




Web 2.0 Tools: RSS


During your travels on the web, you've probably noticed the acronym, RSS, and its 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.

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 your 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