Getting started

Once you've subscribed to a number of RSS feeds, it's a good idea to try out a number of different feed readers and to identify which you prefer. There are many options, including ones that are web-based (Google Reader, Netvibes, iGoogle and Newsgator), browser options (Firefox, Internet Explorer) or even various email clients. Web-based readers are popular as they require no installation, are increasingly powerful and enable you to access your feeds from any web-enabled device. They also make it easy to publish or share your feeds with other people!

Ten things to try

1. Visit the websites you use regularly and identify available RSS feeds.

2. Add a number of RSS feeds from the BBC website to Google Reader, use it for a week and review your experience.

3. Subscribe to one of the Web2practice RSS feeds.

4. Subscribe to an RSS feed for the weather where you live.

5. Try accessing your RSS feeds from your mobile phone.

6. Track updates to a wiki page using RSS.

7. Subscribe to a feed for a Flickr photo gallery.

8. If you're using a social bookmarking tool, subscribe to a feed for one of your tags (Hint: Perhaps have a 'to-read' tag that you subscribe to and track).

9. Aggregate a range of RSS feeds together in Netvibes for your research project and share them with your project team.

10. After a month using RSS, review your feeds; browse for new ones and delete any you haven't read regularly.

RSS

Change the way you read the web

Web2practice: Guides to emergent technologies & innovative practice

Subscribe to your favourite sites & let new content come to you!

Keeping up-to-date with favourite websites is a challenging task using traditional browsing methods. Even if you've bookmarked the sites, you do all the hard work, visiting every site in turn and scanning the page to decide what's new. RSS changes everything, providing a simple and efficient way to track new content as it appears on your favourite websites. It saves you time and helps you to get the information you want quickly after it's published.

RSS stands for 'Really Simple Syndication' but many people describe it as a 'web feed' or 'news feed' that you subscribe to. The subscription is dynamic, not periodic, with new information delivered to you every time there's an update on a website you've subscribed to.

Using RSS, you can keep up-to-date with your favourite websites, blogs, podcasts and social media services in a single place, without having to actually visit them. To do this, you need a feed reader, a piece of software that checks the status of your feeds, automatically updates when new content is added and presents the latest articles for you to read at your leisure.

"How did I keep up-to-date before RSS? I couldn't cope without it!"

In Practice

"RSS feeds are one of the most important developments for both publishers and readers - it's now so much easier to stay up-to-date with developments in your profession…"

The amount of information that can be tracked using RSS is huge, wide-ranging and ever increasing. Once RSS becomes part of your practice, you'll be more surprised if a website or service doesn't have a feed than if it does!

Researchers can subscribe to RSS feeds for journal tables of contents, automatically updated when a new issue is published. They will also find feeds for funding calls from Research Councils and other funders, as well as feeds for blogs written by other researchers about their current work, thinking and projects.

Administrators will find feeds for a range of information they need to keep informed about, including items of institutional news, announcements and notifications.

Teachers can use RSS feeds to track the activities of students undertaking individual work, writing reflective blogs perhaps, or group work using wikis. Additionally all relevant feeds can be viewed from one page, and if appropriate, that page can be used by the whole class.

RSS has been described as *"the glue that holds the web together,"* enabling individual users to access information important to them more easily and quickly than ever before. Additionally, services such as iGoogle or Netvibes allow relevant information to be linked together, aggregated and published to any audience.

Look for the RSS icon on your favourite websites…

Who's using it?

The JISC-funded ticTOCs project has used RSS to aggregate Tables of Contents feeds for over 12,000 journals from more than 430 publishers. They have developed a service, making it easy for academics, researchers, students and anyone else to keep up-to-date with newly published scholarly material.

Find out more: http://www.tictocs.ac.uk/

What are the risks?

RSS means that information is read out of context from where it was published. For publishers this means that content must be created carefully with meaningful, standalone titles and descriptions. For users, this means that sometimes you don't get the full 'experience' intended by the original author and/or publisher.

It's possible to suffer information overload; by having too many RSS feeds to realistically handle. However, it's also possible to rely upon a stable set of RSS feeds and hence to reduce the serendipitous discovery of new relevant, but unrelated, information when browsing.

Aggregating content using RSS feeds has its risks. It is vital to find out who retains ownership of the content, copyright restrictions and any regulations for its use. For further guidance, visit the web2rights project website:

http://www.web2rights.org.uk/

Find out more…

Videos, guides, discussions & downloads

http://web2practice.jiscinvolve.org/