

THE BEAUTY OF RSS

By Sheena Harden

RSS stands for “Really Simple Syndication” and is a way for content to be delivered to us news junkies without being overwhelmed by information. It also keeps us from having to visit dozens of different web pages a day to get the information we need.

If you read an on-line newspaper, newsletter or blog you may have noticed a button or link that says something like, “Subscribe to Posts [Atom],” “RSS” or “XML” (see illustrations below.) These are links that you can use to subscribe to the news source by syndication. If for example you click on the “Atom” link on the bottom of the TATO A blog page it will take you to a page with text at the top which says, “This is an Atom formatted XML site feed. It is intended to be viewed in a Newsreader...” You may notice that there is no formatting on this page, that’s because it is not meant to be viewed as a website but shows instead the raw information which can be sent to a Newsreader (also called an aggregator.) The Atom, XML or RSS link is what you use to tell the Newsreader where to go to get the latest information.



So what is a Newsreader? It is a program, utility or website which gathers up feeds to which you subscribe and puts them neatly in one place. So let’s say you wanted to see the TATO A Blog, the A-News, B-News and C-News every day. Rather than going to four different sites each day you set up a Newsreader to go get the headlines from each page for you and display them in one place.

There are a few different types of newsreaders. Integrated readers come with the software you already have such as a browser or email program. They are fairly easy to set up for the most part. The disadvantages to integrated readers are that they are not very customizable in terms of look and feel and they reside only on the desktop on which you set them up. In other words, unless you’re on a laptop you can’t take them with you.

Stand-alone Newsreaders are available for free or fee-based download and also reside on your desktop. The advantage to these readers is that they are specifically written as Newsreaders and give customization options not offered with integrated

readers. The disadvantage is that they also reside only on the computer on which they are set up.

Web-based readers act the same as web-email. You can login from any computer and read your feeds. The advantage to having your feeds on a web-based reader is that you can access the information from home, work and on the road. The only disadvantage is that the free ones are not customizable in terms of look and feel. If that is a concern, many web-based readers offer subscription packages which allow you more options for customization.

One free web-based Newsreader site is Bloglines (<http://www.bloglines.com>). To use Bloglines you must first sign up for an account. Next you go find the URLs for the site feeds you want syndicated. For TATO A it’s that page you went to earlier, <http://www.tatoa.org/blog/atom.xml>. On other sites look for buttons saying “RSS,” “XML” or “Subscribe to Feed.” Copy the link. In Bloglines choose ‘Add’ and paste the URL in to the blank provided, hit the ‘subscribe’ button and you’re done! You can also set up folders for specific types of news if you don’t want to look at everything at once. It may take a little while to set up your feeds initially but it is well worth it in future time savings.

The great thing about sites like Bloglines is that they also provide search capability. If you’re really into Pink Widgets you can search for “pink widget” and it will show you all of the feeds available with those key words.

For more information:

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/RSS_\(file_format\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/RSS_(file_format))

<http://www.xml.com/pub/a/2002/12/18/dive-into-xml.html>

Web-based Newsreaders:

<http://www.bloglines.com>

<http://www.newsgator.com>

<http://www.newzcrawler.com/>

And for a listing of many more go to:

<http://www.newsonfeeds.com/faq/aggregators>