
RSS - What is it? Why do you need it?

If you visit any web news or publication sites, you've probably seen a button or link to RSS. And, you've probably wondered what the heck RSS is and why the web site includes it. RSS stands for Really Simple Syndication and is a "dialect" of XML (Extensible Markup Language). (XML is a "metalanguage" developed by the W3C - developers of HTML - that provides a way for the definition, validation and sharing of document formats. In other words, it's a way to share documents between systems/applications using a variety of documents and formats.)

RSS is used by publishers to share news headlines and other content that they wish to distribute to a wide audience. Mostly it's used to let the audience know that something has changed - there's "new news". RSS is also used by some of the biggest news providers (like CNN, Salon, ZDNet, CNET and many others) to share information between their sites.

The basic elements of an RSS message include:

- Title
- Link (URL of the item)
- Description (what it's about)
- Author (email address of the author)
- Category (news, sports, technology - you name it)
- Comments (URL of a page with comments related to the message)
- Enclosure (description of an attachment - like a video)
- Guid (unique message identifier)
- PubDate (when it was published)
- Source (RSS channel where the message came from).

As you can see, receiving an RSS feed allows companies and individuals to quickly become aware of "new news" - of any type (as long as the web site provides RSS feeds!). Additionally, there are a number of RSS news aggregators (my.netscape.com, myuserland.com, xmltree.com, moreover.com) that make it easier for you to even add RSS feeds to your web site. So what do you need to start making RSS feeds part of your daily reading?

An RSS reader of course. There are a number of sites that provide RSS readers free of charge (if you use Google, Yahoo! or MSN, they have them as part and parcel of their web portal). Among them are: <http://www.pluck.com>, <http://www.feedreader.com>, <http://www.rssreader.com>, <http://www.sage.mozdev.org>, <http://www.reader.rocketinfo.com>, <http://www.klipfolio.com>, <http://www.inclue.com>, <http://www.attensa.com>.

We use RSS to keep up with the world - and the technology industry. We think you should too! Start integrating RSS feeds today on your desktop - and web site.