



Wikipedia:Wikipedia Signpost/2023-03-20/In the media

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In the media

Paid editing, plagiarism payouts, proponents of a ploy, and people peeved at perceived preferences

By [Andreas Kolbe](#), [Adam Cuerden](#), and [Bri](#)

We're banned! Hire us!

Startupguys.net has a piece on the "[Top 10 Wikipedia Page Creation Services to Look for in 2023](#)" (<https://www.startupguys.net/wikipedia-page-creation-services/>) that acknowledges the [conflict-of-interest guideline](#) and then goes straight on to recommend hiring a business. It's this kind of stuff that the [paid editing policy](#) was created to address ...

Several of the firms recommended by the article (or is it an advertisement?) are fronts for ABTACH Ltd, who are [community banned](#). The fronts are listed at [WP:PAIDLIST](#). – [B](#)



Firms offering Wikipedia editing services – including several who are banned – are looking for customers

In brief

- **Alan MacMasters hoax:** German YouTube channel [Simplicissimus](#) features (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RTVWZwY26Sk>) English-language interviews (with German subtitles) of the (former) students responsible for the [Alan MacMasters "inventor of the toaster" hoax](#) (see [previous Signpost coverage](#) and the [archived hoax article](#)). (The video includes a one-minute ad starting at 01:00.)



- **Disinformation event:** A [press release \(https://agenparl.eu/2023/03/10/comunicato-la-digital-diplomacy-series-dellambasciata-ditalia-a-washington-discute-di-disinformazione-e-con-linviato-speciale-usa-james-rubin/\)](https://agenparl.eu/2023/03/10/comunicato-la-digital-diplomacy-series-dellambasciata-ditalia-a-washington-discute-di-disinformazione-e-con-linviato-speciale-usa-james-rubin/) by the Italian Embassy in Washington, D.C. (Google translation) (https://agenparl-eu.translate.goog/2023/03/10/comunicato-la-digital-diplomacy-series-dellambasciata-ditalia-a-washington-discute-di-disinformazione-e-con-linviato-speciale-usa-james-rubin/?_x_tr_sl=auto&_x_tr_tl=en&_x_tr_hl=en-US&_x_tr_pto=wapp) reports on an event featuring the U.S. State Department's [James Rubin](#) as well as the Wikimedia Foundation's Anti-Disinformation Strategy Lead [Costanza Sciubba Caniglia \(https://diff.wikimedia.org/author/csciubba/\)](#). Held at the Embassy on 9 March 2023, the event focused on "Trust, Truth and Influence in the Digital Age". A recording is available on YouTube [here \(https://www.youtube.com/live/nqYMx6YD3No\)](https://www.youtube.com/live/nqYMx6YD3No).
 A toaster. Not invented by [Alan MacMasters](#), whatever you may have read on Wikipedia
- **Annie Rauwerda continues to be in demand:** This time it's the Mozilla blog's turn to feature an [interview \(https://blog.mozilla.org/en/internet-culture/depths-of-wikipedia-annie-rauwerda/\)](https://blog.mozilla.org/en/internet-culture/depths-of-wikipedia-annie-rauwerda/) with the [Depths of Wikipedia](#) creator.
- **Duck Duck Go AI "DuckAssist" summarizes Wiki articles:** [Tech Crunch \(https://techcrunch.com/2023/03/08/duckassist/\)](https://techcrunch.com/2023/03/08/duckassist/) (March 7); [Ars Technica \(https://arstechnica.com/information-technology/2023/03/wikipedia-ai-truth-duckduckgo-hopes-so-with-new-answerbot/\)](https://arstechnica.com/information-technology/2023/03/wikipedia-ai-truth-duckduckgo-hopes-so-with-new-answerbot/), [Engadget \(https://www.engadget.com/duckduckgos-ai-assist-feature-summarizes-wikipedia-pages-to-answer-search-queries-130049552.html\)](https://www.engadget.com/duckduckgos-ai-assist-feature-summarizes-wikipedia-pages-to-answer-search-queries-130049552.html), [Search Engine Journal \(https://www.searchenginejournal.com/duckduckgo-enters-the-ai-race-with-duckassist/481832/\)](https://www.searchenginejournal.com/duckduckgo-enters-the-ai-race-with-duckassist/481832/) (March 8)
- **Plagiarism from Wikipedia turned into \$1M city payout:** "Author of plagiarized Santa Clara County book to keep \$1M in taxpayer money" (<https://www.mercurynews.com/2023/03/13/author-of-plagiarized-santa-clara-county-book-to-keep-1m-in-taxpayer-money/>) (*San Jose Mercury News*)
- **Birthday complaint:** [Kangana Ranaut](#) complains that "Wikipedia is totally hijacked by leftists, most of the information about me like my birthday or my height or background is totally wrong ... no matter how much we try to rectify it, it's warped again ... anyway many radio channels, fans clubs and well-wishers start to send birthday greetings on 20th March ... I don't mind but honestly many are confused because Wikipedia says my birthday is on 20th March and I celebrate on 23rd March, my birthday is on 23rd March ..." Reported in the *Indian Express* (<https://indianexpress.com/article/entertainment/bollywood/kangana-ranaut-slams-wikipedia-for-incorrect-information-regarding-her-birthday-background-leftists-8500405/>), *Hindustan Times* (<https://www.hindustantimes.com/entertainment/bollywood/kangana-ranaut-says-wikipedia-is-hijacked-by-leftists-as-it-gets-her-birthday-wrong-101678944432358.html>) and others.

- **ChatGPT is the Wikipedia of today:** Kids used to be told not to use Wikipedia to cheat, muses (<https://www.cnet.com/tech/chatgpt-can-pass-the-bar-exam-now-so-what/>) a CNET article. Now they're told not to use [ChatGPT](#). They didn't listen then and they won't listen now, the writer argues. (Incidentally, much the same goes for CNET itself; see [News and notes](#).)
- **Golfer should feel inspired by his Wiki "Fairway Jesus" photo:** *Golf Digest* muses that (<https://www.golfdigest.com/story/tommy-fleetwood-wikipedia-photo-players-championship-2023>) the increasing profile of golfer [Tommy Fleetwood](#) may "finally be enough for Wikipedia to update the decades-old profile photo of Fleetwood without his trademark Fairway Jesus look", quoting him as saying "It's not a great one, is it? I should get an update whether I win or not, really. We'll work on it". Well, we can get a new one in there any time if you release a new one under [any of these free licenses](#)!
- **Aussies on edit-a-thons:** [abc.net.au](#) covers (<https://www.abc.net.au/canberra/programs/afternoons/the-edit-a-thon-highlighting-the-work-of-women-artists/102089466>) an edit-a-thon at the National Gallery of Australia.
- **Rancor over gay marriage userboxes:** Anti-gay UK charity [Christian Institute](#) says that not allowing userboxes that state you're against gay marriage (per a [deletion nomination](#) some three years ago) is "censorship of marriage supporters" (<https://www.christian.org.uk/news/wikipedia-denies-political-bias-despite-censoring-marriage-supporters/>). Elsewhere, their website clarifies their views on the subject, which are that gays should not be allowed to marry, and that [all sex outside marriage is wrong](#) (<https://www.christian.org.uk/issue/marriage-and-family/>).

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- I'm confused about Ranaut's claim that her Wikipedia article gets her birth date wrong... It seems to have said March 23 as early as 2014 if not earlier. [Eddie891](#) ^{Talk} ^{Work} 12:02, 20 March 2023 (UTC)
 - Those evil leftists have hijacked page history to hide their wrongdoing! /s [ThadeusOfNazereth\(he/him\)](#) ^{Talk to Me!} 13:04, 20 March 2023 (UTC)
 - IDK maybe she's referring to another Wikipedia in another language. --[Firestar464](#) (talk) 15:49, 20 March 2023 (UTC)
 - Thanks @Eddie891:! I checked out your assertion and it's correct, at least for when Ranaut made her complaint and for months, probably years, before then. There were a few times when the wrong birthday was put in for a fairly short period after 2014. The real mystery here is where Ranaut's "Wikipedia is totally hijacked by leftists" complaint comes from? Perhaps from the right field bleachers? I'd like to remind Ranaut, and all folks who have complaints about what Wikipedia writes about them, that you can get interviewed by a reliable newspaper (tweets don't carry too much weight here), or even just put out a press release. Press releases aren't the best source of course, but at least we'd have something more than a few stray comments to look at. My favorite form of correcting an article would be to make a video, perhaps with your PR agent or a well known person who knows you asking questions. Please make sure to give the date of complaint. You can upload it to Wikimedia Commons or even just to YouTube and we can put it in the biography article, or even - if you are lucky - in *The Signpost*. [Smallbones](#) ^(smalltalk) 14:24, 20 March 2023 (UTC)
 - **The real mystery here is where Ranaut's "Wikipedia is totally hijacked by leftists" complaint comes from? Perhaps from the right field bleachers?** Ranaut is pretty well known for having hard-right views - I do not know much about the Indian film industry, but I recognized her name because of her notorious Twitter account (<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-56977861>). [ThadeusOfNazereth\(he/him\)](#) ^{Talk to Me!} 14:46, 20 March 2023 (UTC)
 - As we all know, leftism is when they celebrate your birthday on the wrong day. /s [Axem Titanium](#) (talk) 21:05, 20 March 2023 (UTC)
 - The homophobes strike again..."NOOOOOO! HOMOGAY BAD! REEEEEEEEE!" *insert "no one cares gif" --[Firestar464](#) (talk) 15:49, 20 March 2023 (UTC)

Aye. We had a longer rant about it, but cut it down in the end. But, yeah, that argument that all sex outside of marriage is a sin, and also gay people can't get married so homosexuality is a sin is a nice little trap, eh? [Adam Cuerden](#) ^(talk) Has about 8.2% of all FPs. Currently celebrating his 600th FP! 20:19, 20 March 2023 (UTC)

Years ago there was a Swedish satirical news program (a little like *Weekend Update*) where a parody-politician said something like "I have absolutely no objection to a homosexual man marrying a homosexual... woman. That would also assure that there won't be any shenanigans." [Gråbergs Gråa Sång](#) (talk) 10:12, 21 March 2023 (UTC)

The CI also declares: "The Bible defines marriage as a lifelong union between one man and one woman. English law accepted this biblical definition until legal marriage was redefined by the introduction of same-sex 'marriage'." — Apparently they'd never heard of it being legal to **divorce** before then; [Henry VIII](#)

and all that. But I suppose that's all the fault of gays, too. 😞 – [Raven](#) [.talk](#) [16:38, 21 March 2023 \(UTC\)](#)

- I'm curious about the Signpost's editorial thinking behind the choice to publish the piece about a community banned firm trying to promote UPE rather than DENY. [Barkeep49](#) [\(talk\)](#) [16:24, 20 March 2023 \(UTC\)](#)

Doesn't [WP:DENY](#) apply to articles and not the Wikipedia namespace? Also, wouldn't it be beneficial to state firms that are [WP:NOTHERE](#)? – [The Grid](#) [\(talk\)](#) [16:41, 20 March 2023 \(UTC\)](#)

- These sorts of adverts are up all the time and we certainly don't and would not report on them all, but revisiting the subject from time to time seems like it's within the remit of *The Signpost* and raising community awareness that the problem isn't solved. If we followed [WP:DENY](#) at all times, then we couldn't discuss malfeasance in order to stop it. Also, it's not clear whether the author and/or publication is connected to the banned entity or whether they knew that those firms were banned. ☆ [Bri](#) [\(talk\)](#) [17:11, 20 March 2023 \(UTC\)](#)

[@Barkeep49](#): My understanding of [WP:DENY](#) is that it refers to shitposters and lulz-cravers like Willy and Jarlaxle, hence the DFTT illustration and the lead ("true vandals and trolls [...] seek recognition and infamy"). It seems implausible that an edit-for-hire firm would be motivated by lulz -- indeed, if that were the case, why would they ask for cash on top? Honestly, being publicly denounced in a newspaper seems like the worst possible outcome for such a firm, as they generally trade on claims to legitimacy. [jp×g](#) [19:22, 20 March 2023 \(UTC\)](#)

- (EC)I'll mostly repeat what [Bri](#) said: if we can't write about paid editors, how are most Wikipedians to know that this type of advertising of paid editing services are constantly out there soliciting people with false claims? How can we fight this type of paid editing if we can't expose it? I'll add that [WP:DENY](#) is an essay, not a policy or even a guideline. A year or two back we had a series in this column about magazines like *Entrepreneur* writing self-promotional pieces on how you can write your own Wiki-articles about yourself (or if that seems too complicated just contact the authors). So, [@Barkeep](#)., I'm not trying to put you on the spot, but how would you suggest that we report on this type of paid editing? [Smallbones](#)[\(smalltalk\)](#) [19:26, 20 March 2023 \(UTC\)](#)

I am guessing you'd like to hear what I say [@Smallbones](#) not [Barkeep](#). I asked a question. A pointed question but a question. If I had wanted to suggest what I think the Signpost should do I'd have said it. It wasn't clear to me what made this particular UPE worthy of Signpost coverage when everyone seems to agree every UPE is not worthy. [@Bri](#) who actually wrote the item makes an argument that makes sense and answers the question I asked. The sense I get from you and [@JPxG](#) is a circling of the wagons rather than an actual interest in having a conversation and since I wasn't trying to start a conversation but rather get a question answered (which I have now - thanks again Bri) I'm going to move on. Best, [Barkeep49](#) [\(talk\)](#) [20:41, 20 March 2023 \(UTC\)](#)

- (Another EC!) Almost every time we do an article on paid editing we get somebody complaining that we're doing something awful, often based on some wildly original interpretation of Wikipedia's rules. So please forgive me if I was a bit defensive. I really am interested in how you think *The*

Signpost should cover this subject. So if you want to send me an email and discuss it privately, please do. For general interest, I'll just add in the text I typed before the edit conflict.

- I'll also add that last week a long-time Wikipedian forwarded me an email that they had received offering similar services. After checking out the website, I suspect that it was from the same firm that was advertising in the article above. The website gave a Wall Street address that turned out to be a rent-a-mailbox/phone number space. They guaranteed acceptance of an article for anybody (in about 5 out of 7 times that the issue came up in their text). A friendly helper asked to chat and said that I could remain confidential (after I asked). If you read closely they wrote that they'd write articles for other websites to serve as "reliable sources" here. The web-site text was not written by a native English speaker. So by exposing this, am I giving these "service providers" hints on how to avoid getting caught on Wikipedia? I doubt that they know enough about Wikipedia to check this space, but if they got themselves a real address, and they quit guaranteeing article acceptance, quit promising confidentiality, quit writing phony off-Wiki articles, and hired native English speakers to write their text, I would consider that to be a good thing (but bad for their business). All it would do is raise their costs and drive away customers. So how can we help drive away customers from these crooked-as-a-dog's-hind-leg con-men? Just expose them. [Smallbones](#)^(smalltalk) 20:50, 20 March 2023 (UTC)

Also, anyone reading *The Signpost* probably isn't in the market for paid editing, and I believe Wikipedia nofollows all links. Risk almost certainly is overwhelmed by benefits. For comparison, last issue (maybe the one before), I spiked a story about how Wikipedia was supposedly censoring cryptids because the only way to read the person's argument was to buy his book. That felt like a high chance of sending profit towards a non-notable crank. [Adam Cuerden](#)^(talk) Has about 8.2% of all [FPs](#). Currently celebrating his [600th FP!](#) 21:45, 20 March 2023 (UTC)

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