group 3:** how do we work with the social and technical constraints and considerations around these ideas? (Olga)

- Please be positive, constructive, and respectful
- Prioritize generating ideas and questions over having conversations
- Write *everything* down on post-its
Q&A
Our roadmap

Stage 1: Research & requirements

Stage 2: Prototyping & technical planning

Stage 3: Development, deployments, & analysis

Stage 4: Finishing touches and final deployments
Get involved

Project page
https://www.mediawiki.org/wiki/Reading/Web/Desktop_Improvements

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Citations

1. https://meta.wikimedia.org/wiki/Layout_design_document