

How Can RSS Feeds Help Your Business?

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What Are RSS Web Feeds?

RSS is an acronym for Really Simple Syndication. Many websites, blogs, and news feeds produce RSS feeds or webfeeds in an XML format. These are known as: "RSS feed", "webfeed", "RSS stream", or "RSS channel".

Atom feeds are also published by many of the websites and blogs. The Atom Publishing Protocol (APP for short) is another type of XML formatted HTML page.

The idea with both RSS and Atom feeds are, they can be subscribed to in a RSS/Atom online or local feed reader or aggregator. Many of the new web browsers such as Internet Explorer 7 are coming standard with the built in RSS readers. The beauty of this type of subscription is that when a website, blog, or news feed is updated, an automatic ping is sent out to let the world know that new information is available. Not only is the ping sent out, but the information can be sent directly to the RSS reader before it is ever viewed by the subscriber. This provides a means of collecting information about various news stories, products, or services provided by companies or a select group of industries.

New RSS subscribers are growing as users discover the potential for time savings and the convenience of subscribing anonymously. A subscriber can automatically be informed when new content is provided on a particular website, or when a new newsletter is published online. This is especially useful way of subscribing to online newsletters and ezines.

Just about anything can be converted to a XML RSS feed. News stories and Blogs are just a couple of examples of items that are producing feeds. Every page of a standard website could be converted or just a few select pages that might get updated quite frequently are good candidates for producing RSS feeds. Applications for this are quite diverse. Engineering data could be collected from various sources and merged into a single RSS feed. A private group Blog or Wiki (A website where anyone can edit the information) could be set up to produce an RSS feed. That way when one person makes a change in one area, everyone could be automatically sent the updated information to their RSS readers.

Taking Advantage Of RSS For Your Business Website

The Internet is about the sharing of information, business and consumer marketing, advertising, and sales. Many times websites are looking to syndicate their articles on other websites. Using RSS for syndication purposes is easier than you think. First off, I am not a lawyer. The use of copyright published material is constantly being tested on the Internet. Most information is copyrighted online and the taking of complete published works would be viewed as a copyright infringement. However, taking a snippet of information and giving credit to the source has been done since the beginning of published research papers. The search engines themselves fall under a category referred to the "fair use doctrine."

The "fair use doctrine" and copyrights have gone through a number of challenges with one of the more recent challenges coming from AFP, a French News service provider. AFP took Google to court and did not like the fact that Google was displaying headlines, snippets of information, and links to AFP French News service. Belgium News also sued Google on the same context. A Belgian court ruling dictated the removal of the content from the Google News website and also required a posted copy of the ruling be displayed on the Google Belgium home page for some period of time. An interesting note, is that any news service provider can simply opt out of the Google News pages to begin with. So, in the opinion of this author, the Belgium lawsuit was somewhat of a stunt by the Belgium press. Belgium may have won a battle, but they might have lost the war.

Let's get back to the business of business. There are several ways a business can take advantage of using RSS feeds to market and advertise online. Any company can create a Blog, which outputs RSS feeds and have those feeds automatically published at other websites. For example, syndicated columnists often write their articles on their blogs and the information is

automatically picked up by newspapers and online news services around the globe. These are then republished with the authors permission in other publications. If your business is a specialized business, consider writing content for technical publications in the company blog. Then have other web sites reproduce your works with a stipulation that the link back to your website must be maintained. Additionally, a very good way of promoting your company is to have these snippets of your technical publications on other areas of your company website. This is like adding fresh content to your pages on a regular basis, and the search engines love that.

There are a number of free and commercial programs available for including RSS feeds into websites. Several software programs that are worth looking into for a website are [rss2html](#), [CaRP](#), and [FeedBurner](#). To obtain the maximum value of having the articles and links included into the website from a search standpoint, it is best to use a program that outputs a feed to PHP format or a Server Side Include feed output. Both of these require specific web page file types to include the feed into the web page. Javascript is another available option for just about any type of page, but will not provide the same search benefit as the others. This is because search engine spiders do not place the Javascript sections into the search catalog database and will not pick up the keywords in those sections.

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