

**Are you on Wikipedia?**  
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# IDEK

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To what extent and in what way should or can a cultural institution use Wikipedia? I will try to summarize my own thoughts from my time at the National Library of Sweden.



## **Why Wikipedia?**

There are many good reasons to look at Wikipedia as a channel to reach your target audiences.

For example Wikipedia:

- Is the default information source when looking for information on various topics and institutions
- Is often ranked on top in search results
- Is considered as a correct and unbiased source of information

Could you say about your own channels? Lucky you then!

## **Why not Wikipedia?**

There are several reasons not to use Wikipedia. The most common one is probably that you feel unsure of how to use it and how what the benefits for you are. To write or edit articles takes time and resources that might not exist. If you want to use part of your work time on Wikipedia then you must, in many cases, be able to show what benefits it gives back to your institution. Which is not more than fair.

The fact that you do not have control over the media and others can change the text can also make many hesitate.

## **What's in it for them?**

The benefits to Wikipedians and public are obvious when institutions make historical source material with expert comments accessible through Wikipedia. Knowledge that was previously inaccessible or hard to find will then become part of common knowledge; instead of going to the museum, it suffices to do a Google search. It is also often part of the institution's mission to impart knowledge about their field to the public, right?

## **What's in it for us?**

This is the trickier part. It is of course a commendable deed to enlighten the masses. But if needs are near inexhaustible, resources are not. Therefore you have to be "selfish" and see what benefits you have of the publishing and try to find the areas where self-interest and public good meet. In that way, I think there is opportunity for a responsible and economically viable way of publishing on Wikipedia. I will give you some examples of such areas below.



*National Library of Sweden*

### **The article about us (National Library of Sweden)**

Is there an article about your institution on Wikipedia? In most cases the answer is yes. Is it good, accurate and well written? Maybe this is not always the case.

May I, as a representative of the organization, rewrite the article myself?

In the brochure *Cultural Treasures online*<sup>2</sup> Wikipedia says:

*Writing about oneself is not prohibited, but one should focus on correcting factual errors, typos, etc.*

I think you can as well as should review your own article. You must however take great care in being objective and avoiding positive judgments and recognizing any criticism or "competitors". It is often the institution itself that has both the expertise and commitment required to create the foundation for a great article. There is also a large public interest in accurate information about important cultural institutions.

When I worked with the text of the National Library entry for Wikipedia, we translated it into a number of major languages and the official Swedish minority<sup>2</sup> languages . We then made entries in the different language versions of Wikipedia. I was a bit hesitant to put the text in a language I did not understand where you had to guess which button in the interface is the save button.

### **Key concepts**

For most institutions, there are concepts that are important for the understanding of their operations and that contribute to building the brand or influencing the opinion. In many cases, these concepts are unknown or hard to understand for the vast majority. The organization often puts lots of efforts into making their questions part of the general debate. If you then manage to arouse interest in some parts of your operations it is likely that someone who is not familiar with the area will seek more information on Wikipedia, and I think you **have to** make sure it's there. In our case, this was about the following concepts.

- 1) School libraries (Everyone knows enough about what they are, but not that all schools must have one under the Education Act)
- 2) Legal deposit of electronic material, a monumental but difficult to communicate change of the National Library's activities
- 3) Dewey Decimal Classification, a new way for libraries to classify books and other media

None of these pages have very high visitor numbers. But visits to these pages are valuable because they enhance and give credibility to other communication efforts.



### Import items from the collections

There are some items in our collections that for various reasons are important and famous. In some cases, the objects are actually, internationally, more famous than the institutions.

Of course, these objects are important to us. In the National Library's case these include 'Codex Gigas' or Devil's Bible as one such example. It's a giant manuscript, weighing 75 kilograms and containing a portrait of the devil, which is unusual in bibles. The library has other medieval manuscripts that are important in regard to Swedish history

This is what people are looking for. It is also our chance to make sure they get accurate information about these objects and the institution that manages them. Of course it is important to remain objective and not write more about your institution than is necessary (and in comparison to other similar institutions).

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Notes.

1, This publication is in Swedish. You could find similar information at

<https://outreach.wikimedia.org/wiki/GLAM>

2, Sweden has five official minority languages: Finnish, samic, yiddish, romani and meankieli. Public institutions are requested to have at least basic information about themselves in these languages