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Today's technology ensures that we have more choices for information delivery than ever before. We can choose from numerous formats to package and deliver our information. Today we examine one of these formats: RSS. Roddy MacLeod gives us a refreshing take, including the hype.

RSS enables the sharing of content such as snippets of information or headlines. You may

not know, for example, that you can now receive a content feed (RSS/XML) of the latest 10 headlines from our FreePint forums: the FreePint Bar and Student Bar <<http://www.freepint.com/feed/>> and the VIP Lounge and VIP Wire <<http://www.vivavip.com/feed/>>. Without having to visit our Web sites, you can keep abreast of issues being discussed or key information products being launched. Roddy also explores innovative uses for RSS such as receiving journal table of contents, invaluable for the academic community.

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The immediate advantages of documents being available in a growing number of formats provides a longer term challenge for the legal retention of records in the private and public sectors. Freedom of Information legislation and the impact on records management is a hot topic for information professionals in many countries. In our other article today, Lorraine Bradshaw in Australia explains the international impact of the Sarbanes-Oxley Act 2002. This US legislation requires organisations to keep records in any format, for as long as they are needed. The act was passed to ensure accountability after the collapse of companies like Enron and Worldcom. Lorraine works in an Australian library records management recruitment agency. Job seekers and recruiters who currently subscribe to the 'FreePint Jobs Update' will be hearing more from her as she is one of our new regular guest editors providing insider tips and comments on current trends in recruitment. See her editorial in Jobs Update No.74 <<http://www.freepint.com/go/b28882>> and today's edition, No.75, with comment from Sue Hill Recruitment <<http://www.freepint.com/go/b28999>>. If you are looking for an information-related job, then subscribe to the Jobs Update by modifying your account at <<http://web.freepint.com/>> and if you have a vacancy to fill then simply complete the order form <<http://web.freepint.com/jobs/>>.

So, in whatever format you are seeing this, thanks for reading. Do also let me know your ideas for hot topics or themed issues you would like to see covered in FreePint.

Best regards

Annabel Colley
Editor, FreePint <annabel.colley@freepint.com>

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To see the Jobs Update No.75 and read the new 'Jobs Advice' section, visit <http://www.freepint.com/go/b28999>. To subscribe, modify your account at <http://web.freepint.com>.

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Research Executive

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Information Research Co-ordinator

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NEW: VIP No.6 reviews MyInsight and Datastream Advance

This issue reviews MyInsight (Global Insight's interface for end-users) and the economic data and analytical tools available via Datastream Advance.

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MY FAVOURITE TIPPLES by Jeremy Williams

Jeremy Williams spent most of his career in the automotive supply sector in engineering, marketing, and product management, before setting up the 1835 Company in Paris with the aim of helping smaller companies expand their markets and launch innovative products.

Submit your top five favourite Web sites. See the guidelines at <http://www.freepint.com/author.htm>.

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- <http://www.bbc.co.uk> The good old BBC. If you want to know something, the BBC have probably made a program on it. They also treat their website like another station, lots of new stuff and links to other sources of info. If they ever get around to cataloguing their archive the world will be eternally grateful. In the meantime the site is easy to use and the radio programs (and some transcripts) are available for a few weeks after broadcast.
- <http://www.just-auto.com> If you're in the automotive sector this isn't a bad place to get information, daily briefings, etc. Costs GBP100 a year or so subscription, news headlines are free.
- <http://europa.eu.int/> EU main page. The EU works by documenting everything. There's an amazing amount of stuff on this and the associated pages (<http://www.cordis.lu> acts as a sort of cross-reference). The competition commission will quote market data in its findings.
- <http://www.freedoniagroup.com> Just one of many of the market research groups, and you find their studies on other sites too. I got into the habit of using it when it was just about the only site that offered reports at USD25 (now USD30) the page, which was cheap if you just downloaded the graphs.

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I've always thought that the strongest companies are those with a solid presence both online *and* offline. With the completion of the purchase of a permanent physical home for FreePint just one week away, it's great to know that our members are supporting FreePint online by maintaining the range and quality of help available at the Bar.

FreePint is about online information, and information queries have once again dominated the Bar in the last couple of weeks. Does your organisation have a 'Database Management Policy' (covering data entry, quality and management) <http://www.freepint.com/go/b28990>? Are there any statistics or guidelines on the best ratio of print to electronic resources in a library or information service? <http://www.freepint.com/go/b28969>. Anyone using biometrics for authentication in a library? <http://www.freepint.com/go/b28842>. Or maybe you'd like to find some easy-to-understand guides to the Data Protection Act <http://www.freepint.com/go/b28817>.

Are you willing to share experiences of outsourcing research and information services overseas?

<http://www.freepint.com/go/b28810>. It would be great if we could hear some views on this -- if you'd prefer to post anonymously then send your posting to bar@freepint.com and request anonymity.

We have a large number of FreePint beer mats/coasters to give away to students on information or business courses. Get in touch if you're a course leader and would like us to post some to you, wherever you are in the world -- we've just sent a few hundred to Australia! <http://www.freepint.com/go/b28933>.

Other unanswered queries at the Bar include: Someone wanting to import Library of Congress CIP data into a personal bibliographic database <http://www.freepint.com/go/b28847>; Using a Mac to burn a presentation/video onto a DVD <http://www.freepint.com/go/b28986>; Where to find a listing of European companies and the motor industry tiers they are in? <http://www.freepint.com/go/b28974>.

Finally, VIP No.6 is now available and reviews MyInsight, Global Insight's interface for end-users, and includes a second review concentrating on the economic data and analytical tools available via Datastream Advance <http://www.freepint.com/go/b28870>. There's a quick tour on the VIP Web site of the new 'Online Information Online' virtual show <http://www.freepint.com/go/b28921>, and VIP Eye No.11 includes news of the sale of one of the US's oldest established business information companies to the Chinese <http://www.freepint.com/go/b28992>.

William Hann william.hann@freepint.com
Managing Editor, FreePint

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TIPS ARTICLE

"The Impact of the US Sarbanes-Oxley Act on Records Management World Wide" By Lorraine Bradshaw



Lorraine Bradshaw is the Marketing and Training Coordinator for Information Enterprises Australia (IEA) <<http://www.iea.com.au>>. IEA is a specialist library and records management recruitment agency in Western Australia for permanent staff placements and short-term labour hire solutions. Lorraine is the current writer of the Australian Record Retention Manual and is the author of IEA's free monthly e-zine 'Information Overload'.

Mention the names WorldCom, GlobalCrossing, HIH, Ansett, Enron and Andersen and most people will know that these former giants of the corporate world are no more. Whilst the reasons behind the failures are complex, one of the main reasons was due to poor records management practices, and in particular the retention and disposal of corporate records.

After the energy giant Enron collapsed, the role that Arthur Andersen played was investigated. Arthur Andersen, one of the "big 5" accounting firms, was retained by Enron to ensure investors could rely on the company's financial statements. But Andersen was also a major business partner - soliciting and selling millions in consulting services to Enron. Added to this conflict of interest, Andersen was also responsible for some of Enron's internal bookkeeping, and some of Andersen's executives ended up taking jobs at Enron. Whilst Andersen took the steps to fire the Enron lead auditor, Mr David Duncan, after it was discovered that he had ordered the destruction and shredding of documents pertaining to the audits performed by Andersen, it was not enough to save the organisation from being charged with obstruction of justice by the US judiciary system, effectively sealing its fate.

Introduction of the US Sarbanes-Oxley Act

In a move to eliminate perceived conflicts of interest such as Andersen and Enron, Senator Paul D Sarbanes (D-Md) and Republican Michael G Oxley introduced a bill to the US Senate that was quickly adopted by the Bush administration. The Bill sought to ensure that auditing firms could no longer perform non-auditing work for their clients. The services to be banned included consulting, internal accounting and information system design <<http://www.accountancyage.com/News/1129572>>.

The United States Sarbanes Oxley Act 2002 states that non-compliance with the rules applying to the maintenance of records is a federal crime in America and can result in a jail term of up to 20 years and large fines. The Act also governs accounting practices and specifies mandatory retention periods of five years for all audit and review work papers. Failure to keep records (in whatever format) for the specified term can result in jail terms of up to 10 years.

Complying with the Act requires that an organisation should produce, on request, authentic and reliable records and all supporting documentation. Section 1102 of the act is concerned with tampering with records or impeding official proceedings and states that:

"Whoever corruptly - (1) alters, destroys, mutilates, or conceals a record, document, or other object, or attempts to do so, with the intent to impair the object's integrity or availability for use in an official proceeding; or (2) otherwise obstructs, influences, or impedes any official proceeding, or attempts to do so, shall be fined under this title or imprisoned not more than 20 years, or both." The Act can be viewed in its entirety at

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<<http://news.findlaw.com/hdocs/docs/gwbush/sarbanesoxley072302.pdf>>.

But what has all this got to do with records management in the rest of the world?

In simple terms - Any company or organisation that is an SEC (the United States Government's Securities and Exchange Commission) registrant, as well as those subsidiaries of US or European parent companies that are SEC registrants MUST comply in full with Sarbanes Oxley.

An Introduction to Retention and Disposal of Records

Every organisation needs to keep records of business decisions and transactions to meet the demands of legislative and corporate accountability. With the ever-increasing use of technology to meet the growing demands of business to achieve efficiency savings, greater market share, and to communicate more efficiently and effectively with clients and customers alike, there has been an explosion in the creation, distribution and use of electronic records. However, as the Sarbanes-Oxley Act has stated, these records need to be kept for a minimum of 5 years.

Of course - the 5 years stated is for auditing records in America, depending on the country of origin for your business, you may need to keep records for alternative lengths of time. Today's paper does not hope to address the issues surrounding the retention and disposal of all records. For those of you who are interested, Information Enterprises Australia publishes an annual volume entitled "The Australian Record Retention Manual" and contains over 1660 pieces of legislation that affects the retention and disposal of records in Australia and the penalties for not doing so. If you would like more information please go to <<http://www.iea.com.au>>. What the US Sarbanes Oxley Act has done, is to high light the problems relating to the long term retention of records.

As we have seen, the Sarbanes Oxley act requires organisations to keep records in whatever format for as long as they are needed.

As the Director General of Australia said in 1995 "It is a fundamental tenet of our democratic society that evidence in the form of records, be created, kept, preserved and be accessible into the future. With the growing diversity of electronic records, we face a major challenge; that is, developing strategies, standards and processes to ensure electronic records are accessible for as long as they are needed." (1)

Related FreePint links:

- 'Information and Libraries' articles and resources in the FreePint Portal <<http://www.freepint.com/go/p69>>
- Post a message to the author, Lorraine Bradshaw, or suggest further resources at the FreePint Bar <<http://www.freepint.com/bar>>
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In the 9 years since the then Director General of Australia, Mr Nichols, made that statement, there has been a move towards that goal. However, despite many tens of millions of dollars, thousands of "person" hours and countless projects to try and solve the many issues surrounding the longevity of electronic records, there is still not a single, long term, tried and tested solution to the problem of what on earth do we do with electronic records when they are no longer needed on a day to day basis, but still need to be kept for legal and/or other reasons.

Whilst there have been a few notable exceptions, few organisations have yet been brave enough to attempt an electronic archiving implementation strategy based entirely on current thinking (2). It is not hard to see why. Jeff Rothenberg also said in 1995 "it is only slightly facetious to say that digital information lasts forever - or five years, whichever comes first" (3).

The problems associated with legislation like the US Sarbanes Oxley Act are complex. As more records are being generated electronically, ensuring organisations are able "to produce, on request, authentic and reliable records and all supporting documentation" is difficult.

Part of the problem is the speed to technological obsolescence of the computer hardware and software used to generate the records. Other concerns are:

Media Fragility and Version Control

Migration of records across software upgrades can render old files and documents unreadable by the later versions. "Migration is essentially a translation. With migration, as with all translations, some information is lost, no matter how skilled the interpreter. In migration, it is usually the context, rather than the data, that drops out or is improperly reconstructed in the new code. This can be crippling in dynamic formats, in relational databases, and even in simple spreadsheets" (4).

Most people agree that if you have a paper document - you can preserve the object and you preserve the record. With E-records, people experience the record through a performance (by using appropriate software/hardware). Therefore with e-records if you preserve the performance you can preserve the record. However, there is the issue of data migration - if the record has been migrated through various versions - questions you need to ask yourself are:

(i) Is the version that I am viewing the version that the originator wanted me to see?(ii) Is it in the correct format? (iii) Can I see the object in the same way as the original creator saw?

It is said that the key to preservation is:

(i) Actively determining what it is you want to keep (ii) The use of Standards and best practice - for example - ISO 15489; PDF-A and JPEG 2000(iii) Full documentation as to decisions made, which software used and the records migrated or transferred(iv) Active involvement in technology decisions,

records managers, librarians and archivists should be involved at an organisational level(v) Remember there is no silver bullet (vi) There is no product-driven solution.

Notes

(1) Nichols, G; Director-General, "The Electronic Challenge" page 3. In the booklet entitled Managing Electronic Records: A Shared Responsibility. Written by Greg O'Shea, National Archives of Australia, March 1995.

(2) The Electronic Challenge, for example: National Archives of Australia; Public Record Office of Victoria VERS project, Indiana University Electronic Records Project. PDF-Archive (PDF-A - this archival format is due to be released in 2005. The United States Government is pushing the electronic community into creating an international standard of the popular format is a simple one. Two of the largest bankruptcy filings in U.S. history - Enron Corp and Global Crossing, produced a record number of PDF documents, which federal governments have to archive and preserve.)

(3) Rothenberg, Jeff. Ensuring the longevity of digital documents; Scientific American, January 1995, p42. (4) Lawrence, Gregory W et al. Risk Management of Digital Information: A File Format Investigation. Council on Library and Information Resources, June 2000, vi <<http://www.clir.org>>.

EVENTS**United Kingdom:**

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Penny <penny@freepint.com>



Lucy Akroyd works at Aspen Re in London, an insurance and reinsurance company with offices in the US and Bermuda. She is responsible for the Group intranet and websites, and has just embarked on an ambitious overhaul of both the design and navigation of the intranet with a view to introducing a content management system and extranet long-term. She has worked in an online knowledge management capacity for the last five years, having previously served as Web Editor at a small management consultancy in Islington, North London.

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- "Managing Your Internet and Intranet Services: The Information Professional's Guide to Strategy" ISBN 1856044831, published by Facet Publishing

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<<http://www.freepint.com/bookshelf/>>

"Managing your internet and intranet services: the information professional's guide to strategy"

Written by Peter Griffiths
Reviewed by Lucy Akroyd

Having just begun a new role with responsibility for the intranet in a fast-growing company, I felt I needed all the help I could get in beginning the challenge of creating an effective internal online communications tool.

Peter Griffiths is Assistant Director, Communication Directorate at the Home Office. He is responsible for library and information services in the Home Office and Prison Service Headquarters, as well as for intranet and internet publication, an internal reference service, knowledge management and information support to the research community.

This book is clearly and succinctly divided into thirteen chapters which begin by covering the internet revolution and the importance of the World Wide Web, the role of LIS professionals in online work, the importance of a web presence for companies across all industries and the generation of business through e-commerce. This first third of the book outlines preparatory guidance required by readers who might have been given the responsibility of producing an online presence, either in the form of an external facing website, or as an intranet that can only be viewed by colleagues internally.

Griffiths' focus lies predominantly with the internet: the middle portion of this book consists of chapters dedicated to the webmaster and the web team, organisation of the website, managing technical service and "back-end" website technologies, taking care of registration, publication, design and accessibility, and producing web content. Key points lie in the section dedicated to ensuring accessibility of websites to all users, as DDA laws have been passed with a view to coming into effect in November this year.

From a personal point of view, I certainly found the chapter dedicated to "Your intranet" to be the most useful in the book. As well as covering basic ground (intranet potential, usage, portals and knowledge management within an intranet)

FreePint

Contributors to this issue:

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Griffiths also highlights acceptable use policies and ongoing management of the intranet once it's in place as well as providing a number of reference resources to conclude the chapter.

Towards the end of the book, Griffiths has provided two invaluable chapters. "Golden rules of web page content" is invaluable to both the novice and experienced website manager alike. The final chapter is entitled "Resource list" and refers to material already mentioned in footnote format, and also to additional reference material, including sources for legal and regulatory issues, standards and best practice, and online resources for web professionals.

Although I did feel that this guide was tailored most specifically to LIS professionals (particularly the second chapter, considering their role within web work, and LIS skills) it also served as an extremely useful resource for web professionals generally. The companion website provided an updated list of online references, which I intend to refer back to on a regular basis whilst implementing the intranet at work.

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FEATURE ARTICLE**"RSS: Less hype, more action"****By Roddy MacLeod**

Roddy MacLeod
<<http://www.hw.ac.uk/libwww/libram/roddy.html>> is Senior Subject Librarian at Heriot Watt University, and is also Manager of EEVL, the Internet guide to engineering, mathematics and computing. He edits the Internet Resources Newsletter and is Associate Editor of the New Review of Information Networking. Roddy can be contacted by email to

R.A.MacLeod@hw.ac.uk

Yawn ... Not another revolution?

Only the other day I read an otherwise interesting and informative article, about a new service, which claimed that it would induce a change in the way researchers access published papers that would be "every bit as profound as the one induced by Google on the global web". The subject of that article was not RSS - in fact, it dealt with citation ranking - but it is fairly typical of much that is published about networked information, in that it almost certainly over-hyped the importance of the idea under discussion. How many times have we read that this, or that, is going to revolutionise the way we find or use information? Too many times! RSS has suffered from the very same over-exuberance of some of its advocates.

"The coming RSS revolution" is the title of a recent article in Forbes.com by Arik Hesseldahl <<http://digbig.com/4bhbm>>. Elsewhere, an item entitled "The really simple future of the web", about RSS, appeared on the BBC News website <<http://digbig.com/4bhbn>>. Other articles that have come to my attention recently include: "Is ad-supported RSS the next big thing?" <<http://digbig.com/4bhbp>>, "The buzz continues: RSS and newsletters" <<http://digbig.com/4bhbaq>>, "Enthusiasts call web feed next big thing" <<http://digbig.com/4bgkp>> and "RSS is the new news" <<http://digbig.com/4bhbr>>. Even Stephen Arnold, writing in Information World Review, fell into the same trap when he wrote of RSS and user-controlled services, that: "The industry is on the verge of a revolution" ("Data as pure as spring water" Information World Review, February 2004, pp17-18.).

RSS - a revolution? RSS - the future of the Web? I think not. It was refreshing to read on Dylan Greene's blog in January 2004 "10 reasons why RSS is not ready for prime time" <<http://www.dylangreene.com/blog.asp?blogID=363>>. Although it is possible to take issue with some of Greene's points (as the comments to his posting show), he does us a good service by helping to keep things in perspective.

What is RSS?

Whilst RSS may not actually revolutionise the way we retrieve information, it is proving to be a very useful protocol, and one which is likely to grow in importance for the library and information (LIS) community. So what is RSS? According to the Webopedia, RSS stands for RDF Site Summary or Rich Site Summary <<http://www.webopedia.com/TERM/R/RSS.html>>. Some commentators state that it can also stand for Really Simple Syndication. This expansion is growing in popularity, and provides a non-technical slant.

RSS is an XML format which enables the syndication, or sharing, of content. The content in question consists of snippets of information (typically a title, a brief description, and a link), rather than the full substance of the content itself, to which the link leads. For a basic introduction to RSS, see WebReference.com <<http://www.webreference.com/authoring/languages/xml/rss/intro/>>. For an enlightening explanation of the benefits of RSS, see

<http://www.freepint.com/issues/170604.htm>

Jobs Advice in the FreePint Jobs Update

The twice-monthly FreePint Jobs Update now contains 'Jobs Advice' from information-industry recruitment specialists.

See the latest edition online
<<http://www.freepint.com/go/b28999>>
and sign up to receive it by email
<<http://web.freepint.com/>>.

"Unleashing the power of RSS"
<<http://www.sls.lib.il.us/infotech/presentations/2004/cil-rss.pdf>>. For background information on RSS, see "Syndicated content: it's more than just some file formats" by Paul Miller <<http://www.ariadne.ac.uk/issue35/miller/>>. For a detailed explanation of how RSS can benefit publishers and content providers, plus some common questions answered about the format and advice on how to produce RSS, see EEVL's RSS Primer <http://www.eevl.ac.uk/rss_primer/>.

Producing an RSS feed manually is not a complicated process. I know this is true because I have produced some myself, using Ukoln's RSSxpress tool <<http://rssxpress.ukoln.ac.uk/>>, and I am one of the least technically-minded people you can imagine! Reading an RSS file, or feed, on your computer can be slightly more difficult because, as Dylan Greene pointed out in his article (number 4 reason for RSS not being ready for prime time), Web browsers vary in their ability to deal with raw RSS files. This means that if you try to open an RSS file using Explorer, all you are likely to see is the raw XML code. This may look something like the example I have given here:
<http://www.hw.ac.uk/libwww/libram/frcode.htm>

GOLD

A nostalgic look back at FreePint, from this time last year to six years ago:

- FreePint No.138 5th June 2003. "Professional Qualifications in Information and Knowledge Management" and "Writing for the Web - How to Write Web-Friendly Content for your Site" <http://www.freepint.com/issues/050603.htm>
- FreePint No.113 30th May 2002. "Trade Unions on the Net" and "The Future of Mobile Telephony" <http://www.freepint.com/issues/300502.htm>
- FreePint No.88 24th May 2001. "Waste on the WWW" and "Images on the Web" <http://www.freepint.com/issues/240501.htm>
- FreePint No.63, 25th May 2000. "Maximising Press and PR Exposure via the Internet" and "XML : Perception to Practice" <http://www.freepint.com/issues/250500.htm>
- FreePint No.39, 27th May 1999. "Lingo on-line - Languages resources on the World Wide Web" and "Central and Eastern European Web Sources" <http://www.freepint.com/issues/270599.htm>
- FreePint No.15, 28th May 1998. "Web Slavery - Automating Information Retrieval" and "Food Industry Information on the Web" <http://www.freepint.com/issues/280598.htm>

Related FreePint links:

- 'Information and Libraries' articles in the FreePint Portal <<http://www.freepint.com/go/p69>>
- Post a message to the author, Roddy MacLeod, or suggest further resources at the FreePint Bar <<http://www.freepint.com/bar>>
- Read this article online, with activated hyperlinks <<http://www.freepint.com/issues/170604.htm#feature>>
- Access the entire archive of FreePint content <http://www.freepint.com/portal/content/>

Viewing RSS Feeds

They can be viewed using a desktop reader such as AmphetaDesk <<http://www.disobey.com/amphetadesk/>>. As with other desktop applications, if you use more than one PC you will need to install the reader on each, and you may experience duplicated items when moving from one PC to another.

There are also other methods. Bloglines <<http://www.bloglines.com>>, a Web-based RSS aggregation service, allows even the worst technophobe to read RSS feeds easily and gives you the added convenience of access from any networked PC. Bloglines has a feature called My Bloglines which allows you to subscribe to RSS feeds of your choice. Bloglines will subsequently automatically monitor updates to those sites, and it is then possible to read the latest entries to your selected RSS feeds. It costs nothing to subscribe to a feed.

A growing number of portals allow their users to select RSS feeds for inclusion in personalised information landscapes. An example of a portal which encourages this is the University of Sheffield portal: MUSE - Portal News Feeds <<http://digbig.com/4bght>>. Portals, and other types of websites, often feature one or more feeds somewhere on their sites, often in a 'news' section.

Why would you want to read RSS feeds?

Adding selected RSS feeds to a desktop reader, a web-based reader, or a personalised landscape within a portal allows those feeds to be scanned at your convenience. Instead of having to visit numerous sites to find the latest information, or alternately, instead of being inundated by email alerts or email versions of newsletters and such like, aggregation of RSS feeds allows you to read the latest information, often from the very same sources as the email alerts and newsletter, when you want to. The information itself will be in the form of items within feeds, on subjects, or from services, of your own selection, and a link will take you to the full content at the source site.

How to exploit the potential of RSS?

So, what of the practical ideas for utilising RSS? Am I simply talking about reading the latest world news in a slightly more convenient way? Certainly not, but it is as well to deal with this first.

1. News feeds

Many articles about RSS concentrate on its ability to facilitate the retrieval of news items from a number of sites, without having to visit each site individually. "News that comes to you" posted by J.D. Lasica to the Online Journalism Review <<http://www.ojr.org/ojr/lasica/1043362624.php>>, and also a series of articles in the November/December issue of b/ITE <<http://www.sla.org/division/dite/bite/NovDec2003.pdf>>, explain adequately the benefits of this method of retrieval. Lasica outlines mainstream news services producing RSS feeds which can be subscribed to from a feedreader or web-based

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<<http://www.vivaVIP.com/>>

reader, and a Help file on the BBC News site <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/help/rss/3223484.stm>> explains, very concisely, how to subscribe to a selection of BBC News pages using RSS.

Many thousands of news services, websites, newsletters and also blogs (which can use the same RSS technology to deliver content) now produce RSS feeds, and there is a surprising number of directories which now list these sources. A good list of directories is "RSSTop55 - Best Blog Directory And RSS Submission Sites" <<http://digbig.com/4bhbs>>.

The LIS community can exploit this wealth of information in various ways. Links to facts, figures and sometimes opinions (especially in the case of blogs) can help to answer some, particularly topical or news orientated, reference enquiries. A literature search on, for example, a current affairs topic, would not now be complete without the inclusion of RSS feeds as target sources. Much company and product information is made available via RSS feeds. It should be remembered that many RSS feeds (again, especially, blogs) are completely unmoderated and therefore more than usual care needs to be taken with verifying authenticity and over qualitative judgements.

The LIS community is well served by RSS feeds in its own subject area, and these can be invaluable for keeping up to date with the latest information news. Some notable RSS feeds include:

Ariadne
<<http://dois.mimas.ac.uk/rss/ariadne.xml>>

FreePint Bar
<http://web.freepint.com/library/broadcast_freepint_bar.xml>

VIP Wire (Information-related press releases)
<http://web.vivavip.com/library/broadcast_freepintvip_Wire.xml>

D-Lib Magazine
<<http://dois.mimas.ac.uk/rss/dlib.xml>>

InfoWorld Columnists
<<http://www.infoworld.com/rss/columnists.xml>>

Librarians' Index to the Internet
<<http://lii.org/ntw.rss>>

ResourceShelf
<<http://www.resourceshelf.com/resourceshelf.xml>>

The Digital Librarian
<<http://digitallibrarian.org/index.rdf>>

LISNews <<http://www.lisnews.com/lisnews.rss>>

Internet Resources Newsletter
<<http://www.hw.ac.uk/libwww/irn/irn.rss>>

As well as being able to exploit content from existing RSS feeds, the LIS community has a potentially important role to play in presenting/re-presenting RSS content directly to users, and also in the production of RSS feeds from its own content.

2. Aggregation and presentation

Aggregation involves gathering things together in order to make a whole. In the context of RSS, the term aggregation has, rather confusingly, sometimes been used to describe:

* A desktop news aggregator such as AmphetaDesk, or a web-based aggregator such as My Bloglines. In reality, these might better be described as 'personal aggregators'

* General aggregators such as NewsIsFree <<http://www.newsisfree.com/>> which aggregate feeds in all subject areas. In reality, these are more accurately described as RSS directories/search engines

* Subject, or resource-type aggregators.

The third category is, so far, relatively untapped, and I believe that there is much scope for further development.

LISFeeds.com <<http://www.lisfeeds.com/>> is an example of a subject-based RSS headline aggregator. LISFeeds scrapes headlines from sites and services that specialise in library-oriented news, and then presents them in a convenient way for the LIS community to keep abreast of news.

There are a few other subject-based aggregators which are gaining in popularity. Meerkat: An Open Wire Service <<http://www.oreillynet.com/meerkat/>> aggregates a number of technical computing-orientated RSS feeds, and allows items to be filtered by time and source. The source feeds are automatically visited every hour, to ensure currency.

Another example is EEVL's OneStep Industry News service <<http://www.eevl.ac.uk/onestepnews/>>. OneStep Industry News gathers news headlines from feeds produced by e4engineering.com, ProTalk, the Institute of Physics, scenta, Nature - Materials Update and other sources, and intermingles results from each source. It is also possible to search for items within the relatively small archive of news stories.

Over sixty RSS feeds are included in LISFeeds, over 100 in Meerkat and nearly fifty in OneStep Industry News. Whilst it is possible to include each or any of these feeds in a personal desktop feedreader or web-based reader, how very convenient it is to have these subject aggregator services do the work for you. Feedreaders have a tendency to get swamped with multiple subscriptions, areas of personal interest change

over time, and individuals will often want to scan items from a subject area with which they are not familiar. As Ian Winship recently pointed out, it is very easy to get overwhelmed when more and more feeds are added to a personal desktop reader

<<http://www.cilip.org.uk/update/issues/may04/article2may.html>>. These are instances where specialised subject aggregators come into their own.

New Book Listings by RSS

Another example of practical and potentially useful RSS aggregation includes new book listings. Many publishers currently provide free email alerts to their book news. These often work well, but a problem lies in the fact that there are so many publishers producing titles in any one subject area. To systematically scan all relevant publishers' output, either via email, by visiting publishers' websites, or by browsing publication catalogues, can take considerable effort. How much easier it would be if publishers produced RSS feeds of announcements for different subject areas, allowing these to be added to desktop readers or Web-based readers, or included in subject-based aggregation services.

Amazon is already involved in the production of a number of RSS feeds which aggregate book news under popular headings <<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/subst/xs/syndicate.html>>. Though useful, these feeds have their limitations, and, especially in the academic sector, there is scope for presenting more specific aggregation from selected scholarly publishers.

Aggregation is possible not only by subject, but also by resource type. An existing example, which in this case aggregates job announcements, is EEVL's OneStep Jobs service <<http://www.eevl.ac.uk/onestepjobs/>>.

Journal Table of Contents by RSS

Aggregated Table of Contents (TOCs) for academic journals are available. It is now possible to receive content from BioMed Central and The Scientist as RSS headline feeds <<http://www.biomedcentral.com/info/about/rss/>>. For any BioMed Central journal, adding /rss/ onto the journal URL gives an RSS feed which contains details (including abstracts) of the latest articles to be added to that journal. An experimental RSS feed for Nature is available <http://nurture.nature.com/rss/nature_test.rdf>, the Institute of Physics (IoP) produces RSS feeds for several journals <<http://www.iop.org/EJ/help/-topic=rss/>>, and several other publishers are known to be experimenting with TOC RSS feeds. An RSS Module has been developed for TOC type information as part of the PRISM Project <<http://www.primstandard.org/>>. Robin Peek, in an article in InformationToday <<http://www.infotoday.com/it/oct03/peek.shtml>> recognised the potential of RSS feeds for journal TOCs, and Tony Hammond looked at the syndication of TOCs in more detail <<http://www.xml.com/lpt/a/2003/07/23/rssone.html>>.

Aggregated journal TOCs, along subject lines, would allow academics to scan numerous publications from different publishers, and aggregated TOCs along institutional lines would allow them to scan those to which they have immediate access. Such services are very likely to be popular.

Other Uses for RSS

Other RSS aggregation services, which would almost certainly prove useful for the academic community, include aggregated professional society news and aggregated research funding news. Again, content from the sources (professional societies and funding bodies), in the form of RSS feeds, would be required before such services could become a reality. Once available, they would undoubtedly add value to university and college departmental websites, library websites, pathfinder guides and portals.

There is also much scope for libraries to use RSS to present their own information. The University of Louisville produces RSS feeds containing the most recent ten books added to the collections in various subject areas

<<http://www.library.louisville.edu/users/mopurc01/rss/>>. Elsewhere, the University of Alberta Libraries produce RSS Feeds for Library News, Knowledge Common News, and Library Instruction and Training Opportunities

<<http://www.library.ualberta.ca/rss/>>. A large number of libraries now produce library blogs, using RSS

<<http://www.libdex.com/weblogs.html>>.

3. Customised Feeds

Two very interesting new tools were recently unveiled by xmlhub - an Open Directory Search - Custom RSS Feed Generator, and an Open Directory Category - Custom RSS Feed Generator <<http://dmoz.org/>>. The first generates a custom RSS feed of Open Directory <http://www.xmlhub.com/odp_feed.php> search results for any search term. The second generates a custom RSS feed for any Open Directory category. These tools make it possible to be alerted to new resources being added to the Open Directory in areas of particular interest. A similar tool from Paul Bausch, the

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<<http://www.vivavip.com/oio/>>

author of "Amazon Hacks: 100 Industrial-Strength Tips and Tools" enables the creation of customised RSS feeds of new additions to Amazon

<<http://www.onfocus.com/bookwatch/AmazonRSS.asp>>.

The same methodology could be used to generate customised RSS feeds for other databases, including OPACs, bibliographic and full-text databases, and Web directories and gateways. To some extent, this is already happening, with several RDN Hubs producing RSS feeds of new resources added in selected subject areas or resource types e.g. EEVL New Learning Materials for Engineering:

<<http://www.eevl.ac.uk/cgi-bin/learn-eng-on-eevl.rss>>

Humbul Resources for African Studies: <<http://www.humbul.ac.uk/output/RSS/african.xml>> What's New in the Women's Studies section of SOSIG:

<<http://www.sosig.ac.uk/roads/cgi-bin/new2rss.pl?channel=women>>. Only a little imagination is needed to see how useful personalised search feeds and new resource feeds could be, both for individual use and for incorporation into Virtual Learning Environments or pathfinder guides.

Conclusion

There are several practical ways in which the LIS community can both exploit the content of RSS, and improve their services through the presentation and re-presentation of RSS feeds. These do not amount to a revolution, but rather represent a step on the path to better information services, and one which takes advantage of advances in technology.