

Wikipedia's Jimmy Wales has launched an alternative to Facebook and Twitter

In a nutshell: Hardly anyone would say that social media is good for you, yet billions use it in one form or another (often concurrently) every single day. These platforms make billions of dollars by addicting users and getting them to click ads. One Wikipedia co-founder wants to change that with a new social media site that is supported by the users rather than big advertisers.

Wikipedia co-founder Jimmy Wales is launching a social-media website called [WT: Social](#). The platform aims to compete with Facebook and Twitter, except instead of funding it using advertising, Wales is taking a page from the Wikipedia playbook and financing it through user donations.

"The business model of social media companies, of pure advertising, is problematic," Wales told [Financial Times](#). "It turns out the huge winner is low-quality content."

WT: Social got its start as [Wikitribune](#), a site that published original news stories with the community fact-checking and sub-editing articles. The venture never gained much traction, so Wales is [moving](#) it to the new platform with a more social networking focus.

"Instead of optimizing our algorithm to addict you and keep you clicking, we will only make money if you voluntarily choose to support us – which means that our goal is not clicks but actually being meaningful to your life."

The site will still post articles, but instead of giving priority to content with the most "Likes," its algorithms will list the newest stories first. However, the founder is open to adding an "upvote" feature similar to Reddit's down the road.

Wales says that he hopes to nurture niche groups, which are sometimes censored or removed by Facebook and Twitter. However, this does not mean people can post whatever they want without fear of removal. Wales does not want it to devolve into a network of hate.

"We will foster an environment where bad actors are removed because it is right, not because it suddenly affects our bottom-line," he said.

Currently, WT: Social has about 50,000 users, and it only went live a month ago. The platform will be free to join, but right now, users signing up are put on a "short" waiting list unless they donate or invite friends to register.

"Obviously the ambition is not 50,000 or 500,000 but 50m and 500m," Wales stated.

"If we grow from 400 users today (you're in on the ground floor!) to 400 million, we will have revolutionized the Internet and shown a better and more healthy way to share information and collaborate with each other."

The move falls in line with a general philosophy within the Wikipedia community. Earlier this year, fellow Wikipedia co-founder Larry Sanger wrote a "Declaration of Digital Independence" and called for people to [boycott social media](#) platforms on July 4 and 5.

"We possess the digital rights of free speech, privacy, and security," said Sanger at the time. "Like old King George, Big Social Media have systematically abused our rights."

Whether WT: Social can gain ground against social media titans like Facebook and Twitter remains to be seen. Others have [tried it](#) with little luck. Even search giant Google's attempt at breaking into the market with Google+ was no match to the size and power of Facebook.

Asking users to donate also seems like a mark against the alternative platform. However, Wikipedia has been operating for 18 years on that model. We'll have to wait to see if the network can make any headway against some very tough competition.

Masthead image credit: [Joi Ito](#) via Flickr