Do Entrepreneurs Need a Wikipedia Page?

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Recently, there has been a surge of personal Wikipedia pages. This trend was preceded by the emergence of purported specialists who extol the benefits of Wikipedia entries not just for organizations, but also for business owners.

In fact, some argue that failure to embrace social media could stunt executives' career prospects, as it serves the dual purpose of promoting and legitimizing a business as well as creating an authentic and personal online presence. Many public figures (i.e., Hollywood celebrities, politicians, writers, media personalities, etc.) have no choice in the matter. However, some business people do have a choice and can attempt to avoid being memorialized in Wikipedia — perhaps the most controversial platform. While there is relative clarity regarding the importance of social media, the argument for business executives having a presence on Wikipedia is not as concretely understood. Wikipedia is the world's largest and most-read reference work in history, and despite battles with credibility challenges, is often a go-to when researching a notable person.

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Pros and cons of having a Wikipedia presence

One of the obstacles in navigating a Wikipedia presence is, of course, how to get a page in the first place. Understandably,

there are certain criteria to prevent the platform from becoming log-jammed with self-made pages of random self promoters. To pass the “notability” test, an individual must be “significant, interesting, or unusual enough to deserve attention or to be recorded.”

This means you need coverage in numerous reliable secondary sources, independent of the subject. Arguably, meeting this barometer is in itself an accolade worth making a point of. Therefore, if this is you, you may wish to use it to signal your success. On the other hand, Wikipedia retains a reputation as being filled with a plethora of niche and un-noteworthy pages, or pages that contain incorrect claims based on dubious sources or no sources at all – and the layman is likely not aware of the eligibility hoops one has to jump through to make it on there. In essence, it may not be worth having a page simply to “flex” your importance. Other factors are at play. Moreover, once your page is up and survives initial scrutiny, be prepared to defend its integrity and direction of the narrative it provides. With a Wikipedia page, you may become a target of random trolls, ex-spouses, former business associates or disgruntled employees. Just because you could, doesn’t mean you should.

To state the obvious, it would be bizarre for certain CEOs and business executives to *not* feature on Wikipedia due to their celebrity status and long lists of accolades. The CEO of a multinational corporation and the owner of a small startup will likely not have the same needs, and thus their Wikipedia pages will be of differing impact. It can add little value to shoehorn yourself onto a platform where you don’t belong. A managed Wikipedia page that lacks substance and reads like promotional material – even if it survives Wikipedia scrutiny – can make an entrepreneur look like a phony. Smart audiences can spot thinly disguised sponsored content.

Let’s put it another way: If you should not have a Wikipedia page, don’t get one. And if you should, think twice.

Notwithstanding, if you *are* your brand or are intrinsically linked to it, then a Wikipedia page might eloquently showcase how you have curated a personal brand and can champion you as both your business and a person, assuming that you are truly noteworthy.

Having a Wikipedia page presents advantages in search engine optimization, or SEO for short. Wikipedia ranks highly on search engine results: In fact, it's the number 1 search result on more than 56% of Google searches. This is thanks to its strong domain authority and the structuring of its internal links. Despite Wikipedia's rocky reputation over the years – for example, its use by students being typically frowned upon by teachers and professors – its top spot on search engines does bolster reputation and suggest both fame and credibility. With this in mind, it is perhaps advantageous to prioritize your business over yourself when considering a Wikipedia presence as a business tool.

A good personal Wikipedia page is undoubtedly quite an impactful way for your achievements, personal background, previous business ventures, awards and honors to be listed, with links to references embedded. Its presence signals that the executive is noteworthy and serves as an endorsement when it is substantive and comes across as being objective. There is a certain credulity in a third-person account of someone which is not (or at least shouldn't be) biased or self-promotional.

But beware: One of the shortfalls of having a Wikipedia presence is the lack of ownership of content. One of the most common criticisms of the platform is the fact it is run by a community of volunteer contributors. That's to say, just because you are the subject or a feature of an article, does not mean you get to control the content, even if it is incorrect, damages your character or mistakes you for someone else! You could even find yourself in a battle with moderators and editors. In an era of cancel culture hegemony, an

incorrect allegation of fact – even if only posted temporarily – could be very damning.

Have you heard of the rippoffreport.com? If you have not, consider yourself lucky. It is a controversial site, where people can post anonymous complaints. It is often relegated to a category of rogue complaint sties, despite its purported utility as a forum for the public to voice grievances. Why is this relevant to a discussion about Wikipedia? As I have suggested, Wikipedia has a shady side to it beyond the risk of falling pray to revisionist editors' zeal. Some (and perhaps many) Wikipedia editors are not just selfless nerds, but rather cold-blooded paid mercenaries. I have witnessed their work firsthand and was surprised at the audacity that editors-turned-paid-media-consultants exhibited in protecting their clients and dismantling substantiated, empirically factual information to maintain an entirely false narrative that their clients paid for. Once you have a Wikipedia page, make sure you allocate a budget to defend it from paid attacks or random vandals.

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Other options

In light of contributor corruption inherent to Wikipedia, you may wish to focus your time and resources on curating a safer social media presence – one that aligns with and promotes your brand and core values, provides insight and depth into who you are as a person and signposts clients and customers to your offering. This could be your personal website, LinkedIn, Facebook, Instagram and other pages where you have more control over content. LinkedIn, for example, is well-known and widely used by business executives and provides the added benefits of availing its participants of business networking opportunities. It also empowers business people to chat, promote, recruit, post content and even market products.

In essence, unless you organically find yourself featured or strongly feel it will accelerate your business, there is no need to divert too much attention to a personal page — especially one that looks disingenuous. The risks that your Wikipedia page turns into a ripoffreport.com complaint about you on the first page of a Google search is real.

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