

Hop on the RSS bandwagon

Applies to: Microsoft Outlook 2010, Outlook 2007, Outlook 2003, Outlook 2002

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Crabby Office Lady

Really Simple Syndication (RSS) has been around for a while now yet some of you are still scratching your heads about it. This week I try to deconstruct what it is, why you need it, and how you can get it.

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Doesn't it feel like there's a new computer acronym every day? ISP, Bcc, XML — it's enough to put you off your alphabet soup. Behind these mystery monograms, however, is often something useful and good to know. RSS, for instance. RSS stands for Really Simple Syndication. Let's break that down:

- **Really** means assuredly, beyond a doubt, precisely, unmistakably.
- **Simple** denotes straightforward, facile, no problem, effortless.
- **Syndication** refers to amalgamation, a bringing together, a coalition, a set.

So, RSS means a reliable, straightforward way of gathering a bunch of ... something, and that something is content from online magazines, Web sites, news agencies, and so on. The publishers of this content make their news, blogs, and most anything else they pump out available to subscribers — and that content is usually free. Quickly said, when you troll the Internet for the type of stuff you want — daily comics, news stories, book reviews, blogs — you can subscribe to all that, and then every time the author writes something new or updates the content, it's delivered fresh, right to your door (your computer door, that is). RSS is a virtual newsboy (who brings it up to the porch, rather than leaving it to get all mucky in the gutter). You can quickly browse the story headlines and summaries and then if you're interested, click the links that take you to the full story on the original site.

What's the advantage, you may wonder? Well, take me as an example (that's what I'm here for). Before RSS, every morning I would boot up my computer, open up a browser window, and take a look at my daily dose of favorite Web content: the Chatterbox blog at Slate.com. Then, when I was too infuriated to read any longer, I'd try to calm my nerves by dashing over to another favorite site, the New York Times Books section. After that soothed me, I'd wake myself up again, get my dishy gossip at the MSNBC Entertainment section, and thank my lucky stars I'm not one (a star that is). And then of course, if time allowed, I'd read a few more of my favorite blogs (nope, I'm not disclosing what those are).

You can probably guess that all this searching and jumping from one page to another took quite a bit of time. I'd have to open up several browser windows (or use one and keep searching through my Favorites lists) and basically just hop all over the Web. When I found something new that I liked, I had to add it to Favorites, remember it, or find it all over again. Finally, I realized what this little icon means.  And I hopped on the RSS train. No more searching and jumping. All that great stuff was brought together for me, effortlessly and assuredly, by an RSS "reader," a piece of software that I downloaded and that kept and updated all of my favorite content together.

I want more (of course)

But still, something wasn't perfect. Now that I got what I wanted all in one place, I realized that what I really needed was to get all my RSS content in the same place where I spend most of my work time: Outlook. Lucky for me (and for you) Outlook 2007 offers that very feature. So, I can pop off inappropriate e-mails, try to untangle my calendar, and delay or delegate all my tasks, all while catching up on important news about which star's baby is cuter and if Lyndon LaRouche might actually be able to win over exhausted Democrats.



- 1 After you have subscribed to RSS in Outlook, a folder is displayed for the new RSS Feed in the Navigation Pane. When you open the folder, the latest items downloaded from the RSS Feed are displayed.
- 2 Outlook checks the RSS publisher's server for new and updated items on a regular schedule.
- 3 The new and updated items are downloaded to Outlook and displayed in the folder for that RSS Feed. You open, read, and delete these RSS items just as you would any mail message. You can even move, flag, or forward the items to someone else.

How? What? Where?

Okay, so you're getting the idea; good for you. Now you have to figure out whether your favorite sites have RSS content or not. Since RSS came on the scene a few years ago, there have been many icons — sign posts, as it were — to let you know that a page was available in RSS. Some said "RSS"; some said "XML"; some said "Feed"; and others used the name of an RSS reader: "NewsGator," "Atom," and "Feedster" were a few of the more popular ones.

These days there is another, standard way to tell if a site has a feed: If you're using Internet Explorer 7 (and you really should be) there is a new toolbar on the top left that has a little RSS icon: . When you see that, it means that Internet Explorer has detected that the page you're viewing has an RSS feed. Click the icon and away you go. In fact, when you do subscribe to a feed this way, you can view it in the Internet Explorer window as well as in Outlook. Best of both worlds.

I suggest you read up on how to get RSS feeds using one of the helpful links I provided in the **See also** box at the top of this page.

Git yer red hot RSS feeds!

I've already mentioned that you can find RSS feeds for newspapers, online magazines, and even sites that house only comic strips. How can you make time to look at all that? One answer is to do your job faster and more efficiently. To help you do that, this very Web site offers RSS feeds for almost every sort of content imaginable, including this widely admired column! Why go searching for the newest Crabby or Office Hours columns when we can deliver them to your door, hot and fresh? (Why indeed ...)

Here is a partial list of RSS feeds that Office.com offers ... as well as a few of my favorite feeds. Happy reading.

Some favorite RSS feeds on Office.com

- [Crabby Office Lady](#)
- [Office Hours](#)
- [Training and Demos](#)
- [Templates Blog](#)
- [Blogging with Office.com](#)

Some favorite RSS feeds out in the world

- [Wired: Culture](#)
- [NPR: Arts & Culture](#)
- [New York Times: Laurie Anderson](#) (not updated too regularly but I like to keep up with my favorite performance artist)

Those are a mere few of the millions of sites that offer an RSS feed. So why make the Web more difficult than it has to be? RSS is one-stop shopping.

"Everybody gets so much information all day long that they lose their common sense." — Gertrude Stein

About the author

[Annik Stahl](#), the Crabby Office Lady columnist, takes all of your complaints, compliments, and knee-jerk reactions to heart. Therefore, she graciously asks that you let her know whether this column was useful to you — or not — by entering your feedback using the **Did this article help you?** feedback tool below. And remember: If you don't vote, you can't complain.

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