

Paul Stamatiou

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startup guy living in SF

@Stammy

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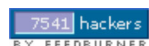
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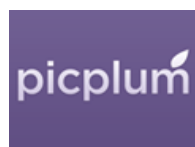
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HOW TO: Getting Started with RSS

13 Nov 2005

RSS has become a valuable technology for everything from casual web users to webmasters. According to a recent Yahoo survey only 12% of internet users are aware of RSS and a mere 4% have knowingly used RSS. RSS exists as a means to gather and display information quickly and easily. By the end of this article, you should know what RSS is and how to use it to make your life easier.

What exactly is this RSS thing?

RSS stands for several things, the most widely accepted being *Really Simple Syndication*. RSS is often described as being a feed, which one subscribes to. RSS feeds are frequently updated and distributed in the [XML](#) format, allowing for custom tags. You have probably seen small, often orange, RSS or XML icons on websites. These icons link to that website's feed. We still haven't gotten to what kind of content RSS feeds hold. It depends on whose feed you are viewing, but RSS feeds often include the title of the article and a small excerpt or even the whole article. Viewing someone's feed is referred to as aggregation as you are gathering all of the latest entries. RSS has become extremely popular with blogs as the headline format comes naturally.

Why should I use it?

Using RSS can save you lots of time on a daily basis. Let's say you visit a collection of 5 tech news websites three times a day. Currently, you visit them one by one in your browser, look for a new story and then go on. Going through all 5 sites might take 3-4 minutes or more if you find a new article. With RSS, all you do is go into an RSS feed reader, or RSS aggregator, and you will instantly know which websites have new articles and which don't. You will also be able to see past entries with RSS. If you were to only visit the website, you could miss an article if you don't visit frequently enough or get bored of seeing the same article if you visit too frequently. RSS fits in perfectly with this scenario. Now, imagine if you wanted to keep tabs on 25 websites. RSS easily proves indispensable. You have probably already used RSS before... Google's customizable homepage gets your news from RSS feeds, as does My Yahoo.

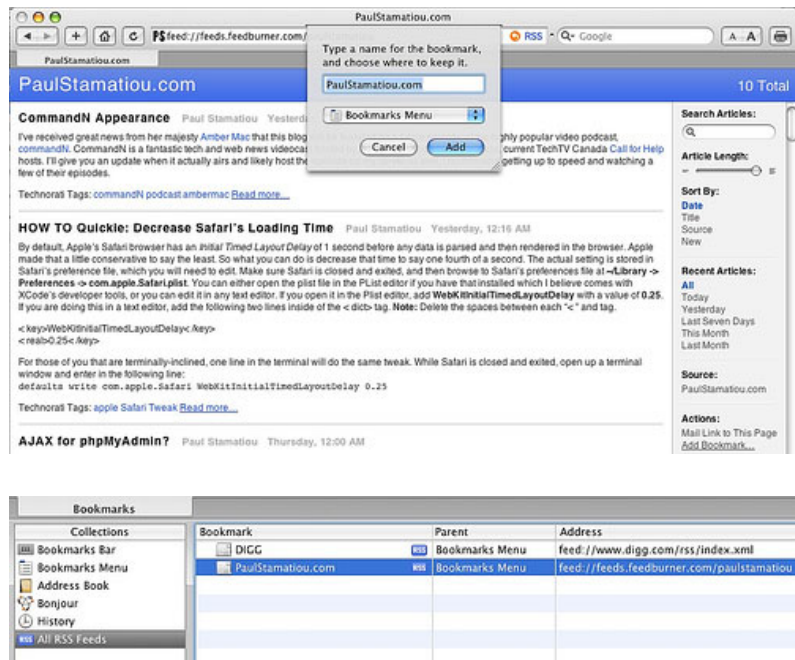
Using RSS

So now that you've got a grasp of the guiding concept behind RSS, you must be eagerly awaiting your first aggregation. First, go out and find a feed to use. If you are using Apple's Safari browser or Mozilla's Firefox you can automatically find out if that website has an accessible feed, even before scouring the page for an RSS icon. In Safari a blue RSS icon appears to the right of the URL in the address bar and in the Firefox an orange icon appears in the same location.

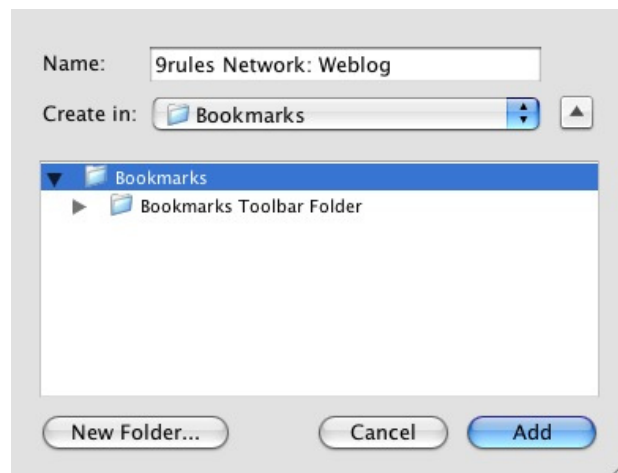




Clicking on the RSS icon in Safari will load a simple feed reader, where you can click **Add Bookmark...** on the right pane. The feed will now be viewable in the Safari bookmarks manager under **All RSS Feeds**.



In Firefox clicking the orange icon will ask you where you want to save the feed. Firefox deals with feeds as *live bookmarks*. Going to the place where you saved the "bookmark" in Firefox will show a folder with an expand arrow. Clicking on the arrow will show the latest entries on that particular website, with the most recent on the top.



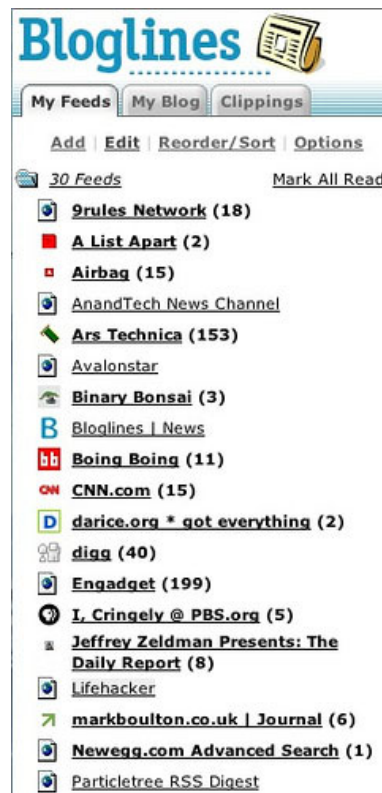


However, your browser might not always find the site's feed (not all websites have feeds). This is your cue to look for any feed-related items throughout the webpage. Many websites have a FeedBurner feed, often linked to via an icon that looks like a counter, which displays that websites current feed subscribers. Once you find such a feed icon, right click the icon or text link and copy the link location. We will then paste this into a feed aggregator in a little while.

Setting Up and Using an Aggregator

While the in-browser feed readers are convenient they are still quite rudimentary. You should consider switching to a full-fledged feed aggregator for more features and increased usability. There are many feed readers to choose from, each have different levels of complexity and features. There are essentially two types: web-based and application-based. With a web-based aggregator you can check your feeds from any computer but this comes at the cost of limited functionality and speed. With application-based feed readers you get excellent features and speed but lack mobility. You don't have to decide just yet, I'll go over configuring both types.

First off, we'll start with a web-based feed reader. The most best and popular online feed reader, in my opinion, is [Bloglines](#). Sign up for an account and click **My Feeds** on the top left. Test out Bloglines by adding a few feeds. When you setup Bloglines for the first time, it will suggest a few feeds to subscribe to. I usually do not accept them and just add my own. Below My Feeds should be a **Add** link that you will click.



You will be on a subscribe page now. If you found the feed on the website you can paste that in here. However, Bloglines has a feature where you can just type in the URL of the website and it will search for feeds. It may find several feeds and other times it will not find any.

To avoid confusion about which feed to use, I suggest using the one shown on the website as that is the one they want you to use. Sometimes they will place a link to their FeedBurner feed and forget to remove the old feed. Either way, whether you enter a [feed](#) or URL, click **Subscribe** and use the default options. Do this several times with some more feeds and you will have setup Bloglines. Everytime you login you can click **My Feeds** and instantly find out how many of your feeds have new posts you have not read yet. Unread feeds will be bolded and have the number of new

stories in parentheses. Bloglines provides a simple way to read RSS feeds from anywhere, but is not the fastest and most feature-rich solution.

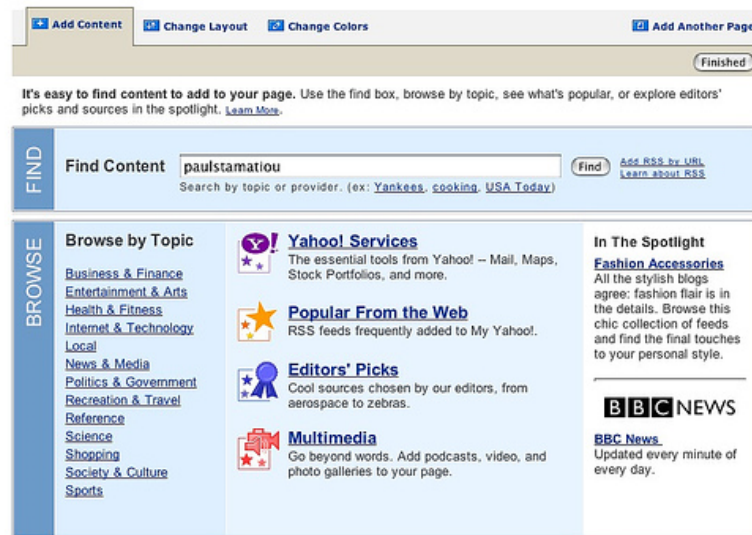
Google Personalized Home

Google's recently launched personalized home, accessible via google.com/ig allows people to keep track of several feeds. You will have to have a Gmail or Google account for this to work though. Go to the personalized home website and login. Click the button labeled **Add Content** in the upper left corner. Google already has several feeds from which you can choose, but we are interested in the **Create a Section**. Click to expand this section and then add the URL of a feed you wish to add then click **Go**. The section will be added to your personalized page, where you can drag it wherever you want. Click **Close** when you have added all the feeds you wish to add right now.



My Yahoo!

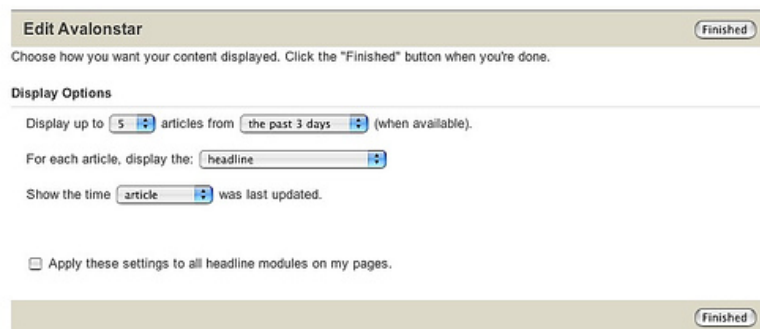
Yahoo has simplified the whole user interface when it comes to reading feeds. Many websites now have *add to My Yahoo* icons which you can click and instantly add the feed to your personalized My Yahoo page. Assuming you have created a Yahoo account, logged in and gone to the My Yahoo page, click on **Add Content** under the search bar. On this page you can easily find content (the word Yahoo uses for feeds) by searching.



After you search for something, you can just click the **ADD** icon next to the search result you wish to add. Yahoo automatically adds it to your My Yahoo page.



However, it may not be where you want it but this can be changed by visiting **Change Layout**. Depending on your taste you can select two or three columns to organize your feeds. You can also move where each feed is displayed by selecting a piece of content and using the arrow buttons. When you are done with that click **Finished**. Yahoo lets you change the way your feeds are displayed even more by clicking the small **edit** button on the top right corners on each content box. On the proceeding page you can set various appearance options such as whether to display short summaries for each entry. Overall, I think My Yahoo is one of the easier ways to aggregate your feeds.



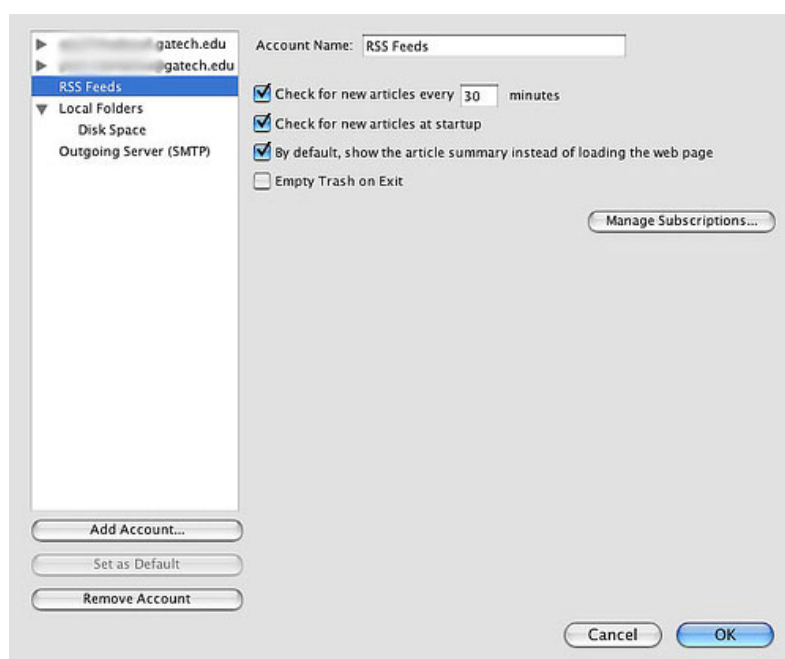
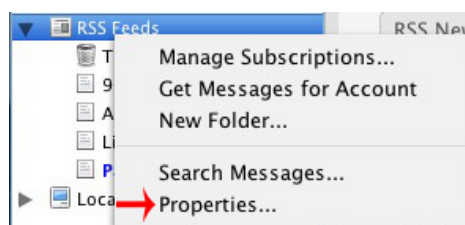
Using Thunderbird for RSS

Before I delve into RSS-only applications I am going to show you how to setup a program you already have to gather your feeds. [Mozilla Thunderbird](#) has rapidly replaced Microsoft Outlook (which also does RSS) as the email client of choice for thousands of people. The current versions of Thunderbird include excellent support for RSS. Go to **File > New > Account...** and in the window that pops up, select **RSS**

News & Blogs and click continue. Give it a name, click continue and then click done.



In the pane on the left under your email account, you will now see a spot for your feeds. Right click on the name of the RSS account and click **Properties...**

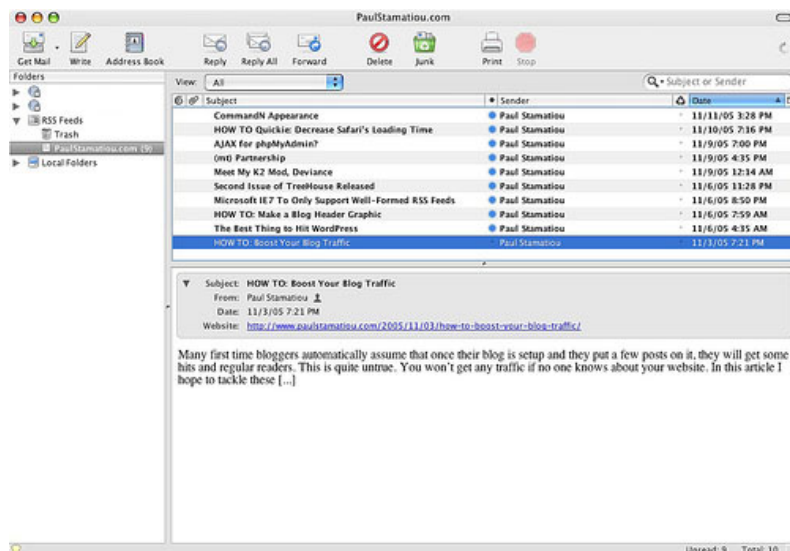


I recommend setting **Check for new articles every _ minutes** to around 15-30 minutes. This won't put too much stress on your feeds' servers. Setting it too low on a small blog or website is not playing nice. If you only subscribe to big name feeds such as CNN, feel free to crank it down as they have wicked fast servers. Check the boxes for **Check for new articles on startup** and **By default, show the article summary instead of loading the web page** if they are not already. Click **OK**. Loading the article summary is much faster than loading the web page. Right click on the RSS account once more, but this time select **Manage Subscriptions....** From here you can click

Add, type in the feed URL (you must know the URL to the feed, it will not work if you just type in the website URL), and click **OK**.

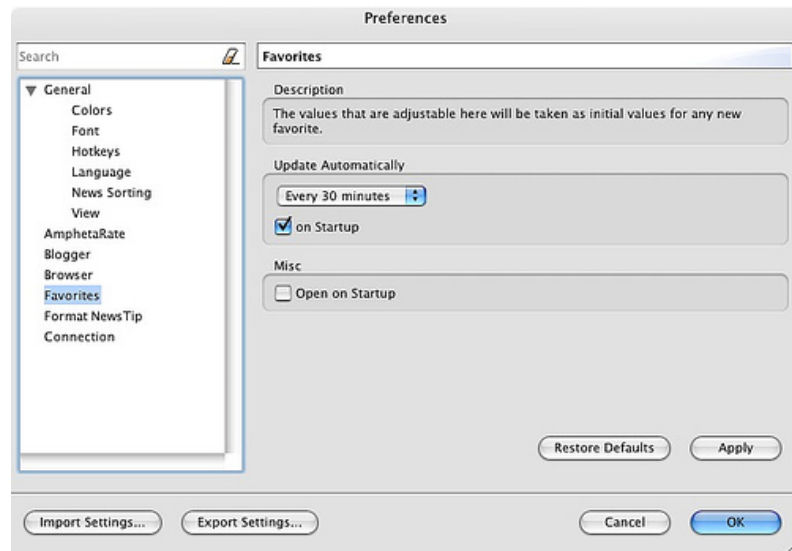


The format should be similar to Bloglines in that unread feeds are bolded and have the number of new articles in parentheses. Clicking on a feed will bring up the latest articles in the top right pane (make sure to organize by date published by clicking on the **Date** box). Furthermore, clicking on an article will load an excerpt or full article, depending on the feed.

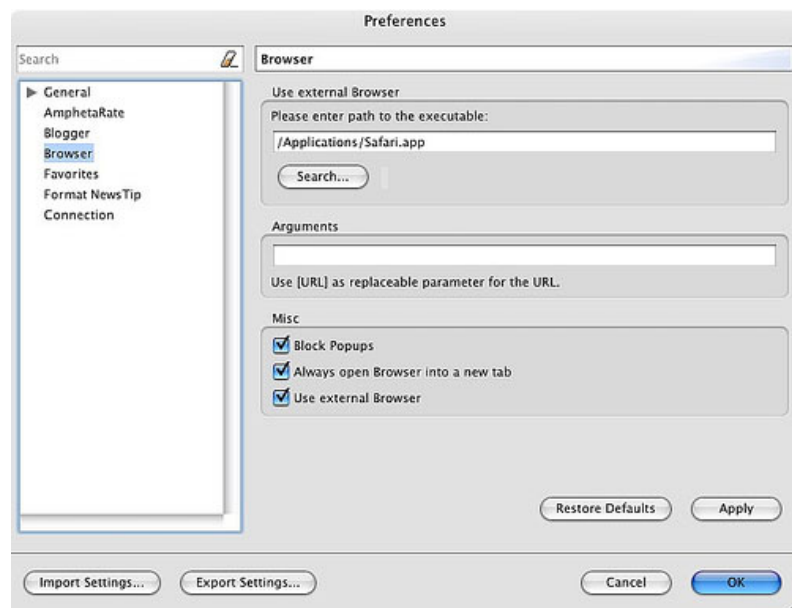


RSSOwl

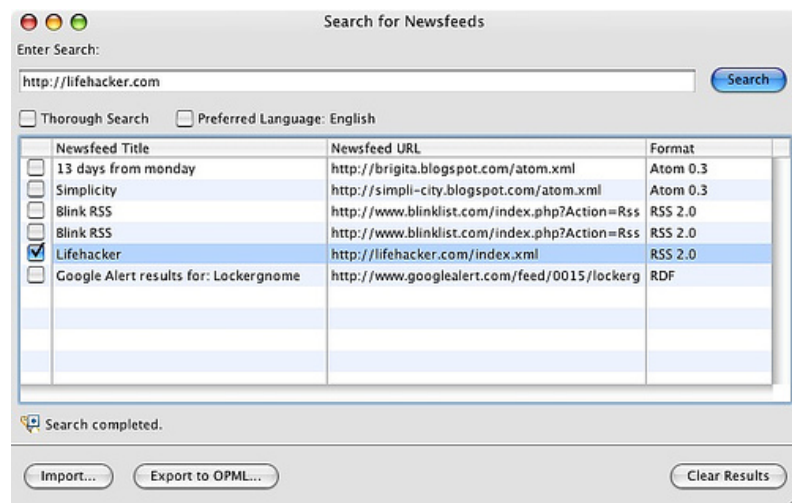
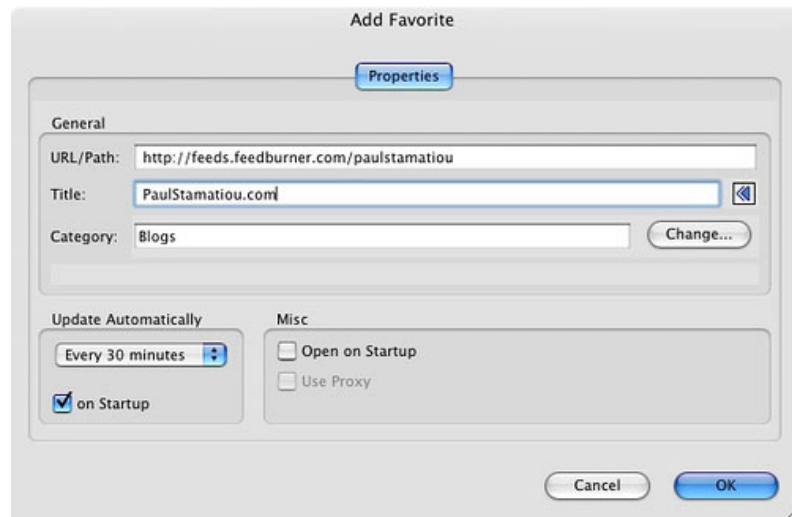
One of the more popular standalone feed aggregators has been [RSSOwl](#). Built on the Java programming language, it can be run on many operating systems. Version 1.2 was recently released and has been highly improved, making it realistic choice for your RSS reading. Download and install the latest version and fire it up for the first time. Click **Tools > Preferences...** and then on **Favorites** on the left. Under **Update Automatically** set the time to **Every 15 or 30 Minutes** and check the box for **on Startup**.



Then go over to **Browser** and give RSSOwl the location of your primary web browser. This is not necessary, but I recommend using an external browser to view links you click on rather than RSSOwl's internal one. This is also a good time to make sure that **Block Popups**, **Always open browser in new tab** and **Use external browser** are all checked. Click **OK**.



There are two main ways of adding feeds in RSSOwl. One way can be found by clicking **New** and the other can be accessed via **Tools > Search for newsfeeds....** The feed search feature of RSSOwl is my favorite feature that RSSOwl brings to the table. You can type in keywords or an entire URL and it will still find the feed you are looking for. Once you find the feed you want, put a check mark next to it and only it. Click **Import...** and then choose a folder to place your feed and click **OK**. If you do not have any folders yet, you can create a new one by clicking **Add Category....** Using Import is ideal for adding multiple feeds at the same time, but if you just want to add one, right clicking on the feed and selecting **Add to Favorites...** is a bit more efficient.



Now that you have several feeds added to your favorites, we will need to update or aggregate the feeds with **Favorites > Aggregate All Favorites**. To actually view the entries from a particular feed, you must double click that feed from the left pane. A new tab will pop up and from there you can select an entry to read. The format is similar to Thunderbird's.

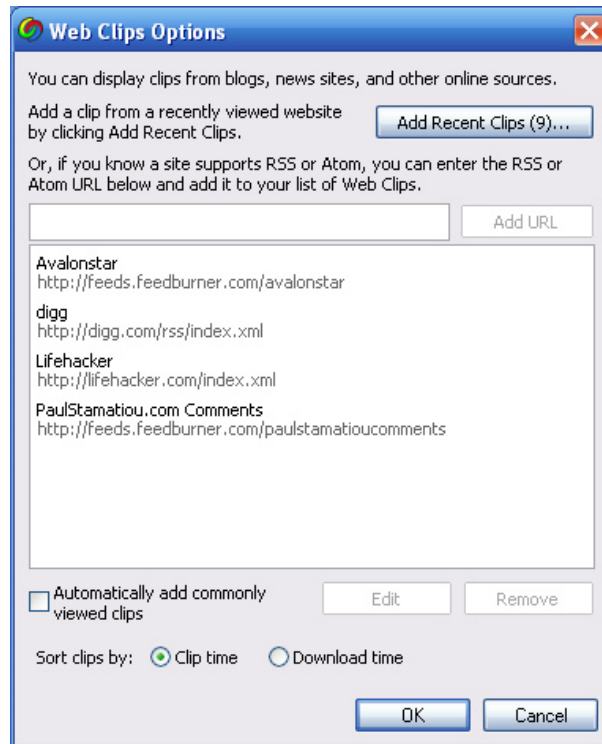
Google Desktop

[Google Desktop](#) aims to be your one-stop shop for everything from news to maps. Once you download and install Google Desktop (currently Windows only), right click the taskbar icon and select **sidebar**. As Yahoo called feeds *Content*, Google calls them *Web Clips*. According to [Search Engine Watch](#) Web Clips are...

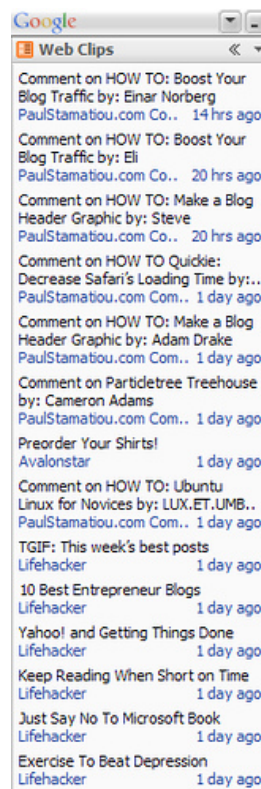
Web Clips is the Google name for RSS feeds. In other words, the sidebar can also function as an RSS or ATOM aggregator. Web Clips also offers an autodiscover function. Say you visit a bunch of sites that have feeds but can't find the feed. Simply click and add them to your list of feeds.

Once the sidebar is up, it is probably cluttered with many things. Give Web Clips some more room and remove things you won't use by right clicking the bar for that item and selecting **Remove**. Now that Web Clips has some room to breathe, it needs some feeds! Right click the Web Clips bar and select **Options....** This window is easy

enough; add a website URL or feed URL and it will get added to your Web Clips.



One important thing to note about Web Clips is that your feeds will get mixed together. I recommend unchecking **Automatically add commonly viewed clips** as it tends to add random feeds, which can get rather annoying. That's pretty much it for Google Desktop. Be on the lookout for plugins that are being released daily; a great RSS functionality extending one could come out at any time.



There's More?

As I said earlier in this guide, there are many RSS readers out there. I couldn't

possibly go over every single one so I just highlighted some of my favorites. If you have not found a favorite yet, you might want to take a look at [NetNewsWire](#), [RSS Bandit](#), [Lektora](#), [NewsGator](#), [Sage](#) (Firefox Extension) and [NewsFire](#). If you have any question about anything discussed in this guide or even if it's something completely unrelated, I'm sure I can help somehow so [visit my contact page](#). If you haven't subscribed to my RSS feed yet, [here's the link](#). Please subscribe so you will know what I'm babbling about that day and chime in. Hopefully you have learned something today, as that's always my goal.

Come back soon!

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[Clinical Cases and Images](#) 5 years ago

I made a short tutorial showing [How to Subscribe to Medical RSS Feeds on Bloglines](#), it's a Wink presentation as a PDF file and is freely downloadable.

1 person liked this.



[google sniper](#) 7 months ago in reply to Clinical Cases and Images

good tutorial...thanks for posting it



[Sander](#) 5 years ago

Nice article :-)

I like also syndication of rss on websites, but they are hard to find.



[Vinu](#) 5 years ago

excellent article man ...

I am making a list of good resources .. incase you have any do let me know!

<http://del.icio.us/vranganatha...> 101



[Myles Braithwaite](#) 5 years ago

How do you get that cool style for windows?



[Paul Stamatiou](#) 5 years ago

Myles: I am using the XP Energy Blue 2 theme. It is the default Windows Media Center Edition theme that Microsoft released after lots of talk. It's a free download on the Microsoft site.

Like Reply



Andy 5 years ago

If you'd like to get started creating an RSS feed for your own website, check out this brief tutorial complete with code samples.

http://paininthetech.com/rss_f...

Like Reply



Ahmed 5 years ago

Wonderful article - i've now gone ahead and made my site RSS compatible with a ton of different feeds. Also i think Bloglines is the best service available for reading RSS feeds (in my opinion).

Like Reply



women 5 years ago

rss is great!

Like Reply



acrv 5 years ago

i used bloglines and sharp reader (i am grateful to their providers) and tried many others rss aggregators. but I don't understand why bloglines is considered the best - the fact that it is so popular is a plus factor? now i use CITA RSS Aggregator, that combines newsfeeds and podcasts. i think it is enough to be preferred to bloglines (but i am considering all its attributes). did you try it?

Like Reply



Richard Holden 5 years ago

Does anyone know how to properly synchronise Bloglines and RSSOwl?

Like Reply



Dan McComb 5 years ago

Thanks for the tip on how to set up a new category based on a feed in Google personalized home. I've been using that for awhile, but didn't know you could do that.

Like Reply



Marshall Kirkpatrick 5 years ago

I've set up a demo account in Newsgator for anyone interested in seeing how that works and what a reader seeded with feeds is like. Check out <http://newsgator.com> username marshalldemo pw welcome.

I've also written about subscribing to the RSS feeds of searches, one of the best uses of RSS in my mind. That's at <http://marshallk.com/rss-not-s...>

Like Reply



Ken Savage 5 years ago

You mentioned how to read RSS feeds but didnt mention how to get RSS feeds on your site.
That's what I thought this article was about.

Any ideas on how to get RSS on a website that's NOT running a blog or CMS?

Like Reply



Paul Stamatiou 5 years ago

Ken: I wasn't aiming for that when I wrote this article, but I've [found a solution for you](#).

Like Reply



Ken Savage 5 years ago

Yea no sweat. I was doing a search for how to create an RSS feed WITHOUT using a CMS or blog software and somehow I found your post.

Thx for the link I'll check it out.

UPDATE: seems FeedTier is only a hosted link and I need something for my client. I do appreciate the help though.

Thx and drink up!

Like Reply



J Hallgren 5 years ago

Found this via post at FeedBurner...nice write-up! Just skimmed it so far but looks very promising...I'm a newbie at RSS...am creating one via Perl script for my site...suggestion: I found SharpReader to be my preferred stand-alone reader...tried BlogExpress and FeedReader...not as good, IMHO.

Like Reply



Vijay 5 years ago

this is a great way to save time viewing pages of [internet.it](#) helps in maintaining the relevancy of information that we are in need of.good going.

Like Reply



ed 5 years ago

i need help to put on my site any tutorials or help

Like Reply



Paul 4 years ago

You guys really should be working in online documentation.

Screenshots were great for figuring out about rss for thunderbird!!

Thanks

Like Reply



indu 4 years ago

nice tutorial.....

Like

Reply

**Online TV** 4 years ago

Great job, it's a good read for new users.

Like

Reply

**ReM** 4 years ago

neat tutorial buddy! since i've been using RSS, a tool called feedity.com has helped me a lot to create RSS from feed-less webpages. very nifty!

Like

Reply

**tanglly** 4 years ago

I need Rss !

Like

Reply

**Micahville** 4 years ago

Thanks for the useful post. I was going to do something like this for my blog, and now I have a point of reference. Much appreciated.

Like

Reply

**Create RSS Feeds Online** 4 years ago

Really great information on RSS. There are also some cool RSS creation tools available here.

Like

Reply

**Deborah Murphy** 4 years ago

Again thank you. This is the send post on blogging from that I have visited. Both were worth printing out so that I could really study your suggestions.

By visiting your archives, I might just survive because you really try to provide real live examples. I almost always need to see something applied.

I will continue to lose myself in your archives a while longer....

Like

Reply

**RedDawg** 3 years ago

Sorry if this sounds dumb but...

I support a website for one of my company's facilities. I have a dire need to be able to read ONE (1) XML file from the National Weather Service and post its contents dynamically on my inTRANet web site. I've tried to come up to speed on RSS readers but keep getting confused. Here's my limitations (corporate posed): IIS 6.0 with .NET on a Win2003 server is all I have. I cannot use ATOM, PHP, etc (again corp. policy).

I really don't want to use a scraper although my though process is the same:

1. Create a scheduled task to copy over the XML file from the source server (e.g. NOAA)
2. Parse the XML file into some kind of SSI that I can just reference in my web page.

Am I all wet? The reason I'm wanting this is because I live on the Gulf Coast, have been without power for the past 2 days due to hurricane Humberto which formed up 200 miles away and was only supposed to be tropical storm. We got caught with our pants down on that one.

Thanks for any help...

Like Reply



Gert 3 years ago

Hi, I have a question : for a website that uses frames I use the google picasa web fotoalbum. Now I want to go to this page using RRS feed.

Can you, via a link in the RSS feed, open de page with the link going to the page including the frames and a specific target in the main frame ?

Thanks

Gert

Like Reply



santhana 3 years ago

Yes, RSS is a great way to build your automatic traffic. so just make sure that you don't miss out.

Like Reply



Hero 3 years ago

Like Reply



Anirban 3 years ago

Nicely writtten and that makes me to use RSS now knowing it will save a lot of time following up blogs. Thanks for the infos.

Like Reply



Jeffrey Peacock 2 years ago

Great information for a beginner with RSS. Thanks.

Like Reply



Cody 2 years ago

Where can I find a good (and easy please) tutorial to install a RSS feed on a website? I googled it but never found something easy to understand....

Like Reply



Cody 2 years ago

My post didn't appear!!???!!

Like Reply



jane 2 years ago

i try

Like Reply



vthingF 2 years ago

hello sir....!i'm new in this blogosphere ..I want some RSS bottions or widgets where I should get it.?! have an account already.

thanks and more power.

Like Reply



Matt Mason 2 years ago

Just what I was looking for. Thanks.

Like Reply



Stephanie 2 years ago

Great post! I will be sharing it on mine. Now, if I can just find the email subscription button on your site instead of the RSS feeder...

Like Reply



Akan Udoeyop 1 year ago

You can host your RSS feeds for free at PulSSR.com... It's awesome!!!

Like Reply



akash 1 year ago

nise to joining with u i think will ben moved good

Like Reply



saltwater aquarium 7 months ago

Ya I also this it is great. I prefer to host my RSS feeds there as well.

1 person liked this.

Like Reply



Prazynothh 3 months ago

Information was helpful.. thanks

Like Reply



angela paul backlink 2 months ago

great tut, my guy!

Like Reply

Add New Comment

Optional: Login below.

Type your comment here.

Post as ...