

## What is RSS?

**Compiled by:** Karen Blakeman, RBA Information Services

[karen.blakeman@rba.co.uk](mailto:karen.blakeman@rba.co.uk) web: <http://www.rba.co.uk/> blog: <http://www.rba.co.uk/rss/blog.htm>

This factsheet is brief introduction to RSS. There is a separate companion UKeiG factsheet on features to look for in an RSS reader.




### What does RSS stand for?

RSS can stand for Rich Site Summary, RDF Site Summary or Really Simple Syndication depending on the version. It is a way of delivering news and headlines direct to you, the reader. Just to complicate matters Google has its own format called Atom. From the user's point of view, the version should not matter because any half decent reader should be able to cope with all formats.

### How is it different from email alerts?

RSS feeds are designed to be read by RSS aware programs or news readers, which means that all your news alerts can be gathered together in a single location without cluttering up your email. Because the alerts do not go anywhere near your mail server they are not trapped by spam filters. A good RSS reader will allow you to specify how often your feeds are updated and how long headlines are to be archived. You can directly control when you read your feeds and how long to keep the headlines. Each headline appears as a separate entry in your RSS reader and not as part of a long list in an email. This makes it easier to identify and isolate relevant articles. And it is easier to unsubscribe – just highlight the feed title and delete!

### How can I tell if a news service has an RSS feed?


Look for the XML , RSS  or  icons. XML stands for extensible markup language, which is how the feeds are coded. There are also Atom feeds, which is Google's own version of RSS. Most of the major services, such as the BBC and Yahoo News offer RSS feeds. If you suspect a web site has feeds but you cannot find them, track them down using the Windows Live ([www.live.com](http://www.live.com)) feed: and site: commands. For example `feed:bbc.co.uk site:bbc.co.uk`. (The BBC has over 2000 RSS feeds!)

### Do I get the full story or just the headlines?

You usually receive just the headlines or excerpts, for example the first couple of lines or sentences. It depends on how the author of an RSS feed has set up their feed and also which reader you use. There is normally a link attached to each item so that you can view the whole article, either within the reader or in your preferred browser.

### What do I need in order to read RSS feeds?

#### Firefox and Thunderbird

Both [Firefox](#) and [Thunderbird](#) have "Live Bookmarks" that enable you to store the URL of the feed and view RSS headlines. In Firefox go to Bookmarks, Manage Bookmarks, File, New Live Bookmark and enter the URL of the feed. On some sites you will see a Live Bookmark icon  in the bottom right hand corner of the status bar. Click on the icon, select an RSS feed and follow the Add Bookmark dialogue. In Thunderbird go to Tools, Account Settings, Add Account, RSS News & Blogs. Firefox also has reader add-ons or extensions.

#### Internet Explorer and Outlook

IE 7 has built in RSS reading capability but it is not intuitive. There are several plugins for Outlook, for example Newsgator([www.newsgator.com](http://www.newsgator.com)), and Outlook 2007 has an RSS reader by default.

### **Web based readers**

Web based readers have the advantage that you can access your feeds from any Internet terminal. Bloglines is just one free web based feed reader ([www.bloglines.com](http://www.bloglines.com) ). There is a Bloglines tutorial at <http://tinyurl.com/ap42n>. Google's own reader has improved dramatically and can be found at [www.google.com/reader](http://www.google.com/reader). If the feed requires user authentication, try Newsgator ([www.newsgator.com](http://www.newsgator.com)). There is a guide to getting started with Newsgator at [www.rba.co.uk/rss/newsgator.pdf](http://www.rba.co.uk/rss/newsgator.pdf) .

### **Stand-alone readers**

If you prefer headlines to be stored on your desktop, view them on your mobile or Blackberry there are many programs that can be downloaded to your applications for your computer. There is a list of readers at [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_news\\_aggregators](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_news_aggregators) and the RSS Compendium ([www.allrss.com](http://www.allrss.com)). My own personal favourite desktop program is Omea ([www.jetbrains.com/omea/reader/](http://www.jetbrains.com/omea/reader/)), which is free. A guide to getting started with Omea can be found at [www.rba.co.uk/rss/omea.pdf](http://www.rba.co.uk/rss/omea.pdf)

### **How do I get the feed into my reader? When I click on the link in my browser it is unreadable**

Simply copy the URL of the feed, go to your reader, choose the option for setting up a new feed, paste the URL into the relevant box and follow the instructions. That's it!

### **How do I get rid of a feed I no longer want?**

Highlight the feed in your reader and hit the delete or unsubscribe button.