

# Picking The Best RSS Client

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It's not too hard to choose a good Web-based reader for RSS (Really Simple Syndication), because there are only three major online players. But if you want a reader that runs as an application on your PC, there are dozens to choose from.

Early this year, the blog for FeedBurner, a free service that manages more than 70,000 RSS feeds, released some of the most recent information I've seen on the number of different aggregators being used. There were more than 700 "user agents" at that time polling FeedBurner's top 800 feeds. The number has certainly grown since then.

RSS will soon become a household word when it gains support from Microsoft's Internet Explorer 7.0 later this year, as I wrote on June 28. I published on July 5 a ranking of the Top 20 RSS readers, and on July 12 I rated the best of today's Web-based readers.

Today, in my fourth and final installment in this RSS series, I'll describe your best choices for a client-based RSS reader.

## **Knowing What You Want**

Since Web-based readers allow you to see your favorite RSS feeds -- no matter what computer you're using anywhere in the world -- you might wonder why anyone would want a client-based reader.

The answers are many. For one thing, if the company you work for publishes RSS feeds for internal communications, it will probably want to keep those feeds private. That means you'll need a username and password to access your intranet feeds. But Web-based RSS readers can't authenticate themselves to get inside your firewall in this way.

Other people simply prefer to read their RSS streams within an application they use constantly. Some like their RSS feeds to show up as a toolbar in their browser, while others want RSS to be displayed side-by-side with their incoming e-mail messages. Still others prefer a standalone RSS application.

All of these considerations mean that there's no single "best" RSS reader for everyone. The answer for you will depend upon which environment, if any, you want your RSS reader to be integrated with.

### **Wouldja Like An Application With That?**

If you know where you want your RSS feeds to appear, you're already halfway home to a decision. There are clear market leaders in each of several categories:

- **Mac users.** For those who run Mac OS X, the overwhelming favorite client-based RSS reader is NetNewsWire. If you're not going to use Apple's Safari browser -- which has had RSS support built in since Mac OS X 10.4 -- NetNewsWire is the obvious choice.
- **Firefox users.** Firefox, the fast-growing browser alternative to Internet Explorer, has a native feature called Live Bookmarks. Since this displays only headlines in a pull-down bar, however, many Firefox users prefer to install a separate "extension" to read RSS feeds. Far and away the most popular extension is Sage, which adds newspaper-style feed rendering within the browser.
- **Users of both Firefox and Internet Explorer.** If you use IE at work, but run Firefox at home, you'll be interested in Pluck 2.0. It's the first RSS reader that synchronizes your selected feeds between different browsers and even different operating systems, according to Pluck CEO Dave Panos. Pluck offers an IE BHO (browser helper object), a Firefox extension (which is in a late beta with full release within weeks, Panos says), and a Web server that matches up your feeds on different machines.
- **Microsoft Outlook users.** There are plenty of reasons to integrate RSS feeds into your e-mail inbox. For one thing, you're probably checking your e-mail application several times a day already -- why not check your feeds, too? If your e-mail client of choice is Microsoft Outlook, the obvious adjunct is NewsGator Outlook Edition. (The company is unrelated to Gator, an adware publisher now known as Claria.) Starting at \$19.95 per year, Outlook Edition allows corporate admins to configure RSS feeds for mobile phones and other devices in addition to Outlook. And NewsGator's E-mail

Edition supports Outlook Express, Eudora, or any POP3 e-mail client.

- **Standalone RSS readers.** You may want your RSS reader to be completely separate from any other application. That way, you can open and close it independently, move its window around without regard for which other apps are running, and more. If so, arguably the most popular standalone aggregator is FeedDemon, a \$29.95 application. Since FeedDemon was purchased in May by NewsGator, full integration between the different program's components is promised soon.
- **Podcasts only.** If you just want to download podcasts -- which are RSS feeds associated with audio files -- you don't need a specialized RSS reader. Instead, you can use a specialized music download app. Apple's iTunes (starting with version 4.9, which was released on June 28) and the open-source iPodder will do the trick. Of course, you can also get both podcasts and regular RSS feeds using FeedStation, a free beta feature of NewsGator and FeedDemon.

## Conclusion

The wealth of RSS readers makes it somewhat confusing to select the best one for your company. But, if you know which application you'd like to associate RSS feeds with, it's not too hard to make a choice.

And you can lean back and appreciate the benefits of diversity. Unlike Web browsers, RSS readers haven't yet been reduced to just two or three serious choices. Enjoy it while it lasts.