A Little Good News: Using RSS Feeds in Library Outreach and Instruction

Most libraries have heard of RSS feeds, and a number of us now use news readers and aggregators to get our favorite news sources delivered to us in one-stop reads. At DePauw University, librarians are exploring ways to deliver information to our patrons via RSS feeds. We have changed our “Library News” headlines on our home page to be created from a blog that generates RSS feeds. Patrons with news readers can now add the library news to their aggregators, where they are much more likely to see it. Additionally, we are using RSS feeds to make our workshop announcements more easily discoverable to students, faculty, and staff. Using this same technique, we are feeding our library catalog and Blackboard, and publishing content for library instruction sessions. For example, a class guide created for a “Media, Culture & Society” library instruction course contains New York Times Media & Advertising feeds as well as appropriate headlines from organizations such as EJRI (Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting). This will provide a basic introduction to RSS feeds and news aggregators, but will primarily focus on how to use them to get the most current information to your patrons.

Put news on your site

Sites like Feed2JS (Feed to JavaScript), Feedroll, and Jawfish adapt the RSS feeds from other websites so that their headlines, summaries, or content display on your site. This is usually as small as you need it, don’t link to the original source. Each is very easy to use.

• Go to their website.
• Paste the address of the feed into a box. http://www.npr.org/rss/rss.php?id=1012 is the address for NPR’s Politics & Society news feed.
• Fill in the form below to decide things like whether you want the whole story, just a summary, or just the headline.
• They’ll generate a short code to paste into your website.

Here’s the code that Feed2JS made to take headlines from our library’s news blog to our library’s homepage:

```html
<script language="JavaScript"
type="text/javascript"></script>
<noscript>
<a href="http://jade.mcli.dist.maricopa.edu/feed/feed2js.php?src=http%3A%2F%2Fblog.depauw.edu%2Flibrarynews%2Findex.xml&amp;chan=y&amp;num=10&amp;html=y">View RSS feed</a>
</noscript>
```

DePauw student Chad Bennett checks out the RSS feeds on his Anthropology class guide.

What is an RSS feed?

RSS is a way to subscribe, or at least, discover content from a website that is syndicated to other aggregators. For instance, a popular news page (such as the Indianapolis Star or a blog (like http://www.time.com/) can format their content in XML so that the headlines and summaries are easier to see by your reader or client. There are numerous newsreaders available, including the following types:

Built-in to browsers:
- This example shows NPR headlines displayed in the Firefox toolbar.
- The Opera and Safari browsers also have built-in RSS readers.

Internet Explorer is supposed to have better RSS reading options built into version 7 (now in Beta).

Stand-alone software programs:
- This example shows the SubscribeRSS feed displayed in a program called BlogLines Reader.
- Some sites will help you find feeds of interest, either by letting you browse directories, or search by keyword. Examiner (http://www.examiner.com/) for instance, will pull up individual stories, rather than entire feeds. Based on a keyword you enter - the feedreader then shows you a particular news source, rather than a set of news items as they appear across multiple sites.

Web-based readers:
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For a thorough list of available feed readers, check out http://铱hib.com/rss_reader.html

Where do I find RSS feeds?

So you’re convinced… these RSS feeds sound like something you ought to check out, but where do you find them? Some of the newsreaders provide ways to search for feeds within the program. Many sites provide a list of their feed and many others distribute feeds specifically to regional headlines, or other topics such as sports, financial or entertainment news. Also, if you look closely at the web pages you visit regularly, you’ll forever RSS feeds all over the place. Look for icons like these:

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What can I do with an RSS feed?

Here’s how we did it:

- Opened the blogs we want to mix.
- Penguin the blogs’ RSS feed addresses into FeedFusion’s form.
- Told it to limit to items with the phrase “New Orleans.”
- Picked visual options like how many items to display, which font, and whether or not to show the date.

Mix news from several sites, and limit to specific topics

Sites like FrankenFeed and FEEDcombine mix multiple feeds, like Politics or Health from BBC, NPR, and PBS, into one. FeedDigest does even more: it filters those feeds to display only those items containing specific words. Here’s a mix of feeds from PLA, YALSA, ACRL, and LITA, limited to those items containing the phrase “New Orleans.”

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Where can I put feeds?

At DePauw, we’ve used feeds from various news sources in the online class guides we design for library instruction sessions. RSS feeds are most useful for classes that are studying current events.

We put feeds in our guides for a Media, Society, and Culture course as students could use the latest headlines about the media for a specific assignment.

We also used RSS feeds in a Latin American and Caribbean Cultures guide to help students keep informed of top news stories from the region.

RSS feeds can also be set up in course management systems such as Blackboard. Some libraries feed their news stories to the announcement page so students will follow headlines as they change or change to library resources. Students working on projects that require keeping up with the latest information could have relevant news tied to their course site. Automated feed RSS is a page of feeds from several sources and graduate school sites that would help students prepare for life after graduation.