

Targeted Teaching Topic



OMAHA WORLD-HERALD BUYS WIKICITY

By Gina Chen, October 29, 2009

The Omaha World-Herald Co. announced in October 2009 the purchase of WikiCity, a hyperlocal site with local content for just more than 22,000 U.S. communities that I wrote about here in August.



WikiCity, which started in late 2008 and launched publicly this summer, is a bit like CitySearch with its telephone-book-like listings of restaurants and businesses and similar to BackFence with its aim to be a user-generated hyperlocal site. But it lets readers update their own communities pages, giving a bit of a Wikipedia feel. One of the best potential benefits of something like WikiCity would be to team up with local news organizations.

That, in essence, is what happened. The Omaha World-Herald Co.'s flagship publication is the Omaha World-Herald, with a 200,000 Sunday and a 160,000 daily circulation, said Joel Long, the company's director of public relations. The privately held, employee-owned company owns 9 dailies in Nebraska and Iowa, 22 weeklies, and 23 other publications. Buying WikiCity "offers us a new an exciting opportunity of looking at other avenues of connecting with our readers," Long told me.

Neither Long nor WikiCity's founder Pat Lazure would reveal details of the purchases, except to say that Lazure will become president of the new World Interactive Group, which will run WikiCity. Lazure started WikiCity with his business partner, Rohit Keshwani, a pre-med undergrad at the University of Minnesota.

Long said company officials haven't yet decided whether WikiCity will have a presence on the World-Herald website. Lazure said the idea is WikiCity will maintain its own brand, but readers might eventually be able to access it through the newspapers' websites. He said advertising was the expected source of revenue for WikiCity.

What's cool about this for the newspaper business is it's an example of a newspaper redefining its role and product. This sale seems like a realization that the product isn't news; it's helping readers make sense of their world in every way possible. I think more newspapers will need to do this as their business continues to evolve.

It's also an example of a tech-based company working with a news company, a combination that I believe will become more vital as time goes on. Technology has always gone hand in glove with gathering and disseminating news, from the days when technology meant lead type and a hand press.

Today, it's an even more important connection. News organization cannot survive if they don't understand and use the rapidly changing technologies. And to understand them well enough to be competitive, newspapers must include people from the technology field among their staffs.

As Lazure puts it: "What does this mean for newspapers? I think newspaper are looking to spread out and doing different verticals. I see WikiCity as one of those verticals to keep readers on their sites." I know I'll be watching to see whether this partnership works and what the rest of us can learn from it.

Building Community Connections Using WikiCity

Teachers Guide

Relevant National Content Standards for Entrepreneurship

Business Functions	
The business activities performed by entrepreneurs in managing the business	
K	Information Management Understands the concepts, systems, and tools needed to access, process, maintain, evaluate, and disseminate information for business decision-making
Technology	
K.07	Explain ways that technology impacts business
K.08	Use Personal Information Management/Productivity applications
K.13	Demonstrate collaborative/groupware applications
Information Acquisition	
K.16	Conduct an environmental scan to obtain marketing information

Background



WikiCity Guides provides students with the unique opportunity to collaborate not just with their classmates, but with the community as a whole. Regardless of the subject, instructors and team members can closely monitor each student's contributions, and all changes are tracked and time-stamped for added accountability. Best of all, the assignment itself is never complete. Instead, it is inherited by the local community, thus allowing others to progress its quality, content, and accuracy.

Project Plan #1 - The Historian

The purpose of this project is to allow students to chronicle the historical value of local heritage, traditions, and landmarks within their community. Assign or invite the students to identify local heritage, traditions, or landmarks within the community. Assign individuals or teams to chronicle the historical relevance related to the selected topic. Evaluate all contributions by referencing the article's "history" tab. (Always remember, all team members' contributions will be recorded and time-stamped as part of the article's "history".)



Project Plan #2 - The Journalist



The purpose of this project is to allow students to exercise and develop their journalism skills, while highlighting and sharing important community events. Identify upcoming community activities such as a sporting event, city council meeting, or general current event. Assign individuals or teams to attend the event and to individually or collaboratively generate an article summarizing the key happenings. Evaluate all contributions by referencing the article's "history" tab. (Again, remember, all team members' contributions will be recorded and time-stamped as part of the article's "history".)

Project Plan #3 - The Biographer



The purpose of this project is to allow students to exercise and develop their journalism skills, while profiling a local elected official. Identify a local elected official (i.e. mayor, city council member, etc.). Assign individuals or teams to interview the elected official to better understand his/her background, elected job duties, and favorite aspects of the job. Generate an article based upon these findings and share by linking it to the community's respective Government Resources subpage. Evaluate all contributions by referencing the article's "history" tab. (Again, remember, all team members' contributions will be recorded and time-stamped as part of the article's "history".)

Additional Help

Feel free to reference the help section at <http://www.wikicity.com/Help:Contents> for any additional needs or support.

The screenshot shows the WikiCity Guides 'Help:Contents' page. At the top, there is a search bar and a 'Search' button. Below the search bar, there are navigation tabs: 'help page', 'discussion', 'view source', and 'history'. The main content area is divided into three sections: 'Understand', 'Contribute', and 'Talk'. The 'Understand' section includes links for 'About WikiCity Guides', 'Welcome, Newcomers', and 'Frequently Asked Questions ...and answers!'. The 'Contribute' section includes instructions on how to add a new page, tips for new contributors, and a link to upload pictures. The 'Talk' section is currently empty. On the left side, there is a navigation menu with links for 'States', 'Cities', 'Counties', 'Marketplace', 'Coupons', 'Add a new page', 'Add a picture', 'Recent changes', and 'Help'. At the bottom left, there is a 'Become a Fan' button for WikiCity on Facebook.

Additional Ideas and Discussion

Inevitably, creative instructors will come up with new and innovative ways to approach the WikiCity Guides, so please feel free to utilize the "discussion" tab on the WikiCity Guides project page to help develop these ideas, and of course, once materialized, feel free to share them.

Source: http://www.wikicity.com/WikiCity_Guides:Project_Plan

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