Slide 1

Quick Takes–
What Is RSS?

Derry Lyons
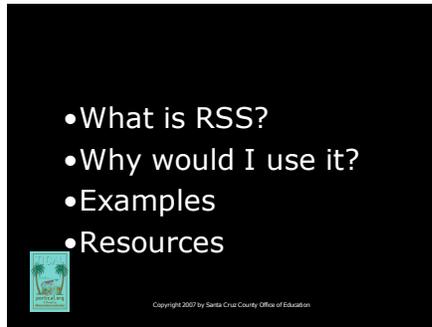Director, IT Services
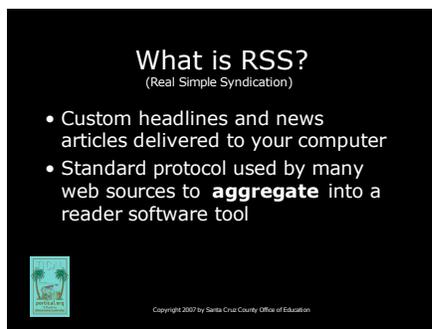South Kitsap School District, WA State

Hello! My name is Derry Lyons and I am the technology director for the South Kitsap School District in Washington State. I've been working with technology in K-12 education for the past 20 years and continue to be amazed at the new tools we have at our fingertips. This is one of a series of Quick Take presentations that provides a brief overview of one emerging technology and how you can use it to improve your effectiveness with technology.

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•What is RSS?
•Why would I use it?
•Examples
•Resources

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This Quick Take focuses on a communication technology called RSS. We will answer the question, "What is RSS," discuss why you would use it, view some examples, and see a listing of resources if you need additional help.

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What is RSS?
(Real Simple Syndication)

• Custom headlines and news articles delivered to your computer
• Standard protocol used by many web sources to **aggregate** into a reader software tool

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RSS is an acronym that stands for Real Simple Syndication, and Syndication is a way of sharing content among web sites.

For you, it's a way of getting updates on new content that's getting posted on the web, and having those updates delivered right to your computer. As an educational leader, I'm sure you feel there is just WAY too much information to keep on top of, and the magazines and news articles just keeping coming. How do you keep up?

With RSS, you get to designate

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which "feeds" (similar to channels) are of interest to you. Any updates to those feeds show up in your reader, which feels a lot like the front page of a newspaper. You can quickly scan the headlines, read the articles you want, and you're on top of what's happening.

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What is RSS?

Common Sources of RSS:
• Commercial Sources (CNN, NBC, etc.)
• Web Sites
• Blogs

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There are many places on the web offering RSS feeds, and more are being added all the time. What really intrigues me is that the source can be COMMERCIAL (along with the biases of traditional news organizations), the source can be a WEB SITE (information about updated web pages you might be interested in), the source can be a BLOG (again, biases of the individuals writing the blogs)… and all of these come to you in one place.

When choosing your feeds, I strongly recommend subscribing to a variety of sources to balance biases and help you THINK about the news you're reading. To get started, I'd recommend no more than 4 or 5, and choose a range from simple (perhaps a weather forecast or comic strip) to in-depth (more thought-provoking).

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Why Would I Use It?

- Transition from printed to electronic content (and e -sharing!)
- Keep up with current trends in education news, blogs, etc.
- Quickly see content update to web sites, including your school site.

While RSS technology is pretty cool, it can still feel like another "add on". As an educational leader, there are some great benefits to FREEING UP time and staying on top of your reading. And not to totally discount magazines, but my RSS feeds have just the types of articles and posts that I'm interested in—I get the meat and can skip the other stuff. As I have moved to using RSS feeds from traditional print media, I'm quickly able to forward a link to an article to my staff and colleagues ~ and they marvel at how on top of everything I've become!

As for blogs, there are some really good and insightful ones, and some not-so-insightful ones. I'm finding more and more "hip" authors will write a book then continue the conversation on their blog, which also includes comments from other readers.

Staying on top of web site updates is the last thing on my list ~ if it doesn't come into my e-mail box (or now my RSS Reader!), I probably won't see it. Our district's new web service, as well as our Moodle course management system, are RSS-enabled so I can keep up on new content and classroom discussions. If your school's web site supports RSS, you can add those feeds to your RSS reader. When a teacher or staff member updates their section of the site, the new content will show up as an article in your reader.
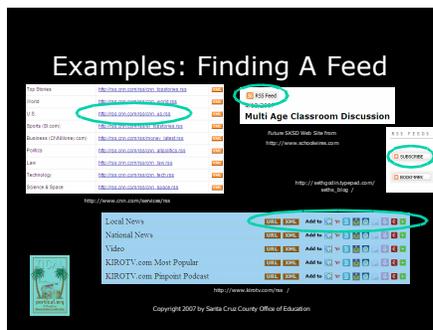
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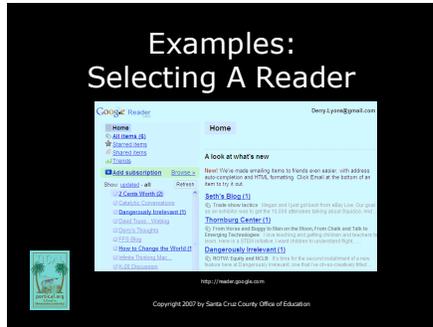
To get started, you need to choose a READER, often called a Newsreader or an Aggregator. This can either be a software program you install on your computer or a web site that you visit. My tool of choice is Google Reader (which you can find at reader.google.com), but there's also Bloglines and several others. With any of the services, you will probably need to create an account so the system can keep track of what you've read.

After you have created an account and logged in, you can begin adding subscriptions (or "feeds").

In my subscription list that you see here, the bold-blue headings on the left side of the screen have new entries that I need to read. On the right side of my screen you'll see the preview of that article.

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So how do you find RSS feeds? In this slide I've grabbed a handful of examples of where you might see the RSS logo as you surf the web. In most cases, you can click the orange logo (a plus sign, RSS, XML, etc.) and be prompted to add it to your reader.
The bottom example shows the familiar orange tags along with a quick way to add it to the readers shown: Google Reader, Yahoo, Bloglines, Newsgator, Windows Live, AOL, PageFlakes, Rojo, NetVibe

Sometimes you may need to manually copy the web address and Add a Subscription. The GREAT news is once you've added it, it starts feeding right away and unlike

regular web surfing, you won't have to go back to the web page again.

Before you get too RSS-happy, remember that the word FEED means you start getting information whether you can digest it or not. Pick about 4 feeds you'd like to start with, then see how the volume of those feeds fits your style before adding or removing them.

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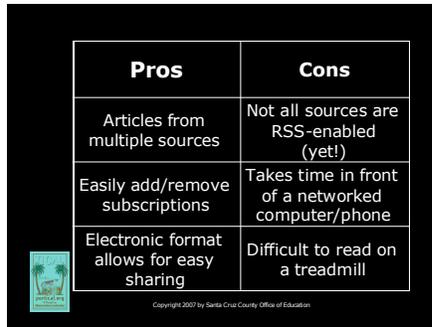
Pros	Cons
Articles from multiple sources	Not all sources are RSS-enabled (yet!)
Easily add/remove subscriptions	Takes time in front of a networked computer/phone
Electronic format allows for easy sharing	Difficult to read on a treadmill

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So in closing, let's review the pros and cons of using RSS.

The pros are that you have one point for multiple sources of data on the internet which you can easily update as your needs change, and it's in an electronic format that is flexible and allows you to share with friends and colleagues.
The downside is that not everything on the web is RSS-ready (yet!), you need to be connected and using some kind of a electronic device to read, which makes it hard to use on a treadmill or on the un-wireless beach.

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Here are two great places to get started.
The first, Google Reader, is the reader that I use. There are others, such as Yahoo, AOL, Bloglines, Netvibes, Pageflakes, etc.
If you're looking for another quick video tutorial on getting started, the folks at CommonCraft have done an excellent job with their video.

Don't forget that TICAL has a blog, too, so there's at least one source to get you started.

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If I can leave you with one bit of advice: make the commitment to check your RSS feeds at least every other day for a minimum of 30 days. Could be first thing when you turn your computer on; while you're watching the news… whatever fits your style, but DO NOT let those articles pile up for several days or you'll give up as I did at first.

Again, this is Derry Lyons and I hope this Quicktake has given you a good overview on how you can use RSS to regain control of information overload and keep up to date at the same time. Thank you.

http://www.portical.org/Presentations/quick_takes/#rss