

# The Marketer's Introduction to RSS Content Delivery Power

Written by Rok Hrastnik, MarketingStudies.net

Published by MarketingStudies.net

## About MarketingStudies.net

MarketingStudies.net [<http://www.marketingstudies.net>] brings you marketing views and experience with the difference, including real-life marketing case studies and reports on what we learned from our own successes and mistakes.

## Contact us

[info@marketingstudies.net](mailto:info@marketingstudies.net)

## Subscribe to the infoMarketing e-zine

Providing strategic semi-monthly marketing diaries, views, commentary, ideas, studies and advice for the professional marketer.

<http://www.marketingstudies.net/blogs/about/archive/000016.html>

Please forward this report to whoever you believe will find it useful!

## The 2004 Internet Marketing Reality

- A large percentage of your internet content is not getting delivered to your recipients due to spam filters or changed e-mail addresses, or not being read due to uncontrollable amounts of e-mail messages in inboxes.
- Chances are, up to one half of your e-mail subscribers aren't getting your messages or aren't reading them.
- Consequently, your business is suffering because you are not maximizing the effectiveness of your content delivery efforts.
- If half of your subscribers aren't getting your content, that's 50% of lost sales and relationship opportunities. Do you dare to calculate how much that amounts to in losses over the course of the next few years?
- Not only your prospects, but your customers as well are missing out on what you have to say to them. Imagine the negative impact this has on your follow-up sales and after-purchase relationship building activities?

- People are afraid of subscribing to your e-mail newsletters; they cannot control the inflow of information as it is, increasing it only means more trouble.
- The U.S. CAN-SPAM legislation is putting all legitimate e-mail publishers at risk, enforcing rules that instead of being dangerous for the real spammers actually threaten legitimate senders.

**This is the internet marketing reality in 2004.**

And yet some companies and content publishers, such as the New York Times, BBC, MarketingVOX, Lockergnome, Yahoo! and many others, small business publishers among them, are still easily delivering their content without the fear of spam accusations or blocked e-mails ...

## The Question of Further E-mail Usefulness

Internet content delivery and consumption, arguably two of the key elements of internet marketing and usage, are facing increasing challenges.

While we, marketers and publishers, are fighting to get our content delivered to our audiences, internet users are fighting for better control of their content consumption.

At the heart of this problem lies the arguable inadequacy of e-mail to further serve us as the preferred content delivery and content consumption channel.

SPAM, enabled by the "democratic" nature of e-mail, has created such content delivery and consumption barriers that the entire content delivery process is in peril.

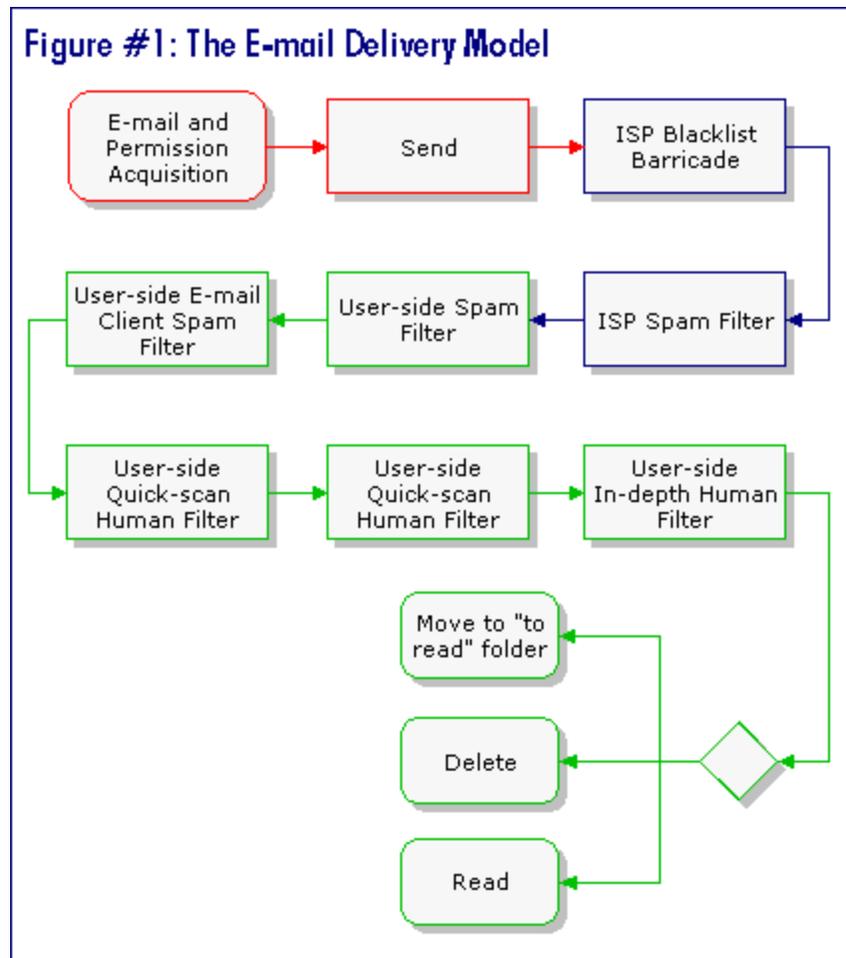
*Figure #1, The E-mail Delivery Model*, demonstrates what barriers e-mail messages need to cross in order to finally get read.

We start by having to acquire our recipient's e-mail address and permission to communicate, which in itself is a daunting task considering the fear of adding to the e-mail jungle in the recipient's inbox.

We then, after sending the message, need to face various barricades with the recipient's ISP.

After getting through the ISP barricades we still have to "combat" the various filters in place with the user, such as a third-party spam filter (or more of them), usually coupled with an e-mail client spam filter.

Then, the user still quickly scans the messages, eliminating the most obvious spam, and on top of that usually also performs an in-depth scan to finally decide what messages to delete, move to the dreaded "to read" folder (which never gets read) or actually read.



This model clearly shows how difficult it is indeed to get our e-mail delivered and actually read. There are just too many barriers on the way to make this a truly effective delivery system.

Certain solutions that might "cure" the spam problem are already in development, among those [Sender ID](#), being developed by Microsoft, but these are still quite far from being applied to everyday e-mail use.

On the other hand, it seems that e-mail postage via the [Bonded Sender Program](#) is also in strong consideration, which means more bad news for e-mail publishers.

## Is RSS the Solution?

### Quick RSS Explanation

RSS is a content delivery channel that allows you to easily deliver your internet content to your target audiences, while eliminating a large part of the external noise and shortcomings of other delivery channels.

In order to view your RSS content, the user needs to either download special software, called an RSS aggregator, or use web-based RSS services. He then needs to proactively add the link to your RSS feed (basically a file in which you "store" the headlines, links and summaries of the content on your web site you wish to make available using RSS) to view your content.

Don't be afraid, while all this might sound confusing, RSS is actually very simple to use, whether you are a publisher or an end-user.

RSS, already an "old" technology, has the potential of overcoming many of these challenges and becoming a preferred content delivery vehicle.

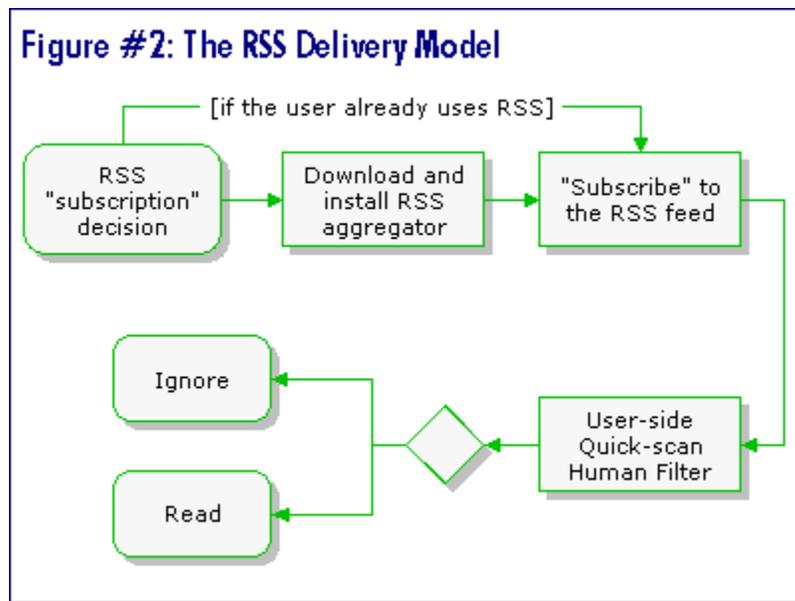
While achieving not more than marginal penetration, its usage is growing with astounding speed, powered by the activities of small-business internet publishers and key players, such as reputable news media and giant web portals, as well.

- For internet marketers and publishers, RSS promises to increase our capacity to actually deliver content, evading most technological barriers, such as spam filters. RSS also increases the number of our content delivery opportunities, offering us new and more effective ways of getting different types of content in-front of our target audiences (*our prospects, existing customers, business partners, suppliers, employees or team members, media representatives and all other target audiences we are communicating with using the internet*).
- For internet users, RSS promises to provide them with a better level of control over the content they consume, in addition to increasing their content consumption efficiency.

RSS as a technology already provides these solutions, but is, however, faced with many obstacles that might in fact stop it from reaching mass penetration.

- The largest of these is the requirement for users to download, install and adjust to new software, which is tedious task for most people, especially when discussing mass penetration. Right now, it seems impossible imagining novice internet & computer users doing this, especially if they are relatively happy with e-mail performance. As *Figure #2, The RSS Delivery Model*, shows, there are fewer obstacles involved with getting content delivered using RSS than with e-mail and all of them are related to the user's actions and not third-party barriers, such as ISP spam filters. However, getting the user to download and install an RSS aggregator is a huge obstacle that has the power to break our RSS content delivery activities.
- A huge leap in penetration, in order to reach critical mass, requires larger scale support from marketers and publishers, converting more users to RSS; first, we must accept the new approaches forced on us by the unique

characteristics of RSS and the way it is consumed, and second, we must give up much of the content delivery control (*in terms of demanding attention when we want to, instead of when the recipient so chooses*), including the "push" factor, which we enjoy so much with e-mail.



It is quite impossible to predict at this time how RSS penetration and usage will grow in the future, but the fact remains, that we must research the various RSS uses and at least implement RSS as a secondary content delivery channel to reap many of its benefits and gain a competitive advantage over our competitors.

The choice is, as always, ultimately in our own hands.

Do we proactively accept these new challenges or passively wait for the current content delivery situation to get better?

Basic RSS implementation is easy and doesn't cost us anything. So even if we miss, we won't be losing much. Right now there are no good reasons to prevent us from at least basic RSS usage.

## Will RSS Replace E-mail?

This is not a debate of whether RSS will replace e-mail, because its individual characteristics in no way make it a viable candidate for internet communication supremacy.

E-mail, in our opinion, is here to stay, although it will need to evolve to further retain its usefulness as the top communicational channel.

E-mail is a complete communicational channel and it is hard to imagine any other channel touching it on this front.

RSS, however, offers us unique content delivery opportunities, and this is the area where e-mail might be in danger.

Other sources, such as Mediathink, confirm this direction as well:

*"We believe RSS is a disruptive technology, poised to challenge email's monopolistic role as the best and preferred distribution/subscription mechanism for newsletter publishers on the Internet. RSS is potentially most disruptive to email, although it is important to understand that RSS is not at all likely to replace email. New media rarely ever replaces old."*

*[RSS: The Next Big Thing Online, July 2004, MediaThink]*

In affect, we must now start thinking of how to use RSS together with existing channels, instead of hoping or fearing it replaces them.

## Now, What RSS Actually Is?

By definition, RSS stands for "Real Simple Syndication" or "Rich Site Summary", depending on who you ask. Basically, RSS can mean both, and the actual definition is of little practical use to you.

- Real Simple Syndication: RSS makes it easy to syndicate your content around the web by simply providing users with an RSS file that they can use to display your content on their web sites.
- Rich Site Summary: RSS feeds usually contain text summaries (newer RSS versions already allow for use of images as well) of the content you then provide in full on your web site.

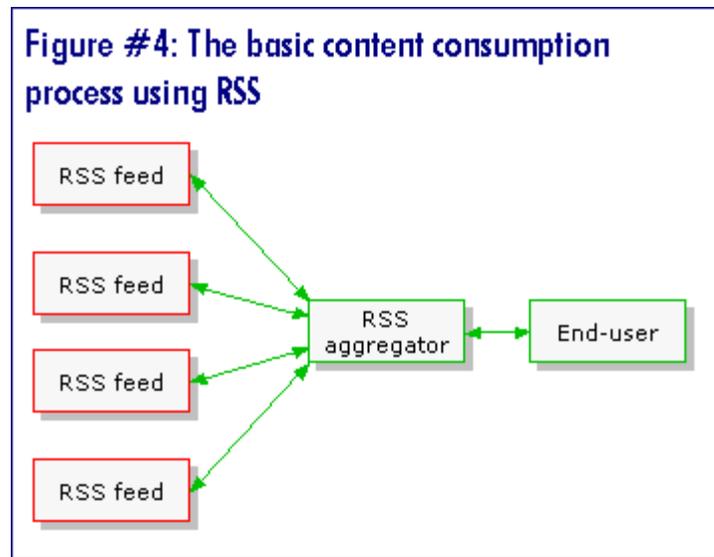
But what's more important than RSS definition is how you can use it to increase your internet business results.

RSS is a content delivery channel that allows you to easily deliver your internet content to your target audiences, while eliminating a large part of the external noise and shortcomings of other delivery channels.

## How RSS Works

RSS allows internet content publishers to deliver content using RSS feeds, which can then be used in multiple ways.

It's however important to remember that these are just different ways of consuming the same RSS feeds, which means the publisher only prepares one RSS file, which can then be used with different consumption methods.



### End-user consumption using Client-side RSS aggregators or readers

Client-side RSS aggregators or readers are applications that allow internet users to use and view RSS feeds directly from their computers.

But in order to do this, users need to download, install and learn how to use new software, which is the top obstacle to mass RSS penetration.

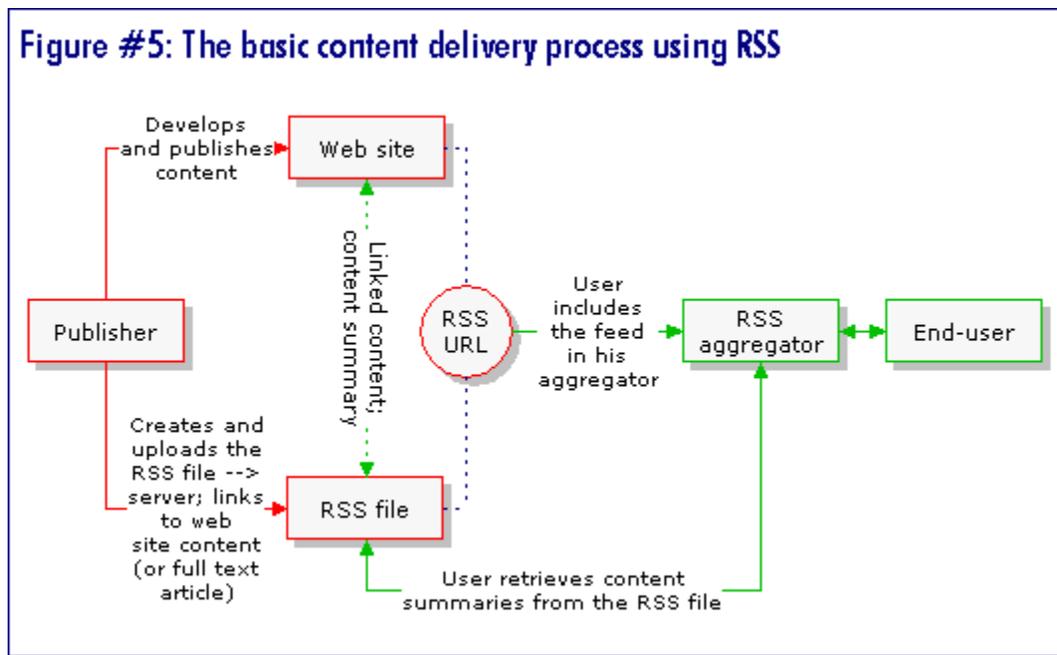
Ordinarily client-side applications run faster than web based RSS aggregator services and give users more advanced functions and control over how they aggregate and use RSS content.

Most client-side RSS aggregators are standalone products that work on their own, while some can even be [integrated in to Microsoft Outlook](#) or internet browsers, such as Mozilla or Internet Explorer.

Let's take a look at a very basic explanation of how this works ...

1. The content publisher creates and publishes his content online, usually to his web site.
2. He then creates an RSS file (also called the RSS feed), in which he includes the headlines, links and summaries (or even full text) of the content he wishes to distribute through his RSS feed.
3. He then puts the link to the RSS file on his web site. Now, if people click on that link and open the file in their web browsers, all they are going to see is a lot of confusing code that they won't know what to do with.
4. Users actually need to include the link to the RSS feed ("subscribe to the RSS feed" or "add the channel") to their list of RSS feeds in their RSS aggregators. Some solutions already exist that make this even easier and turn it in to a one-click process.
5. When the user has the RSS feed included in his aggregator, the software will display all the headlines and summaries the publisher included in his

RSS file. When new items are added to the file they can also be seen by the user on his aggregator. Each item is linked back to the web site to a specific piece of content, such as an article, or contains the full text article.



Now, let's take a closer look at how this works from the user's point of view. This is only a basic RSS "subscription" process. Later on we'll take a look at many of the options to make it easier for the user, even if he doesn't use an RSS aggregator yet.

Right now it's only important that you understand how the "subscription" process basically works so that you can better understand RSS.

1. The user comes to your web site and sees the link to your RSS feed.
2. If he directly clicks on that link all he sees is a lot of confusing code.
3. Instead of clicking on the link, he needs to copy it in to his RSS aggregator.
4. He launches the aggregator and decides to add a new content channel, and then pastes the link in to the appropriate field in the aggregator.
5. He now has access to the content items you included in your RSS feed. They can either be summaries with links to articles on your web site or full-text articles.
6. By clicking on an individual item the user is usually (depends on the aggregator) taken to the article on your web site, which happens within the RSS aggregator, which now also serves as an internet browser.
7. The RSS aggregator periodically checks the RSS files in the user's list to see whether new content has been added to them, and marks those

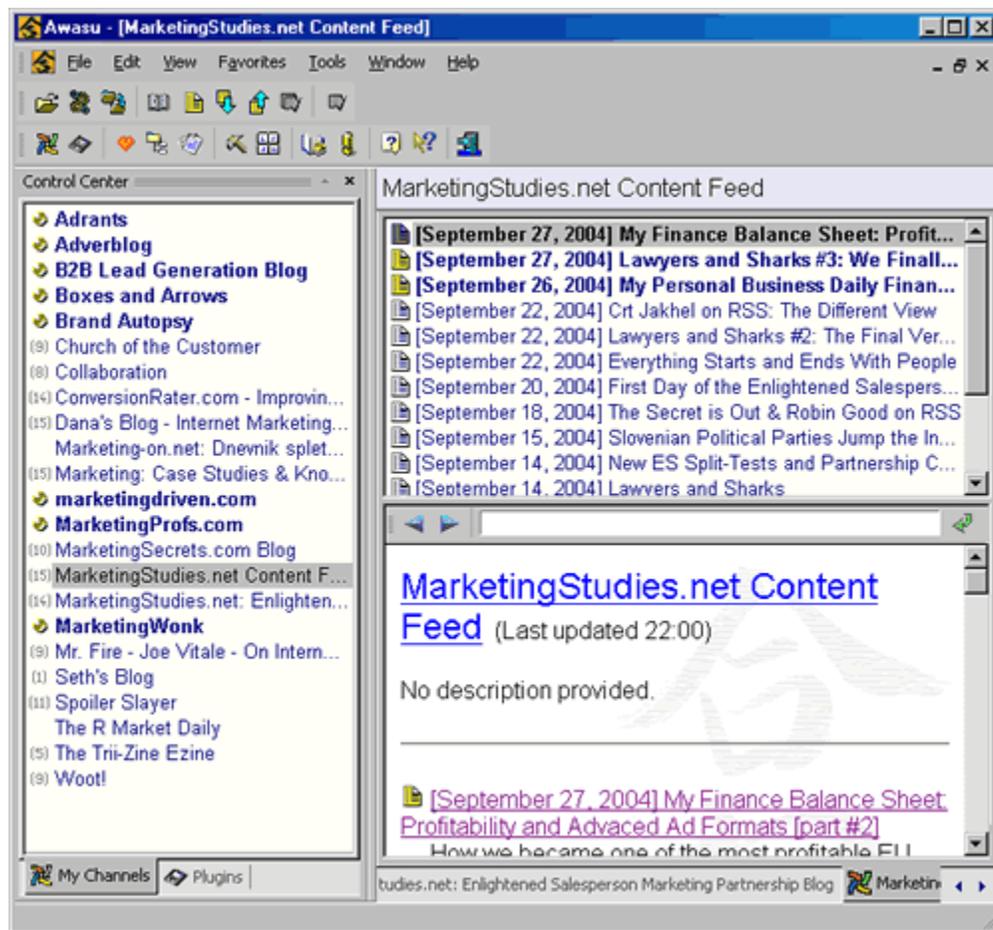
feeds or in some other way lets the user know that new content is waiting for him.

This process is of course much more difficult if your visitor doesn't know what RSS is, how to use it and doesn't have an RSS aggregator.

In this case you first need to motivate him to find out what RSS is and why it's good for him, and then motivate him enough to actually decide to use RSS, find an appropriate RSS aggregator and then install it. And finally, you need to get him to include your RSS feed in his new aggregator.

This process can be quite difficult, depending on how internet & computer savvy your visitors are. Either way, you will need to lead them step-by-step, and giving them enough benefits along the way to bring them to the final step.

Fortunately, as more and more publishers adopt RSS, more and more users will already know how to use it and have their own RSS aggregator.



Screenshot: [Awasu](#), client-side RSS aggregator

## End-user consumption using native internet browser features

With the increasing importance of RSS some internet browser developers are already starting to implement basic RSS aggregation functionality in the actual browser itself, such as the [Mozilla Firefox 1.0 Pre-release](#) version.

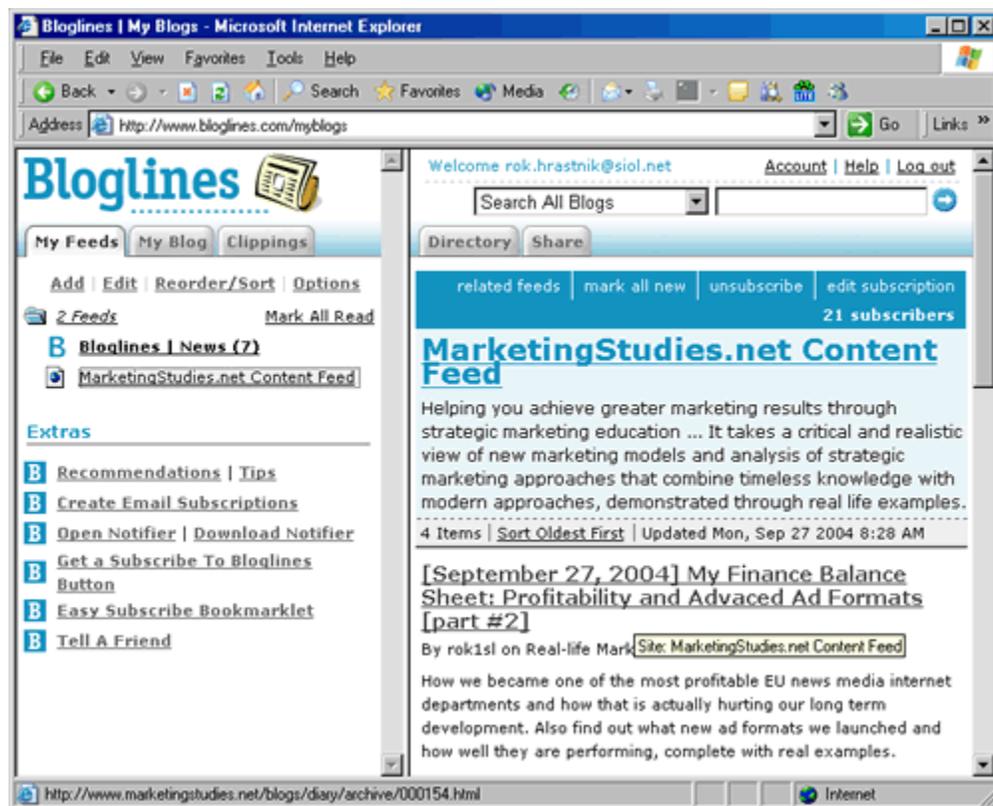
This basically means that the user won't need to install a separate piece of software to use your RSS feed, which definitely is good news.

However, since most internet users use Microsoft's [Internet Explorer](#) we will have to wait until Microsoft decides to implement RSS in to his browser before we can expect this to have much impact.

Only this, in our opinion, along with the possible implementation of RSS functionality in Microsoft's Outlook by Microsoft itself, will make mass RSS penetration possible.

## End-user consumption using web based RSS aggregators

Users can also use RSS feeds through special web based RSS aggregators that as well allow them to customize what RSS feeds they would like to watch.



Screenshot: [Bloglines](#), a web based RSS aggregator

This works similar to client-side RSS aggregators, but with some important differences:

- Instead of having to install new software, you use your existing web browser and special web sites that offer web RSS aggregation services.
- The user needs to find and register at a web site (create a personal account on that web site) that offers web RSS aggregation services (these are free).

- Once the user is registered he again needs to include the link to the RSS feed or file he wants to "watch", but this time in his web list of RSS feeds that is "stored" in his web account on the web site.

This will usually be easier for less frequent internet users and/or "novice" computer users.

Consequently, if RSS functionality does not become an integral part of internet browsers or e-mail clients soon, it's quite safe to predict that web based RSS aggregators will become the most popular way of end-user RSS consumption.

Depending on how such web based RSS aggregators further develop, this could actually be bad news for content publishers.

All internet service providers need a source of income, and for most that source of income is paid internet advertising. What happens if web based RSS aggregation service providers decide to offer contextual advertisements to advertisers?

It could for instance mean that when your content matches an advertiser's context, the system will display the ads from the advertiser right next to your content. Consequently, your one-to-one communication with your target audiences becomes invaded by your competitors who actually use your content as a vehicle to reach the most relevant prospects through the web based RSS aggregation service provider.

This is actually an organic problem for publishers in relation to similar web based services, which include webmail.

Unfortunately, besides educating your audiences towards preferring client-side RSS aggregators, there is little you can do about this problem.

It is however still much too early to accurately predict what RSS content consumption tool is going to win the upper edge.

## Media consumption: Displaying RSS content headlines and summaries on other web sites

Web site publishers can use RSS feeds to display content headlines and/or summaries from other content sources on their own web sites (content syndication) to provide additional content to their visitors.

Web site publishers do this either using their own content management system that ["parses" RSS feeds](#) to display their content on the web site; third party parsing programs or third party parsing scripts.

The advantage of using RSS for this is that when the publisher updates the RSS file all of the content headlines and/or summaries for his content on other web sites are instantly updated as well, thus making the syndication process very easy, simple and fluid.

## RSS search engine listings

Many new search engines that search for and index RSS feeds and even specific content items from these feeds have surfaced as of late.

Naturally, these search engines provide easy access to very specific content, especially with their capability to list individual content items from complete RSS feeds.

### Technical side-note

In purely technical terms RSS content is not delivered to the final consumption point, such as a client-side RSS aggregator; RSS files are either automatically downloaded to the final consumption point and then interpreted there, or automatically read from that consumption point, depending on how RSS is actually consumed by the end user.

## Key Benefits of Using RSS: The Publishing Viewpoint

- Content is delivered directly to its final destination (one of the possible consumption points, such as a client-side RSS aggregator), without having to face any obstacles on the way, such as filters.
- Your content does not have to compete with loads of spam and other business & personal messages, but only with other relevant RSS feeds your readers "subscribe" to.
- Because of a different delivery mechanism than with e-mail, you don't have to be bothered with list management, unsubscribes, spam accusations etc., which means you have more time for other marketing related issues and suffer less costs, including no delivery costs (for instance, some e-mail delivery vendors charge companies per e-mail sent). In addition, your subscribers don't need to fear computer viruses and other similar dangers they face with e-mail.
- RSS is a content delivery channel, which means you can use it to deliver almost any kind of content, naturally within the individual limits of the channel.
- Low barriers to entry, meaning the cost of setting-up your own RSS feed is very low or almost non-existent. You can even create your own feeds by hand-coding them, which is fairly simple and does not require any kind of special software or technology.
- The nature of the channel allows for rapid and frequent content updates.
- RSS is, in its nature and concept, a "pull" channel, and is also perceived as such, as opposed to e-mail, which is perceived as "push". The "pull" in this case means that the user needs to proactively include your RSS feed in his

aggregator in order to receive content from you. You cannot deliver content to people who have not individually added your feed to their aggregators.

- If a prospective reader is familiar with RSS and already uses RSS feeds, converting him to a "subscriber" is relatively easy if your content matches his needs, since there is no "fear factor" that is usually involved with giving your e-mail address to an e-mail publisher.
- It makes content syndication easy and fluid.
- RSS files contain links to your updated content, which also help improve your search engine positioning.

## Key Disadvantages of Using RSS: The Publishing Viewpoint

As every other channel, RSS has its disadvantages.

- Users need to install special software or use special web sites to use RSS feeds. This is the greatest obstacle to using RSS, and definitely one that makes it difficult to use exclusively RSS to deliver content.
- Its penetration is still marginal, although it is growing, mostly through the efforts of the "movers and the shakers".
- Because of its low penetration, most people don't know what it is and what do to with it, which consequently means getting "subscribers" is difficult and requires much market education. Even with the strong "fear factor" involved with getting e-mail subscribers, it's still much easier doing that than getting people to add your RSS feed to their readers if they don't even know what RSS is.
- "Unsubscribing" from your feed is quick and easy, which means that you have to invest special care to provide only very high quality and relevant content with a high perceived value for your audience.
- Delivering direct marketing campaigns through your own RSS feed is, taking in to consideration the low "acceptance" margin, difficult and dangerous at best.
- Introducing RSS in to your communicational mix requires different marketing approaches, which may, from case to case, even require a fundamental change in the way you market and prepare your content.
- The lack of "push" can also become a disadvantage for your subscribers, since people occasionally and with specific content types in mind actually want to be pushed with content, for instance receiving financial market updates as soon as they become available.

## The Probable RSS Overload

It is important to add that some of the disadvantages could also be perceived as advantages for capable internet marketers, most especially the current low RSS penetration.

The growth of RSS content publishers and available RSS content could eventually cause RSS content overload for end-users.

With more content available to them every day, and with a lack of fear, currently present with e-mail subscriptions, internet users will probably overload themselves with the number of RSS feeds they include in their aggregators.

In a perfect world most internet users would behave rationally, in this case carefully control the number of RSS feeds they watch by carefully evaluating each RSS feed before adding it to their list.

Unfortunately, most people do not behave rationally.

It's quite safe to presume they actually will overload themselves with RSS feeds, as they overloaded themselves with e-mail subscriptions.

The overload will bring less visibility for your own feed and might even create a situation close to what has happened with e-mail. Yet again your content will be lost among the hundreds of other choices available to the user.

Early RSS adopters from the ranks of publishers will have the upper hand. By starting early and offering exceptionally high-quality content you right now have the chance to position yourself among the top RSS feed providers your target audiences will not want to miss, thus gaining an important competitive advantage for the future.

## The RSS Push vs Pull

*"In my view it's a somewhat risky proposition to present RSS as a perfect-delivery, no-noise mechanism. My reason for saying so is a matter of demographics. I believe that if / when it becomes apparent that a great number of people are using RSS (relative to the numbers using e-mail), there will be a tendency for this medium to become more and more cluttered. Yes, it is open to clutter; it is in no way inherently clean. It is clean right now because of the situation as it exists right now; it is clean because it's just not that popular yet. It creates an overblown hope of succeeding exactly because it hasn't yet met with overwhelming success. In the computing world, the analogy would be to say that while Linux may be technologically superior to the Windows platform, it is also much less often targeted by various attacks for the simple reason that it is not as widely used and when it is, it's usually in the hands of advanced users. Result: the*

*"mistaken idea that using Linux provides instant safety."*

*[Crt Jakhel, Dergan, comment posted on MarketingStudies.net]*

The "pull" factor is often used as one of the key advantages of using RSS in a world where people are tired of "push".

RSS is fundamentally a "pull" channel in the sense that the user needs to proactively include your RSS feed in his aggregator in order to receive content from you. You cannot deliver content to people who have not individually added your feed to their aggregators.

However, RSS in itself is only a content delivery channel. Internet users still need to use special software or web based services in order to take advantage of this channel and actually use it.

Depending on how this software develops in the future, it could introduce strong "push" factors to the entire RSS consumption process. While the channel itself fundamentally is "pull", it depends on the "entire package" (*the entire consumption process, which begins with the RSS feed but is used through an additional component, the RSS aggregator*) how internet users will ultimately perceive it.

If RSS aggregators start "pushing" their users with RSS content, for instance by displaying a large full-screen notice on the screen when new content items are available in the user's RSS feeds, the entire RSS content delivery channel will become perceived as a "push" channel.

But this is not the worse of what could happen.

When RSS aggregator developers start seeing a huge increase in the number of users, advertisers will soon follow, offering to "buy" RSS aggregator ad inventory. It could start with unobtrusive banner ads and text ads, continue to contextual advertising and end with multimedia ads being delivered through the RSS aggregator, causing even more clutter and a strong "push" perception of the channel.

We are not in danger of this happening just yet, but it eventually should happen if mass RSS penetration is reached.

While this danger will not affect us at this time, it is recommended to keep a close eye on further RSS aggregation software development to be prepared for possible future changes to the channel and the way it is perceived.

With all of this in mind, let us now finally take a look at the key RSS business uses.

## Key RSS Business Uses: The Publishing Viewpoint

RSS is mostly associated with blogs, which really drove and still drive most of its penetration.

But, RSS really offers us many more content delivery opportunities that either enhance existing content delivery possibilities or even provide new capabilities.

It's important to understand that RSS is only a channel; what we do with it depends only on us.

Let's take a look at a quick summary of how we can use RSS ...

### Delivering general, segmented, customized and/or personalized content updates to a mass audience

- [MarketingVOX | News](#) offers a single RSS feed to deliver the whole spectrum of the news they cover in all of their various content categories. This is delivering general content updates to a mass audience.
- [The New York Times](#) offers individual internet content (news) updates for their content categories via RSS. Each content category comes in a separate RSS feed, thus making it easy for NYTimes.com users to keep constant track of current news. This is delivering segmented content updates to a mass audience.
- [The business daily Finance](#) offers its users the capability to precisely customize their own individual RSS feeds to receive only content updates that precisely match their content requirements. This is delivering customized content updates to a mass audience.

These are just a few examples of how publishing companies are delivering their content today using RSS. The one thing they have in common is delivering content to a mass unsegmented audience, basically everyone that cares to use their RSS feeds.

Actually, most companies today use RSS in one of these ways, unfortunately overlooking all of its other benefits.

But this is only the tip of the iceberg.

For instance, [Amazon offers Top 10 bestsellers lists](#) for different product categories, again using RSS.

And we can go even further. RSS feeds, although intended for the largest audience, can also be personalized for each user, making the experience not only more personal but also more effective for the company itself.

## Targeted and specialized content delivery to segmented target audiences

RSS is not appropriate only for content delivery to mass audiences, but also for precisely targeted and specialized content delivery to very segmented target audiences.

- Some affiliate managers are already communicating with their affiliates using blogs and then RSS to easily deliver blog updates to them.
- The [MyST Technology Partners](#) are using RSS to easily conduct interviews with media representatives. RSS not only helps follow new questions and answers, but also allows them to quickly syndicate the interview to other web sites.
- One company uses RSS as a consulting billing awareness tool. The consultants create activity reports and the RSS feeds from the activity channels carry the billable information to the accounting staff for invoice preparation.  
[Information provided by [MyST Technology Partners](#)]
- Another company uses RSS feeds as a security awareness mechanism at a Zoo, making security updates, such as missing children or handbags, immediately available to Zoo security sites and personnel with wireless devices.  
[Information provided by [MyST Technology Partners](#)]
- You can deliver news and company updates to your employees or even your company owners using secure RSS feeds that can only be "read" by the people you give access to this content. Also think in terms of project management RSS feeds where different team members post either their own project updates or quickly "send messages" to the entire project team.
- If you consider your customer content updates important you naturally want to make sure that all of your customers actually receive them. Again, RSS makes this easy, even or perhaps especially if your content needs to be delivered securely and you want to manage who accesses it.

## Syndicating web content to various internet media

RSS makes getting more content exposure using third-party web sites easy.

Every RSS feed you publish can also be used to publish your content headlines, summaries and links on other web sites, thus helping you increase your traffic and position yourself as a source of quality news in the area you cover.

## Secure direct one-to-one or one-to-many communications

What can you do when you want to be 100% certain that your messages either reach the intended recipient or their messages reach you?

Due to the obstacles on the e-mail delivery route, this is getting increasingly difficult. There is no way to be absolutely certain that your messages are getting through or that you are receiving the messages intended for you.

On a limited scope, RSS might offer a solution in this area as well, by using RSS feeds as a one-to-one or one-to-many communicational challenge.

For now, just consider the following possibilities:

- Ever since spam started becoming a real problem many web site owners started replacing their on-site e-mail address with web forms that their visitors can fill-in to send them an e-mail, without actually revealing the web site owner's e-mail address. Now, imagine replacing the delivery channel behind the web form from e-mail to RSS. Instead of receiving these messages to your e-mail address, fearing some of them won't reach you, they are instead delivered through your RSS feed directly to you or more precisely to your RSS aggregator. Since you are using a secure RSS feed only you or the people you trust can access it, which even provides more security and privacy than e-mail.
- This can also work the other way around, utilizing RSS for dialog among known participants.

While RSS might not be terribly practical for communicational purposes, it does increase the level of certainty that your messages will be delivered or that you will receive those messages intended for you, as well as add another level of security and privacy.

The real benefit of using RSS for direct communicational purposes will especially be evident to companies that will venture to invest more in to internal RSS technology that will fully integrate RSS as a delivery and as a communicational channel, making individual customized RSS feeds integrated in to the corporate communicational system.

## Advanced RSS marketing capabilities in conjunction with RSS aggregators

RSS feeds are, for the most part, in direct connection with RSS aggregators that make RSS content consumption possible.

If we look at both in an integrated fashion it's quite easy to detect that RSS aggregators themselves can be used as an important marketing tool, as well for brand building as for direct marketing.

Advanced marketers can offer their audiences customized RSS aggregators that enforce their brand and at the same time provide an additional contact point with them. This is direct branding and experience branding at its best.

Each of these five categories offers a wide spectrum of possibilities.

## Why Should You Care?

Either as an end user or as business person, content delivery should be one of your top informational concerns.

- As an end user you cannot function properly without having relevant access to the information you need. Content delivery mechanisms affect your ability to access this information.
- As a business person you must understand that your business success, among other things, depends on information, and in large on your ability to deliver it. Without the proper content delivery vehicles you cannot get content in front of your target audiences, at least not in a relevant fashion.

RSS answers the needs of both.

While its penetration is not nearly high enough, it is slowly increasing. Right now RSS is being used by the trendsetters and early adopters, but that is going to change over time.

On the other hand, these are exactly the people that move and shake our society, so reaching them with a channel of their choice is a sound business decision, regardless of other key benefits.

From the organizational viewpoint, your organization can achieve great benefits by implementing RSS on the content consumption and content delivery side, even turn it in to a strategic asset and a competitive advantage; and this applies for small and large businesses alike.

Since this may sound too conceptual, let's take a look at the key practical reasons why you, as a marketer and content publisher, should care about implementing RSS as one of your content delivery channels:

- People want to receive content in a controlled environment where they are in-charge, not the publisher.
- Delivering content using e-mail is becoming increasingly difficult, due to blacklists, spam filters and over excessive amounts of e-mail in your recipients' mailboxes.
- RSS allows you to deliver content beyond your e-zine, giving you more beneficial possibilities.
- RSS is a natural tool for content syndication, which means easily and instantly delivering your content to hundreds of other content sources, thus creating additional exposure.
- When using RSS to deliver all of your web site content updates, RSS will actually increase your web site traffic, thus giving your promotional messages more exposure.
- People are afraid of subscribing to e-mail lists, which makes getting new subscribers difficult; RSS is a whole different story.

## Special thanks

*Special thanks to Crt Jakhel, who helped me along the way as my impro editor, and to all the people that invested their time and knowledge in to the interviews on RSS I did with them: Amy Gahrn, Heiko Hebig, Tom Barnes, Alan Webb, Bill Flitter, Åsk Wäppling, Tom Hespos, Rick Bruner, Tig, Robin Good, James Robertson, Shawn Collins, John Moore, Jeanne Jennings, Alain Jourdier, Dwight Shih, Paul Chaney, Laura Ries, Kim Bloomer, Trina Schiller, Bill French, Alex Williams, Christopher Knight, Jim Gray, Raj Devasagayam, Dana VanDen Heuvel, Derek Scruggs and all the people who I'm still waiting to get their responses from. Thank you! All of the interviews will be published in full in an upcoming publication.*