

ADDRESSING THE NEEDS OF
PERSONAL COMPUTER USERS
WHO FREQUENT THE INTERNET,
WITH SPECIAL EMPHASIS ON GIST
SUPPORT GROUP MEMBERS.

safe surfing



*Your Own
Daily Herald*

THIS MONTH, BY SPECIAL REQUEST, WE LOOK AT RSS FEEDS. AND THAT'S A PRETTY HEFTY TOPIC, SO WE WON'T BE ABLE TO COVER MUCH OF ANYTHING ELSE (EXCEPT FOR A FEW LITTLE TIDBITS EMBEDDED HERE AND THERE)

What's RSS?

Many web sites (and blogs) frequently update their pages with new stories and posts. If you track news from multiple online sources or need to stay informed on specific subjects, it's a challenge to keep up with all the latest news and most recent updates. An increasingly popular way for distribute updated content is "syndication" -- a way to "broadcast" headlines and frequently updated web content to consumers using a standard distribution format called RSS.

RSS stands for "Really Simple Syndication," a format used to

send updated headlines and news summaries to you via services that gather the content you select from a variety of sources and displays it for you in one convenient location.

Syndication means you don't have to visit each site individually to see what's new -- you simply scan headlines or brief article summaries and click to read the full text. So it's "really simple" for you and for the content publishers to make their material accessible to you.

Syndication describes the process of publishing simultaneously in more than one online location. It's usually not for distributing full-text articles (though it can be), but often includes the headline and a few lines of text or a short summary of the article.

If you've been to "portal" sites that provide news and headline summaries from other sources, you've seen RSS in action. Because RSS is a relatively new format, not all sites currently syndicate their content in this way. However, many reputable sites do offer RSS, and every day the


offerings increase. For example, news sites such as the BBC, CNN and CNet's News.com use RSS to syndicate news headlines and summaries. By the way, our own GistSupport.org uses RSS! Other sites use RSS to alert customers of new products or upcoming events.

Although RSS feeds are usually used for news and blog websites, they are also used for distributing other types of digital content such as pictures, audio or video. Feeds can also be used to deliver audio content in MP3 format which you can listen to on your computer, PDA, cell phone or MP3 player. This is referred to as "podcasting."






How do I know if a website offers RSS feeds?


When you first view a website, whether you use Mozilla, Netscape or Internet Explorer, your browser will search for feeds. If feeds are available, a unique icon or color will appear. In Internet explorer the Feeds button  will change color and a sound will play.


How do I view an RSS feed?

When you visit a webpage, if the Feeds button  changes color to orange, letting you know that feeds are available, click the Feeds button, and then click the feed you want to see. To get content automatically, you should subscribe to a feed.


How do I subscribe to a feed?

1. Click to open Internet Explorer.

2. Go to the website that has the feed you want to subscribe to.
3. Click the Feeds button  to discover feeds on the webpage.
4. Click a feed (if more than one is available). If only one feed is available, you will go directly to that page.

5. Click the Subscribe to this Feed button , and then click Subscribe to this Feed.
6. Type a name for the feed and select the folder to create the feed in.
7. Click Subscribe.

How can I review my subscribed RSS feeds?

You view feeds on the Feeds tab in the Favorites Center. To view your feeds, click the Favorites Center button , and then click Feeds.

Can other programs display my subscribed feeds?

Yes, Internet Explorer provides the Common Feed List to other programs. This allows you to subscribe to feeds with Internet Explorer and read them in other programs, such as e-mail clients, or the Windows Sidebar.

How do I read my subscribed feeds?



To properly read the feed, you need an RSS reader. Here's how to get and use one.

Step 1: Get a reader

Check out some reviews at places like CNet.com. Then, either download the app directly from the review, or visit Download.com and choose from among the many RSS readers listed there. Many are free or offer free trial periods. By purchasing the app, you often have access to more tools and features within the reader. I like Bottomfeeder and it's free. Download it here:

http://www.download.com/BottomFeeder/3000-9227_4-10596669.html?tag=lst-6-2

There are two main types of RSS reader. Standalone applications are simply programs that process RSS feeds for you. The advantage of a standalone is that it is a new application that you can populate as needed. The disadvantage: it's one more app to have opened on your desktop. The other type is the plug-in. This app works within an existing program such as Microsoft Outlook or Internet Explorer. The advantage of having RSS work with an existing app is that you likely have Outlook or IE open already, so the reader becomes a new component of that app. The disadvantage is that if you have a lot of e-mail folders or bookmarks already established, you may not want to overload your application with daily feeds of new information.



Step 2: Installation and setup



Standalone reader - When you first launch a standalone reader, most

often you will see a toolbar and three window panes arranged much like the preview mode in Microsoft Outlook. The pane on the left side typically displays RSS feeds, or channels, to which you are subscribed. These can be organized into categories or folders. The upper-right panel typically shows a list of articles within whichever channel is selected, and the article content is then displayed in the lower-right panel. To change channel groups, just click the drop-down box at the upper left beneath the menus. Sometimes a brief description will appear in the lower right; if so, click the link in the article to load the complete text. Some standalone apps can be configured to send you e-mail every time there's a new article on a topic you're interested in. Most, however, will display a small dialog or pop-up window over the taskbar informing you of the channel, the title, and the URL of the new article.



Add-on reader - Readers that plug into existing applications such as

Outlook and Internet Explorer typically include a column for channels and a display area for a headline, a brief description, and a URL. Outlook readers make it easy to organize your channels in convenient folders along with your e-mail. They usually display only the headlines and summaries within the e-mail application; they open an instance of Internet Explorer to display the full articles. Internet Explorer readers, on the

other hand, automatically display a chosen article within the browser. The downside here is that the channel column can take away much of the browsing space and/or replace the Favorites bookmark collection.

Step 3: Add channels and channel groups



Most RSS readers come preloaded with a bunch of channels, but you will want to add your own. Most programs allow you to create new channel groups to organize your channels. To add a channel, for example, go to the CNet RSS page and click the All Reviews link. Right-click or use CTRL+C to copy the URL from the address bar of your browser, which should show a page full of XML code. Go back to your newsreader, choose the category where you want the new subscription to live (Business, Entertainment, the *New York Times*), and select New or New Channel from the File menu. In most cases, the URL you copied should automatically be pasted into the URL field in the New Channel wizard. If not, you can cut and paste the URL yourself.

Step 4: Customize



find specific information. Fortunately, newsreaders include useful tools for finding articles. A Filter tool will show only articles that contain a keyword you specify.



Most RSS readers come

This may also be labeled Search. To use it, type a keyword directly into the Filter/Search bar. For example, if you were looking at a listing of apartments for rent, you might want to enter **1BD** to search for one-bedroom apartments. Press Enter, and your newsreader should display only articles containing that keyword. To go back to the full article list, click the drop-down control for the Filter bar and set the keyword to None. Whenever you find an article you want to save for later, select it, then click the Edit menu. Choose "Copy to news bin," and the article will be saved in a News Bin, which you can access in the left-hand panel.



Some readers include the ability to set a *watch*, an automatic search through all your incoming feeds for a specific keyword. For example, you could enter **GIST** as a watch. If any article in any feed you subscribe to mentions GIST, the article will be included in the Watch List. To set a watch, open the File menu, choose New, then select New Watch. Enter a title for it in the dialog box that comes up, then

enter a search term in the keyword field. Click Add to put the search term into the keyword list. Click OK, and your watch will be active, and it will appear in the Watch list in the left panel. The Watch panel shows how many articles have come in with each keyword. Click any of your watches to see the articles it has caught.



Step 5: Prune your feeds

Eventually, you'll probably end up with more feeds than you want or can read regularly. In most readers, to delete a feed you're no longer interested in, you simply delete its title. Then your RSS reader won't seek out that information anymore, and you won't get any content from the publisher unless you go to its site or resubscribe to the feed.

¡VISTA, NO! ¡WAIT, SI!



Just in case you missed my recent email alert. If you're thinking of upgrading to Windows Vista,

DON'T! I believe Microsoft has a lot of fine-tuning to do before the program will be useful to most people. On one of my newest machines Vista came standard, but I dislike it immensely. Many things seem to have been changed just for the sake of change (or appearance). I have found a total of ONE (1) of those changes that I consider worthwhile: the new

replacement for Outlook Express, Windows Mail (a HORRIBLE program overall), has a superb Spam blocker. That's it!

Otherwise Vista is terribly bloated, agonizingly slow and a miserable memory hog. Having said that, if you're buying a new machine and do not have the option of keeping XP, just be sure you get at least 2GB of RAM and things will be better for you (after you finish tearing your hair out, reconfiguring almost everything and finding new software and hardware to replace the XP stuff you had so that it is compatible with Vista).

PLANNING TO TAKE YOUR COMPUTER IN FOR VIRUS, SPAM, ADWARE OR SPYWARE RECOVERY?

If so, try your best to backup or copy all of your critical files to external disk or other medium for loading up to your repaired machine. That's because the expedient way for "repair folk" to handle your problem is to completely reformat your hard drive and reinstall a fresh operating system. When they do that you lose everything on your hard drive. The better, but much tougher and more time-consuming approach is to track down and remove all the viruses, Trojans, etc. But few people will take that time unless you specifically ask them to do that. And, to be completely forthcoming, there are reasons for that approach beyond laziness or profit margin interests: sometimes, after all of that work, it proves impossible to recover enough of the original operating system to actually resolve the problem and you have to reformat the drive anyhow!

In summary, just try to keep

1. Your critical files backed up at least on CD or DVD media,
2. Your system virus free and
3. Your computer guru happy!

RECOGNITION SECTION



This month I owe CNET and Yahoo! both considerable gratitude. They produced excellent articles I was able to "steal" from liberally to create this primer on RSS feeds. I find them both to be reliable and accurate sources of information, but I use CNET a lot.

Not only can you find instruction and help for virtually every computer-related issue on CNET, but reviews and buying advice for hardware and software is a large part of the popular site.

Additionally, Download.com is a very important part of CNET. I always study their editor and consumer reviews on software I am considering. Their ratings are the most reliable I've found. You can search or arrange their listings in order of their review ratings, user ratings, price, application or alphabetically by name. And many of the software they (and I) like best is FREE!

CARDS AND LETTERS

Your emails to me are very helpful in determining where to put emphasis in future newsletters. Please keep them coming. And, of course, I really appreciate the compliments and kudos.



Barry Codron lives (with his wife and doggie and near his children and grandchildren) in the Sacramento area. He is technically retired (from the Air Force, he's proud to say), but often consults in areas including technology and music, among other fields that pique his interest from time to time. He welcomes your questions, comments or corrections.

Email him at barry.mart@sbcglobal.net.

