

Making a RSS feed....

RSS is a method of distributing links to content in your web site that you'd like others to use. In other words, it's a mechanism to "syndicate" your content.

What is a RSS feed?

How does RSS syndication work? Say you publish a new web page about a particular topic. You want others interested in that topic to know about it. By listing the page as an "item" in your RSS file, you can have the page appear in front of those who read information using RSS readers or "news aggregators". RSS also allows people to easily add links to your content within their own web pages. Bloggers are a huge core audience that especially does this.

The RSS file

At the heart of an RSS file are "items." No matter what version of RSS you settle on, your file will have to include at least one item. Items are generally web pages that you'd like others to link to. For example, let's say you just created a web page reviewing a new cell phone that's being released. Information about that page would form an item.

To enter your item into the RSS file, you'll need three bits of information:

Title

Description

Link

The title and description of your item need not match exactly the HTML title tag of the web page that the item refers to, nor the meta description tag, assuming you use these. You can write any title and description that you think will describe the page. However, using your page's title and meta description tag certainly makes it easy to copy and paste to build your RSS feed.

In the case of our example page, let's say this is the information we settle on to define it as an item:

Apostolic Webmasters Association RSS Feed

Apostolic Webmasters Association is an association of website designers and web masters, organizations, and churches with a vision for the web. Apostolic Webmasters Association is a place to gather together and share ideas, designs, and advice with others. It is a place to mentor and to be mentored by others with a shared calling and gifts. It is a place to find resources, articles, tutorials, tools, examples, advice, and counsel to help fulfill the burden placed upon us by the gospel of Jesus Christ for the Internet.

<http://awa.daystart.org>

Now we have to surround that information with XML tags. These are similar to HTML tags, with the exception that unlike with HTML, there's no set definition of XML tags. Anyone can make up a particular XML tag. Whether it is useful depends on the program that reads the resulting XML file. In the case of RSS feeds, they have their own unique set of XML tags that are defined. Use these correctly, and then anything that reads RSS will understand your information.

Confusing? If so, don't reread -- just carry on to see how simple it is. First, open a text editor like Notepad. We're going to build our RSS file using it.

For your title, you need to start it with the <title> tag, then follow this with the text of the title, then end with the </title> tag. It looks like this:

```
<title> Apostolic Webmasters Association RSS Feed </title>
```

For your description, you do the same, starting out with the opening <description> tag, then following with the actual description, then "closing" with the </description> tag. Now you have this:

```
<title> Apostolic Webmasters Association RSS Feed </title>
```

```
<description> Apostolic Webmasters Association is an association of website designers and web masters, organizations, and churches with a vision for the web. Apostolic Webmasters Association is a place to gather together and share ideas, designs, and advice with others. It is a place to mentor and to be mentored by others with a shared calling and gifts. It is a place to find resources, articles, tutorials, tools, examples, advice, and counsel to help fulfill the burden placed upon us by the gospel of Jesus Christ for the Internet.</description>
```

Next, we add the link information, beginning with <link>, following with the actual hyperlink, then closing with </link>. That gives us this:

```
<title> Apostolic Webmasters Association RSS Feed </title>
```

```
<description> Apostolic Webmasters Association is an association of website designers and web masters, organizations, and churches with a vision for the web. Apostolic Webmasters Association is a place to gather together and share ideas, designs, and advice with others. It is a place to mentor and to be mentored by others with a shared calling and gifts. It is a place to find resources, articles, tutorials, tools, examples, advice, and counsel to help fulfill the burden placed upon us by the gospel of Jesus Christ for the Internet.</description>
```

```
<link>http://awa.daystart.org</link>
```

Now there's one more thing we need to do. We actually have to define all this information as forming a particular "item," which we do using a special item tag.

You place the opening item tag, <item> at the top or start of all the information we've listed. You then place the closing item tag, </item>, at the bottom or "end" of the item information. The finished product looks like this:

<item>

<title> Apostolic Webmasters Association RSS Feed </title>

<description> Apostolic Webmasters Association is an association of website designers and web masters, organizations, and churches with a vision for the web. Apostolic Webmasters Association is a place to gather together and share ideas, designs, and advice with others. It is a place to mentor and to be mentored by others with a shared calling and gifts. It is a place to find resources, articles, tutorials, tools, examples, advice, and counsel to help fulfill the burden placed upon us by the gospel of Jesus Christ for the Internet.</description>

<link> <http://awa.daystart.org> </link>

</item>

Congratulations! You've now made your first item. There's a bit more to do to finish our RSS file. First, what if we have other items we want to syndicate? Then we simply add more item elements, just as we did above. You can have up to 15 items. New items tend to be inserted at the top, with old items removed from the bottom, to make room for new stuff.

With our example, let's see how things look if we add two more items:

<item>

<title> Apostolic Webmasters Association RSS Feed </title>

<description> Apostolic Webmasters Association is an association of website designers and web masters, organizations, and churches with a vision for the web. Apostolic Webmasters Association is a place to gather together and share ideas, designs, and advice with others. It is a place to mentor and to be mentored by others with a shared calling and gifts. It is a place to find resources, articles, tutorials, tools, examples, advice, and counsel to help fulfill the burden placed upon us by the gospel of Jesus Christ for the Internet.</description>

<link> <http://awa.daystart.org> </link>

</item>

<item>

<title>New Free Item</title>

<description>AWA just loaded a new free item for Apostolic webmasters!</description>

<link><http://awa.daystart.org/new.html></link>

</item>

<item>

<title>Join the fun!</title>

<description>Come and join the webmasters that make a difference!</description>

<link><http://awa.daystart.org/fun.html></link>

</item>

Having defined items we want to distribute, we now have to define our site as a "channel." You'll use the same tags as with the items: title, description and link. However, this time the information will be about your entire site, rather than a particular page. That means our channel information would look like this:

<title>AWA</title>

<description>Apostolic Webmasters Association</description>

<link><http://awa.daystart.org/index.html></link>

Now, how does something reading our RSS file know that the information above is for our "channel" when it looks just like item information? Simple. As long as we don't surround this information with an opening and closing <item> tags, it won't be seen as item information but rather as channel information. That gives us this:

<title>AWA</title>

<description>Apostolic Webmasters Association</description>

<link><http://awa.daystart.org/index.html></link>

<item>

<title> Apostolic Webmasters Association RSS Feed </title>

<description> Apostolic Webmasters Association is an association of website designers and web masters, organizations, and churches with a vision for the web. Apostolic Webmasters Association is a place to gather together and share ideas, designs, and advice with others. It is a place to mentor and to be mentored by others with a shared calling and gifts. It is a place to find resources, articles, tutorials, tools, examples, advice, and counsel to help fulfill the burden placed upon us by the gospel of Jesus Christ for the Internet.</description>

<link> <http://awa.daystart.org> </link>

</item>

<item>

<title>New Free Item</title>

<description>AWA just loaded a new free item for Apostolic webmasters!</description>

<link><http://awa.daystart.org/new.html></link>

</item>

<item>

<title>Join the fun!</title>

<description>Come and join the webmasters that make a difference!</description>

<link><http://awa.daystart.org/fun.html></link>

</item>

There are a few last things we need to do. First, we need to add a tag at the very top of the file saying that this is written according to the XML 1.0 specifications. Right under this, we also have to say what RSS version we are using.

Finally, after the RSS tag, we need to add an opening "channel" tag. That gives us this at the top of the file:

<?xml version="1.0"?>

<rss version="2.0">

<channel>

At the bottom of the file, after all the items we want to syndicate, we have to insert a closing channel and RSS tag, in that order. Those look like this:

</channel>

</rss>

This means our complete file looks like this:

<?xml version="1.0" ?>

<rss version="2.0">

<channel>

<title>AWA</title>

<description>Apostolic Webmasters Association</description>

<link><http://awa.daystart.org/index.html></link>

<item>

<title> Apostolic Webmasters Association RSS Feed </title>

<description> Apostolic Webmasters Association is an association of website designers and web masters, organizations, and churches with a vision for the web. Apostolic Webmasters Association is a place to gather together and share ideas, designs, and advice with others. It is a place to mentor and to be mentored by others with a shared calling and gifts. It is a place to find resources, articles, tutorials, tools, examples, advice, and counsel to help fulfill the burden placed upon us by the gospel of Jesus Christ for the Internet.</description>

<link> <http://awa.daystart.org> </link>

</item>

<item>

<title>New Free Item</title>

<description>AWA just loaded a new free item for Apostolic webmasters!</description>

<link><http://awa.daystart.org/new.html></link>

</item>

<item>

<title>Join the fun!</title>

<description>Come and join the webmasters that make a difference!</description>

<link><http://awa.daystart.org/fun.html></link>

</item>

</channel>

</rss>

Saving The File

Now that we're done adding to the file, we need to save it. But what name shall we give it? All the example feeds I've seen all ended .xml, so let's do the same. As for the first part, that really can be whatever you like. For our example, let's say we just call it feed.xml.

Now that our file is saved, we can place it anywhere we want on our web server. Let's say we put it in the root or home directory. Then the address to our RSS file would be:

<http://awa.daystart.org/awafeed.xml>

Now that your file is validated, you want the world to know about it! To make this happen, visit the RSS directories and search engines listed in the [RSS: Your Gateway To News & Blog Content](#) article. They generally offer submission pages, where you can inform them of your feed.

You also want to make sure people who come to your web site see that you provide a feed. It's very common to post a link to the feed somewhere on the home page of a web site. If you have a dedicated news page, you may want to put it there, as well.

You can link to your feed with an ordinary HTML link. However, many sites use a small orange XML icon to link to the feed.

Finally, it's good to "ping" one of the major services that track when web logs and RSS content changes. By doing this, you ensure that other sites that monitor these know to check back at your site for more content.

[Weblogs.com](#) is one of these major sites. Enter your site's name and the URL of your feed into the manual [Ping-Site Form](#), and it will know you've updated your feed.

We made our own button:

Again, why do this? By spreading interest in the gospel, we spread the "Good News". God bless your RSS!

Great, but how do make a RSS feed for iPods? [Click here](#). To return to the How To Page, [click here](#).