

RSS, Aggregators, Blogs, Wikis, and Tags

David S. Jakes

<http://www.jakesonline.org>

In the past six months, I have had an opportunity to work with a variety of digital tools that were very new to me. Their functionality basically made me re-think how the World Wide Web works and will work in the future. The potential of these tools is dramatic; their ability to connect people, resources, and ideas is truly compelling. I've learned more in the last six months about applications of technology to human endeavor than I have in the last six years.

RSS

RSS stands for Really Simple Syndication. RSS is basically a feed, a stream. Think of it as a garden hose turned on but instead of water coming out one end, information does. You subscribe to that feed, or stream, much in the same manner you subscribe to various magazines. You subscribe to the magazine, it appears in your mailbox. In the case of RSS, you subscribe to the feed and it appears in your mailbox. In this case, the mailbox is called an aggregator.

AGGREGATORS

This is software that collects your feeds. I actually use [Bloglines](#) which is an aggregator Web site (as a result, my feeds are available on any Web-connected computer. I currently have 24 RSS feeds coming into my Bloglines aggregator (I'm a rookie). So, instead of having to go to 24 sites to read the information contained on those pages, the 24 RSS feeds come into Bloglines and I can read all 24 in a single interface. Every time content is updated, that feed appears in bold in my Bloglines account so I know to check it.

BLOGS:

Short for Web logs, blogs have revolutionized the way in which any individual can contribute their thoughts and ideas to the social fabric of the Web. It takes about 4 minutes to set up an account at [Blogger](#) (it's free) and a person who can type can be publishing to the Web in a matter of minutes. Every blog that's out there typically publishes an RSS feed, which you can collect in your aggregator. It's so easy, classes of 3rd graders routinely blog.

WIKIS:

Wikis are collaborative Web sites where individuals can contribute their content, knowledge and understanding to specific pages about a particular topic. Depending on the administrative control of the page, a completely open system where anyone can contribute can be used, to a tightly controlled system where only registered users of the Wiki can contribute. Basically, it's a Web site with multiple authors and generally anyone can contribute. The tool is designed to take advantage of the collective intelligence of the individuals who populate the Web. [Wikipedia](#) is a great example of a Wiki.

TAGS

Technorati.com defines tags as "Think of a tag as a simple category name." Many of the new resources appearing online allow individuals to categorize their entries by a tag name. It's a new way to organize content. In some Web sites (43things.com, Technorati.com, Flickr.com), the relative size of the tag represents the number of individuals categorizing content under that tag name.

UPSHOT

How will we use these tools with students? The above tools represent the new tools of the Web, and basically allow everyone to participate, everyone to contribute. With these tools, we can truly help students participate in a collaborative construction of knowledge. What we need now is to take these tools and adapt them to classroom use.

Copyright 2005 by David Jakes. All rights reserved.