One of the challenges facing webmasters today is the issue of keeping their information fresh and relevant. A new advance in the field of content syndication, Rich Site Summary (RSS) gives us a way to source information from other locations on the web and include them in our own web sites.

Due to the explosive growth of the Internet, the biggest challenge that our users have is finding the information that they need without having to wade through the chaotic babble. It has been observed that the biggest benefit of the Internet is that everyone has a voice. On the other hand, the biggest problem with the Internet is that everyone has a voice!

You can help your users find meaningful and authoritative information by incorporating syndicated web content into your own and adding real value to your customers. Being seen as a reliable source of information helps to build trust with your customers and gives them a reason to keep coming back to your site, giving you ample opportunity to promote your own goods and services.

What is RSS?

RSS is a web based content syndication model. It stands for:
Rich Site Summary, but others, quite rightly, refer to it as ‘Really Simple Syndication’.

RSS is a way to distribute your web content to other web sites and a way that you can weave content from other web sites into your own to provide your users with a rich information source.

RSS is based on an Internet standard for marking up content. That means that, when you have included the content once, you won’t have to redesign it every time the author republishes.

Sites that use RSS information for you to use usually include an RSS or XML icon on the page to show you that the content is free for syndication.

And now the Technical side

RSS is a loose XML standard for content syndication. Originally developed by Netscape as a means of maintaining content across a single site, the technology was adapted to be used as a model for pulling content from one location to be used in multiple locations. RSS channels were also regarded as an early contender for online application updates and the channel architecture that came and went with MS IE version 4.1 and have been incorporated into a raft of proprietary standards over time.

The RSS document is an XML document located on a web server that can be downloaded or accessed directly in the same way that other XML content can be accessed on the web. The content is marked up according to the RSS 0.91, 0.92, 1.0 or 2.0 standards (defined by the version attribute of the <rss> tag), which exposes a range of information sources.

The XML information can be parsed on the server before being presented to the user in a Common Gateway Interface (CGI) model to apply filtering, caching or the application of business rules or it can be presented to the user directly using Cascading Style Sheet (CSS), XML Style Language Transformation (XSLT) or similar technologies to present the information in the same look and feel as the rest of the web site.

The RSS information contains (as a minimum) a collection of items with a Title, Description and a Link, but can contain other information that can be used by the webmaster to further enhance the user experience, such as: Language, Date of Authorship, Copyright information, Expiry Date and more.

For example an enhancement to CouncilConnect (www. CouncilConnect.tas.gov.au) will allow you to use information from the Jobs, Tenders, News and Public Notices services on your own websites as RSS data. This information, when you request it, will be formatted according to the RSS 2.0 specifications.

As all Tasmanian councils now have websites that are managed by either the UnityDCW Content Management System (24 out of 29) or another type of Content Management System, incorporating RSS data into council websites is easy. The UnityDCW Content Management System natively supports RSS 2.0 data as a “content object”.

◊◊ A good source for RSS 2.0 information can be found at blogs.law.harvard.edu/tech/rss

ICT Solutions Update

Website Usability Testing Services

The aim of usability testing is to help website developers and providers to improve the accessibility and navigation of websites and website content. Usability testing provides an insight into how effective a website really is. The State Library of Tasmania’s Website Evaluation Centre provides testing facilities for website development and design. The State Library offers two standard usability testing services for clients, with testing managed either independently by the client or by the State Library. Clients who are interested in independently managing their testing are required to undertake a short accreditation course. Once the course is completed clients may hire the Website Evaluation Centre on a daily basis. For further information, contact the State Library of Tasmania on 6233 5023 or email state.library@education.tas.gov.au.

Mobile Phone Infrastructure Code

A revised industry code governing the planning and installation of new telecommunications facilities has been registered by the Australian Communications Authority. It improves consultation between telecommunication carriers, industry groups and community members when new facilities such as mobile towers are being planned and installed. Councils will be able to request an additional five business days to comment on a carrier’s draft community consultation plan and carriers must now provide reasons if they do not accept a council’s comments on consultation plans. Go to emr.aca.gov.au/

Silver Surfers

Older Australians wanting to gain basic IT skills and familiarity with computers, the Internet and email, now have assistance through a new “how to” video, Connecting with Computers. The Connecting with Computers video and DVD targets those who are 45 and over, with limited or no computer experience. It covers basic information such as operating systems, word processing, managing files, sending emails and using the Internet as well as the benefits of digital photography. The Australian Bureau of Statistics has revealed that 23% of people over 55 use a computer at home today, compared with only 11% in 1998. Free copies of Connecting with Computers in video or DVD format can be ordered through 1300 363 079.
COLLEX
"SUPPORTING TASMANIA"

COLLEX has a major investment in the state of Tasmania focused on providing quality services to industry and playing a role in maintaining a healthy economy. We are committed to forming strong partnerships between the environment, the community and its business. For us sustainable development means that the current generation should leave a world with adequate resources and with minimal damage for the enjoyment for future generations. Collex has the capacity to handle virtually every type of liquid or solid waste, whether it’s unwanted industrial liquid, building waste, medical and quarantine waste or domestic waste. Accordingly many waste generators from all sectors of industry and community across the state elect to use Collex for their waste and environmental service needs.

"Developing A Sustainable Future"
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