

# The Top 5 Reasons Why It's "RSS or DIE"



*Web publishers and marketers who think that RSS is "simple" may be caught off-guard. Companies that have yet to adopt an RSS strategy are already falling behind...*

A Room 214 White Paper  
By Jason Cormier and James Clark

## Executive Summary

"RSS" stands for "Really Simple Syndication." In a nutshell, it is the technology enabling blogs, podcasts, and all major online news rooms. RSS is rapidly displacing email and websites as the preferred method for distributing online content. However, although the syndication technology may indeed be "simple," highly-effective RSS deployments are not. Success hinges on a careful re-thinking of content channels and marketing strategies.

In order to "get RSS right the first time," companies need to understand the basic paradigm shift it represents, and how that should be integrated with overall corporate marketing and PR communications.

## The RSS Paradigm Shift

RSS ("Really Simple Syndication") is a relatively straightforward technology that completely changes the model for distributing content online:

- ***RSS is anonymous*** – subscribers receive your content without ever having to provide their name, email address or other contact information.
- ***RSS is highly-focused*** – it's easy & essential to create individualized content channels that let the consumer choose which content is of interest to them.
- ***RSS is instantaneous*** – new content is instantly delivered to the subscriber's RSS reader, without the need to "surf" or manually check websites for updates.
- ***RSS is trusted*** – it goes straight to the subscriber, without having to run the gauntlet of corporate or ISP email/spam filters. RSS content feeds *always* reach subscribers.
- ***RSS is "expert"*** – search engines (correctly) recognize RSS feeds as highly-focused content and therefore give it a higher "expert info" weighting that boosts search rankings and overall credibility.

All of these characteristics are fundamentally superior to the current website- and email-based models of content distribution. However,

without a fundamentally new strategic plan to capitalize on RSS' strengths, many companies will spin their wheels and squander any "first mover" advantage they may have had.

Let's examine the key considerations in greater detail...

## RSS Offers True Choices

Marketing guru Seth Godin frequently points out that "people simply want what they want" – in the exact form they want it, and exactly when they want it. Pleasing people is all about giving them an easier and faster way to satisfy their desires. When something pleases them, they want more of it. And when they come back for more, they tell others along the way.

RSS creates an entirely new channel for consumers who want specific content but don't want to exchange their contact information for it. They subscribe (paid or free) to receive your content anonymously, according to their own preferences.

RSS equips companies with the power to segment content – written, audio or video – for any audience. This means no more cramming all manner of content into a single newsletter in order to please the masses. Instead, you can now create individualized content *channels* that let consumers choose what's of interest to them. These content channels might include:

- News
- Product development
- Sale items
- Sales team programs
- Corporate or employee blogs
- Training
- Departmental updates
- Articles
- Case studies
- Research
- Anything else applicable to your business

This deceptively simple shift in how content is organized and distributed promotes subscriber loyalty and interaction. You'll see the

FACT

*A recent TEK Group survey of how journalists view newsrooms on websites showed that 70% of journalists want news organized by type of news content, and 24% want to receive that news via an RSS feed.*

FACT

*In June of 2006, Jupiter Research reported that 30% of marketers surveyed implemented RSS Feeds due to customer demand.*

positive results in whatever metric you use – readership, listenership or viewership.

## No Barriers to RSS

As a marketer, relying on consumers to come back and check your site regularly for new content is an increasingly risky proposition. With the availability of search engines, desktop widgets and RSS feeds, fewer-and-fewer consumers are willing to spend hours surfing the Web for information.

Likewise, an increasingly dying practice is relying on the spam-battered email Inbox as the sole repository of key information. For example, if it's important for journalists to see your information, does it really make sense to expect them to create a folder for your specific information? Not likely.

RSS feeds offer the ultimate “opt-in” model of receiving content, meaning that consumers can easily and immediately control their secure subscription (free or paid) to information.

Unlike email, consumers receive information through an RSS feed while remaining completely anonymous. Nothing – not even an email address – needs to be submitted to receive information via an RSS feed. There is no “request to unsubscribe” step, as in email. All the consumer needs is an RSS reader, most of which are freely available.

Once subscribed, previously published information becomes *immediately* accessible, and new content is delivered as soon as it is posted. With web-based RSS readers, that content also doesn't pile-up on the consumer's hard drive. Plus, email servers are bypassed, so the many frustrating problems associated with lost emails or spam filtering are completely eliminated.

## RSS Content is High Profile

Typically, your online content lives or dies by its search engine rankings. How can you use that to your advantage? Consider this: The mission of a search engine is to be relevant. The more relevant the search results, the more valuable the information is to the searcher. When people get what they want, they come back for more

FACT  
*iMedia Connection reports that over 20% of permission-based email is filtered or blocked before making it to your inbox.*

FACT  
*In 2006, Orbitz reported that 50-60% of all incoming email to their organization was spam. When Travelocity invited their email subscribers to use RSS as an option for receiving updates, over 65% subscribed to their feed.*

and tell others along the way. Google proved this years ago by creating a superior search algorithm, one that continues to evolve and gain market share to this day.

Google's current search algorithm recognizes RSS feeds as extremely relevant content vehicles, even to the point of indexing and presenting the feed content in a search results page. Publishing content through an RSS feed is like "pinging" the search engines, notifying the bots that new content is available. This drives search bots to web pages to index the content. The frequency and relevancy of the content increases the number of pages on your site that are indexed by search engines. This results in higher natural search rankings for your content.

RSS boosts your online visibility in many ways:

- **Syndicates your content** and creates one-way, inbound links from other websites that reference your site as the source
- **Notifies search engines** whenever your content is updated
- **Increases web traffic** via deeper search engine indexing of your site and inclusions in RSS-only search directories
- **Improves search rankings** for targeted keywords (search terms)

### **RSS Positions You as a Thought Leader**

Google, Yahoo! and MSN search engines do not rely on human intervention to rank the importance of websites – yet if your website ranks high for certain keywords, it is perceived by most that the search engine has designated your site as an expert resource for that topic. Although expert resources may be found in top search results, there is currently no reliable process that assures top rankings will only go to top organizations...

This raises an important question: How valuable would it be for your organization to appear as the #1 Google search result for a keyword relevant to your business? Or would even appearing anywhere on the first search results page be great for your business?

**FACT**

*65% of the 2,500 people polled in a recent 2007 survey believed that there was a strong correlation between a website with high search rankings and the level of expertise associated with the entity owning that website.*

Our clients have discovered that top search engine rankings have a profound and positive impact on the perception of their business as an overall market leader. This may seem intuitive, but plenty are still unaware of this simple fact.

Consider these facts from the Middleberg/Ross Media in Cyberspace Study:

FACT

*Although 18-24 year olds still represent the largest demographic aware they are using RSS, the overall adoption rate in 2006 increased by 32% from the previous year.*

- 98% of journalist go online daily...
- 92% for article research
- 81% for search
- 72% to find expert sources
- 73% for press releases

Now imagine that a journalist is going online today to conduct research for an article about your industry. Will your company be visible? Will your content be found and seen as relevant and timely? Will that journalist be able to access back data and read the conversations you've had with your customers? Or read articles that you've written? Or subscribe to your RSS feed to see what kind of trends you find interesting?

Let's face it – the company most likely to catch the journalist's attention is the one with highly visible, relevant and timely content that positions the organization as an industry and thought leader.

This is exactly why an RSS content distribution strategy is so vital – it's the fastest and most effective way to achieve a high-profile online reputation for expertise and leadership. There is an award winning case study (Silver Medal, 2007Colorado BMA awards) we submitted for one of our own clients to demonstrate this – and would be happy to share it if you contact us.

## **RSS Future-Proofs Your Communications**

RSS is the future of communication on the Web. It doesn't totally replace email or static web pages, but radically changes everyday methods of communicating and connecting with consumers, partners, press and employees via the Internet.

FACT

*Forrester's 2007 results from their interactive marketers survey show that: 40% of marketers are using or piloting RSS (up from 10% last year). Blog usage for marketing is at 34% - up 13% from the 2006 study, and 25% of marketers surveyed are now podcasting.*

Some organizations have been lulled into a false sense of complacency by the presence of the word "simple" in the RSS acronym – “Really Simple Syndication” – but "simple" here refers to the technical structure of how your content is formatted in a feed. It does NOT refer to the simplicity of:

- Developing an RSS strategy
- Integrating RSS into marketing, PR and communications plans
- Customizing the delivery and implementation tactics
- Optimizing your RSS feeds for search engines
- Effectively displaying and promoting your feeds
- Measuring results

Here's the bottom line: transitioning to the RSS model is *not* simple for most organizations. Success depends on having a solid foundation in search optimization, the ability to measure results and a keen appreciation of the new tactics utilized for widespread RSS content distribution.

RSS marketing should *not* be approached as a stand-alone module or feature to be added to your website by the techies. It needs to be recognized as a serious communications tool implemented as part of an ongoing strategy to build community, search visibility, expert positioning, loyalty, leads, sales and brand awareness.

*Is your organization ready to make the leap to RSS?* If so, be sure to choose a strategic partner with broad and cutting-edge experience in keyword analysis, search optimization, online publishing and RSS strategic planning. Anything less and you may not 'cross the chasm' successfully.

## **About the Authors**

James Clark and Jason Cormier are co-founders of *Room 214* ([www.Room214.com](http://www.Room214.com)), a Boulder, Colorado, search marketing and social media agency. Room 214 has been recognized as a top-10 fastest growing company in Colorado, and has won multiple awards for original publications and client work from the American Marketers and Business Marketers Associations.

James and Jason originated the "Capture the Conversation" philosophy – that search engines are media and markets are

conversations. To dominate a market, you must first capture the conversation by pursuing a unified, multi-tactic approach to high search engine visibility for increasing sales, leads, brand awareness and profitability.

## Take the Next Step

Through June 30, 2007, readers of this white paper can receive a **30% discount on a comprehensive keyword analysis** by going to <http://www.room214.com/contact.php?rssordie>

Get your **free assessment on an RSS strategy** for your company by calling James Clark or Jason Cormier at 303-444-9214 or by filling in the contact form at <http://www.room214.com/contact.php>

###