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What Is The TSS Wiki?

The TSS Wiki is a website/web application that allows TSS Agents to easily add, remove, and otherwise edit and change available technical support content for MCC. This ease of interaction and operation makes the TSS Wiki an effective tool for collaborative authoring and maintenance of this content.

The TSS Wiki enables documents to be written very collaboratively in a simple markup language using a web browser. A single page in the TSS Wiki is referred to as a "wiki page", while the entire body of pages, which are highly interconnected via hyperlinks, is "the TSS Wiki"; in effect, a wiki is actually a very simple, easy-to-use user-maintained database for searching or even creating information.

Because of this ease of operation and interaction, the TSS Wiki has become in effect a technology support documentation repository for Mesa Community College. Topics such as email settings, installing web browsers, and how to connect to campus resources, can now be easily searched and accessed through a robust, manageable, database-driven, dynamic web site.

Controlling Changes

The TSS Wiki has been designed with the philosophy of making it easy to keep content updated, current and valid. Thus the TSS Wiki provides a means to verify the validity of recent additions to the body of pages. Prominently displayed on the TSS Wiki, is the "Recent Changes" page—a specific list numbering recent edits, or a list of all the edits made within a given timeframe.

In case unacceptable edits are missed on the "Recent Changes" page, the TSS Wiki engine can provide additional content control. It can be monitored to ensure that a page, or a set of pages, keeps its quality. A TSS Agent that maintains pages will be warned of modifications to the pages, allowing him or her to verify the validity of new editions quickly.

The TSS Wiki is an "internal" wiki at this time. Only TSS Agents and members of the MCC ITS staff can edit or create new articles. However, in the future ITS could deem additional persons "Tech Editors", with the ability to also create and edit technology support articles.

Pages and Editing

TSS Wiki uses "wikitext", which is augmented with a simplified markup language to indicate various structural and visual conventions. An often used example of one such convention is to start a line of text with an asterisk ("*") in order to mark it as an item in a bulleted list.

The reasoning behind this design is that HTML, with its many cryptic tags, is not especially human-readable. Making typical HTML source visible makes the actual text content very hard to read and edit for most users. Therefore TSS Wiki promotes plain-text editing with a few simple conventions for structure and style.

TSS Wiki Features and Statistics

- TSS Wiki is a MediaWiki implementation, the same software used by the popular Wikipedia.org which hosts over 1.6 million articles. MediaWiki is free server-based software, that is licensed under the GNU General Public License (GPL). It's designed to be run on a large server farm for a website that gets millions of hits per day. MediaWiki is an extremely powerful, scaleable software and a feature-rich wiki implementation, that uses PHP to process and display data stored in its MySQL database.
- TSS Wiki uses a free, open-source L.A.M.P. (Linux, Apache, MySQL, PHP) solution, running on a Fedora Core 5 virtual machine within a VMWare ESX 3.0 server environment.
- Standards compliant web design generates interoperable web pages that validate through W3C.org and display on all web browsers. Because of standards compliance, the pages are easily accessible by persons with disabilities.
- Adobe PDF capability. All articles can be exported to PDF format on the fly for easy printing.
- Pages use MediaWiki's wikitext format, so that users without knowledge of XHTML or CSS can edit them easily.
- Cost saving. Commercial web content management systems (CMS) can cost as much as \$50,000 to \$100,000. The software that powers TSS Wiki is free.

Outlook

With the successful adoption of the TSS Wiki, MCC ITS has embarked on creating additional wikis for internal documentation and communication. MCC ITS has also forged a partnership with ASU who provides the ability for students and faculty to create their own wikis on demand. Working with ASU, MCC ITS hopes to bring these technologies to the MCC campus community in the near future.

Because of our success with pioneering the use of wikis in ITS, it is inevitable that the entire MCC organization will soon reap the benefits of this low-cost, robust, dynamic and effective way to manage web based content.