Wiki Markup Standard Workshop

Christoph Sauer
Heilbronn University, i3G Institute
Max-Planck-Str. 39
D-74081 Heilbronn, Germany
+49 7131 504 474

csauer@hs-heilbronn.de

Chuck Smith
Heilbronn University, i3G Institute
Max-Planck-Str. 39
D-74081 Heilbronn, Germany
+49 7131 504 474

csmith@hs-heilbronn.de

Prof. Dr. Tomas Benz
Heilbronn University, i3G Institute
Max-Planck-Str. 39
D-74081 Heilbronn, Germany
+49 7131 504 470

benz@hs-heilbronn.de

ABSTRACT

In becoming wiki editors, non-technical users face many obstacles, one of the largest being that every wiki has its own unique syntax. A common wiki markup would facilitate not only learning and teaching wikis, but also developing advanced wiki editors and tools. The wiki markup standard should be intuitive and unlikely to interfere with existing text. Critics say users will not change, but if a wiki standard were developed, all wiki engines could take advantage of it. A wiki markup standard is critical to advancing wikis across the board.

Categories and Subject Descriptors

H.5.4 [**Hypertext/Hypermedia**]: Architectures, Navigation, Theory and User issues.

General Terms

Standardization, Languages

Keywords

Wiki, Markup, Standards, Standardization

1. INTRODUCTION

Wiki markup is easy enough to be understood by end users. It enables them to express the essence of a document, which is the content itself, references to other documents and the emphasis and structure expressed by basic formatting in an easy, platform and application independent way. Some even call that "What you see is what you mean (WYSIWYM)". Therefore it is useful to keep as part of a grammar for online cooperation.

Even if WYSIWYG editors will emerge as the primary way of editing wikis, a wiki markup standard would be quite useful not only as a fallback element for end users. It would also significantly help in creating new software tools like editors, scripting language frameworks, etc. This should be made by looking at the similarities in current wiki syntax variants and trying to compromise on a syntax that would be most intuitive for the user.

2. WORK ALREADY DONE

There is already an extensive list of wiki markups at MeatballWiki:WikiMarkupStandard. We will be following the proposal Suggestion B lists there as our methodology for defining a wiki markup standard. Unfortunately there has been no attempt at consensus and markups are in no particular order. Wikimatrix.org provides a comprehensive list of wiki markups.

3. COMPARING WIKI MARKUPS

We reviewed a wide range of wiki markups, and tried to develop a syntax that has elements already widely used. It should be as intuitive as possible for the user without causing undesired effects to the text. We gave popular wikis like Wikipedia a heavier weight in this first specification, considering the number of their current users. It has not been decided whether the popularity of different wiki engines should be a factor, so this will be discussed at the workshop. We will propose a specification based on this empirical analysis of existing wiki engines to start the discussion. It will only serve as a starting point for the workshop.

4. APPROACHING STANDARDS BODIES

Once we have agreed upon a common wiki markup specification, we could then approach standards bodies for approval. During the workshop we will discuss which standards bodies would be appropriate to approach with our specification. Our aim is to create a wiki markup standard in the end.

5. SPREADING THE SPECIFICATION

The Heilbronn University will help to write converters to provide wiki developers, tool developers and end users with means to more easily integrate the new specification into their software. We will contact different wiki developers to ask them to add support for the new wiki syntax, in addition to their own. This way, administrators starting new wikis will be able to choose whether to use the traditional markup or the new markup.

6. CONCLUSION

While consenting on a wiki markup and promoting it to acceptance is not an easy task, it is worth trying. It is important to have an alternative "interface" instead of a WYSIWYG editor. This lets advanced users separate the model from the view, giving them the ability to create documents, webpages and applications more quickly and efficiently with one unified wiki markup language.