



feedme

Everything You Need to Know About Real Simple Syndication

The internet is becoming increasingly dynamic as information is being added, updated and deleted at unprecedented rates. Even the casual surfer is finding it more difficult to keep up.

Way back in the old days (pre-2005, that is), internet users maintained their collection of useful websites in their browser's "Favorites" folder, and every so often would go into the folder and check out what might be newly added to those sites.

But the amount of time required to sift for updates through each site—which can sometimes number in the hundreds for some people—is becoming increasingly unmanageable. As websites become more complex, finding those sections that have been updated can be frustrating.

Enter the RSS feed.

Real Simple Syndication is a technology that notifies users whenever any of their favorite websites have been updated.

Notification of these updates is pushed directly to the user through a "feed,"—a type of web file that is read by web browsers equipped with RSS feed readers or by feed aggregators. In short, RSS feeds make it possible to keep track of a large amount of dynamic online content in a relatively short amount of time because information updates are pushed directly to users.

Why Use RSS Feeds?

CalCPA recently introduced RSS feeds into some of its online content. By subscribing to a CalCPA RSS feed, you can be alerted to new magazine articles and chapter events without having to visit the website and without having to wait for reminder e-mails.

If you use Google or Yahoo! as your browser's home page, you will know of an upcoming CalCPA chapter event as soon as it is announced. (figures 1 & 2)



figure 1



figure 2

RSS feeds flow CalCPA chapter events, blog entries, magazine articles and podcasts directly to your Google or Yahoo! page.

Finding Feeds

When you visit a website that you plan to revisit frequently, look for “RSS” in an orange rectangle or for the symbol to the right.

When you click on it, you will see a list of articles or podcasts that the site’s webmaster has associated with that particular feed. (If you don’t, you may need to upgrade your browser. See the end of this article for details.)

This is what CalCPA’s RSS feed of *California CPA* magazine articles looks like in Internet Explorer v7 (figure 3) (in other browsers, such as Firefox and Safari, all the information will be the same, but the presentation will differ slightly).

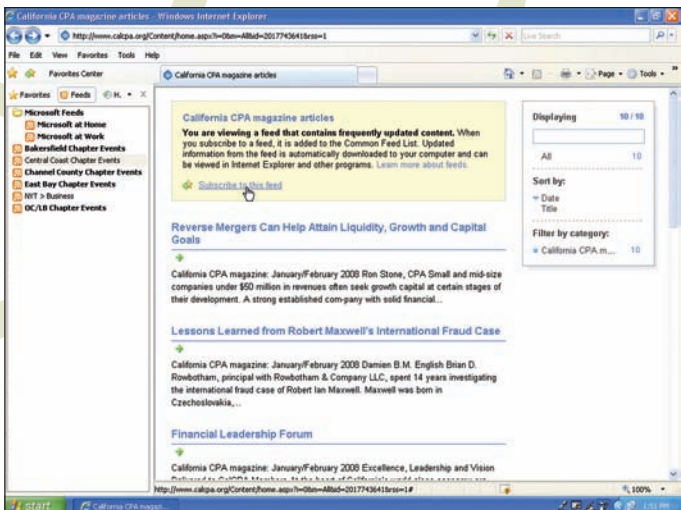


figure 3

Subscribing to a Feed

The power and convenience of RSS feeds are realized when you *subscribe* by clicking on the link that is appropriately labeled: “Subscribe to this feed.”

You will see a dialogue window (figure 4).

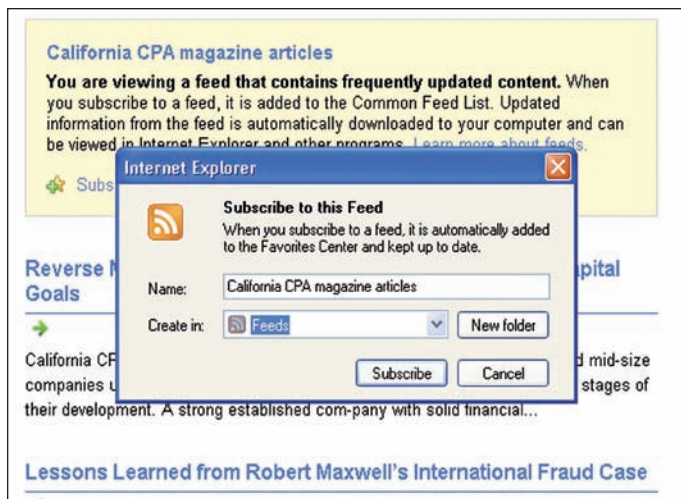


figure 4

The most common way to subscribe to an RSS feed is to use the mechanism described above to create a list of all your feeds and place them in a special feed window (see the left side of figure 3). The bold-faced feeds are those containing information that has been added since the last time you checked the feed.

- There also exist a number of “feed aggregators,” such as FeedDemon, Inbox for Microsoft Outlook and NetNewsWire, which make it even easier to view and organize your feeds.
- Web-based readers, including Google Reader, NewsGator, My Yahoo!, Bloglines and Rojo are more popular than application-based readers.

Using an Aggregator

Let’s use Google Reader as an example. Open a web browser and visit www.google.com/reader. For this and other free web-based aggregators, you’ll need to set up an account.

Once you’ve created an account, you can begin populating Google Reader with your favorite RSS feeds:

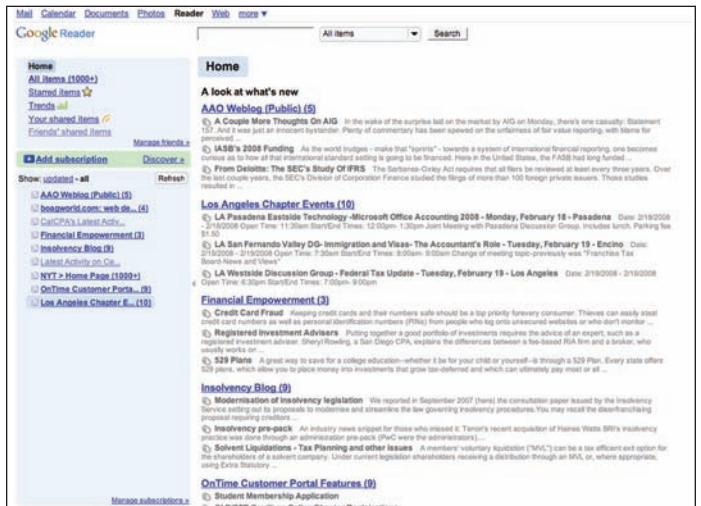


figure 5

Click on “Add subscription” ...

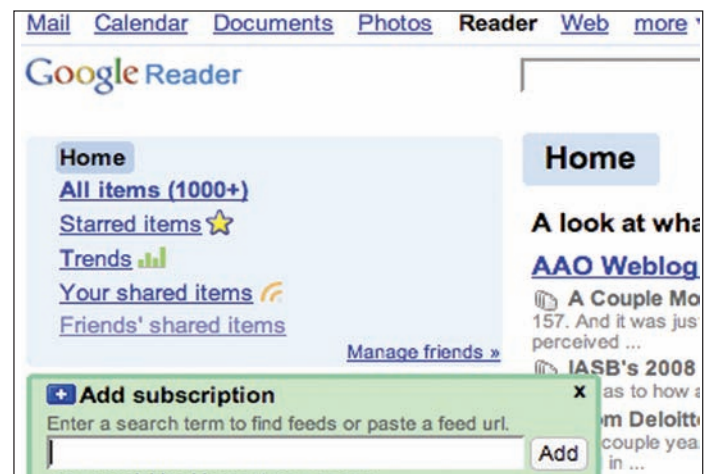


figure 6

RSS feeds make it possible to keep track of a large amount of **dynamic online content** in a relatively short amount of time.

... and simply paste the URL of the feed into the window to have it added to the main list (You can sort your list into folders for additional organization).

If you don't know the URL of the feed you want to subscribe to, Google Reader has a neat feature that allows you to type in a search term (such as "CalCPA") to see a list of feeds dealing with that term (figure 6).

The number in parentheses next to the feed name is the number of items that have been added to the feed since you last checked.

Using RSS to Customize Webpages

As you saw in Figures 1 and 2, websites like Google and Yahoo! allow you to use RSS feeds to customize the content that appears on those pages. Here's how to do it.



Go to www.yahoo.com and click on "My Yahoo!" To select an RSS feed, go to "Personalize This Page – Add RSS Feeds."

You'll see a window in which you type the URL of the feed you want to display. (figure 7).

Voila!, your MyYahoo! page will then look similar to the one displayed in Figure 2.

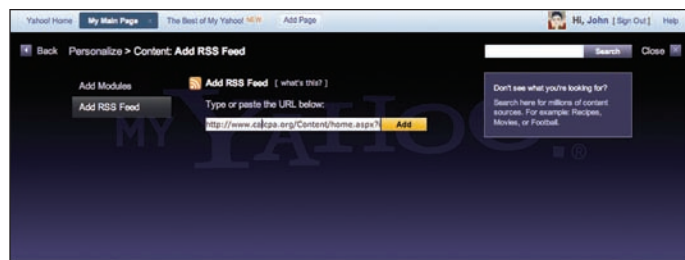
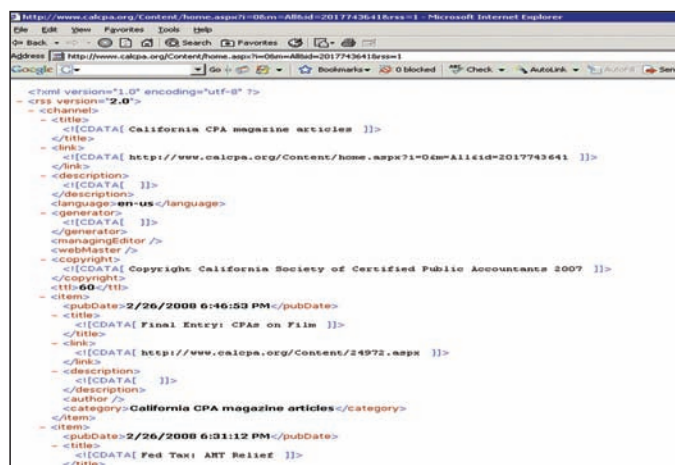



figure 7

If you click on the RSS icon and try to view a feed and see this:



You need to upgrade your browser to a more current version that incorporates RSS. You can upgrade your browser by going to any search engine and typing: "download the latest version of [your browser]." 

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Troubleshooting

As mentioned earlier, only the more recent browsers are able to read RSS feeds, and this is the most common issue faced by those unsuccessfully trying to set up a list of feeds.

cooltip

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