

Internet’s ‘janitor’ whose fingerprints are all over Wikipedia

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The Straits Times, Page 4, Section: THE BIG STORY
Monday 1 December 2025
874 words, 644cm² in size
386,100 circulation

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How often do you use Wikipedia? The answer is probably not as much as Mr Robert Sim, 37, who spends around 10 hours a week contributing to the volunteer-run online encyclopaedia.

Much of this time is dedicated to what many would consider thankless work: updating Wikipedia articles, correcting errors, and performing the mundane administration that keeps the world’s largest encyclopaedia running smoothly.

In August, this earned the digital analytics consultant by day one of Wikipedia’s highest honours. Mr Sim was presented the Wikimedian of the Year award by Wikipedia co-founder Jimmy Wales in Nairobi, Kenya, at the annual Wikimania conference.

Since he first accessed the online encyclopaedia as a 15-year-old, Mr Sim has made over 79,000 edits to the platform. He became one of English-language Wikipedia’s 829 administrators in 2024.

His key contributions include doing outreach for the local Wikipedia movement, most visibly by helping to organise Wikimania 2023 in Singapore. He also maintains the “Index of Singapore-related articles”, an attempt at cataloguing the nation’s presence on Wikipedia.

Pages he has created span everything from the 2024 South-east Asia heatwave to a timeline of Singapore’s Covid-19 measures, from controversial Singapore-raised stand-up comic Jocelyn Chia to former Monetary Authority of Singapore managing director Ravi Menon and those of newly elected MPs.

Mr Sim is a finalist for The Straits Times Singaporean of the Year award, which is organised by The Straits Times, and presented by UBS Singapore.

Mr Sim’s fascination with the internet’s connective potential dates back to his childhood in the 1990s, when he was among Singapore’s earliest adopters of the technology.

Back then, his mother worked as a secretary at the National University of Singapore’s School of Computing, which meant that his household enjoyed free access to a dial-up internet plan. This was a luxury at a time when others paid hefty sums for SingNet.

This was also the era from which Wikipedia was born, in 2001.

Mr Sim’s first brush with Wikipedia came during his years at Monk’s Hill Secondary School in the early-2000s. He created his first account in 2006 while studying at Yishun Junior College, but was put off by the “rudimentary interface”.

“I couldn’t understand the syntax,” he recalls, noting that his early edits were confined to fixing errors in grammar and spelling, and the occasional broken link.

It was only around 2019 that he began to take an interest in editing the encyclopaedia. And in 2022, Mr Sim, a Singapore Management University graduate with a degree in information systems management, was asked if he could help to co-organise Wikimania when it came to Singapore in 2023.

That conference took place at Suntec Convention Centre, drawing over 700 in-person attendees and more than 2,000 tuning in remotely.

That, he says, was a turning point for both himself and the local



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cal Wikipedia movement.

Now, beyond volunteering his time on the platform, Mr Sim also organises outreach events to teach people how to edit on Wikipedia.

What many do not realise is that Wikipedia’s culture of voluntary collaboration means that much significant but invisible work happens behind the scenes. New articles must meet notability standards, involving a long review process by editors. Mr Sim has reviewed over 500 such articles.

Current events also draw an influx of interest and, at times, vandalism. Administrators like Mr Sim step in to lock pages or undo edits when this surge of interest undermines the site’s focus on neutrality.

To create an article, Mr Sim’s research process can take multiple weeks. This involves trawling through the internet and occasionally searching for physical books at

the library when online sources do not suffice.

When asked why he spends so much time contributing to the site without any material reward, Mr Sim ponders his reply. “How are we being rewarded? Is it intrinsic or extrinsic? Getting paid is of course an extrinsic reward, but when I go down this path of contributing content or helping to organise community outreach, it’s a lot more intrinsic,” he says.

There is joy in bonding with others over a shared love of the internet, and in knowing that what one writes is being read by many and built upon by others, he adds.

According to the platform, English-language Wikipedia received an average of 4,000 page views every second in 2024, and around two edits per second.

As at November 2025, the platform saw around 500 new articles

created every day.

However, many gaps remain. Articles that Mr Sim is currently putting together include pages for the Rail Corridor, the Textile Centre shopping mall, and the National Youth Achievement Award (NYAA), which was launched in 1992.

“It’s been close to 35 years now, and there’s nothing on the NYAA at all on Wikipedia,” he says.

“There’s only so much I can do as one person, even in an intrinsic manner,” he says. “That’s why I’d like to involve more people.”

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**SCAN TO WATCH**

Wikipedia is always under threat: Wikimedian of the Year. <https://str.sg/gdSD>

