

Reading RSS Feeds with an RSS Aggregator

RSS or Really Simple Syndication or Rich Site Summary is the latest information management tool that is gradually earning popularity among web users and website owners. With RSS technology, it is possible to get the latest postings from your favorite websites. But clicking on the RSS or XML button in a homepage is not enough to give you the service you need. An RSS feed or code displayed in the pop-up screen if not on the main page is composed of symbols and words that would only make sense to advanced RSS users and computer programmers and software enthusiasts. Another software tool called an RSS aggregator or reader is needed.

An aggregator works by scanning the worldwide web with latest postings based on the RSS code (containing the website's URL) provided or added by the user. When it finds a new posting, news, or update, it will publish the RSS feed on your home page containing the title of the posting, which also serves as a clickable link to the website source. This RSS feed may or may not contain the whole article, a summary, and photos, depending on what RSS aggregator you are using.

Aggregators come in two types: the downloadable program or desktop-type and the online or web-based type. The desktop aggregator usually charges a certain amount for its services; this would include regular updating in the form of upgrades or patches to the original version. This type of RSS reader allows more customization of RSS feeds as well as page format or design over its on-line counterparts. But of course, price can be a drawback.

On-line or web-based aggregators are free of charge. All you need to do is register an account with them then you can start enjoying their services. Depending on the "brand" of the aggregator, customization is more limited. Some even do not allow you to customize at all.

Product and service advertisers are realizing the potential of RSS aggregators in internet marketing. In fact, several submit RSS codes to several popular web-based aggregators to reach the growing technophile and internet-based market. My Yahoo has been instrumental in popularizing RSS technology to both users and website owners and advertisers.

At present, there are many aggregators to choose from and newer versions of the same aggregator are constantly developed by its programmers.

Below are some of these desktop and online aggregators:

Desktop Aggregators

1. AmphetaDesk

Advantages:

- free
- supports Linux, Mac, and Windows
- easy addition of RSS feeds

Disadvantages:

- not maximized use of screen display
- few options for customizing

2. FeedDemon

Advantages:

- user friendly
- free trial version
- contains prepared popular feeds
- allows filtering of RSS feeds
- configurable "watch list" to manage junk RSS feeds
- search channel feature that incorporates other RSS services e.g.

Feedster

- allows feed storage for future use
- tabbed browsers for channel navigation
- built-in podcast receiver

Disadvantages:

- supports only Internet Explorer (embedded)
- paid software (`\$29.95)

Online Aggregators

1. Bloglines

Advantages:

- all major browsers supported (e.g. Netscape Navigator, Internet Explorer, Firefox)
- user-friendly especially for beginners
- free, web-based aggregator
- easy registration
- no advertisements
- contains its own directory of RSS feeds of thousands of websites
- personal email account for subscribing to newsletter emails (optional)
- allows privacy adjustments for personal blogs
- allows saved searches
- mobile version available
- 10 languages supported

- Additional add-on tools for automated blogrolls and subscription buttons

2. NewsGator

Advantages:

- free (consumer-standard version)
- provides personalized news channel
- allows translation of RSS articles into email format
- synchronization of feeds in several devices possible
- browse and search feed capabilities save time on surfing
- allows keyword filtering
- blog headlines
- button-click automatic subscription to news feeds

Disadvantage:

- Outlook-based thus limited to Windows

3. My Yahoo

Advantages:

- Free web-based aggregator
- user-friendly
- customizable home page design
- button-click subscription to RSS feeds
- built-in directory and search tool for feeds
- wide variety of feeds e.g. news (science, technology, local), weather
- connects to all Yahoo features and services

Disadvantage

- banner advertisements

There are also lightweight RSS aggregator extensions which are actually plug-ins to existing internet browsers. An example of which is Sage aggregator.

Advantages:

- free of charge
- beginner-friendly
- reads both RSS and Atom feeds
- allows feed discovery
- can be assimilated to Firefox bookmark (storage and live)
- allows OPML feed lists imports and exports
- customizable style sheets
- supports a wide range of locales e.g. Catalan, Italian, Japanese, Spanish, Korean, Polish, Slovenian, etc.

- easy installation

Disadvantages:

- good for about 12 RSS feeds
- limited use to Mozilla-Firefox and Mozilla-Firefox supported browsers

RSS developers promise better features in future versions of their aggregators. Microsoft is planning to include a built-in aggregator in their next Windows version. These developments are definitely something to look forward to by all internet aficionados.