

Library Helpsheet No. 12

Web 2.0 technologies: RSS feeds

What is Web 2.0?

Web 2.0 is a term used to describe a trend in web design and internet development, and is often viewed as the next phase of evolution of the internet. Web 2.0 technologies employ ideas and techniques which encourage interaction, communication and collaboration between groups of individuals. Such ideas promote a more open approach to the Internet and is reflected in the increased use of blogs, wikis and social networking websites (such as Facebook, MySpace, Twitter, etc.).

RSS (Really Simple Syndication) is one of the tools which form part of today's Web 2.0 wardrobe.



What is an RSS Feed?

RSS feeds or newsfeeds are a type of automatically generated web feed. An RSS feed will alert you when new content is added to a website of your choice. RSS feeds provide a way of sharing and broadcasting content from a website and offer you another way to keep up to date in your area of interest without having to regularly visit several separate websites.

How can I start using RSS feeds?

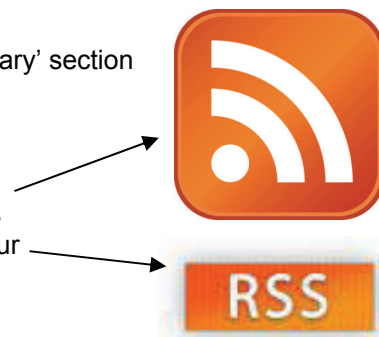
To start using RSS feeds you will need an aggregator (also called a 'newsreader' or 'feedreader'). Your aggregator will collect any RSS feeds that you have set up from different websites and allow you to view them in one place.

There are hundreds of free aggregators available on the internet. You can choose from a desktop aggregator (such as Feedreader) or a web based aggregator (such as Google Reader and Bloglines). A desktop aggregator allows you access direct from your own computer, whereas a web based newsreader requires you to log in (similar to an e-mail account) but can be accessed from any computer with an internet connection.

If you have an NHS Athens account you will have access to an aggregator in the 'My Library' section of the National Library for Health (www.library.nhs.uk).

Where can I find RSS feeds?

If a website generates RSS feeds it will display an RSS symbol; the orange RSS symbols opposite are two examples. You may have noticed these orange symbols on some of your favourite websites; it means that this website produces RSS feeds.



You can also use feed directories to search for websites with RSS feeds. The National Library for Health provides an extensive Feeds Directory at www.library.nhs.uk/rss that covers topics from clinical specialties to health management.

How do I add an RSS feed to my aggregator?

If you find an RSS feed through a feeds directory that you want to subscribe to, there are often on-screen instructions to guide you through adding the feed to your aggregator. For further assistance most aggregators have a Help menu.

If you come across an RSS feed on a website, click on the RSS icon and a new window will open the URL of the feed (e.g. <http://www.examplefeed.com/feed.rss>). Copy the URL of the feed (i.e. highlight the address bar where you normally type in website addresses then right click and select 'copy').

Paste the feed URL in to the 'Add Feed' option (or similar) in your aggregator.

Can't get enough? Learn about more about RSS

Check out our library catalogue for books on RSS at www.whnt.nhs.uk/library.

The National Library for Health provides more information about RSS feeds at www.library.nhs.uk/rss.

What is RSS?
www.whatissrss.com

Visit the Integrated Library Service webpages at www.whnt.nhs.uk/library