Wiki as knowledge database for medical university library users

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Introduction

The poster presents an example of applying wiki technology in constructing a handbook containing practical guidelines for users of the Library of Medical University of Silesia. Wiki technology is one of Web 2.0 components and enables creating knowledge source by use of common effort.

Objectives

The manual was prepared initially as a text document in 2007 and placed on the Library webpage. It included useful for students and scientists information on using Library resources. However, the document in a text format put on the webpage was not "user friendly": it took too much time to find a needed topic; many of the topics should have been placed in several parts of the handbook because it related to various subjects.

Deciding to change the functionality of the manual, we sought for something retrievable, non-linear, linkable and easy to edit by librarians.

Wiki technology allows for including all of these features into our manual.

Methods

DokuWiki software was chosen from many others after analysis; internet service WikiMatrix was used for comparing wiki software. WikiMatrix collects practical information about great number of wiki software and enables comparing them in a tabular form.

DokuWiki has many advantages and as its authors wrote "It has a simple but powerful syntax which makes sure the datafiles remain readable outside the Wiki and eases the creation of structured texts. All data is stored in plain text files no database is required."

DokuWiki documentation accessible on the website facilitated applying the program. It is in a DokuWiki form, so it is also a good example of practical usage. *DokuWiki Manual* leads wiki creators from the beginning (installing software on the server) to using advanced solutions during designing and editing wiki webpages.

First step we took in the Library was to establish webpage and installing DokuWiki on the server. The text document of the library users manual was the base for constructing wiki. Taking into consideration that the basic text was linear and wiki allows to build multilevel structure, we rearranged the content to be hierarchical. This composition is clearly seen in the wiki ndex.

Easy to edit pages allow librarians to modify existing pages or to add a new one. DokuWiki syntax is uncomplicated and is sufficient for our purposes.

Due to personalize our wiki we experimented with *templates* (skins or themes), which are prepared by other users of DokuWiki small programs changing default colors, functionality or layout of window components. Templates which we chose caused problems with indexing of the content so, after several trials, we only decided on small modification of color of the default template. We also managed to place our wiki logo and title of our service on the banner above the contents.

Most of the activity around the wiki needed no IT specialist help and was done by the librarians themselves. However, IT specialist assistance is required.

Results

Our work resulted in a user manual, which has clear structure, great number of illustrative material and links to external sources, is searchable and easy to navigate. As it contains guidelines for all library services it must be often updated - wiki software enables it for all librarians in the Library of Medical University of Silesia, so the next step will be training sessions on how to work with wiki.

Conclusions

Wiki technology fulfilled our expectations concerning library users manual.