

Foreword by Dare Obasanjo

As I write these words, a revolution is taking place on the World Wide Web. The way people obtain, store, and manipulate information from the Web is fundamentally changing thanks to the rise of information feed formats such as RSS and Atom. I discovered the power of RSS in early 2003.

Like most people who spend time online, I read a number of Web sites on a daily basis. I noticed that I was checking an average of five to ten Web sites every other hour when I wanted to see if there were any new articles or updates to a site's content. This prompted me to investigate the likelihood of creating a desktop application that would do all the legwork for me and alert me when new content appeared on my favorite Web sites. My investigations led to my discovery of RSS and the creation of my desktop news aggregator, RSS Bandit. Since then, RSS Bandit has been downloaded more than 100,000 times and has been praised by many as one of the most sophisticated desktop applications for consuming information feeds.

The concept behind information feed formats is fairly straightforward. An information feed is a regularly updated XML document that contains metadata about a news source and the content in it. Minimally, an information feed consists of an element that represents the news source and that has a title, link, and description for the news source. Additionally, an information feed typically contains one or more elements that represent individual news items, each of which should have a title, link, and content.

Information feed formats have a checkered history. There were several attempts to get such a simple metadata format on the Web in the 1990s, including Apple's MCF, Microsoft's CDF, and Netscape's RSS format. It wasn't until the rise of Web logging and the attendant increase in micro-content sites on the Web that people began to embrace the power of information feeds. The use of information feeds has grown beyond Web logging. News sites such as CNN and the New York Times use them as a way to keep their readers informed about the issues of the day. Radio stations like National Public Radio use them to facilitate the distribution of radio shows to listeners in a trend currently called "podcasting." Technology companies like Microsoft and IBM use them to disseminate information to software developers. Several government agencies have also begun using information feeds to provide news about legislative schedules and reports. It seems as if every week I find a new and interesting Web site that has started publishing information feeds.

In this new world, developers need a guide to show them the best ways to navigate the information feed landscape. Danny Ayers and Andrew Watt have created such a guide. This book is full of practical advice and tips for consuming, producing, and manipulating information feeds. It not only contains useful code samples that show practical examples but also explains many of the concepts of information flow that are crucial to understanding the ongoing revolution in distribution of content on the Web. I only wish I had a book like this when I started writing RSS Bandit two years ago.

Dare Obasanjo

RSS Bandit creator: <http://www.rssbandit.org/>

Program Manager, MSN Communication Services Platform

<http://blogs.msdn.com/dareobasanjo>