

During your travels on the web, you've probably noticed the acronym, RSS, and it's counterpart, the orange icon . If you spend countless hours visiting websites and blogs for updated content, consider RSS your new best friend on the web.

What is RSS?

The RSS acronym often stands for:

- Really Simple Syndication
- Rich Site Summary
- RDF Site Summary (RDF stands for "Resource Description Framework")

There is no clear definition for the acronym, however, Really Simple Syndication seems to be the most popular choice because it really is simple!

If you've ever clicked on an RSS icon, you've probably noticed strange code displaying in your browser. That code is XML, or Extensible Markup Language. RSS is a way to share and receive information using that XML code.

The benefits of RSS are simple: instead of having to visit websites and browse for updated content, RSS delivers website content directly to you. You can get all the updated content from a website without having to visit the page.

There are two steps to getting set up with RSS:

- 1. Finding an RSS reader:
- 2. Subscribing to feeds.

1. Finding an RSS reader

An RSS reader (also called an aggregator) is a software application that allows you to read blogs and websites that publish RSS feeds. An RSS reader takes that XML code and converts it to a format you can read.

There are a range of different readers; many of which are free to install on your desktop or accessible on the web. Readers can be web-based, browser-based, or use a downloadable application. The choice depends on how you want to access your feeds.

Web-based readers

Use a web-based reader if you want to read your feeds from any Internet-accessible computer. With a web-based reader, you'll set up an account online. RSS content will be delivered to your reader, and you can login to read your feeds from any computer.

Popular online newsreaders include Google Reader (http://www.google.com/reader), Newsgator (http://www.newsgator.com) and Bloglines (http://www.bloglines.com).

Browser-based readers

Internet Explorer 7.0, Firefox, Opera and Safari, all have RSS built into the browser allowing you to subscribe to and receive feeds.

Desktop-based readers

These are software applications that require you to download and install the reader on your desktop. Examples of desktop-based readers include Feedreader (http://www.feedreader.com/), and NetNewsWire 3.0 (for the Mac) (http://www.newsgator.com/Individuals/NetNewsWire/Default.aspx).

The disadvantage to browser-based and desktop based readers, is that you are tied into subscribing and reading your feeds from one desktop or location. A web-based reader offers you the most mobility.

Additional readers can be found at:

Yahoo RSS Readers & Aggregators

http://dir.yahoo.com/computers_and_internet/data_formats/xml_extensible_markup_language_/r_ss/rss_readers_and_aggregators/

Google Directory: Feed Readers

http://www.google.com/Top/Computers/Software/Internet/Clients/WWW/Feed Readers/

Step 2. Subscribing to feeds

If a website or blog offers RSS feeds, it will often display an icon with the words "RSS", "Feed", "XML" or "Subscribe".

The website may also display the orange icon 🔯 or any number of clickable icons.

Here's a sample of some of the icons you may see on a website or blog:



(Source: http://www.cadenhead.org/workbench/news/2872/support-common-feed-icon)

Clicking on the icon will display the XML code we talked about earlier.

To subscribe to a feed, **right-click** (alternate-click) the icon and select "copy link location" or "copy shortcut".

Go to your reader and look for an option to "add feed". Your reader will allow you to simply paste the feed URL you just copied into the "add feed" option.

That's it! Once a website or blog publishes updated content, it will be delivered to your reader.

Finding feeds

Looking for feeds in a subject area or topic? Take a look at search engines and directories devoted to indexing blogs and RSS feeds.

Libworm The Librarian RSS Engine http://libworm.com/

Technorati http://www.technorati.com/

Google Blog Search http://blogsearch.google.com/

Syndic8 http://www.syndic8.com/

Search 4 RSS http://www.search4rss.com/index.php

RSS Locator http://www.rss-locator.com/

Bloglines (select "Search for feeds") http://www.bloglines.com/search

RSS News Feeds Directory http://www.webdevtips.co.uk/webdevtips/resources/rssdir.php

Caution! RSS feed ahead.

One of the best pieces of advice I ever received when I first learned about RSS was to start small. You may be tempted to subscribe to many feeds, but oversubscribing will defeat the goal of RSS in the first place! RSS, like email, can easily become overloaded. Start with a few feeds that you really want to follow and grow you subscription list slowly.

Learn More

"RSS in Plain English", 3.5 minute video: http://www.commoncraft.com/rss_plain_english

RSS Compendium: http://allrss.com/

RSS Specifications: everything you need to know about RSS: http://www.rss-specifications.com/

The RSS and Javascript Cookbook: Tools: http://paulandmeredith.pbwiki.com/Tools

The Ultimate RSS Toolbox: 120+ RSS Resources: http://mashable.com/2007/06/11/rss-toolbox/

Angela Carito-Walmsley blogs at http://angelacw.wordpress.com

Contact her at angelacw@rogers.com