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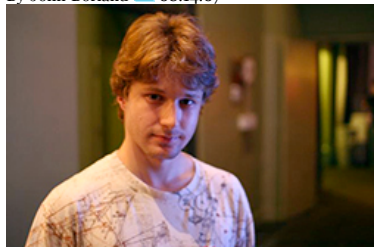
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See Who's Editing Wikipedia - Diebold, the CIA, a Campaign

By John Borland 08.14.07



CalTech graduate student Virgil Griffith built a search tool that traces IP addresses of those who make Wikipedia changes.

Photo: Jake Appelbaum

On November 17th, 2005, an anonymous Wikipedia user deleted 15 paragraphs from an article on e-voting machine-vendor Diebold, excising an entire section critical of the company's machines. While anonymous, such changes typically leave behind digital fingerprints offering hints about the contributor, such as the location of the computer used to make the edits. In this case, the changes came from an IP address reserved for the corporate offices of Diebold itself. And it is far from an isolated case. A new data-mining service launched Monday traces millions of Wikipedia entries to their corporate sources, and for the first time puts comprehensive data behind longstanding suspicions of manipulation, which until now have surfaced only piecemeal in investigations of specific allegations.

Wikipedia Scanner -- the brainchild of Cal Tech computation and neural-systems graduate student Virgil Griffith -- offers users a searchable database that ties millions of anonymous Wikipedia edits to organizations where those edits apparently originated, by cross-referencing the edits with data on who owns the associated block of internet IP addresses.

Inspired by news last year that Congress members' offices had been editing their own entries, Griffith says he got curious, and wanted to know whether big companies and other organizations were doing things in a similarly self-interested vein. "Everything's better if you do it on a huge scale, and automate it," he says with a grin.

This database is possible thanks to a combination of Wikipedia policies and (mostly) publicly available information.

The online encyclopedia allows anyone to make edits, but keeps detailed logs of all these changes. Users who are logged in are tracked only by their user name, but anonymous changes leave a public record of their IP address.

Share Your Sleuthing!

Cornered any companies polishing up their Wikipedia entries? Spotted any government spooks rewriting history? Try Virgil Griffith's **Wikipedia Scanner** yourself, then [submit](#) your finds and vote on other readers' discoveries here.

The organization also allows downloads of the complete Wikipedia, including records of all these changes.

Griffith thus downloaded the entire encyclopedia, isolating the XML-based records of anonymous changes and IP addresses. He then correlated those IP addresses with public net-address lookup services such as ARIN, as well as private domain-name data provided by IP2Location.com.

The result: A database of 34.4 million edits, performed by 2.6 million organizations or individuals ranging from the CIA to Microsoft to Congressional offices, now linked to the edits they or someone at their organization's net address has made.

Some of this appears to be transparently self-interested, either adding positive, press release-like material to entries, or deleting whole swaths of critical material.

Voting-machine company Diebold provides a good example of the latter, with someone at the company's IP address apparently [deleting](#) long paragraphs [detailing](#) the security industry's concerns over the integrity of their voting machines, and information about the company's CEO's fund-raising for President Bush.

The text, deleted in November 2005, was quickly restored by another Wikipedia contributor, who advised the anonymous editor, "Please stop removing content from Wikipedia. It is considered vandalism."

A Diebold Election Systems spokesman said he'd look into the matter but could not comment by press time.

Wal-Mart has a series of relatively small changes in 2005 that that burnish the company's image on its own entry while often leaving criticism in, [changing a line](#) that its wages are less than other retail stores to a note that it pays nearly double the minimum wage, for example. Another leaves activist criticism on community impact intact, while [citing](#) a "definitive" study showing Wal-Mart raised the total number of jobs in a community.

As has been previously reported, politician's offices are heavy users of the system. Former Montana Sen. Conrad Burns' office, for example, apparently changed one critical paragraph headed "A controversial voice" to "A voice for farmers," with predictably image-friendly content following it.

Perhaps interestingly, many of the most apparently self-interested changes come from before 2006, when news of the Congressional offices' edits reached the headlines. This may indicate a growing sophistication with the workings of Wikipedia over time, or even the rise of corporate Wikipedia policies.

Wikipedia founder Jimmy Wales told Wired News he was aware of the new service, but needed time to experiment with it before commenting.

The vast majority of changes are fairly innocuous, however. Employees at the CIA's net address, for example, have been busy -- but with little that would indicate their place of apparent employment, or a particular bias.

One [entry](#) on "Black September in Jordan" contains wholesale additions, with specific details that read like a popular history book or an eyewitness' memoir.

Many more are simple copy edits, or additions to local town entries or school histories. One CIA entry deals with the details of lyrics sung in a *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* episode.

Griffith says he launched the project hoping to find scandals, particularly at obvious targets such as companies like Halliburton. But there's a more practical goal, too: By exposing the anonymous edits that companies such as drugs and big pharmaceutical companies make in entries that affect their businesses, it could help experts check up on the changes and make sure they're accurate, he says. For now, he has just scratched the surface of the database of millions of entries. But he's putting it online so others can look too. The nonprofit Wikimedia Foundation, which runs Wikipedia, did not respond to e-mail and telephone inquiries Monday.

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Posted by: MichaelR 1018 days ago 1 Point

I foresee an upsurge in telecommuting. I foresee an increase in Wikipedia Whitewashing from DHCP IP ranges hosted by Comcast, Verizon and other large ISPs. The Great Foresee has spoken....

[Permalink](#)

Posted by: BatCountry 1018 days ago 1 Point

A democratic encyclopedia built by anyone/everyone is bound to be organic, with the authors interests (or at least perspective) represented. Changes are made based on different perspectives, reference material, and hopefully some historical accuracy....

[Permalink](#)

Posted by: tendonut 1018 days ago 3 Points

"Changes are made based on different perspectives, reference material, and hopefully some historical accuracy...." So that means, in Wal-Mart's perspective, they are not paying minimum wage, they are actually paying \$14 an hour, everyone else just se...

[Permalink](#)

Posted by: supasamurai 1086 days ago 1 Point

Just because it's "not shocking" doesn't make it right. A crack-head may smoke crack, but it's not doing anyone any good, is it? I certainly don't have to love your attitude, do I? Wiki is not about propaganda, it's about information, and I do lov...

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Posted by: leizi018 13 hours ago 1 Point

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Posted by: leizi018 13 hours ago 1 Point

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Posted by: leizi018 23 minutes ago 1 Point

cheap Ralph Lauren polo shirt,discount Ralph Lauren outlet,cheap ...We offer a huge range of ralph lau...

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Posted by: rss 107 days ago 1 Point

In order to change that Wikipedia plans a redesign which has been beta-tested by 500,000 users and is now to roll out from April 5. The revamp will overhaul the homepage a bit and adjusts the navigation of the site to current standards – but most imp...

[Permalink](#)

Posted by: social_roach 123 days ago 1 Point

Far more dangerous than vandalism by corporations is the practice of those same corporations hiring swarms of rent-a-shills to take down articles and to mob Jimmie Wales. Even more problematic is the practice of some corporations to obtain influence ...

[Permalink](#)

Posted by: lailaimia 190 days ago 1 Point

Tracing people by IP address is pretty old. Now they have Wireless Geolocation in newer browsers like the latest Firefox. They can locate you based on your wifi connection. Just read this article <http://www.ip2location.com/html5geolocationapi.aspx> an...

[Permalink](#)

Posted by: Spine 590 days ago 1 Point

I believe that the combination CIA and Department of Inner Security has devised a very clever venue for News-Speak as in the Orwellian Tradition with Wikipedia. They vett the "truth" and turn what ever it is into whatever they want us to see, think, ...

[Permalink](#)

Posted by: GmanB 669 days ago 1 Point

Some of you are either plants or idiots, trying immediately to revise the meaning of this article just as history is revised. What does it matter that Wikipedia already has an IP tracker, or that Mr. Griffith isn't actually a Caltech grad? Even junio...

[Permalink](#)

Posted by: AFRIMERICAN 1064 days ago 1 Point

Propaganda

[Permalink](#)

Posted by: AFRIMERICAN 1064 days ago 1 Point

This is B.S. > The Co Creator of the Wikipedia Format already had an Ip tracing program in place at least three years ago that I know of. Secondly, Wikipedia itself has a built in IP locator that any computer savvy person can access. This article...

[Permalink](#)

Posted by: enadin 1076 days ago 1 Point

Just a small detail - Virgil Griffith isn't actually a Caltech grad student, at least not yet. He's thinking about maybe going to Caltech in the fall. Does it matter how he's affiliated?

[Permalink](#)

Posted by: Mediaura 1080 days ago 1 Point

If it wasn't obvious before...

[Permalink](#)

Posted by: AustinJC 1079 days ago 1 Point

What's so bad about these organizations editing Wikipedia? Isn't it supposed to be open for all?

[Permalink](#)

Posted by: lordameth 1081 days ago 1 Point

As txaggie90 points out, data without context is useless. Just as there is a difference between a CIA employee making edits on Bulgarian folk music and the same employee whitewashing the entry on the CIA director, so too is there a difference between...

[Permalink](#)

Posted by: Herschelkrustofsky 1081 days ago 1 Point

The news coverage of this development presents a misleading picture of what goes on at Wikipedia. Ironically, the so-called "anonymous" edits are the ones that provide an IP address, making their authorship potentially known to the public. The REAL a...

[Permalink](#)

Posted by: openie 1084 days ago 1 Point

Wikipedia reminds me of the old joke about the encyclopedias in Soviet Russia that had loose leaf pages.

[Permalink](#)

Posted by: txaggie90 1084 days ago 1 Point

One thing to remember is that data without context is useless. A CIA employee with an interest in Bulgarian Folk Music taking a part of his lunchtime to update the Bulgarian Folk Music wiki page is a far cry from a CIA employee whitewashing the entr...

[Permalink](#)

Posted by: hoxah 1085 days ago 1 Point

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[Permalink](#)

Posted by: entEngle 1085 days ago 1 Point

One interesting bit of trivia that could be involving (though how?) Buffy, the Vampire Slayer musical's script is the fact that the final re-writes (and shooting) for that episode took place the week after 9/11. The CIA must have Joss Whedon (the se...

[Permalink](#)

Posted by: Durova 1085 days ago 1 Point

I applaud Virgil for this very useful tool. As a Wikipedia administrator I deal with this kind of manipulation all the time. And as a sysop who specializes at investigations, the obvious workarounds have not only been foiled repeatedly, but the mor...

[Permalink](#)

Posted by: alexrson 1085 days ago 1 Point

Unfortunately, this tool is painfully easy to get around with only a modicum of technical competence (editing from home, registering, proxys). This sort of analysis needs to be done internally, by wikipedia where the logs of all IP addresses are kno...

[Permalink](#)

Posted by: 123qwe 1086 days ago 1 Point

Reminds me of this recent story:

<http://www.abeautifulwww.com/2007/05/20/visualizing-the-power-struggle-in-wikipedia/...>

[Permalink](#)

Posted by: qdot 1086 days ago 1 Point

A voice of sceptic - CIA was rumored to experiment with wiki-like technology to improve handling of classified information. It should explain why vast

majority of changes appear to be genuine corrections. It's also difficult to distinguish if change...

[Permalink](#)

Posted by: fityxxpayeevkl 1086 days ago 1 Point

Mind boggling... So the corporate twits and the CIA spooks were not even capable of doing some low-tech IP-spoofing, that even the Russians are very skilled at?

How very silly....

[Permalink](#)

Posted by: Spawn 1085 days ago 0 Points

Obviously, the people are more responsible than the government and corporate world combined.

[Permalink](#)

Posted by: Kspace 1086 days ago 0 Points

Another interesting example is the biography for Bell Canada Enterprises CEO Michael Sabia. Last year his biography was updated to mention that over 4000 employees had been terminated at the same time that Mr Sabia accepted a pay raise of over five ...

[Permalink](#)

Posted by: wheezer 1084 days ago 1 Point

Hey! Im totally diligent and loyal - where's my 6 million dollar salary? \$! hah What a loser!

[Permalink](#)

Posted by: taxidermized 1086 days ago 0 Points

For a very interesting situation concerning editing on Wikipedia you should look into the Wikipedia entry on historian Taner Akcam. Pr Akcam's biography on Wikipedia claimed that he was a terrorist. This resulted in his detention at numerous immigrat...

[Permalink](#)

Posted by: Rudolfo 1087 days ago 0 Points

unbelievable how stupid corporate marketing can act and still earn a living with it. In Germany for example, a pr-agency offered advertising as refund for whole pages of news-coverage, when word gotout, everybody cried about it, the people lost thei...

[Permalink](#)

Posted by: vectorsector 1086 days ago -1 Points

As the Scanner showed, Foxnews edits Wiki all the time. THIS is no news to me, as I battle their elements from those far-right extremists all the time. They want to infiltrate information as we know it. Currently, there's an abusive, agended editor i...

[Permalink](#)

Posted by: vectorsector 1086 days ago 1 Point

Crockspot is an impotent cockroach who will be granted powers to propulgate his fascist agenda in a little more than 24 hours unless he's stopped. I've dealt with the far right elements on Wiki since I joined. The place is being overrun by right-wing...

[Permalink](#)

Posted by: openie 1084 days ago 1 Point

Anybody who would want to become a wikipedia admin should never be allowed to become one.

[Permalink](#)

Posted by: yohon 1085 days ago -1 Points

this is great filter of an article on the net from earlier this morning. here is the original for anyway who wants the real scoop:

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/technology/2007/aug/15/wikipedia.corporateaccountability?gusrc=rss&feed=networkfront...>

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