

Bye-bye Google Reader

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Yesterday Google announced that they will shut down Google Reader July 1st. In a way this announcement didn't surprise me, as my own use of RSS readers has gone down in favor of news readers such as Flipboard and using Twitter as a discovery tool. And built-in support for RSS had slowly been depreciated in web browsers such as Firefox (version 4, 2011) and Safari (version 6, 2012).

Although RSS (and the related Atom) may never have caught on with the typical web user, it is an essential tool for scholarly content. It is the best format to subscribe to journal table of contents, much more suitable than email alerts. JournalTOCs is a good place to get started, but most publishers prominently display the RSS icon. RSS is also great for searches you want to do regularly and is supported by PLOS, PubMed, and others. Because it is a machine-readable format, it is also used by many websites to automatically read in article information. RSS feeds for journal table of contents differ in format, but CrossRef in 2009 has posted recommendations for publishers.

Google Reader is of course only one of many RSS readers, so this announcement shouldn't have any immediate impact. Nevertheless it is probably another sign that the web is moving away from RSS, and that we should start to think about alternatives for distributing tables of content. Or that we should use different strategies for finding interesting articles that have recently been published, e.g. follow the article recommendations in your social network.