

Blogs, PodCasts and RSS Feeds for Church Leaders: The Basics for Getting Started

A New Vocabulary

“A passing fad or a direction that is here to stay?” is the question being asked by many. If we are honest, most of us hope we can wait this latest trend out. Maybe it will die out as swiftly as it is raised to prominence. Most church planting leaders are overwhelmed simply by all the jargon. But should you watch passively from the sidelines or aggressively jump in?

You may not want to hold your breath. Many leading church leaders have thrown their hats in the ring and it appears that these emerging communication technologies resonate with today's culture. Myspace is now one of the leading web site portals on the internet. It's a rage. And the rate of growth of personal blogs and podcasts is growing at a phenomenal rate...seemingly faster than the emergence and growth of online users just a decade ago.

So why the hesitancy to jump in?

- First, it's new and seemingly confusing. So much jargon intimidates many and anything new naturally meets resistance. Welcome to leadership 101. Do we earnestly look for the opportunity in the new with a “why not” attitude or do we more skeptically look at the barriers with a “why should we” attitude. This obstacle says more about our leadership cultures than it does new technologies.
- Second, the technology seems to be changing and expanding so rapidly that it wears us out just trying to keep up. New jargon emerges faster than we learn the old so why try to keep up? With so many other demands tugging at our time, it's easier to ignore the new technologies and hope for the best.
- Third, these emerging communication techniques appear self-serving and to feed an already narcissistic society. Are't blogs (and services such as MySpace) nothing more than the purest forms of idol worship? Don't they simply feed a me centered culture starved for personal attention? Yes! But what an opportunity to engage our culture.

When Paul was in Athens, we read “...he was greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols.” (Acts 17:16). Athens was the living “MySpace” of its day. Its leaders may have been the real founders of present day blogging. We read “all the Athenians and foreigners who lived there spent their time doing nothing but talking about and listening to the latest ideas. (v21)” Wow! Isn't that what blogging is all about?

Paul turned this idol worship into an opportunity. “Men of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an alter with the inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. Now what you worship as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you. (v22-23)” Paul used their idol worship as an open door for sharing the Gospel. Can we also seize the opportunity today to use the emerging communication techniques for God’s glory?

If only things were static it would be so much easier. We must recognize that every pioneer and early adopter learns to conquer resistance to change and to look at every potential obstacle as an opportunity. Do we wait for everyone else or do we lead? Don’t fret. The purposes of this paper are to dispell some of the confusion surrounding the emerging communication technologies of blogs, podcasts and RSS feeds and to show how easy it is to get started.

An Overview

As a way of introduction, let’s start with a basic overview of blogs, podcasts and RSS feeds. In subsequent sections, we will go into even greater detail on each technology.

- **Blogs** - Think of blogs as a public journal. Unlike a personal journal that includes specific topics (“posts” in blogger language) and your specific thoughts about each topic (“entries” in blogger language), a blog provides far more than your own thoughts. As a public journal, you encourage others to post their thoughts about specific topics. Imagine a single entertainment channel that provides the benefits of a newspaper / magazine, interactive individual messaging (Iming), interactive chat forums, radio broadcasting, and television broadcasting all in one. Blogs are the convergence of several communication forums. They are a true “superstation.”

Blogs offer five key benefits:

- **Voice** - With the expanding use of blogs, *anyone* can post their thoughts about *anything* so that *everyone* hears. Wow! The average person is given a worldwide stage with an open mic. Your voice is heard.
- **Information** - We can learn from others and get feedback from what other like-minded people or people we respect think. We can learn directly from others by hearing their experiences first-hand.
- **Real-time** - There is no waiting for new books to emerge or conferences to attend. You can get the latest thinking and insights in real time. Blogs bring the benefits of IM or Chatting forums to a focused topic discussion.
- **Ease and Simplicity** - Maintaining a blog is simple and automated. It is as easy as using a desktop word processor. You don’t have to understand web site programming or maintenance. If you can type you can maintain a blog.

- **More than Words** - Unlike a personal journal that is primarily in written form with one entry a day, blogs include written comments, pictures, audio, and video.

A blog provides a great forum for your church to communicate with your members. Simply post topics of interest, have your key leaders and staff make entries, and invite anyone in the church to comment and ask questions. It's sort of like a good old fashioned town hall meeting.

- **Podcasting** - Do you have a favorite radio program? Possibly a morning talk show? Maybe Rush Limbaugh or ESPN? You make it a point to tune into these shows each day. Sometimes we even structure our schedule around them. What draws us to these shows? More than likely you are interested in what the host has to say.

Think of a Podcast as a radio talk show. A podcast can be any length and on any topic. Anyone can host a podcast with very little effort. Many people are producing podcasts for free via software and services that are readily available through the internet. Simply record an audio session and publish it to a web site. Listeners then subscribe to your podcast and download new sessions as they become available.

Just as you tune your radio to a specific frequency to listen to a radio show, you post your podcast to a specific web address so that others can subscribe to automatically receive new podcasts that are posted to that address. It's just like having your own radio station frequency and call letters.

The most common use of podcasts in churches is to publish weekly sermons. Each week as the new sermons are posted, a person's podcast software will automatically download the new sermons that become available. Some church leaders are beginning to post regular podcasts on specific topics of interest to listeners (e.g. digging deeper into a sermon topic, updating members on key issues such as land and building plans, reinforcing values and beliefs, etc). A podcast essentially gives the church its own radio station with control over the programming.

Many people will highlight their podcast on their blog and use the combination to increase visibility to both forms of technology. Think of the audio files that make up a podcast as the songs or shows on a radio station. Think of the podcast as the radio station itself. Both the individual songs / shows that makeup the podcast and the podcast itself can be highlighted on a blog.




For example, a church leader may post a topic on their blog to discuss plans for the church's new building. The blog would encourage discussion about the different aspects of the building. Seeking to use the discussion to cast vision for the project, the church leader may record an audio interview about the vision for the facility. This audio session can be directly posted to the blog for users to listen to and can be included in the church's podcast.

- **RSS Feeds / Aggregators** - So a blog is like a public journal implemented via your own personal super newsstation and a podcast is like an individual radio station. How do we promote and drive traffic to these things (especially as people become more and more saturated with different blogs and podcasts)? Answer is...we don't. Instead a new technology called RSS Feed Aggregators is emerging that allows us to take our blogs and podcasts to people.

Think about the ticker tapes on most news channels (e.g. CNN, Headline News, and Fox News). Without listening to an entire 30 minute news segment, the ticker tape lets us get the most important news quickly. An RSS Feed is a technology that allows blogs and podcasts to be treated like the ticker tapes on news channels.

A program called a news aggregator (or RSS aggregator) allows people to subscribe to blogs and podcasts through what is referred to as an "RSS Feed". Instead of showing an entire web site or blog post, the RSS aggregator compiles a summary of the changes from each subscribed web site (e.g. a Title and short description). This is the equivalent of taking the headlines in a newspaper and the first few sentences of the article. After reading the headline and a few sentences, you can click a hyperlink to go read more. The aggregator lets you get just enough information to decide if you want more.

For example, assume that you like 20 different magazine publications (e.g. Sports Illustrated, Newsweek, etc). It would be hard for you to keep up with all the articles in this many magazines. But a computer program can. Aggregators automatically compile the headlines and a few sentences from each of the articles into a consolidated list. You could pick and choose which of the headlines you want to read. Each time you log onto your computer the program checks to see if there have been any changes to the magazines and informs you of the changes. All of this without ever opening the magazines. That is what an RSS aggregator does.

We simply create an RSS feed for our blogs and podcasts (an RSS feed is a special web site address that has been created in a language called XML - Don't worry you don't have to know anything about XML). We then make this special address available to anyone with an RSS aggregator for them to subscribe to. It is kind of like giving a listener our radio station frequency. On many web sites you will see small icons such as  or  or . These icons are used for people to subscribe to your RSS feed. These icons include the special web address that the aggregator software needs.

RSS stands for Really Simple Syndication. Think of RSS as a way of syndicating your Blogs and Podcasts to aggregators. Rather than bringing people to your site, you are taking your RSS feed (your special RSS address) to as many people's aggregator as possible. RSS feeds are vital to increasing the readership / viewership of your blogs and podcasts.

Going Deeper

What's a blog?

The Blogger web site states the following:

“A blog is a personal diary. A daily pulpit. A collaborative space. A political soapbox. A breaking-news outlet. A collection of links. Your own private thoughts. Memos to the world.

Your blog is whatever you want it to be. There are millions of them, in all shapes and sizes, and there are no real rules.

In simple terms, a blog is a web site, where you write stuff on an ongoing basis. New stuff shows up at the top, so your visitors can read what's new. Then they comment on it or link to it or email you. Or not.

A blog gives you your own voice on the web. It's a place to collect and share things that you find interesting— whether it's your political commentary, a personal diary, or links to web sites you want to remember.

Many people use a blog just to organize their own thoughts, while others command influential, worldwide audiences of thousands. Professional and amateur journalists use blogs to publish breaking news, while personal journalers reveal inner thoughts.

The blogging experience is about not only putting your thoughts on the web, but hearing back from and connecting with other like-minded folks.”

What are my options for blogging?

Nearly 80% of bloggers use one of seven blogging tools according to a recent study by idealware and CompuMentor. The seven tools include:

1. Blogger (www.blogger.com)
2. LiveJournal (www.livejournal.com)
3. TypePad (www.typepad.com)

4. Movable Type (www.sixapart.com/movabletype)
5. WordPress (www.wordpress.org)
6. ExpressionEngine (www.pmachine.com/ee/)
7. TextPattern (www.textpattern.com)

According to the idealware / CompuMentor study, the key functions to consider when selecting a blogging program include:

- **Create posts.** Since the purpose of a blog is to be able to post new text or information to the site frequently, creating posts should be quick and easy.
- **Upload pictures and multimedia.** Many blogs go beyond text to include photos, video, or audio.
- **Display posts to visitors.** A blogging platform can make it easy for readers to view your posts and to comment on them.
- **Moderate.** While it's typical to allow visitors to post comments to a blog, different platforms provide varying levels of help to weed out inappropriate contributions.
- **Publish RSS feeds.** RSS feeds allow more Internet-savvy users to subscribe to your blog.
- **Configure the appearance and layout.** Tools vary widely in the degree to which they allow you to configure your blog, and the methods they offer to do this.
- **Find support.** Not every blogging tool offers the same degree of support: while some offer personalized assistance, others have forums where you can find answers to your questions.
- **Host your blog.** While some blogging software lives on your own server, others are hosted by the vendor.
- **Get stats on your blog.** Reporting features will help you see how many people are visiting your blog, and which posts are most popular.

Additional configuration functionality to consider includes:

- **Templates.** If you can set up a blog quickly using a template that defines the layout and colors, how many choices do you have, and how professional are they?
- **Logos.** Can you upload your organization's logo? This is a surprisingly rare feature.
- **Vendor branding.** Do you need to show vendor branding -- and if so, how prominently is it displayed?

- **Sidebars.** Most blogs have a sidebar that can include information about your organization and links to your Web site or to other blogs. To what degree -- and how easily -- can you edit sidebar content?
- **Fonts and colors.** Can you tailor text and colors on your blog to match an existing Web site or organizational branding?
- **Domain.** Can the blog use your organization's domain (for example, www.idealware.org/blog)?
- **Widgets.** Can you add in widgets -- pieces of code written by third parties that allow extra functionality -- like polls or images from photo-sharing site flickr ?
- **Layout updates.** To what degree will the platform allow you to modify templates to create a custom layout or to match your Web site?
- **Customization.** Can you customize every single page, message, and element to create a completely tailored blog?

Most church leaders are all about free AND easy! Blogger gives you both...and, because of their relationship with Google, they offer an expanding array of innovative blogging tools. We suggest you start with Blogger.

Getting started with Blogger!

Use www.blogger.com. Setup a new account. It is free and easy. Just follow the simple instructions. Within your account you can add as many blogs as you want. You can have one for work, one for home, one for hobbies, etc. Your main account username and password are valid for each of the blogs within the account. Blogger also includes a good tutorial and help system. You have two options for setting up your blog through Blogger.

- Blog hosted by blogspot via blogger.com. You choose the site name that is accessible through <http://yoursitename.blogspot.com>. You can select any "yoursitename" that is available. Anyone in the world can access your blog through this address.
- Blog hosted on your servers (most likely as part of your existing web site). If your web name is www.yoursitename.com, you can simple add a new page to this site...possibly "blog.html." This second option requires the ability to FTP to your web site. It is slightly more complex to setup, but gives you better integration with your existing web site.

Ways to post to your blog!

1. **Post Editor** via www.blogger.com - If you log into your blogger account, there is a built in editor for making text and picture posts to your blog.
2. **Mobile Phone** via go@blogger.com - The first time you use this feature from your cell, it will post the info to a new blog. It will also send you an “unlock” key that will register your cell phone with the account. You can then go in and change the new blog to your existing blog. All future posts from the cell phone will go to your blog. You can post pictures and / or text via this method.
3. **Email** via username.specialcode@blogger.com - the “username” is your blogger username and the “specialcode” is a unique password you set within blogger so that only you can post to your blog via the email.
4. **Pictures** via [Picasa or Hello programs](#) - Use either free program (both Picasa and Hello are available for free download) to publish photos directly to your blog. The Picasa program allows you to enter a title. The Hello program lets you enter additional text.
5. **Text** via [MS Word](#) - Word has a free add-on feature available for download from the web. This adds several buttons on your top task bar in word. Simply type the text you want to post then hit the publish button. Very simple way to publish.
6. **Audio** via [Audioblogger](http://www.audioblogger.com) - Another free program from blogger / Google. Go to www.audioblogger.com and follow the simple instructions. You use your normal username and password, associate your phone with the audio feature, then pick a special 4 digit passcode. Adding an audio feed to your blog is as simple as calling the number 415.856.0205 and recording your message. Each file is limited to 5 minutes but there is no limit on how many you do.
7. **Text** anywhere on the internet via [BlogThis!](#) - Another free program from Google. If you install the Google tool bar in your internet browser, simply enable the “BlogThis!” feature. Highlight anything online and then hit the “BlogThis” button. It will publish the text to your blog. It does not do graphic images.
8. **Pictures** via [HTML command](#) - use normal HTML programming code to link pictures from existing web sites into your blog.

Glossary of Terms - Learning the Lingo

Blog - A personal or public diary maintained on the internet using a combination of written text, audio, pictures, and video. A blog is like an entertainment channel that provides the benefits of a newspaper / magazine, interactive individual messaging (Iming), interactive chat forums, radio broadcasting, and television broadcasting all in one. Blogs are the convergence of several communication forums.

Bloggng - the process of maintaining a blog up-to-date including adding new posts and content and cataloging / organizing old content.

Blogger - a person who maintains or participates in blogs.

Bloggng Program - a program for publishing posts (your coments) to a blog. Most programs are designed to make maintenance of a blog simple. These programs are either web based or desktop software. Many blogging programs are free (e.g. blogger.com).

Blogger.com - Google's free blogging program. One of the easiest ways to start and maintain a blog.

Entry - a piece of new content added to a blog by the author of the blog. An entry is like the title of a news article in a newspaper. The author typically adds a new entry along with an initial comment to go along with the entry. In posting a new entry, the author is inviting others to post comments in response to the entry. Each new entry is put at the top of the blog. Comments made in response are added as part of the entry. Older entries move down the list on the page as new entries are added.

Comment - new content added in response to a blog author's entries. For example, a blog author may post a new entry asking for feedback on the best free blogging programs. Individual responses recommending free blogging programs would be in the form of comments.

Post - the process of adding a new entry or comment to a blog. Another word for publishing a blog.

Thread - A group of related entries and comments. Each thread can have multiple entries which in turn have multiple comments.

Categories - Blog entries can be "filed" by key word or subject. Maintaining categories within a blog makes it easier for people to search and find relevant topics. Categories are like the card catalog system in a library.

Sidebar - The area on the right or left side of a blog. The Sidebar includes information such as the blog author's profile, entry categories, hyperlinks, etc.

Moderate / Moderator - A blog author can require that all comments be approved by the author before being posted. When a person submits a comment, the moderator approves its addition before it is posted. A moderator ensures only relevant and appropriate comments are posted to the blog.

Audioblogging - adding audio files to a blog. Typically mp3 files. Some services allow audio recordings by telephone which are then uploaded directly to a blog.

Photoblogging - adding pictures to a blog.

Vlog - adding video to a blog.

Mobile Blogging - adding pictures, audio, or text to a blog from a mobile phone.

Social Networks - Special blogs that focus on personal relationship and connections between people. An online place for friends to hang out with friends. Myspace and Yahoo360 are examples.

MySpace - The most popular web portal on the internet. A social network specializing in personal blogs that make it easy for friends to connect with friends.

Yahoo 360 - Yahoo's social network.

Next steps in blogging!

1. Go to www.blogger.com. Click on the “create your own blog in 3 easy steps” link. Follow the simple instructions to setup a new account. Remember, you can add multiple blogs within your account. Your first step is to setup the new account. Remember your username and password. You will use it to login to the blogger site. You will have the option of setting the initial site up on your own server using FTP or allowing blogspot to host your new blog. The fastest way to get started is to allow blogspot to host. You can switch over to your own server anytime in the future. There will be a number of options to select during setup. If you are uncertain, go with the default setting. You can always change the settings later.
2. Setup your email to blog feature. While logged into your new blogger.com account, goto the “Settings” tab. Then goto the “email” tab. You will be asked to select a secret name in the form username.secretname@blogspot.com. The username is your login name. The secret name allows only you to email using this email address. After saving this secret name, you can email text posts to your blog from anywhere you have email access.
3. Goto www.audioblogger.com. Select the link to get started. Enter your blogger username and password. Then follow the instructions to enter your phone number (that you want to use to post audio blogs) and select a 4 digit password. Remember this password. At anytime in the future you can post an audio blog from your registered phone number by simply calling 415.856.0205. Its that simple.
4. Send a picture or text message from your cell phone to go@blogger.com. You will receive a text message back to your phone with a special registration number. Follow the instructions in the text message you receive to activate your mobile blogging feature. Initially, the activation will setup a new blog in your account. You will then have the option of using the new blog or linking your mobile account to one of your existing blogs. In the future, you can send picture or text messages from your mobile phone to go@blogger.com. The picture or text message will automatically post to your blog.
5. If you have the Google Toolbar installed on your web browser (free download), activate the “BlogThis” feature. It is one of the options in the pull down options menu for the Google Toolbar. This is a very cool feature that will allow you to highlight any text on the web and post it to your blog by simply hitting the “BlogThis” icon on your toolbar. This is a must have feature.

6. There is a free add on for MS Word that allows you to publish and edit posts directly to your blog from MS Word. Go to <http://buzz.blogger.com/bloggerforword.html> and follow the instructions for downloading this cool feature. The installation adds several buttons to your Word toolbar to allow publishing posts to your blog from within Word.

7. Download the FREE Picasa (<http://picasa.google.com/>) and Hello(<http://www.hello.com>) programs from Google. These programs allow simple one step publishing from your photo album to your blog.

8. Consider using these additional resources:

a. Free audio recorder and editor from Audacity. This is a great tool for recording audio files directly from your computer...and its FREE! Download the program at <http://audacity.sourceforge.net/>.

b. Hipcast (formerly AudioBlog) has a great service for hosting audio files. Their basic package is \$10 per month and allows you to record audio files directly by phone (each call can be up to 60 minutes in length), directly through a microphone and internet connection to the Hipcast site, or to upload files from your computer. Hipcast is a solid upgrade from the free audioblogger service that limits files to 5 minutes each. Hipcast's site can be accessed at <http://www.hipcast.com/>.



What is Podcasting?

Think of a podcast as your own personal radio station. You have complete control over the content including topics, length of shows, speakers, etc. Producing a podcast is so simple that anyone can do it. Many people mistakenly conclude that podcasts are for Apple ipods. However, any standard mp3 player can play podcasts.

Here are the basic steps in the life of a podcast:

1. **Record an audio file** (typically in mp3 format). Any topic and length are fine. Options for recording include:
 - a. Use of audio recording software such as Audacity (free program available at <http://audacity.sourceforge.net>). You can use the built in microphone on most computers or add an inexpensive external microphone.
 - b. Use of an audioblog recording service such as blogger.com or audioblog.com. These services allow recording of audio messages by telephone. Simply call the services phone number and follow the prompts. You can record an audio message in minutes. Blogger.com has a built in free audio recorder. Hipcast (formerly AudioBlog) has a great subscription service at www.audioblog.com.
2. **Edit the audio file** to remove any unwanted dialogue and to add in any special effects (music, sound effects, etc). This optional step often makes the difference between an average podcast and a high-quality, WOW experience.
3. **Find a home for the podcast / audio file**. Audio files must be hosted on a web site. The files can be hosted on your main web site's server or you can purchase a special hosting package designed for podcasts. Many hosting companies have limits on the number and size of downloads that can be made from their servers. Audio files can quickly eat up and cause you to exceed your allowable limits. Exceeding the limits can be expensive. Check with your web site hosting company to determine whether you have adequate download bandwidth to host audio files. Unless you expect large numbers of people to download your files, you will probably be ok using your main web site to house your files.
4. **Upload your audio files**. Your audio files must be published to the web (to the location determined in step 3 above). You can allow users to download your mp3 files and bypass a podcast altogether.
5. **Create an RSS Feed to distribute your audio via Podcast**. Podcasts are distributed through a special web file called an RSS Feed (see the next section). An RSS Feed is simply a web page written in a special language called XML. Fortunately, a number of programs automate the creation of RSS Feeds so that you never have to learn XML. Your podcast will have an RSS Feed address that uniquely

identifies it (like the call letters and frequency that defines a specific radio station) from other podcasts. To create the RSS Feed, use a free online program such as FeedBurner (see www.feedburner.com). Create a free account, follow a few simple steps, and in minutes you will have an RSS Feed uniquely identifying your podcast. If you prefer to have more control over your RSS Feeds, use a product like FeedForAll (www.feedforall.com) to work more directly with the XML code. After creation, feeds should be validated using one of several free validators: www.feedvalidator.org, <http://rss.scripting.com>, or <http://validator.w3.org>.

6. **Publicize your Podcast.** People need to know about your podcast. Unlike a radio station that can be manually scanned in less than a minute, most people will never find your podcast unless you promote it. You have two main options for publicizing: First, add your podcast to an online podcast directory. A number of online podcast directors are emerging that function much like Yahoo and Google. You can request that your podcast be added to these directories. Second, you can insert a small icon on your web site indicating that a podcast is available. Look for icons (called XML chicklets) such as  or  or . You simply link the special RSS Feed address that you created in step 5 to these icon images. Anyone who wants to subscribe to your podcast simply obtains the address from these links.

7. **Users Subscribe to Your Podcast.** As discussed in the RSS Feed section below, people subscribe to podcasts through software called aggregators. You simply select an option in the aggregator to subscribe to a new podcast and then enter the special RSS Feed address from steps 5 and 6 above. The aggregator program then automatically monitors your RSS Feed and downloads new content as it becomes available. One of the most popular podcast aggregators for subscribing to feeds is Apple's itunes. See www.itunes.com. Many other free aggregators are available. Some are only for podcasts while others are for anykind of content feed (i.e. audio files, written content, etc). After downloading audio files, users can listen to the files on either their computer or their mp3 player.
 - Feed Reader (www.feedreader.com)
 - Sharp Reader (www.sharpreader.net)
 - Pluck RSS Reader (<http://www.pluck.com/products/rss-reader.html>)
 - Blogbot (www.blogbot.com) - plugin for MS Outlook and Internet Explorer
 - RSSReader (www.rssreader.com)
 - Feed Demon (www.feeddemon.com)
 - Bloglines (www.bloglines.com)
 - Juice (old ipodder) (<http://ipodder.sourceforge.net/index.php>)
 - Doppler (<http://dopplerradio.net>) - podcast only...not a newsreader
 - Itunes (www.itunes.com) - podcast...not a newsreader
 - My Yahoo and My Google both have built in readers

New aggregators are being added daily. Do a google or yahoo search on RSS Reader to find more.

Glossary of Terms - Learning the Lingo

Podcast - Audio files distributed by an RSS Feed. A podcast is like your own personal radio station. You control the content that is delivered to listeners.

Podcast Directory - Online search directories for podcasts. Authors can include their podcasts in special directories. Users simply search for podcasts just like they use other key word search directories such as Google and Yahoo. Examples include www.ipodder.org, www.podcast.net, www.podcastdirectory.com, www.podfeed.net, www.podcastalley.com, www.odeo.com, www.podcastpickle.com, <http://podcastingnews.com/forum/links.php>, and podcast.yahoo.com.




RSS Feed - An RSS Feed is a technology that allows blogs and podcasts to be treated like the ticker tapes on news channels. A feed is a summary of blog entries displayed in special programs called newsreaders (aggregators). A feed contains the headline for each blog entry and part of the text from the blog entry. After reading the headline and a few sentences, you can click a hyperlink to go read more. The aggregator lets you get just enough information to decide if you want more. RSS Feeds are written in XML language. Feeds enable blog entries to be syndicated so readers can subscribe to the blogger's content without actually having to visit the blog. The summary of the blog entry is actually brought to the reader via their newsreader (aggregator). An RSS Feed is a web page written in XML that readers can subscribe to through their newsreader (aggregator).

Aggregators - A program used to collect and view RSS feeds. Aggregators (newsreaders) allow readers to subscribe to RSS feeds through the unique web address of the feed. Its like having a magazine subscription delivered to your newsreader rather than your mailbox.

XML - The special computer programming language that RSS Feeds are written in. Most blog authors use automated programs to generate the XML page rather than learning a new computer language.

Subscribe - The process a blog reader uses to sign up to receive RSS Feeds via a newsreader (aggregator). You can subscribe to as many different RSS feeds as you like.

Syndication - The process a blog author uses to turn their blog into an RSS Feed and make the special RSS Feed address available to anyone on the internet. The process includes creating an RSS Feed (including the special address associated with it), and publicizing the address through the use of XML chicklets and podcast directories.

XML Chicklet -  OR  OR  - icons used to give blog readers the special web site address of the RSS Feed. Simple right click on the icon and copy the address. Then paste the address into your newsreader (aggregator) to subscribe to the RSS Feed.

Feed Validation - the process of verifying that RSS Feeds can be properly read by aggregators. Validation occurs after creating an RSS Feed.

Feedback forum

Know of additional cool tools for blogging, podcasting or RSS feeds? Please email us your feedback and ideas to todd@church-planting.net.

Author

Todd Wilson is the Executive Minister at New Life Christian Church in Centreville, Virginia. Todd lives in Manassas, Virginia with his wife Anna and two boys Ben and Chris. Todd is also the Director of Passion for Planting (www.church-planting.net), the Church Planting Network (www.churchplantingnetwork.com), and the National New Church Conference (www.startingchurches.com). Todd is passionate church planting and providing the best possible support for church planting leaders.

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