

Data Everywhere: Opportunities and Challenges for Enterprise MediaWiki

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What do you see?



Data is everywhere.

And different sets of it are important to different people.

No one repository (not even Wikidata) can hold more than a tiny fraction.

No one *dedicated software application* (with hardcoded fields) can hold more than a tiny fraction.

Enterprise MediaWiki = ideal software for lots of data

- Supports any data structure
- Supports any number of users editing together
- Free to use

So why isn't it more popular?

Monday.com

- Project management software
- Company based in Israel (spun off from Wix)
- \$2 billion valuation

Let's see the video

“Everything You Can Do with monday.com!”

monday.com

March 19, 2019

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ObkWrfukomA>

See any similarities to EMW?

Monday.com = more like a web-based spreadsheet than a wiki.

Neither one is “better” – each has major strengths and weaknesses.

But, both have:

- Flexible creation of data structures
- Table, calendar and map display
- Data entry forms

Advantages of monday.com

- Easier to set up simple data structures
- Much more "hand-holding" throughout the process
- Strong marketing focus on a single use case: project management

By the way, monday.com is not alone

Similar software (I think):

- Airtable
- Smartsheet

These have all been described as “spreadsheet/database hybrids”.


What can we learn from this?

Perhaps development has been focused too much on supporting "power users" (sorry, everyone) and not enough on supporting beginning users.

("Selection bias": the people most likely to make bug reports & feature requests are those with the best understanding of the system.)

Features that might be helpful to beginning users

1) A "data structure wizard"



The screenshot shows a MediaWiki interface. At the top right, there are links for "Admin", "Talk", "Preferences", "Watchlist", "Contributions", and "Log out". Below these are navigation tabs for "Main page" and "Discussion", and action buttons for "Read", "Edit", "View history", and "More". A search box labeled "Search Wiki" is on the right. On the left, there is a logo of a sunflower and a sidebar with links like "Main page", "Recent changes", "Random page", and "Help about MediaWiki". The main content area shows the "Main Page" heading and a "Getting started" section with a list of links. A light blue dialog box with a cyan border is centered over the page, containing the text: "Your wiki currently has no data structures. Would you like to create one?" Below this text is a blue button labeled "Continue" and a checkbox labeled "Don't show this message again". At the bottom right of the page, there is a link "[Mark this page as patrolled]". At the bottom of the page, it says "This page was last edited on 1 September 2019, at 03:08."

2) A better data structure creation tool

Special:CreateClass is too basic, the others (Page Schemas, Special:CreateForm, Special:CreateTemplate) may be too advanced

- Could be tied in with the wizard

3) "Undefined" forms

- It should be possible to have forms without a form definition, using just what's in the templates
- This probably requires the use of Cargo
- I've talked about this before. Time to finally do it!

4) Simplified data structure creation

Adding a field to a data structure should require one change to the wiki, not 3-4.

This may be achievable, using Cargo and either Lua or an improved Page Schemas.

Concurrently with software improvements, we could use better marketing.

Some thoughts from the best book on software marketing I know, *Crossing the Chasm* by Geoffrey A. Moore (1991).

"Competition [is, for many people,] a fundamental condition for purchase. So, coming from the early market, where there are typically no perceived competing products, with the goal of penetrating the mainstream, you often have to go out and *create your competition*."

- *Crossing the Chasm*, pg. 133 (paperback)

Creating our competition

Far from being a problem, the presence of monday.com and these other spreadsheet/database hybrids may be a great benefit to us.

We finally have “competition”; these give us both *context* and *legitimacy*.

"People are very conservative about what they let you do inside their head. One of the things they do not like is for you to take up too much space. This means they will use a kind of shorthand reference...

If you don't make the choice to fill the space with a single attribute, then the market will do it for you."

- *Crossing the Chasm*, pg. 155 (paperback)

Short marketing statement, based on *Crossing the Chasm's* ideas:

"X is like Y except it Z."

Option #1

“Enterprise MediaWiki is like other wiki software except it allows for turning the wiki into a structured database.”

Pro:

This is the obvious approach – and the standard one.

Con:

The "selling point" is unclear – and maybe too big a jump.

Option #2

“Enterprise MediaWiki is like monday.com except it is free to use.”

Pro:

Everyone understands the value of paying less.

Con:

Not necessarily true, if the person pitching the software is a consultant!

Option #3

“Enterprise MediaWiki is like monday.com except it is cheaper.”

Pro:

Again, people like paying less.

Con:

For many organizations, quality is more important than cost.

Option #4

“Enterprise MediaWiki is like monday.com except it keeps a version history of everything.”

Pro:

A version history is crucial for a lot of things.

Con:

People might not understand the benefit.

Option #5

“Enterprise MediaWiki is like monday.com except it allows for more complex data structures.”

Pro:

Seems useful - the simple data structures of monday.com, etc. may be too simple for a lot of tasks.

Con:

Is complexity a good selling point?

Is there a “right” answer?

Maybe, maybe not.

It would be nice to coalesce on one central selling point, if it's possible and makes sense.

Questions/comments