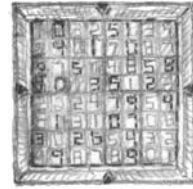


WHY IS RSS IMPORTANT TO YOU?

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RSS technology can make your job easier by offering some significant advantages over previous electronic news delivery methods. This column reviews what RSS is and how you can use it to simplify the automation of your everyday information search and retrieval tasks.

THE RSS DELIVERY MECHANISM

Many web sites, weblogs (blogs), and other online publications use a technology called RSS, a family of XML (extensible markup language) formats, for web syndication. There are a few definitions of what RSS stands for: "Really Simple Syndication," "Rich Site Summary," and "RDF Site Summary." In all cases, the intent is to automatically distribute content in a

SIDEBAR: CHOOSING THE RIGHT RSS TOOL

- 1) Do you want to be able to add feeds while surfing the web in your browser?
- 2) Do you spend most of your time online?
- 3) Do you have limited information technology support in-house (or is IT support difficult to access)?
- 4) Do you work in an environment where IT department permission is required prior to downloading any software to your PC? Will this request take a significant amount of time, or is it likely to be rejected?

If you answer yes to these questions, a web-based RSS reader will give you the flexibility you need.

standard machine-readable format.

This data delivery technology allows you to receive filtered electronic information from your favorite news publishers whenever they add new information. While this technology has been around for several years, its application has just recently become widespread. Hundreds of mainstream publishers, including Reuters, Google, CNN, CNET, and Yahoo! News, are now proving RSS news feeds.

Yahoo! News defines RSS simply as "a format for distributing and gathering content from sources across the web, including newspapers, magazines, and blogs" (<http://news.yahoo.com/rss>). RSS feeds typically include links, headlines, and content summaries. Some even include thumbnail images.

READING RSS FEEDS

The technology that allows you to receive and display RSS feeds on your computer is known as an RSS reader or RSS aggregator. This software, which delivers RSS feeds from multiple sites in an intuitive, user-friendly manner, either resides locally on your computer or is remotely accessed on the web. (See figure 1.)

An RSS reader does not typically store information on your desktop but simply displays a link (usually with a short abstract) to the actual content of the feed you have selected. RSS feeds displayed in a reader are typically listed in a linear format that includes the date, source, title, and a short summary of the content available through the link. The order may be configurable by date or other parameters, depending on the capabilities of your reader. (See figure 2.)

Both RSS readers and aggregators allow you to easily create and update a set of news feed sources without having to rely on an external news service to aggregate them for you. You control the sources that feed your RSS content, and you can dynamically change the content mix. The software provides an intuitive interface to organize, manage, and in some cases edit content from these sources and continually monitors the information sources for updates. New information is automatically displayed as it is received.

RSS ADVANTAGES

With easy access to multiple information sources and user control over what is sent to them, RSS technology presents some significant advantages for professional researchers:

Reduces subscription costs:

Although much of the information you require for your research is available on the web, you often need third-party news aggregators such as Lexis-Nexis, Factiva, or Dialog to filter this content and deliver the results in a structured, easy-to-process format. RSS technology helps you to eliminate these subscription services for at least a portion of your content mix. It allows you to automatically receive filtered content from thousands of electronic publications without having to rely on a third party.

Reduces technology costs: RSS technology reduces the need for expensive (and often labor-intensive) syndicated search tools, since it is designed to push filtered syndicated content to external users directly from web publishers. Eventually, the average user will be able to set up a library

```
<?xml version="1.0" encoding="ISO-8859-1" ?>
- <rss version="2.0">
  - <channel>
    <title>CNN.com</title>
    <link>http://www.cnn.com/rssclick/?section=cnn_topstories</link>
    <description>CNN.com delivers up-to-the-minute news and
    information on the latest top stories, weather, entertainment,
    politics and more.</description>
    <language?en-us</language>
    <copyright>© 2006 Cable News Network LP, LLLP.</copyright>
    <pubDate>Sun, 08 Jan 2006 20:35:25 EST</pubDate>
    <ttl>5</ttl>
  ->image>
    <title>CNN.com</title>
    <link>http://www.cnn.com/rssclick/?section=cnn_topstories</link>
    <url?http://i.cnn.net/cnn/.element/img/1.0/logo/cnn.logo.rss.gif</url>
    <width>144</width>
    <height>33</height>
    <description>CNN.com delivers up-to-the-minute news and
    information on the latest top stories, weather, entertainment,
    politics and more.</description>
  </image>
```

Figure 1: Example of a raw RSS Feed from CNN

of RSS feeds directly from his or her favorite web sources.

Reduces information overload:

Accessing your news through RSS feeds allows you to cancel many of your individual e-mail-delivered news subscriptions. This helps you avoid any marketing spam related to e-mail-based subscriptions while also consolidating your content sources. RSS data is delivered and managed in a dedicated reader, where you can control the sources and the frequency of your updates.

Reduces security concerns: Unlike conventional e-mail web publishing, RSS does not require subscribers to disclose their e-mail address or any other personal information. This means that you have access to a full range of content without having to disclose personally identifying information.

Saves time and improves productivity: Think about how many bookmarks and folders you have. How often do you visit each of your favorite sites every day? RSS allows you to bypass the manual search process by letting you capture the essence of your favorite web sources in the form of a single electronic “newsletter” delivered to you via e-mail.

Disseminates research more effectively: RSS technology can also help you publish and archive your analysis in an RSS reader-friendly format that other users in your organization can access and search using their own terms. Unlike the conventional newsletter, RSS is easy to set up and does not pose the risk of being inadvertently intercepted by a spam filter or blindly deleted by overwhelmed readers trying to clean

up their inbox. Interested parties can easily find information when they need it.

Manages internal documents: An RSS feed sends you information recently published on a web site (much like a search tracker). This makes RSS technology an ideal tool to track changes and provide links to new document recently posted on your own department/company’s internal web site or intranet.

GETTING STARTED

The first step to getting started with RSS feeds is to select a reader or feed aggregator. There are two types: web-based and locally installed (downloaded). The web-based tool offers the following advantages:

- **Flexibility:** Online services allow you to add new RSS feeds to your reader while you are actually surfing the web.
- **Low maintenance:** Online services do not require upgrades, preventative maintenance, or internal technical support, since they are hosted and maintained by a third-party provider.

A locally installed, downloaded tool offers the following advantages:

- **Speed:** Locally installed tools are often much faster, at least when accessing content that has previously been downloaded locally rather than over your Internet connection.
- **Off-line Accessibility:** Locally installed tools allow you to access your RSS feeds even when you are not connected to the Internet, but

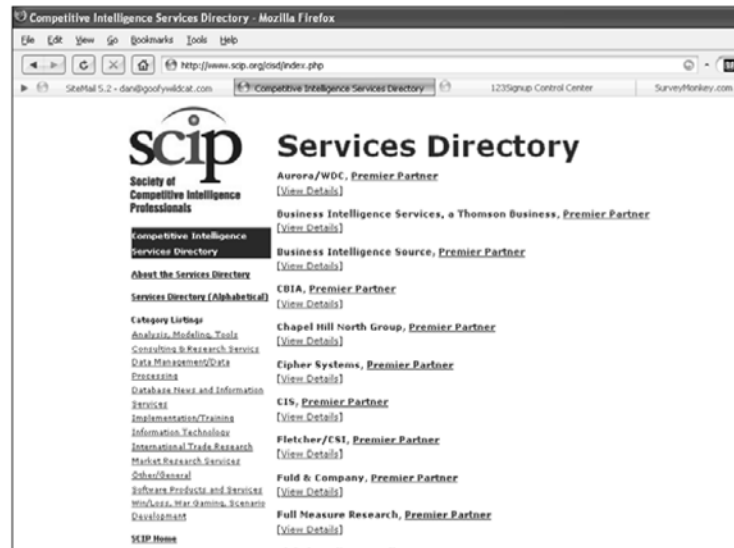
you will not be able to follow any hyperlinks until you connect.

See the sidebar for help in choosing the right tool for you.

You should also think carefully about the way you do research in order to define the functional requirements of your RSS reader. The following are some of the most popular downloadable RSS readers on the market today:

Active Refresh (www.activerefresh.com)
 feeddemon (www.feeddemon.com)
 Headline Viewer (www.headlineviewer.com)
 NewzCrawler (www.NewzCrawler.com)

Ted Johnson is the Chief Technology Officer of CIPHER Systems (www.cipher-sys.com). He is currently working on the design and implementation of CIPHER's RSS Manager for competitive intelligence professionals, to be introduced at SCIP 06 in Orlando. CIPHER specializes in competitive intelligence consulting and technology services for both the public and private sectors. Services include primary/secondary data collection, analysis, reporting, company profiling, and scenario planning. CIPHER's award-winning competitive intelligence software Knowledge Works is a customizable toolkit of competitive intelligence technologies. Ted can be reached at t.johnson@cipher-sys.com or 01.860.652.7438.



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