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Technology in Practice. Keeping Up, 2.0 Style

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Keeping Up, 2.0 Style

Current awareness through RSS

by Meredith Farkas

When I first received my library degree, I religiously kept up with blogs and journals in my areas of professional interest. I'd read blogs through an RSS reader—in my case, Google Reader—and I'd try to remember to read the journals I was most interested in when they came out.

Now, as the mother of a toddler, I'm lucky if I can remember to put my socks on before leaving the house. It is a pipe dream to think I could remember to look up the latest issues of my favorite professional journals. I started to find that while I was still keeping up with blogs, I was missing a lot of what was coming out in the scholarly literature of our profession. If it wasn't linked to from a blog post, I probably didn't know about it.

Luckily, over the past few years, it's become possible to subscribe to the vast majority of library and library-related journals through RSS readers as well. An RSS feed is basically a tool for subscribing to web content that is updated periodically so you don't have to remember to visit the websites it came from. Once you find an RSS feed for content you want to follow, simply copy its URL into the tool you use to

read RSS feeds (RSS reader, e-mail client, personalized start page, ticker, etc.). When new content is posted to that website, it will be delivered to you. Now, you can follow the professional conversation through blogs, trade journals, scholarly journals, and more all in one place.

There's a feed for that

When I'm looking to keep up with a specific journal, I will first check to see if it's available through a database my library subscribes to. The majority of database vendors (such as EBSCO, ProQuest, and Elsevier)

provide RSS feeds that will deliver the most recent tables of contents of journals in their database to your reader.

Unless the journal's articles are freely avail-

able online, it's best to get an RSS feed from a database in which the journal is available in full text because you'll be able to access the article simply by clicking on a link in the RSS feed. If you do not have a database that provides RSS feeds of that journal or your library doesn't subscribe to it, you can also frequently find table of contents RSS feeds on the website of the journal publisher. For example, the RSS feed for this column is available on the *American Libraries* website.

Some people may be more interested in following a topic than a specific journal. For example, I'm very focused on information literacy instruction and articles on that topic are published in a great variety of journals. Some databases, especially those from larger vendors, also make it possible to subscribe to search feeds. You create a search query that gets you the sort of results you're looking for and then subscribe to the RSS feed for that search. Whenever a new article is published that meets your search criteria, it will be sent to you. This allows you to keep current on just those specific topics you're most interested in.

Overriding overload

We are bombarded with so much information these days that any content that isn't right in our faces will likely be missed. This is why RSS is so valuable; it allows us to choose exactly what types of information we want to find and what sources we want to follow, and have all that delivered to us on a regular basis.

The real antidote to information overload is having a well-defined current awareness strategy that fits into your workflow. ■



It is a pipe dream to think I could remember to look up the latest issues of my favorite professional journals.

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