

# Wikipedia founder: Public needs online references

March 27 2012, By JON GAMBRELL , Associated Press

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Jimmy Wales, the founder of Wikipedia speaks during a seminar on youth marketing in Africa in Lagos, Nigeria, Tuesday, March. 27, 2012. The man who helped found Wikipedia says the end of the printing of the Encyclopaedia Britannica signals a new beginning for reference materials online. (AP Photo/Sunday Alamba)

(AP) -- The man who helped create the online reference Wikipedia said Tuesday that the end of Encyclopaedia Britannica's print run shows the world's growing reliance on the Internet as a base for knowledge.

Jimmy Wales' first visit to Nigeria also highlighted the growth of other languages besides English on [Wikipedia](#), particularly the Yoruba language of the oil-rich nation's southwest. While growth remains slow and uneven, Wales said he hopes more users for the community-edited website will begin offering new articles as creation on the English

version has slowed as it now has nearly 4 million entries.

"I'm an optimist about the Internet as a force for preserving culture, while at the same time increasing [global culture](#). I don't think we have to have either/or," Wales told The Associated Press in an interview in Nigeria's commercial capital, Lagos.

Wikipedia's popularity remains high among [Internet users](#) as print resources continue to suffer. This month, the owners of [Encyclopaedia Britannica](#), published since 1768, announced its print edition will stop being available when its current stock runs out.

The Chicago-based Encyclopaedia Britannica Inc., which publishes the 32-volume set, said it will continue to offer [digital versions](#). Wales said that decision represented the will of a public now expecting to have knowledge at the push of a mobile phone button or at the finger-sweep of a [tablet computer](#).

"It's the culmination of a very, very long trend. In a way, it's a sad moment, but it's the way technology moves on," Wales said. "Even if we think Britannica is what we want, we really want Britannica on an [iPad](#) or a phone, accessible to us all the time, not in dusty books on the shelf - no matter how beautiful those might be."

Wales acknowledges the limits of Wikipedia, a website he said is edited by a user base that's 87 percent male, with an average age of 26. He said he hopes a simplified editing process will allow the reference site to attract a more diverse range of contributors with knowledge in a variety of fields.

In Africa, Wales said that the Yoruba language of Nigeria's southwest, including Lagos, led the continent in actual pages in its own version of Wikipedia with more than 29,000 pages. However, the majority of those

articles came from "bots" - programs designed to take data from a table and create a simple Wikipedia entry. Detailed entries remain far fewer, as there appears to be one dominant user creating the Yoruba entries, he said.

Connectivity to the Internet remains another challenge. Nigeria in particular relies on Internet over mobile phone networks as hard-wired lines remain few and expensive. Fiber optic lines now running under the ocean to Nigeria could see better service brought to the nation of more than 160 million people.

"From this hotel, the speed of the connection is better than New York City, which is quite amazing," Wales said during a speech Tuesday at a seminar on youth marketing, drawing applause from the crowd. "Of course there are bigger challenges. For one thing, this is at a fancy hotel by the seaside and of course loads of people across Nigeria are still struggling with very difficult access issues."

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