



## A Faceoff with Netscape

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*Wednesday, June 16, 1999 by Dave Winer.*

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### A format split ↵

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As I've written previously, when Netscape came out with their web syndication format in March, it was too good an opportunity to pass on. We had been working in this area for over a year, on two of three sides of the problem, as a content developer, publishing an XML-syndicated channel; and as a tools vendor, providing software to organizations that develop web news channels. The third side, operating a syndication hub, was something we hadn't explored yet, because there wasn't enough support among web developers to do so.

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Enter Netscape. With some fanfare, in March they introduced RSS, and quickly there were a hundred compatible channels. We quickly shifted, did three revs of My.UserLand.Com, and now we're operating an RSS content server on the web, and are covering all three sides of this equation.

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But RSS is woefully inadequate. It's missing the key thing web writers and readers need. A channel is not a series of links pointing to articles, it's a set of paragraphs that point to one or more articles \*per paragraph\*. We told Netscape this, and they said they would work with us on the next rev of the spec.

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Now, being an experienced commercial developer for twenty years, I know that such promises mean almost nothing. And with all the departures at Netscape, it's not surprising that they went forward with the next rev without our help. When I became aware of this, we immediately tooled up a new version of our format, and addressed the issues needed to bring it to parity with RSS.

### An A-B Comparison ↵

Here's the Netscape-compatible version of the Scripting News channel:

<http://206.204.24.3/snimages/channelskinny.gif>

Now here's the "fat" version:

<http://206.204.24.3/snimages/channelfat.gif>

I think it's pretty clear that the second one is better. Writing happens in paragraphs. Web writing allows links to be anywhere. To limit channels to one link per paragraph is not good! Technology serves writers and readers, they shouldn't be limited by technology.

### **Outcome** ↩

I hope Netscape will now work with us so this world doesn't have to fragment. I think we were generous by holding back on our format to see if we could work with Netscape. We published our format publicly in 1997, long before Netscape entered this area. We informed many Netscape people about it. Unfortunately most, if not all of them no longer work at Netscape. To the current management at Netscape, whoever they may be, let's work together.

Thanks!

**Dave Winer** ↩