



Fáilte Ireland

National Tourism Development Authority

GUIDE TO RSS

How to use RSS to stay up to date with news and how it can benefit your business

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Introduction

This guide is an overview of what RSS is and how you can use it to benefit your business

Skill Level

Inter The topics in this guide are suitable for users with reasonable IT skills and who have some familiarity and experience with using some of the social media tools and platforms.

Terminology

You will come across the following terminology in this guide which you need to be familiar with:

Term	Explanation
RSS	Real Simple Syndication. If you have content that you want to share then providing this content in a standard format makes it much easier to share. Providing your information in RSS format allows people to access this content in a very easy way through a range of different applications.
RSS Feed	If you have a blog with lots of articles, you get people to subscribe to your 'RSS Feed' and this means they get notified of the latest articles. They can read these articles without having to visit your website.
Feed Reader	Information provided through RSS is provided in a feed. A feed reader is an application that can understand and display this content in its correct format.
RSS Reader	An application that allows you to read content shared out by RSS. For example, if I provide articles in RSS format then somebody can subscribe to this article and they don't have to come to my website to read it. They can view it through an application called an RSS reader. Google have a reader application that is free that people can use.

Video Tutorials



Indicates a video tutorial. Click on the icon to watch the video. These videos demonstrate how to carry out a particular task. In order to watch the video tutorials in this guide, you will need to have Adobe Flash Player v9.0.28 or above installed on your computer.

Note: When you go to watch the video, a check is done to make sure you have the correct software installed. If you do not have the correct version installed you will be provided with a prompt to download and install the correct version.

What is RSS?

RSS (Real simple syndication) is a standard format for making your content available for people to read using a variety of applications. The content could be a blog containing a mixture of text articles, audio/video content or even photos or just content from your website.

If I write articles on my website and I don't provide this in RSS format then people will have to come to my website to read all the articles. Also, if I write a new post they are not notified that there is a new post for them to read.

However, if they subscribe via RSS the articles are automatically sent to them and they get notified when there's a new article. Also, if you want to read articles from many different websites wouldn't it be nice if you were able to read all of them in one location and got notified if they wrote new posts also? If you provide your articles in 'RSS' format then visitors can subscribe to your articles by RSS and then they can use a separate application to read these articles or get them delivered via e-mail.

There are a range of applications available they can use to read this content. These applications are called 'RSS readers' because it's able to understand and read any information provided in RSS format.

There is a lot of data around the web provided in this format so it can be a great way to save some time and enable you to access all this information in one place. This guide will take you through how all this works.

Your Questions Answered

What does RSS stand for?

Real Simple Syndication.

What is it used for?

RSS provides a web user an easy way to get articles delivered to you via e-mail or through a standard application known as an RSS reader. Using RSS it is possible to get notified when new articles are created without having to visit the website.

What is an RSS feed?

This is the content provided through RSS. When you subscribe to a feed it means that you get notified when new content has been added.

Why should I provide my content in RSS format?

Everybody is very busy these days and lots of people will want to keep track of new content on many websites but don't have the time to visit them all. So you need to make it easier for them.

I still don't get it, can you provide an example?

You are in the Hotel industry and you want to keep track of 5 different journalists that write posts online. Each of them are focussed on tourism related industries so you think there is a chance they will write about you at some stage. To build up a relationship with them you have decided to read their blog posts every week and provide some insightful comments back to them, however, you are very busy and you don't want to have to go back to each individual website every few days checking to see if any of them have written new blog posts.

You see that each of these journalists provide their information in 'RSS' format. So you go to each site and subscribe to their content.

You then use a tool, such as Google Reader, so you can see the blog posts from all the journalists in one place. Each week all you need to do is login to Google Reader and it will show you which journalist has written a new post.

The advantage from the Journalist's point of view is that you have subscribed to their blog so it's likely you will continue to read their posts. The advantage from your point of view is that you are saving some time.

What is an RSS reader?

This is an application you can use to read any information you subscribed to via RSS. It's simple to use and really handy!

Can I only access RSS via a computer?

No, you can also access it via a mobile phone.

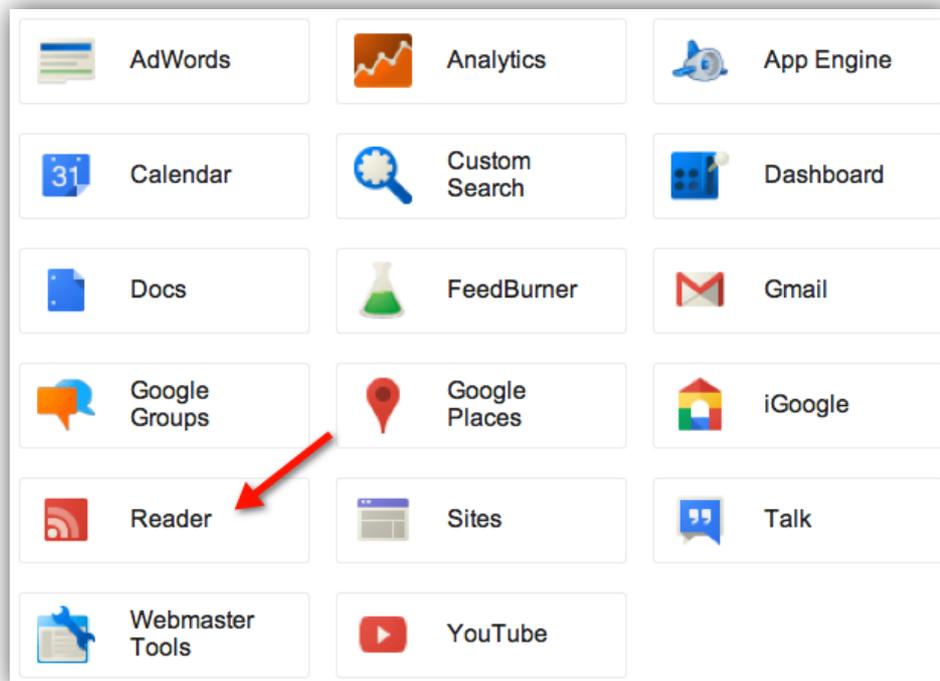
Subscribing to RSS Feeds through a Feed Reader

If you want to subscribe to some content on various websites the first thing you need to do is set up an RSS reader application.

Setup Google Reader

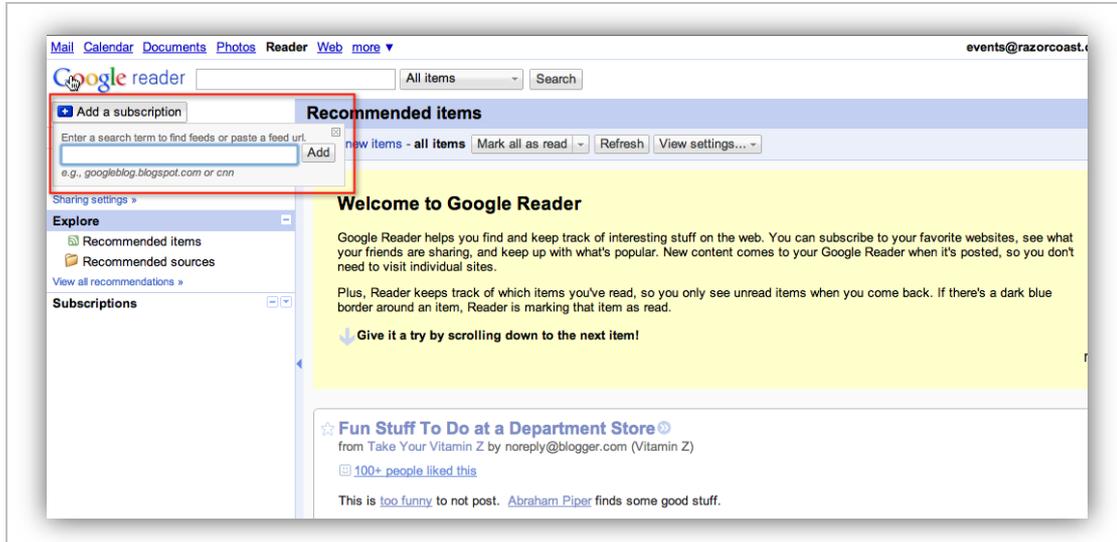
The following example shows you how to set up and use the Google Reader application, which is a free application provided by Google.

1. First of all you will need a Google account so if you don't have one already, go to <https://www.google.com/accounts> and create your account.
2. Login to your Google Account and go to the following address - <https://www.google.com/settings/products>. Select the 'reader' application.



Alternatively, you can go directly to the Google Reader application by going to www.google.com/reader and logging in using the Google Account you have just created.

3. You are presented with the Google Reader main screen as shown:



As this is the first time you have logged in to Google Reader you will not have subscribed to any RSS feeds so the only information you will see is recommended content provided by Google. So the next step is to subscribe to an RSS feed so that the information appears in Google Reader.

Subscribe to an RSS Feed

When information is provided in RSS format there is a web address where the feed is stored so you can enter this in to the Add a subscription box at the top of the Google Reader application (as shown previously).

However, the normal is to visit the website that you want to subscribe to and subscribe to it using the RSS Subscribe option on that website.

Now that you have Google Reader set up lets subscribe to an RSS feed and then step through the functionality of the reader.



VIDEO: *Subscribing to an RSS feed*

This video takes you step by step through the process of subscribing to an RSS feed and displaying this feed in Google Reader.

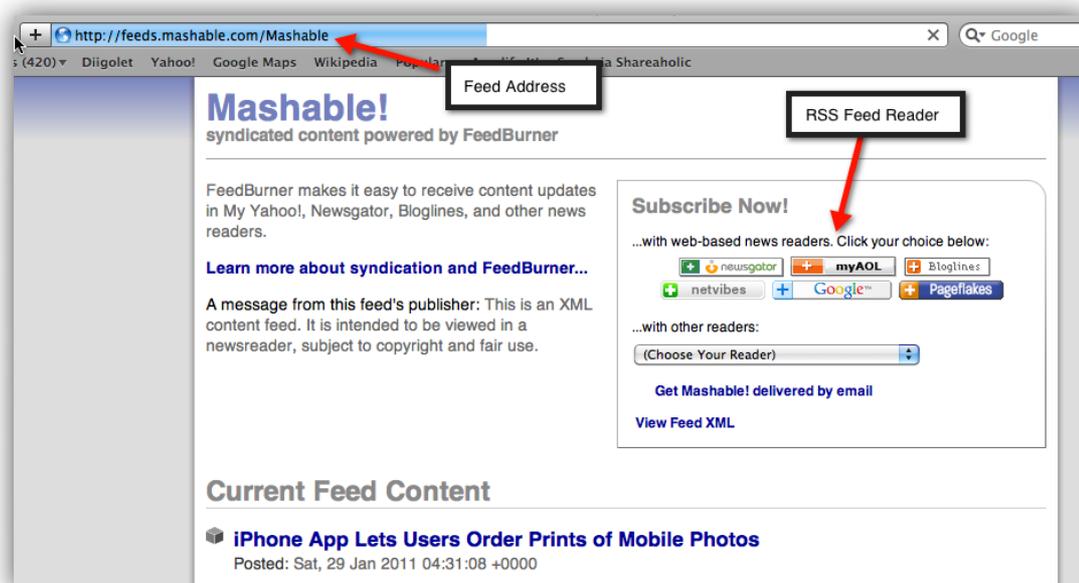
When you are ready, click the PLAY icon to start the video.

For this example, we will subscribe to a website called Mashable that contains lots of useful information on Social Media. Because I am interested in reading the latest articles from this website, and I want to view them using Google Reader, then I need to subscribe to them.

1. Go to the website that you want to subscribe to, for example, www.mashable.com.
2. Look out for an orange icon with an 'RSS' or 'Subscribe' label and click on this. An example, of this can be seen below.



3. Click on this icon and you are brought to a screen that allows you to subscribe to the information on this website, as shown.



On this screen you can see the following:

- a. Feed Address — this is the web address of the RSS feed.
 - b. RSS Feed Reader — this shows you a variety of applications that you can use to view this feed.
- 4.** Select Google as Google Reader is the application that we have set up.
 - 5.** You are then brought to the Google Reader application where you will now see the details from this website appear on the right hand side of the reader screen.

Subscribing by e-mail

If you don't want to use an RSS reader application, such as Google Reader, you can also subscribe to a feed by e-mail. This means that every time a new post is published you automatically get an e-mail with details of this new post in the e-mail.

Useful Feeds to Setup

When you set up Google Reader and you are considering what type of information you should subscribe to, here are some ideas.

Influencers

Track and respond to articles from influential people in your industry. An influential person could be a high profile journalist that specializes in articles about the tourism industry. By reading and responding to their articles it will be much easier to form a relationship with them.

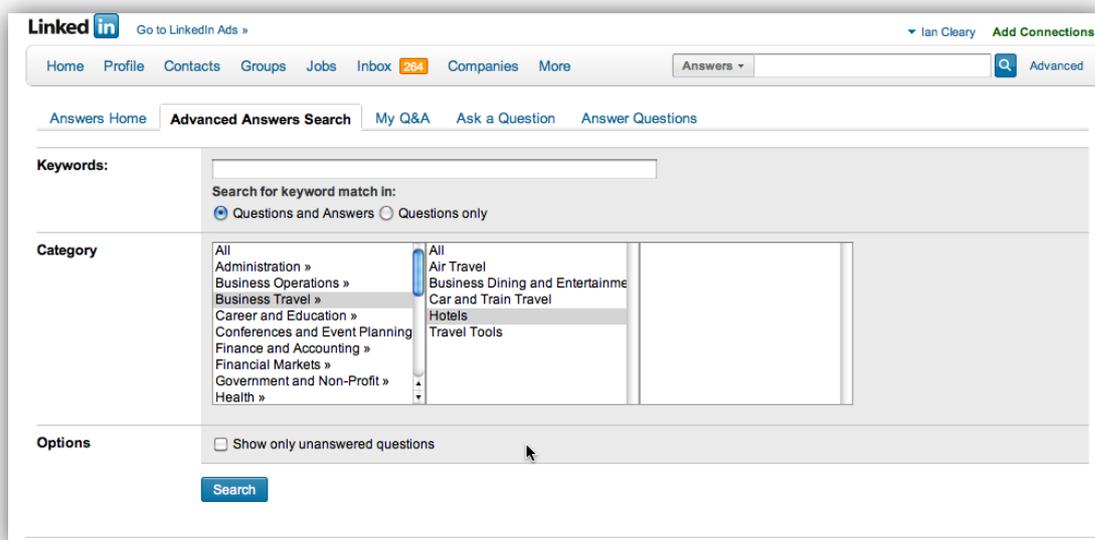
Competitors

You may want to track competitors to get ideas for content and see what they are discussing with their followers.

LinkedIn Feeds

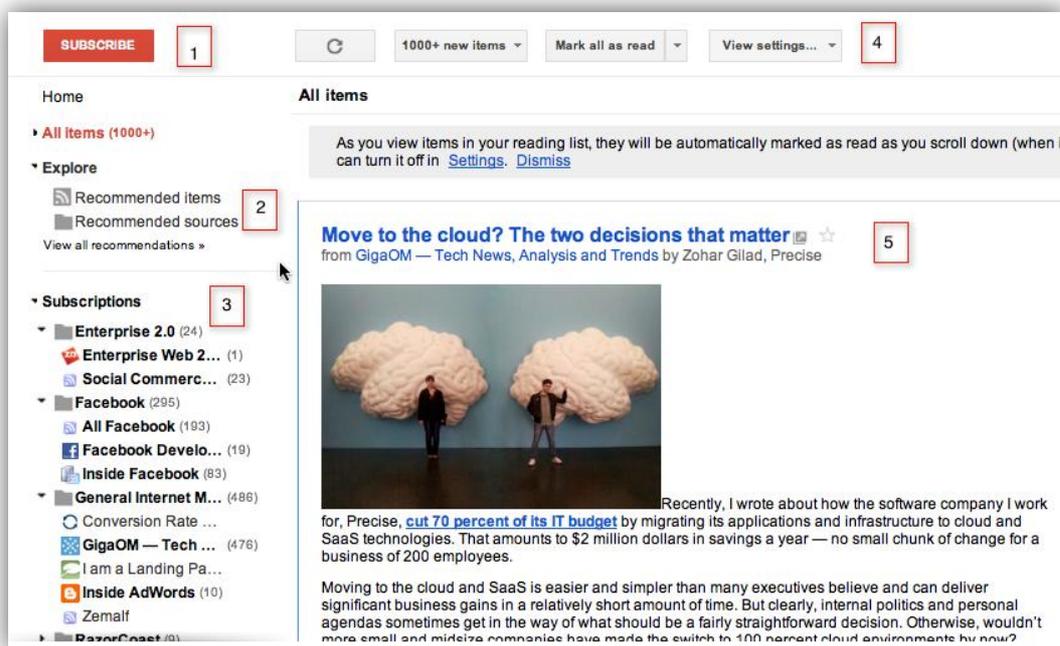
LinkedIn is a business networking site with over 150 million people. In one area of LinkedIn there is the opportunity to ask questions. So for example, some business people ask questions related to how to market their business, manage their staff, and much more. This might be interesting to track by setting up the search as a feed.

Also, there are sections for people to ask about other areas. For example, questions about 'hotels'. You might set up a feed to monitor questions about what type of hotels are good to stay in, and so on.



Using Google Reader

Google Reader is an RSS reader application that enables you to read any information you subscribed to via RSS in one place. So rather than having to visit multiple websites everyday to keep on top of the information you are interested in, you can have all the information delivered to and displayed through one easy to use interface.



VIDEO: Using Google Reader

This video takes you step by step through the functionality available in Google Reader.

When you are ready, click the PLAY icon to start the video.

The following explains all of the sections of Google Reader displayed above.

- 1. Subscribe** — there is a web address associated with each RSS feed. You can go to a website and click on the RSS icon and look at the web address bar and you'll see the address. You can then copy this and go to Google Reader and click this option to add a subscription and enter in the address. However, normally, you just go to a website and subscribe from there.

- 2. Recommended items / Recommended sources** — these are feeds that Google recommends.
- 3. Subscriptions** — this shows you a list of all the RSS feeds that you have subscribed to. If you look at the number in brackets this is the number of unread items.
- 4. Feed Options** — the options available are as follows:
 - The circular icon at the start is for refreshing and getting the latest articles.
 - 1,000+ items – This is a drop down which allows you to select the new articles or all articles. So there are over 1,000 new articles at the moment.
 - Mark all as read – If you want to start fresh you can mark all items as read.
 - Feed settings – Various configuration settings of the feed, for example, do you want to display the newest or oldest items in the list.
- 5. Feed Window** — this is where you read all the content. Generally the full post will appear in this area but sometimes companies decide only to include the initial couple of lines. If this is the case you have to click on the post and then you will be redirected to the website to get full details.

Setting up your Data in RSS Format

To allow people to subscribe to your website via a reader or e-mail you need to provide your information in RSS format. Some tools that you may be using will automatically provide the content in RSS format and for others you will need to get your programmer to generate the relevant information in RSS format.

- Content Management Systems — a lot of content management systems that you can use to create a website can automatically create your data in RSS format so it can be read by feed readers. For example, WordPress is a blogging platform which includes a content management system and supports RSS. So when you create a new blog post it automatically creates an RSS feed for it.
- Creating your own feed — if, for example, your website is developed without the use of any tools then your developer will need to present content that you want included in a feed in a specific format that can be read by RSS readers. This is not difficult to do but it is a development task.

You will find that there are many different types of applications that automatically produce RSS feeds. For example, Flickr allows you to set up a feed of pictures, Twitter lets you set up a feed of tweets, and so on

The Technical Stuff (please feel free to ignore this)

RSS (Really simple syndication) is based on XML which is a markup language used for describing your data. XML is a widely used standard for transferring textual information between applications on the Internet. RSS is just one standard for expressing feeds as XML, there are other ones (e.g. Atom) but they are not as widely used.

TIP: *When you create your feed, register it with Feedburner which will manage your feed. The big advantage of using Feedburner is that they create a 'SmartFeed' from your feed which means that your feed is more accessible to a wider variety of applications.*

For example, if the reader application that a subscriber uses doesn't support RSS and supports another type of feed (e.g. Atom) then Feedburner will automatically create the appropriate format. The other advantage of using Feedburner is that they provide a lot of useful statistics on your subscriber base, such as, who is reading your RSS feed, and so on.

See the section "Using Feedburner for Analytics" on page 14 for more information on setting up Feedburner.

Who is Subscribing and Reading your Blog?

Quite often people ask about who is subscribing and reading your articles. There are a couple of ways to find out.

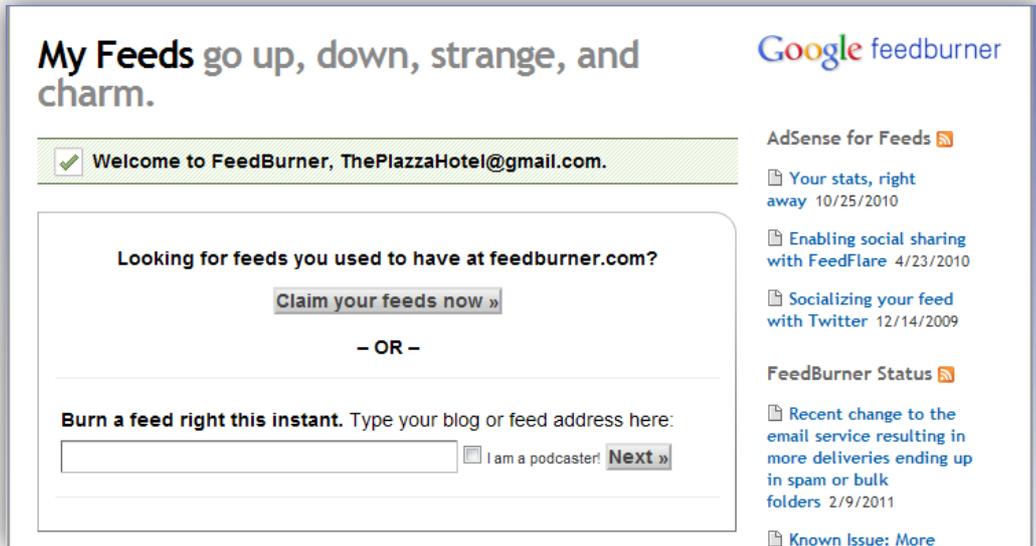
- Google Analytics — by having a separate page for each article and having Google Analytics installed, you can see how many people visit your page and how long they spend there. However, if they have subscribed via RSS then they don't visit your website so it doesn't appear through Google Analytics (see the Google Analytics guide for details on setting this up on your website).
- Analytical Applications for RSS Feeds — there are applications available that provide analytics on your RSS feeds. One such application is owned by Google and is called Feed Burner. You take an RSS feed you already have and add it to Feedburner and then when people subscribe to a feed this is tracked within Feedburner. Feedburner then also provides analytics so you can get lots of useful information.

TIP: *If you are using WordPress as the application for writing blog posts and providing it in RSS feed format, there is a Feedburner plugin that will automatically create the Feedburner feed and set them up for you.*

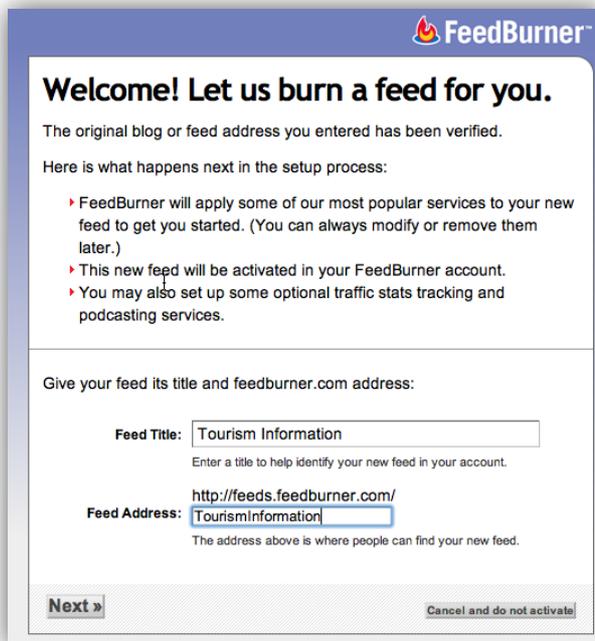
Using Feedburner for Analytics

To set up Feedburner:

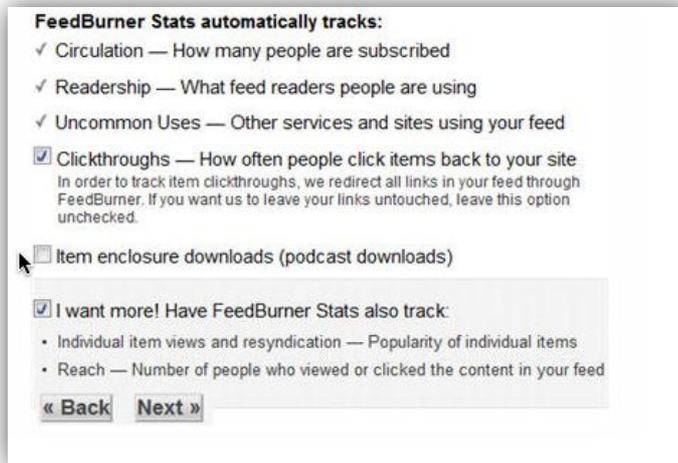
1. Go to www.feedburner.com.
2. Sign in using your Google Account username and password. If you don't have one then create a Google Account now.
3. Once you have logged in you are presented with the choice of either claiming a feed that was already setup with Feedburner.com or entering in the address of a new feed. As you are new to Feedburner the option to claim an existing feed is not applicable.



4. Enter the RSS address of the feed on your website in the **Burn a feed right this instant** field and click Next.
5. You will then have to provide some details of the feed. Enter the title of your feed and the feed address and click Next.



6. Next you need to configure what you want to track. Select the **Clickthroughs** option so that you can track any click throughs to your website and also click the **I want more** option, as shown:

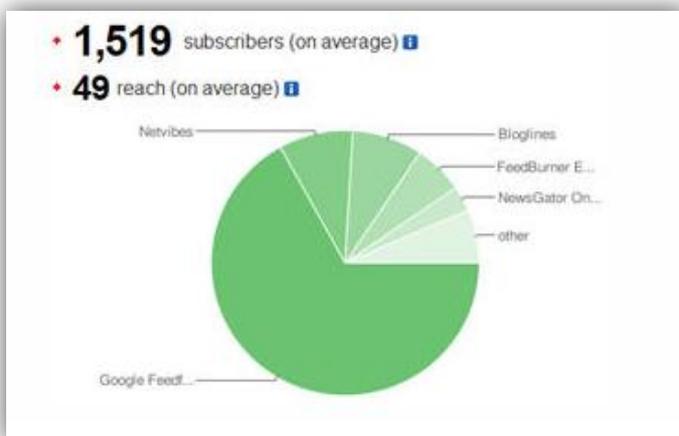


7. Click Next to complete the setup.

Once you have set up this feed when people subscribe to it you will start getting stats, such as:

- Number of e-mail subscribers.
- Type of applications people are using to read your posts.
- Reach – there may be lots of subscribers but you also want to track how many of them are reading your content.
- e-mail addresses – you can see who subscribed and what their e-mail address is.
- Graph showing trends regarding how many people are reading your posts. Based on these trends you can start to figure out what posts are working/not working.

The following shows a typical chart provided by Feedburner showing what Feed reader people use, number of subscribers and the reach.

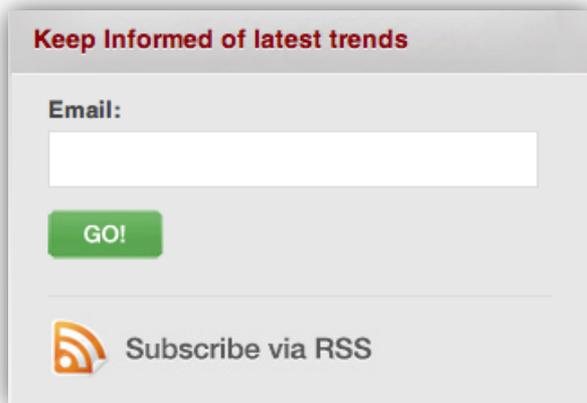


Getting People to Subscribe to your Website/Blog

Once you have everything set up you then want to get people to start subscribing to your feed using their feed reader of choice and/or by e-mail. To make sure people subscribe you need to have very clear calls to action and a very simple way of completing the subscription.

For example, if you want people to subscribe via e-mail they should be able to just enter their e-mail address and click go. This box for collecting this information should be very clearly visible on the page.

The following screen allows you to easily enter your e-mail to subscribe or you can subscribe via RSS if e-mail subscription is not of interest.



The image shows a subscription form with a grey background and a white border. At the top, it says "Keep Informed of latest trends" in red. Below that, there is a label "Email:" followed by a white text input field. Under the input field is a green button with the text "GO!". At the bottom of the form, there is an orange RSS icon followed by the text "Subscribe via RSS".

So if you really want people to subscribe make it easy and make sure the possibility for subscribing is displayed very clearly and preferably on the top half of the page where the user is browsing (i.e. you should see the option to subscribe without having to scroll).

Summary

If you are providing regular new and interesting content on your website it is very useful to provide a facility for website visitors to subscribe to this content so you have another way of keeping in contact with them.

The two main options of subscribing are via RSS or e-mail. Provide both options to your current or potential customers. Also set up your feeds through Feedburner so you get some good analytics.



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