



RSS: Syndicating Your Web Site Information

RSS Defined



RSS -- Really Simple Syndication -- is a format for syndicating news and information from your web site. You may know RSS by the buttons (above) visible on a growing number of web sites and blogs. People subscribe to your web site's RSS feed using a:

- **personal start page** such as My Yahoo! or Google Homepage
- **blog** such as Blogger.com, EasyBlogger.com, LiveJournal.com
- **newsreader** such as Feedreader (PC), AmphetaDesk (Linux), NewsFire (Mac) or Bloglines.com
- **RSS-enabled browser** such as Safari (Mac) and Mozilla Firefox (PC and Mac)
- **handheld** with software such as MobileFeedReader (PalmOS) and NewsMob (cross-platform)

For a list of aggregators (software that reads RSS feeds) visit

<http://blogs.law.harvard.edu/tech/directory/5/aggregators>.

Subscribers love how RSS content from many web sites and blogs in one, convenient location. There is no spam, no viruses, no need to give away your e-mail address to receive e-mail newsletters. Think of RSS as a tool for creating a personal, virtual newspaper. Web site managers view RSS as a communication vehicle and marketing tool that increases the reach of their web sites. For more definitions of RSS see page 4.

Finding RSS Feeds

Web sites and blogs that have RSS feeds include National Public Radio, Rolling Stone, Christian Science Monitor, Minneapolis Star Tribune, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, University of Minnesota, Gustavus Adolphus, St. Cloud Area School District 742, Chronicle of High Education, National Weather Service, Boing Boing: A Directory of Wonderful Things, John Amato's Crooks and Liars and Gizmodo.

Search engines can locate web sites and blogs with RSS feeds. Using Google, for example, you can do a keyword search and then use **filetype:rss** in the *Search within results* feature to narrow your results to RSS files only.

RSS directories are also helpful. General directories include <http://www.syndic8.com>, <http://www.rss-network.com>, <http://allrss.com/rssfeeds.html> and <http://www.feed-directory.com>. There are topic-specific directories, such as the college and university feeds directory at <http://directory.edufeds.com/>, the science directory at <http://us.scienceport.org> and the finance

and investing directory at <http://www.finance-investing.com>. RSS search engines, such as <http://www.newsfeedfinder.com>, can find feeds via keyword searches. At <http://www.justinpfister.com/gnewsfeed.cfm> you can create custom feeds that leverage major search engines. For example, you can track the keywords “species extinction” in Google.

The Details Behind RSS Newsfeeds

RSS works best for people who consistently update their web sites several times a week. It is a dialect of Extensible Markup Language (XML), a text format popular for data exchange on the Internet. As an RSS publisher, you can syndicate content from your site without knowing much, if anything, about XML.

There are numerous versions of RSS. Visit http://www.w3schools.com/rss/rss_history.asp for a condensed history of RSS’ tumultuous development. The newest version, RSS 2.0, is controlled by Harvard University, used by Yahoo! and favored by podcasters. The RSS 2.0 specification is available at <http://blogs.law.harvard.edu/tech/rss>.

The Steps for Creating a Feed

1. Create your RSS file (it should be the .xml file type)
2. Validate the file using a free, online validator
3. Upload the file and link it to your feed page
4. Submit your file’s URL to key RSS directories
5. Target RSS-enabled browsers
6. Update your web site and feed regularly

1. Create Your RSS File

Start with a free, online RSS generator to create and maintain your RSS feed file. If you like RSS, move on to a stand-alone, feed-creation application. If hand-coding is more your style, there are online RSS-coding tutorials.

Free, online feed creators

- WebReference.com’s RSS Creator at <http://www.webreference.com/cgi-bin/perl/makerss.pl>
- WebDevTips.co.uk’s RSS Headline at <http://www.webdevtips.co.uk/webdevtips/codegen/rss.shtml>

Feed creation applications

- RSS DreamFeeder (PC and Mac), a \$49 extension for Macromedia Dreamweaver, is at <http://www.rnsoft.com/en/products/rssdreamfeeder/index.php>
- FeedforAll (PC and Mac) is at <http://www.feedforall.com/>

Hand- Coding Tutorials

- Danny Sullivan’s tutorial on Search Engine Watch is at <http://searchenginewatch.com/sereport/article.php/2175271>

- Jason Cook's tutorial on Web Monkey is at <http://www.webmonkey.com//03/17/index3a.html?tw=authoring>
- Mark Nottingham's tutorial is at <http://www.mnot.net/rss/tutorial/>

2. Validate Your File

To assure best results in the greatest number of RSS readers, validate your file.

- FEED Validator at <http://feedvalidator.org/>
- Userland's RSS Validator at <http://rss.scripting.com/>

3. Upload your file and link it to your feed page

Upload your file to the root of your web site to keep the URL as short as possible -- something like yourwebaddress.com/rss.xml. Ideally, your feed page should be your index page (front page of your site). Link yourwebaddress.com/rss.xml to a text link or button on your front page. A search engine search will produce buttons such as those displayed at the beginning of this document. There is no standard button, so your best bet may be to imitate the button choices of a web site similar to yours.

4. Submit your file's URL to key RSS directories

To help people find your news feed, submit your file's to as many RSS directories as you can. See a partial list of directories in the **Finding RSS Feeds** section of this document.

5. Target RSS-enabled browsers

Safari and Firefox browsers also act as RSS newsreaders. Microsoft's Internet Explorer 7, which was in public beta in April 2006, is expected to support RSS. To take advantage of RSS-enabled browsers, your feed page (usually your index page) should have the following code inserted in its head (between the <head> and </head> tags).

```
<link rel="alternate" type="application/rss+xml"
  title="[YOUR RSS FEED TITLE]" href="[URL TO RSS FILE]">
```

For example:

```
<link rel="alternate" type="application/rss+xml"
  title="District 742 News, St. Cloud, MN" href="http://isd742.org/rss.xml">
```

6. Update your web site and feed regularly

RSS will have little value to you, or anyone else, if you do not update your web site and your feed frequently. Remember: the first three letters in "news" are n-e-w.

RSS in 10 Words or Less

Syndication system that pulls content you choose from the Web.

Get the latest site updates without visiting the webpage.

Keep track of site updates in one convenient place.

Allows you to create your own virtual newspaper.

Websites publish updates in a standard format; you can subscribe.

Read about money, airplanes, heroes, and microwave ovens, more conveniently.

Standardized internet news format readable by personalized news reading software.

Get website updates right in your browser; works like email.

Share and enjoy news updates from all over the world.

Get news automatically instead of visiting sites manually.

News comes to you. You don't have to gather it.

A format for delivering summaries of regularly changing web content.

That is what you need to get the hottest news.

Reader's Digest for the Web.

Get breaking headline alerts without giving out your e-mail address.

Freed, J. (2004). An exercise in clarity: RSS. Retrieved April 3, 2006, from <http://www.37signals.com/svn/archives/000622.php>