



Mt. Lebanon School District

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www.mtlsd.org

What are RSS newsfeeds? *

RSS stands for Rich Site Summary, or for Really Simple Syndication. Both mean the same thing, so don't let it confuse you. An RSS provides readers with a "newsfeed" of information from a website (or a blog). It's available for everyone to add to their own "newsreader" for free and gets displayed on your Desktop or in your web browser.

It works almost like a stock ticker, delivering exactly the information that you have anonymously "subscribed" to, eliminating the need to go out and check your favorite outlets for new information, because they're already delivered to your computer.

Who needs RSS?

Well, everyone needs it. It's so much more efficient than going to get it, or getting endless email newsletters. Having the paper delivered to your home makes more sense than driving to the store every day, doesn't it? In the same vein, let's say that you want only the latest news about only certain subjects, and routinely go out and check several websites to see what's new. Using RSS, those individual websites will deliver that news right to your Desktop, suitable for reading, clicking, printing, or ignoring.

How can you use RSS?

There seems to be no single definitive answer, because there are so many ways to use it. I'll tell you about the easiest way to get RSS feeds that I know of, but by no means is that the only way, that is, on your Home Page of your web browser.

First, you need an RSS newsreader (a.k.a. "aggregator"). The good news though is that you may already have one. Since millions of people have Yahoo, MSN, Hotmail, or Google accounts, I'll walk you through adding a newsfeed to your MSN Home Page. Go to <http://www.my.msn.com> and sign in. If you don't already have a Hotmail account, go ahead and create one. If you'd prefer, you can go to <http://my.yahoo.com> and do the same. It only takes a minute to get a new account.

After signing in to My MSN, you'll see quite an array of news, weather, sports, ads, stock quotes, local information, etc. Think of this as your canvas, and you're free to arrange or remove the information how you see fit. Each of these sections can be easily moved or deleted. To move them, just click and drag from the top right of each subject area. To remove them, click the minus (-) sign in the top left of the subject area. Feel free to delete them all, since you can always add them back later.

Now go to top left of the screen, right above the "Welcome" area, and you'll see "Add Content" below your name. When you go there, you get four choices (Tabs) for adding content. The default Tab that comes up is "Search" and from here you have four options, each clearly defined. If you know the exact web address (URL) for a company's newsfeed, you can enter it right here. The other three Tabs might be worth exploring too, since they let you browse by company names and subjects. Then you just click a box for all you want.



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After signing in to My Yahoo, you'll notice that there are already several newsfeeds from Reuters listed there, with "Top Stories," "World News," "Politics," and "Business." Above those stories, you'll see a big yellow box in the center explaining how you can "Add Content." Click the link to "add content" and you'll come up with a search box allowing you to "find content" about a given subject. Type in a search phrase, and you'll be presented with search results that all have an "Add" button next to them. Hit the "Add" button by the ones you want, and then hit the "Finished" button at the top right, and you're done. You just added that RSS newsfeed to your My Yahoo page. Scroll down at the My Yahoo main page, and you'll see those news headlines you added at the bottom of your list. To rearrange the order of your newsfeeds, just hit the small "edit" button at the top right of each news section. To remove a newsfeed, just hit the "X" like you would to close any window.

Customizing your own news feeds

Now suppose you don't need to "find" a newsfeed on a subject, because you already know you want to add a particular one. Well that's easy too. All you have to do is identify what the "RSS Feed URL" is for the information you want to add. Most blogs or news organizations show you these now on their websites.

Look for a small orange box on the website that says XML or the words "RSS Feed" or "Newsfeed" and click on it. In the case of large organizations, like CNN for example, you'll be taken to a page with a nice set of instructions, and a whole list of RSS newsfeed URL's that you can manually copy and paste into your newsreader.

Sometimes though, you'll be taken to a page that looks like gibberish code. Don't let that scare you like it did me the first time I saw it! When that happens, you are actually looking right at the feed itself, and all you have to do is copy and paste what's in the address bar of your web browser, right into your newsreader. That's called "knowing the specific URL of the feed" on MSN, and "Add RSS by URL" in Yahoo.

In My Yahoo, to manually add a newsfeed, go to the "add content" area, and choose the link to the right of the Find button that says "Add RSS by URL." Once you paste your URL in that window and hit "add," the news headlines should show up there. If they don't, then you may have copied the URL wrong, or added a space at the end. Then just hit the "Add to My Yahoo" button and you're done! In MSN, you'll paste the URL of the newsfeed right into the search box, then check the box when it shows the result.

Delivering exactly what you want—and only when you want—is how the Internet is supposed to work. Things are only getting better.

In researching this article, I notice that My Yahoo seems to be having problems adding certain manual URL's. Oh well. Nothing's perfect.

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