



Written by [C. Mitchell Shaw](#) on April 26, 2017

Wikiritribune: Wikipedia Co-founder's Open-source News Site to Combat Fake News

Wikipedia co-founder Jimmy Wales (shown) is launching an innovative news website called Wikiritribune to combat “fake news” by creating a partnership between professional journalists and a community of volunteer contributors. Readers will be able to suggest edits to the news articles. This “open-source” model of news reporting borrows more than a little from the model of Wikipedia.



Wikiritribune will “cover general issues, such as US and UK politics, through to specialist science and technology,” [according](#) to *The Guardian*. The Wikiritribune [website](#) — which does not yet contain any news articles — describes the goal of the site as fixing broken news by “bringing genuine community control to our news with unrestricted access for all.” The site says:

The news is broken and we can fix it. We’re bringing genuine community control to our news with unrestricted access for all. We’re developing a living, breathing tool that’ll present accurate information with real evidence, so that you can confidently make up your own mind.

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Wales told *The Guardian* that he had intended to put his plan to combat “fake news” on hold, but changed his mind on the first day of Trump’s presidency. “Someone I know convinced me to give Trump 100 days before making my mind up,” he said, “but then on day one Kellyanne Conway came out and said her ‘alternative facts’ line. That was when I really decided to move forward.” The plan to accomplish his goal of fixing the news and bringing “accurate information with real evidence” is to allow greater community involvement by allowing readers to suggest edits, which will only go “live” after approval by site administrators:

In most news sites, the community tends to hang at the bottom of articles in comments that serve little purpose. We believe the community can play a more important role in news. Wikiritribune puts community at the top, literally.

Articles are authored, fact-checked, and verified by professional journalists and community members working side by side as equals, and supported not primarily by advertisers, but by readers who care about good journalism enough to become monthly supporters.

The site will initially be funded by a crowdfunding campaign. If enough money is raised to begin with a crew of 10 paid journalists, the site will go live and will rely on supporters instead of advertisers. While asserting that advertisers will not have a stake in what is and is not published (since there won’t be any advertisers), the site says:



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Wikitrubune is 100% ad-free, no one's relying on clicks to appease advertisers; no one's got a vested interest in anything other than giving you real news. There's no paywall, so anyone can read Wikitrubune. Anyone can flag or fix an article and submit it for review.

And:

In order to deliver on our promise, we need people who care about good journalism. People like you. Support us in our mission to bring you transparent facts and we'll build something constructive, something which outwits the prevalence of untrustworthy news sources.

By donating to our campaign, you'll play a critical part in an energetic surge towards media honesty. It's a movement that we believe will eventually obliterate low-rent, unreliable news for good. We want to raise enough money up front to get us started — but we need your regular commitment to make sure we can keep improving and delivering on giving you real news.

And while Wikitrubune points to the lack of being beholden to advertisers as a major selling point, *The Guardian* reported that those who support the site will have a say in what stories the site covers:

Those who donate will become supporters, who in turn will have a say in which subjects and story threads the site focuses on. And Wales intends that the community of readers will fact-check and subedit published articles.

The idea of an open-source news site is appealing, but it remains to be seen whether Wikitrubune can deliver on its promise to give its readers "real news." After all, the difference between having the editorial policy set by dependence on advertisers and having it set by dependence on supporters is not quite night and day. Especially considering the people Wales has named among his advisors.

Those advisors include Lily Cole, Jeff Jarvis, and Lawrence Lessig.

Lily Cole is an English actress, model, and environmental activist who endorsed the parliamentary candidacy of the Green Party's Caroline Lucas in the 2015 UK general election. She has been cited by PETA as an example of activism for her efforts to raise awareness of the use of animal products in cosmetics. It's hard to find anyone much more devoted to liberal causes than Cole.

Jeff Jarvis is an American journalist, professor, and public speaker whose views on privacy would make the NSA blush. He has [said](#), "If all we do is pay attention to privacy, we may lose the opportunity and the benefits of publicness," adding, "sometimes, when you hold something back, you have to ask yourself, 'would that be selfish?'" His 2012 book, *Public Parts: How Sharing in the Digital Age Improves the Way We Work and Live*, advocates his view of "publicness" and argues against regulations to protect privacy. He describes himself as a "post 9/11 hawk." For a man who describes himself as "a liberal: a centrist leaning left," the surveillance state couldn't ask for a better apologist.

Lawrence Lessig is the founder of Mayday PAC, which seeks to bring about a "Second Constitutional Convention" for the purpose of rewriting the Constitution to fit his liberal views. He is a long-time Obama associate, dating back to their days of teaching law together at the University of Chicago and was one of the early endorsers of Obama in 2007. He is a big advocate of government control over the Internet under the misnamed scheme of Net Neutrality.

If — and it is hard to determine the size of that "if" — Wikitrubune can overcome the influence of its advisors and avoid the "edit to assure liberal bias" culture that has plagued Wikipedia (which has no connection to Wikitrubune other than being co-founded by Wales), it may prove to be an interesting news site. If not, it may well make the *New York Times* look both conservative and trustworthy by



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comparison.

Photo: Wikipedia co-founder Jimmy Wales



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