

The Mechanism of RSS*

There are four steps to publishing and receiving an RSS message.

Step 1: Save Our Canyons will create and publish an RSS XML file (an update to our “Current News” section). This file is called the feed, which is the container into which messages are sent. The XML file has a URL associated with it, just like any other Web page. The publisher can then post that URL on his or her Web site.

Step 2: The recipient who wants to receive the feed adds that URL into a program called a reader. A reader is just a program located either on the Web or on the recipient's desktop (many RSS readers are add-ons to Microsoft Outlook) that can read and interpret RSS XML files. There are more than 1,000 readers available, most of them free. RSS is also built into the open-source Web browser Firefox, the Apple Macintosh OSX operating system, and the Web portals AOL, Yahoo!, Google and MSN. Plus, Microsoft is building RSS into the Internet Explorer browser and incorporating it into the next generation of its Windows operating system. As of January 2005, six million U.S. Internet users were using RSS readers, according to the ongoing Pew Internet & American Life Project.

Readers are not proprietary. Any reader can be used with any feed, and a reader can keep track of any number of feeds simultaneously. Two examples of common feed readers are My Yahoo! and NewsGator. The process for subscribing to a feed varies from reader to reader, but usually is a matter of only a couple of clicks.

Step 3: When Save Our Canyons wants to send a message to the recipient, we simply add entries to the XML file. Messages have three parts: a title, a summary and a message body. The title and the summary are added directly to the XML file, along with an entry date. The message body is an HTML file that is referenced in the entry.

Step 4: The function of the reader is to make "virtual visits" to the specified XML Web page at specific intervals (usually once an hour) and check for updates. When the reader finds updates, it makes them available to the recipient. The form in which the message is delivered depends on the reader. In a Web-based reader, it might appear as an entry under the feed banner (see My Yahoo! below). In an Outlook plug-in reader, it would look like an email message.

*This information was found at:

http://www.silverpop.com/rssdirect/about_rssdirect/rss_tech.html