

# MAKING USE OF RSS

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With RSS feeds, readers get the information they want from all over the Internet, à la carte. Small magazines can use RSS to instantly distribute their content to readers.

RSS STANDS FOR REALLY SIMPLE Syndication or Rich Site Summary. For small magazines, harnessing the power of RSS can expose your content to new audiences. And it's simple...really simple. RSS tools are so easy to use that one study from 2005 reports more people use RSS than know what it is (<http://www.clickz.com/3555441>).

RSS files, known as feeds or channels, can contain the full text, multimedia or headlines of a Web page. These files are found and compiled by feed readers (sometimes called news aggregators), which can be Web-based tools or separate standalone computer programs. Many Web browsers also feature built-in aggregators. Popular aggregators include NetNewsWire, NewsGator, Bloglines, Google Reader, My Yahoo, Firefox's Live Bookmarks, and iTunes (for podcasts). Once users set up an account with one of these services—and in some cases install a piece of software—they can add feeds from all over the Internet based on their particular interests.

Users can also create custom headline filters that automatically search for information based on keywords. Some aggregators also allow users to group feeds by category, sort the order in which feeds are viewed or share feeds between computers. The RSS method of information gathering has taken off because it gives users control over access to content and goes beyond the mainstream media. It lets users customize their Web reading experience and find content they wouldn't know existed otherwise.

More and more publishers are syndicating their content using RSS, but readers subscribing to feeds may not realize they're using RSS technology. Publishers use a variety of names and labels for their syndicated content. "If you look at how we've integrated RSS into Yahoo News, we're not actually using those three letters very much," Scott Gatz of Yahoo News told the USC Annenberg's Online Journalism Review (<http://www.ojr.org/ojr/stories/050331glaser/>). "[Yahoo News] says, 'what would you like to add to your political news, here are some political blogs. Would you like to add CNN or MSNBC onto your news page?' The fact that it happens in XML or RSS isn't the important thing. Most of the users don't want to have to figure that out."

Several versions of the RSS technology have been

developed in recent years that allow independent publishers to offer RSS to their audiences. All your magazine needs to publish RSS feeds is knowledge and some basic software. For an excellent tutorial on how to create an RSS file, go to <http://www.xul.fr/en-xml-rss.html#building-feed>. (A basic knowledge of HTML is an asset when reading this guide.) In order to build a wide audience for your RSS feeds, you can "burn" them using FeedBurner ([www.feedburner.com](http://www.feedburner.com)), a service that publicizes, manages and tracks subscriptions to RSS feeds, and optimizes your feeds so all kinds of aggregators can read them properly.

## Look for this orange icon, which indicates an RSS feed:



As you're exploring the potential of RSS for your small magazine, follow these tips:

1. Label your content with RSS in mind. People scan RSS headlines; give yours some punch, but also make them clear. The headlines you put on your stories, blog posts and podcasts are the most important part of your feeds
2. Choose what feeds you offer based on the activity of your website. You can create RSS feeds for just your homepage, for every page on your site, or a selected number of pages and content categories. It's a good idea to have a feed for every frequently updated page you have.
3. Keep an eye on developments in RSS. This technology is still fairly new, and has great potential. One example of the near future of RSS is Yahoo Pipes, a new application that allows users to "mashup" feeds for a truly customized and specific RSS experience.

### Further Reading:

1. [http://radar.oreilly.com/archives/2007/02/pipes\\_and\\_filte.html/](http://radar.oreilly.com/archives/2007/02/pipes_and_filte.html/) (the potential of Yahoo Pipes)
2. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0klgLSxGsU> (Learn RSS in plain English)
3. <http://www.emarketer.com/Article.aspx?id=1003936> (Millions spent on blog, RSS and podcast advertising)

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