

Tech Talk

Navigating the world of technology one gadget at a time
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RSS Feeds



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What are RSS feeds?

RSS stands for “really simple syndication” and refers to a technology used to deliver fresh content to Internet users. Back in the old days of the Internet if you wanted to see if any content changed on a news site, you’d have to check it every few hours or subscribe to a daily email newsletter. As a way of solving this problem, RSS allows you to get notified of changes on a site by subscribing to a feed.



You simply click on the RSS icon which appears on compatible pages. Some websites even provide a list of all of their feeds on a single page for one-stop-shopping. Once you subscribe to an RSS feed you will automatically get updates from the content publisher, thus freeing you from having to check to see what’s new. This makes it easy to scan the day’s news and to stay current on your hobbies and interests.



Chicago Tribune article headlines generated by RSS as they appear in *my.yahoo.com*. To read more, you simply click on the headline link.



After you click on the headline, you will be directed to the story on the source’s site.

What's the best way to read RSS feeds?

Most people read their subscribed RSS feeds using Internet sites known as aggregators. They are called aggregators because they aggregate, or collect, information from many different sources on the Internet. Since RSS feed aggregators are Web-based, they will work on virtually any Internet-connected computer regardless of operating system. They will keep track of which items you've already read; you won't have to scan the headlines of old articles if you change from your home to your work computer.

You typically have the ability to tailor the layout of your RSS feeds in some way, such as changing the order in which they appear or grouping them into categories. This customization helps you to stay organized and lets you read your news efficiently and in an order which makes sense to you.



Google Reader, a web-based RSS aggregator, has legions of users worldwide. Because it's web-based, it can run on nearly all computers with Internet access and a web browser.

Examples of popular web-based RSS aggregators include:

- **Google Reader:** reader.google.com
- **My Yahoo:** my.yahoo.com
- **Bloglines:** www.bloglines.com

Can I access RSS feeds from my cell phone or handheld device?

In many cases, yes. Many cell phones and other handhelds allow you to subscribe to feeds using tailor-made RSS feed readers. Because RSS is largely a text-based form of communication, it is ideal for a handheld device which lacks the processing power and memory capacity of a full-fledged computer.

In addition, since some mobile phone companies charge a per-megabyte (MB) fee for data, RSS will save you from downloading unnecessary content.

Can you recommend any useful RSS feeds?

RSS feeds can be surprisingly interesting and functional. By subscribing to these feeds, you can:

- **Track a package:** Go to isnoop.net/tracking and enter a tracking number from UPS, FedEx, USPS or DHL then click “Track this Package via RSS.” The RSS feed generated by isnoop.net will be updated whenever the status of your package changes (e.g., from “in transit” to “out for delivery.”) You can even see a map of the package’s progress.

- **Learn something new every day**
A number of sites offer *xyz of the day* services designed to inform and educate. Here are a few interesting choices:



isnoop.net's package tracking site will give you updates via RSS.

- **Word of the Day** by Dictionary.com (dictionary.reference.com/wordoftheday/). You'll have a fabulous vocabulary before you know it.
- **Urban Word of the Day:** If you want to stay up-to-date on the latest street lingo (and aren't easily offended), subscribe to this feed from the Urban Dictionary (urbandictionary.com/daily.rss). Recent entries have included “you forgot Poland,” and “silent rave.”
- History buffs may wish to try [Encyclopædia Britannica's This Day in History](http://Encyclopædia Britannica's This Day in History feed) feed (www.britannica.com/eb/dailycontent/rss).

- **Track stock prices** using QuoteRSS (QuoteRSS.com). Note: this service is limited to 30 quotes per hour, so you may not want to start a day-trading business using this service.
- **Stay in the loop with Chicago's public transportation system** using the CTA Tattler's RSS Feed (ctatattler.com/index.rdf).
- **Receive notifications of local news stories** from the *Chicago Tribune* (feeds.chicagotribune.com/chicagotribune/news/local/) or the *Chicago Sun-Times* (suntimes.com/rss/news/metro/index.xml).
- **Discover online bargains** with this SlickDeals feed (feeds.feedburner.com/SlickdealsnetFP).
- **Get Hinsdale weather updates** using RSS Weather (www.rssweather.com/wx/us/il/hinsdale/rss.php)
- **Feed your addiction to comic strips** at tapestrycomics.com. Included among the over 200 choices are "Peanuts" (feeds.feedburner.com/tapestrypeanuts) and "Dilbert" (feeds.feedburner.com/tapestrydilbert).
- **Get notified of discount travel opportunities** with Orbitz.com's Chicago RSS feed (www.orbitz.com/rss/origin/CHI.rss.xml).
- **Get notified of new email messages in your gmail account:** After you sign in to your account using mail.google.com/mail/feed/atom, you can get RSS updates when a new message arrives.

If you have questions, comments or suggestions, you can visit me at the Reference Desk, contact me via email (moetting@hinsdalelibrary.info), or call me at 630-986-1976x225.

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