

For You Today

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The Need

People interested in daily news are in a tough situation. Newspapers provide a tactile experience and constrain the amount of time spent reading news. However, many newspapers are in decline, and subscriptions may be cost prohibitive. Facebook is a popular online source of news, but it is designed to increase engagement (time spent on Facebook) instead of providing the information that users care about. Online sources, whether Facebook, RSS, Substack, or other technologies, also potentially provide an unbounded limit on the time spent consuming news as people follow embedded links, further keeping people glued to their computing devices. People need a way to read the news they care about the most, away from screens, in an affordable format.

Our Solution

For You Today is a native desktop application that collates news from online sources selected by customers. It then prints a physical copy daily on the user's local printer after programmatically laying out the collected stories, images, and other resources. For You Today keeps costs down by limiting its documents to two pages, printed duplex if the customer's printer supports it. Like a newspaper, this creates a physical artifact for users that also constrains the amount of time spent on news.

The Competition

Substack is an email-based subscription newsletter. It supports an RSS aggregator as well in a separate application. Feedly is an online RSS aggregator using an AI recommendation engine. Feedly also supports aggregating email newsletters. Facebook is a social media platform where ~30% of US adults receive their news. It tracks how long people use the service and attempts to increase the time by showing engaging postings.

For You Today differs by providing a daily physical newsletter; by not making recommendations; and also by being a free product. Further, For You Today is an application on customers' computers and not hosted remotely. People using For You Today are interested in a customized, physical news document that doesn't collect or sell usage metrics. Since For You Today limits the printed newsletter's length, it's also meant for people who are OK with a subset of all possible stories.

Sample UI

🍏 Finder

[FYT] [Network] Jan 1 06:00

Configuration options up top. Printer settings opens OS config dialog.

Information (including when to print and the email address to use for newsletters) down below.

Manage Newsletter...
Printer Settings...

Printing at 6 a.m.
FYTa938q7@gmail.com

For You Today

Name	Type	Source
leadertelegram.com Follow the L	RSS	https://www.leadert
Crossword — Shepherd Express	RSS	https://shepherdexp

Print at 6:00 a.m. ▾

Email for Subscriptions: FYTa938q7@gmail.com

Generate

Close

Entering a new source automatically populates the name and type. May want to change this to use a + button instead that prompts for the source RSS or email sender.

Scope

For You Today will be a node.js service running on Windows and macOS with a service tray icon interface and will target modern (Windows 11, macOS Monterey) operating systems. Computers capable of running these operating systems should suffice for For You Today as we primarily deal with text. Potential users will also need a local printer. We plan to use Electron, sqlite3, and PDFKit to generate the newsletter. For You Today will not include any recommendation algorithms or support social media.

Our minimum criteria for success includes:

1. The service should automatically print a document at the specified time of day.
2. Users should be able to enter an RSS feed.
3. The service should automatically layout a text-based newsletter using the specified RSS feed.

Should time permit, additional goals include the following:

1. The service should include images in the newsletter.
2. Users should be able to manage multiple RSS feeds.
3. Users should be able to sign up for an email newsletter using a generated email account.
4. The service should include emails in the generated account in the newsletter.
5. The service should decide which sources to include based on whether the source was recently included or not.
6. Users should be able to specify a maximum newsletter page length greater than 2.
7. The service should include an always-included advertising feed based on IP address.

Potential Pitfalls

While we have experience with JavaScript, we have less experience with node.js; further, we haven't used Electron or PDFKit previously. Should generating the PDF from node.js be problematic, we'll generate an HTML document and use a command-line tool to convert it to a PDF. If we find Electron to be problematic, we intend to pivot to using Java instead.

Another potential problem is handling email. We've mitigated this by pushing it into an optional feature for now. We're also concerned that people won't want to have randomly generated email accounts (or that such accounts might violate terms of services), and so we would also need to investigate parsing a specific email account and marking messages as being read.