

Really Simple Story Reading

RSS – Really Simple Syndication – is a form of web feed that supplies subscribers with a feed of new content. Think of them as your own virtual newspaper boy or girl, bringing you the news or information you select as and when it is published or updated.

The concept has actually been around in one form or other since 1999, but has become much more popular in the last few years. This is probably to some degree driven by both embedding the ability to receive RSS feeds into Internet Browsers, but also the growth in blogs. As bloggers often post erratically the benefit of an RSS feed is that instead of you having to keep checking the site in question for new content, the content comes to you when it is published. This saves the reader a lot of time potentially wasted checking sites when nothing has changed.

In order to gain the most from RSS feeds it is a very good move to subscribe to an RSS reader. There are many of these out there – Google Reader, Bloglines, Feed Demon are some examples – some are free and some charge a fee. I personally use one of the free ones – Bloglines, www.bloglines.com. The power of a service such as Bloglines is that not only can you bring together and organise all of the feeds that you subscribe to in one place, but you can then access these feeds from anywhere where you can access the Internet. In practice this means I am able to catch up with my feeds at work, home and even on the move via my mobile phone. This flexibility means I can read the stories it delivers to me pretty much anytime and anyplace – even while out walking my dog!

So what sites can you subscribe to? The answer is pretty much any. From mainstream editorial news sites such as the bbc.co.uk or guardian.co.uk to blogs such as techcrunch.com or gigaom.com. You can also subscribe to the kind of reputation management RSS feeds mentioned in the earlier social bookmarking and microblogging articles. That way you can stay on top of what people are saying about your organisation online. In fact Bloglines itself is a community and as with the other community tools you can even search within Bloglines for particular terms and so harness the RSS feeds of the community as a whole for your research or reputation management purposes.

Given the power of this tool it is perhaps unsurprising that a recent piece of research put the number of people who subscribe to RSS feeds in the US at around 30million.

Watch out newspaper boys and girls, your days could be numbered!