

# For the price of 15 cups of coffee a day

Thoughts on Enterprise MediaWiki sustainability

**Yaron Koren | EMWCon Spring 2023 | April 19**

# About me

- Live in New Jersey, U.S.
- Enterprise MediaWiki developer, consultant, evangelist
- WikiWorks, *Working with MediaWiki*, *Between the Brackets*, Canasta



# We are very lucky

- We use software, MediaWiki, that is open source but requires no effort on our part to keep going.
- MediaWiki is maintained (very well) by the Wikimedia Foundation and a large group of motivated volunteers.

# What about extensions and skins?

There are basically four groups:

- Maintained by the Wikimedia Foundation, or WMDE (VisualEditor, Scribunto, Wikibase)
- Maintained by a company (Semantic MediaWiki (?), SocialProfile, WSOAuth)
- Maintained by one or more individuals (most of them)
- Not maintained

There are gray areas here, of course.

# Extensions in *all* of these groups are at risk.

See, for example: LiquidThreads and Flow/StructuredDiscussions - both created by the WMF to structure talk page discussions.

- If you installed LQT on your wiki, you are out of luck!
- If you installed SD, you may be out of luck in the future.  
(Maintenance-only since 2015.)

# What about extensions maintained by MediaWiki consulting companies/wiki farms?

These may be the safest - though still at risk.

Also, "maintained" does not mean that new features are getting added.

See:

- SMW: no new features since 2020?
- SocialProfile: still lacks an extension.json file

# The good news

"Zombie" extensions can live a long time, if they are hosted on Wikimedia's Git repository.

- If keeping an extension working just involves staying up-to-date with changes to MediaWiki hooks, functions, etc., there is a small group of devs and volunteers who continuously make these fixes across all extensions.
- (Also true for skins? I don't know.)

# The bad news

Most extensions and skins need more than find-and-replace-style maintenance.



# The bus number/"bus factor"

It's real!



# Anyone remember these ads?

(This one doesn't mention coffee... but I recall some of the ads/commercials saying "for the price of one cup of coffee a day...")



**She Needs Your Love**

Little Kim was abandoned by her mother in an alley of Seoul, Korea. She was found curled up behind a box, shivering, hungry and frightened. Her U. S. father probably doesn't even know she exists. And since Kim is a mixed-blood child, no relative will ever claim her.

Only your love can help give little Kim, and children just as needy, the privileges you would wish for your own child.

Through Christian Children's Fund you can sponsor one of these youngsters. We use the worst sponsor to symbolize the bond of love that exists between you and the child.

The cost? Only \$10 a month. Your love is demonstrated in a practical way because your money helps with schooling meals . . . medical care . . . warm clothing . . . education . . . understanding housemothers . . .

And in return you will receive your child's personal history, photograph, plus a description of the orphanage where your child lives. You can write and send packages. Your child will know who you are and will answer your letters. Correspondence is translated at our overseas office.

(If you want your child to have a special gift—a pair of shoes, a warm jacket, a fuzzy hat—you can send your check to our office and the entire amount will be forwarded, along with your instructions.)

Will you help? Requests come from orphanages every day. And they are urgent. Children wringing rags on their feet, school books jostled out of date, walk supplies exhausted, babies abandoned by unwell mothers.

Since 1938 thousands of American sponsors have found this to be an intimate, person-to-person way of sharing their blessings with youngsters around the world.

Little Kim and children like her need your love—won't you help? Today?

**Sponsors urgently needed for children in India, Hong Kong, Korea, Japan, Formosa, Brazil**

Write today: Verdon E. Kemp  
**CHRISTIAN CHILDREN'S FUND, Inc.**  
Richmond, Va. 22184

I wish to sponsor a  boy  girl in \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_  
I choose a child who needs no more.  I will pay \$10 a month (\$10 a year)  
I enclose my first payment of \$\_\_\_\_\_  
Send me child's name, story, address, and picture.  
I intend to sponsor a child for \_\_\_\_\_ years.  
Please send me more information.

Checklist: Write 1967 Form, Form 1, Government Approved, Registered (C.F.A.) and with Advisory Committee on Voluntary Foreign Aid. Gifts are tax deductible.

# Some math

- Nowadays, a cup of coffee in the U.S. costs an average of ~ \$3
- Fifteen cups a day, over an entire year =  $\$3 * 15 * 365 = \$16,425$
- I believe that, for even just this amount of money, the so-called Enterprise MediaWiki ecosystem can be made self-sustaining!

**What can be done with \$16,425?**

# Google Summer of Code

- A program, run by Google, that matches open-source newcomers (no longer just college students!) with open-source software orgs, and funds their development projects for the summer.
- Started in 2005; the Wikimedia Foundation has participated every year since 2006.

# Benefits of Google Summer of Code

- Introduces ~~students~~ newcomers to open-source software and specific orgs
- Free labor for open-source software projects
- **Identifies people who can later be hired**

Notable former GSoC students: Jeroen De Dauw, Nischay Nahata.

# What do GSoC participants have in common?

- Talented (since they were selected out of a group of candidates)
- Interested in contributing to open source
- Interested in MediaWiki
- Usually affordable!

# How to collect/distribute the money?

- Best option: an organization/consortium/foundation, similar in concept to the Linux Foundation, Document Foundation, etc.
- Ideally, one's "vote" is tied as directly as possible to the size of one's financial contribution



# My previous attempt at this

- The "Enterprise MediaWiki Consortium"
- One reason it failed: the Wikimedia Foundation doesn't want the word "MediaWiki" to be used for money-related purposes.

**New idea:**  
**"Canasta Foundation"**

# Canasta

- A Docker-based framework for MediaWiki (<https://canasta.wiki>)
- Meant to be universal, flexible
- Currently includes ~150 extensions, ~10 skins
- Provides a rough guarantee that all the software it bundles together will work

# Why "Canasta Foundation"?

- Solves the naming problem
- Canasta is actually (in my opinion) an ideal "framework" for making Enterprise MediaWiki-related decisions
- Can accomodate a community-based decision-making process
- The set of extensions and skins within Canasta provides an easy demarcation of the Canasta Foundation's "domain"
- Note: you don't have to use Canasta to be involved (though I think everyone should!)

# Case study: WatchAnalytics extension

- Created by James Montalvo and Kris Field of NASA in 2015
- Development ended around 2020
- Overhauled by WikiWorks intern Sanjay Thiyagarajan in 2022 and 2023 (including a move to Wikimedia's Git repo) **to enable inclusion in Canasta**
- Code is now in much better shape, including extensive internationalization

# Why not Open CSP?

- Open CSP is very tied in to one company (Wikibase Solutions) and its extensions; it's not something that could really be controlled/adopted by a community.
- (Same is true for Hallo Welt's BlueSpice.)

# What about MediaWiki Stakeholders' Group?

- Simply a different approach - MWStake is democratic, while a "Canasta Foundation" would be essentially "oligarchic".
- Also, MWStake is not chiefly focused on extension and skin maintenance
- However, MWStake could make sense as the ones who hold the bank account

# Could this lead to a "hostile takeover"?

- Company ExtremeWikis pays in \$20,000 a year
- Get more than 50% of the vote
- They vote to remove the extensions they don't like, and add in all of their own extensions



# This fear is overblown

- Voting would be more about how funding gets allocated, not the overall direction
- Many open-source organizations provide a model for decision-making process
- That said: money talks! Putting in money is a good way to get your voice heard.

So, what's next?

That's up to you.

Thoughts?