

A Short Primer on RSS



What is it?

RSS stands for “really simple syndication.” It is perhaps one of the tech industry's silliest names or acronyms. But hiding behind it is one of the most powerful tools available to streamline your day. RSS allows you to subscribe to the output of a web site, so you can gather in one location updates from many of the web sites you would normally visit.

Why should I care?

Effective use of an RSS reader will allow you to weed out your email newsletters and other junk and focus on using email as a communications tool rather than an information-gathering tool. Your RSS reader then becomes the go-to place to read the latest news and updates.

How do I use it?

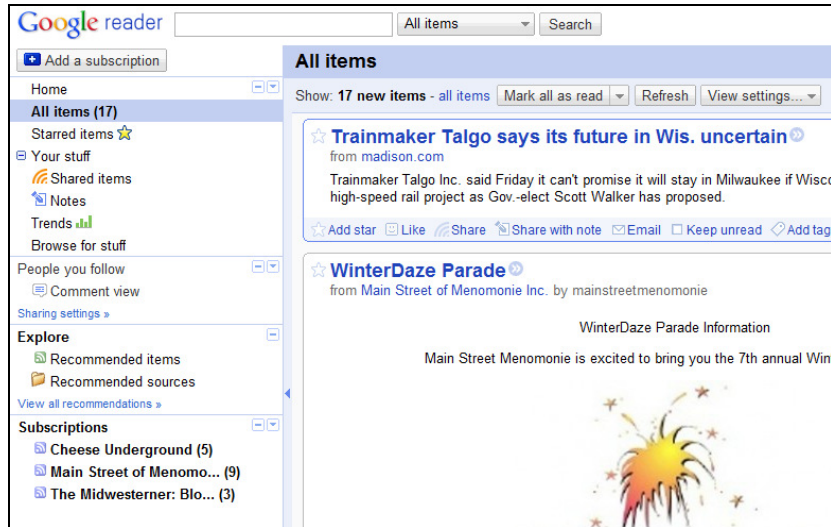
The first step in using RSS is to set up an RSS reader. There are a number of good ones available, some online and some that you install on your computer. My favorite is the free Google Reader, so the rest of this primer will focus on that. Go to <http://reader.google.com> and sign up for a free account.

Next up, to make it easier to subscribe to RSS feeds, you should install a browser plugin. If you're using Chrome or Firefox browsers, do a search for RSS plugin and the name of your browser. Both of these browsers offer plugins to allow you to subscribe to an RSS feed with one click. Internet Explorer has this capability built in.

Now it's time to start surfing and finding RSS feeds. Most newspaper web sites offer them. Most blogs offer them. Whenever you find content online that interests you, look for the RSS logo – that big orange square at the top of this primer. If you've installed a browser plugin, look for the RSS icon in your browser's address bar.

Once you find an RSS feed, you can click on the RSS icon to subscribe. You may be asked where you'd like to read the feed. If you're using Google Reader, select that. You should then be redirected into Google Reader, with your feed now showing.

After you've added a number of feeds, your Google Reader display will look something like this:



Now you're ready to start reading. Click on the All Items link on the left side of the window. Next, click the X New Items link under All Items in the middle of the screen. You're now looking at your stream of news, with most recent items first. You're looking at only new items, so once you scroll past an item, it will no longer show up.

To scroll through your unread items, you can either scroll with the mouse, or use the keyboard shortcuts – j and k will move you forward and backward through the items, while the space bar will scroll down one page at a time. Using these keyboard shortcuts you can scroll through a lot of news in a very short time.

If you find an article that interests you, you can click on the headline of the article to go to the original web site to read the article. If you want to check out items from only one of your feeds, you can click that feed in the left sidebar to display the unread items. If a feed is not showing, there are no unread items.

This is a pretty brief introduction. Please feel free to get in touch if you have any questions, and check out our web site for some more great content.



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