



School of Law
UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA

Prepare.
Connect.
Lead.

University of Georgia School of Law
Digital Commons @ University of
Georgia School of Law

Continuing Legal Education Presentations

March 28, 2011

Mar 28th, 1:30 PM - 2:15 PM

They Passed THAT? He Decided WHAT? Tools and Techniques for Staying Informed about the Law

Jason Tubninis

University of Georgia School of Law Library, jtubinis@uga.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.law.uga.edu/cle>



Part of the [Digital Communications and Networking Commons](#), and the [Library and Information Science Commons](#)

Tubninis, Jason, "They Passed THAT? He Decided WHAT? Tools and Techniques for Staying Informed about the Law" (2011). *Continuing Legal Education Presentations*. 7.
<https://digitalcommons.law.uga.edu/cle/2011/schedule2011/7>

This Event is brought to you for free and open access by the Alexander Campbell King Law Library at Digital Commons @ University of Georgia School of Law. It has been accepted for inclusion in Continuing Legal Education Presentations by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ University of Georgia School of Law. [Please share how you have benefited from this access](#) For more information, please contact tstriepe@uga.edu.

**They Passed *THAT*? He Decided *WHAT*?
Tools and Techniques for Staying
Informed About the Law**

Jason Tubinis, J.D.

Information Technology Librarian
Alexander Campbell King Law Library
University of Georgia School of Law
Athens, Georgia

They Passed *THAT*? He Decided *WHAT*? Tools and Techniques for Staying Informed About the Law

Contents

I. Getting Started: RSS Fundamentals	2
What is RSS?	2
What are the Benefits of RSS?	2
Choosing a Reader.....	3
Google Reader	4
FeedDemon	5
II. Lists of Sites Available for Subscription	6
ABA Journal Blawg Directory.....	6
BlawgSearch	7
Law Blog Directory	7
III. General Legal Information Sources.....	8
Jurist.....	8
Daily Report.....	8
Concurring Opinions	9
Law.com.....	9
SCOTUSBlog.....	9
BeSpecific	9
The Volokh Conspiracy.....	10
GovTrack	10
StateLine.org	10
IV. Specialized Legal Information Sources.....	10
Labor & Employment Law Blog	11
The CorporateCounsel.net Blog	11
MyShingle.....	11
Insights	11
Law Department Management.....	12
V. General Interest Information Sources.....	12

Atlanta Journal-Constitution	12
CNN	13
BBC	13

Thanks to the wide-scale adoption of the Internet as a primary means of disseminating information, the amount available is increasing at an exponential rate every day. This is especially true for the legal field and the practice of law. There is an incredible amount of information being released from a myriad of sources; government agencies, legal scholars, private practitioners, experts and more are distributing a veritable treasure trove of resources online. The question is no longer “Is it out there?” but “How can I find it?” Unfortunately, this question is becoming increasingly difficult as the sheer amount being released begins to obfuscate the process of finding all of that useful data. One solution to this ever- increasing obstacle is not to search more and search longer, but rather to have the desired information be delivered to you in a timely and organized fashion.

An ideal way to achieve this is with a piece of technology called “**RSS**,” or “**Really Simple Syndication**.” While it’s not the most creative acronym ever devised, it does succinctly explain its view of syndication: publish a piece of information, usually a story or news item, from the Internet onto multiple platforms simultaneously. The item is delivered by an “**RSS Feed**,” also sometimes referred to as an “**RSS Subscription**.” Feeds are usually made available by websites that frequently update or change content. Feeds don’t publish themselves, though; to view a feed, an “**RSS Reader**” is required. Readers take multiple feeds, format them for ease of reading, and collect all of the most recent information from the sources you’ve selected. Tailoring your feeds to your interests and fields of legal expertise will enable your reader to alert you as new content becomes available.

This presentation will detail some of the most popular RSS readers and blogs that provide the best legal information available. By the end of the presentation, you should be able to configure a reader and add feeds from law related blogs and websites.

I. Getting Started: RSS Fundamentals

What is RSS?

RSS (**R**eally **S**imple **S**yndication or **R**ich **S**ite **S**ummary) allows you to designate multiple web sites, such as blogs or news agency sites, and have new content sent to you as it is published. The reader is constantly scanning for this new information, and aggregates them into a readable format all in one place. Readers maintain an active list of the content you have and have not read, and typically prioritize the display of new and unread stories. Some feeds provide you with the full text of the article (pictures included), while others will provide a title, summary, and link to the article on their website.

What are the Benefits of RSS?

Without a doubt, the primary benefit of RSS is how simple it makes the process of gathering information. The reader provides you with all the convenience of “one stop shopping.” The usual process for visiting a web site that you’ve found interesting or useful usually involves: remembering to check it, navigating to it, possibly logging into the site, scanning the relevant sections for new information, and then repeating the process. What if you find no new content, or if you can’t find it? At best, this is

inefficient, and at worst the whole process becomes too bothersome to do with any regularity. RSS bypasses all of this for you by putting the new content you want from all your favorite web sites in one place; all you have to do is check your reader. New content will stay highlighted and ready to be read until you check it off. Even if the content disappears from the web site, content delivered to a reader will never disappear unless you specifically delete it.

At first blush, there doesn't seem to be much of a difference between a collection of email newsletters and RSS feeds. The benefit comes in the privacy afforded by RSS. With newsletters, you will at least have to provide your email address, and depending on individual requirements, other pieces of personal information. Canceling a newsletter also depends on their automated system to register that you are no longer interested in receiving their emails. With RSS, the information exchange is purely one-way, with the sites sending information directly to the readers and completely unaware of the person actually receiving them. Furthermore, a mere key-stroke is required to end your subscription to a feed that is no longer useful or has become defunct.

Choosing a Reader

There are numerous readers available, each providing different styles and functionality. Some readers offer an incredibly robust interface, while others are quite utilitarian. Many will offer features their creators think compliment or enhance the feed reading experience. Which you choose will depend largely on personal preference. For an extensive list of RSS readers and the functionality they offer, refer to

www.newsonfeeds.com/faq/aggregators or

en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Comparison_of_feed_aggregators. For the purpose of this presentation, we will look at two of the best readers currently available:

Google Reader (reader.google.com): Part of the suite of services offered with a Google Account, Google's foray into the RSS reader field emerged in 2007.

Google Reader is a hosted reader, which means that it is accessed with an Internet browser and you log into your account. New users may find the series of videos available on Google Reader's official Youtube page

(www.youtube.com/googlereaderhelp) and the "Getting Started with Google Reader" tutorial

(www.google.com/support/reader/bin/answer.py?answer=113517) helpful.

Special features include:

- A home page that displays shows the newest item in all of your feeds. The feeds you read the most will appear closer to the top.
- Sharing items with other users
- Keyboard shortcuts for important features (e.g. the space bar scrolls from one item to the next)
- Two default viewing option for a feed: 'list view' with just the title of the story item, and 'expanded view' with the title and description (some feeds send the entire content of the story item)
- Can view a feed in 'Reader Play,' which turns a feed's story items into a full screen slideshow.
- Automatically marking items read as you scroll past them (this can be disabled)

- Tool that allows you to follow a web site that updates frequently but doesn't have an RSS feed in Google Reader
- Recommends new feeds based on your currently subscribed feeds
- Can find new feeds with keyword searching

FeedDemon (www.feedException.com/) Founded in 2003 and sold to NewsGator Technologies in 2008, FeedDemon is the most popular standalone reader for Windows. Unlike Google Reader which can be accessed from any web browser as long as you have an internet connection, FeedDemon is a program that you download and install on a single computer. While it does still need a moment of Internet connectivity to find new items, it is not dependent on an active connection like Google Reader. Some key features include:

- Three default viewing options: 'Headlines' which only displays the title of the story, 'Summaries' that shows the title and a brief description, and a 'Full Posts' that displays the entire contents of the story
- Has a built-in tracker that shows all of the popular stories in the feeds you're subscribed to
- Has a real-time 'Watching' field that automatically display feeds that contain key words you define
- Automatically flags feeds that have not updated in 2 to 3 months for deletion

- If there are a large amount of unread stories accumulating, the ‘Panic Button’ feature automatically engages and lets you mark stories outside of a certain time frame as ‘read’
- Can download feeds so that they can be read later when you don’t have an Internet connection

Furthermore, FeedDemon can synchronize with Google Reader – any changes you make in Google Reader will be reflected on FeedDemon and vice versa. Where Google Reader can be accessed anywhere via an Internet connection and a web browser, the robust features of FeedDemon can make managing feeds simpler. This connection effectively allows you to utilize both at the same time, enjoying the functionality of both readers.

II. Lists of Sites Available for Subscription

Having an RSS reader and familiarizing yourself with its features is an important first step, but a reader is only as good as the content it delivers. But where do you start looking? This section will provide some directories that provide a large selection of law related blogs. These lists provide a sampling of law blogs (blawgs) that are both general and field specific.

ABA Journal Blawg Directory (www.abajournal.com/blawgs/): Covering over 100 different topics, the Blawg Directory is a robust and frequently updated resource for finding any number of subject specific blogs. The blogs are not only classified by their topic, but one can also view blogs based on their author type,

region (e.g. a specific circuit, state), and law school. When browsing specific topics or categories, the most popular blogs are listed first by default.

BlawgSearch (<http://blawgsearch.justia.com/>): A directory maintained by Justia.com, BlawgSearch boasts a search feature that is conspicuously absent on most directories. The functionality is certainly needed though, as BlawgSearch features thousands of blogs across categories, states, countries, and law schools. After navigating to a specific area of interest, the blogs are listed in 'Expanded View,' which displays the three most recent items posted and options to add the blog to some of the most popular readers.

Law Blog Directory (http://uslaw.com/law_blogs): Offering over 1,000 blogs covering legal topics and certain jurisdictions, the USLaw.com hosted directory includes a search function and an option to be updated as descriptions change. While there are no categories that specifically address legal issues in Georgia, the web site includes the option of nominating blogs to be listed.

Which feeds one subscribes to will vary from person to person, with personal preferences and fields of practice dictating how one's collection will develop. It's advisable to subscribe to some of the most popular general legal blogs and a small selection of subject specific blogs, and then expand as desired. If one becomes too zealous in expanding their subscriptions, the steady stream of useful information swiftly becomes an overwhelming deluge of data. If possible, make checking your reader part of your email reading routine: check for new mail, then scroll through your reader. This will not only keep you informed and up-to-date, but it keeps the number of unread stories to a manageable amount. Maintain your reader by occasionally pruning blogs

that have not updated recently or ones you don't find yourself checking frequently. Some blogs allow you to select what kinds of stories you want sent, so try customizing your subscriptions narrowly. RSS is a fantastic tool to stay informed and find fascinating new pieces of information, but like any tool, it needs to be used properly to see the maximum benefit.

III. General Legal Information Sources

You can quickly populate your RSS reader by scanning through the directories mentioned above. The following are some of the most popular sites and blogs that users interested in the law will find frequently referenced:

Jurist (<http://jurist.law.pitt.edu/email.php>): "JURIST is the world's only law school-based comprehensive legal news and research service. Its professionally-trained staff of law faculty and law students report and research the latest legal developments in real time for members of the legal community and the public at large. JURIST covers legal news stories based on their substantive importance rather than on their mass-market or commercial appeal. It's entirely non-commercial and ad-free."

Daily Report (http://www.dailyreportonline.com/Editorial/News/free_rss.asp): While full access to articles published by the Daily Report requires a subscription, the stories listed in the feed are provided free of charge. The stories provided for free

will just provide the title and a brief summary in the reader, and frequently that will be enough.

Concurring Opinions (<http://www.concurringopinions.com>): “Concurring Opinions is a group blog with a broad emphasis on legal topics. It is run by Concurring Opinions, LLC, a Pennsylvania Limited 8 Liability Company. Concurring Opinions regularly publishes contributions from blog members as well as guest bloggers.”

Law.com (<http://www.law.com>): “Law.com is the Web's leading legal news and information network. Law.com connects legal professionals to more than 20 award-winning national and regional legal publications online, including *The American Lawyer*, *The National Law Journal*, *New York Law Journal* and *Legal Times*, and delivers top legal news electronically to a growing national and global audience of subscribers each day on The Newswire.”

SCOTUSBlog (<http://www.scotusblog.com>): The definitive blog for the U.S. Supreme Court, providing both up-to-the minute news about the court, as well as thorough analysis of current issues and scholarly articles by professionals in the field. Sponsored by Goldstein, Howe & Russell, P.C.

BeSpecific (<http://www.bespacific.com>): “beSpecific provides daily law and technology news with links to reliable primary and secondary sources on topics including: e-government, privacy, government documents, cybercrime and ID

theft, the Patriot Act, freedom of information, federal legislation, legal research, KM, blogs, RSS and wikis.”

The Volokh Conspiracy (<http://volokh.com>): A group blog formed by UCLA law professor Eugene Volokh, the Volokh Conspiracy “is a weblog which mostly covers United States legal and political issues, generally from a libertarian or conservative perspective.”

GovTrack (<http://govtrack.us>): Launched in 2004, GovTrack gathers nearly all of its information from THOMAS, the online repository for data generated by the federal government maintained by the Library of Congress. After reformatting the information into a more accessible format, there you’ll find “the status of U.S. federal legislation, voting records for the Senate and House of Representatives, information on Members of Congress, district maps, as well as congressional committees and the Congressional Record.”

StateLine.org (<http://www.stateline.org/live/RSS+Feeds>): “*Stateline’s* unparalleled coverage across all 50 states and insight into the most important policy developments on a range of issues make it an indispensable resource for policy makers and others at all levels of government.”

IV. Specialized Legal Information Sources

The web sites described above offer a very general view of legal news and developments. There are numerous web sites and blogs that provide a more focused perspective on well-defined legal specialties. Some examples of these include:

Labor & Employment Law Blog

(<http://www.laboremploymentlawblog.com/>): The “purpose of this blog is to provide easy-to understand, accurate and informative articles on labor and employment issues that involve federal labor and employment laws.”

The CorporateCounsel.net Blog

(<http://www.thecorporatecounsel.net/blog/index.html>): Unlike more theoretically or academic efforts, this site bills itself as “The *Practical* Corporate & Securities Law Blog.”

MyShingle (<http://www.myshingle.com>): “Launched in 2002, MyShingle.com was the very first blog for and about solo and small law firms, and part of the first generation of 100 lawyer blogs to come online. To date, MyShingle.com remains the most comprehensive online resource for solo and small firm lawyers with thousands of blog posts and an impressive stock of free e-books, checklists and forms on starting and running a law firm. “

Insights (<http://www.asil.org/insights.htm>): “ASIL Insights, the ‘international law behind the headlines,’ provide brief, balanced accounts of the international law issues raised by newsworthy late-breaking events. Insights, which are created

as international law events arise, are distributed to subscribers and posted on the ASIL website two or three times a month.” Topics addressed by *ASIL Insights* may include but are not limited to: Development and International Law, Human Rights and Humanitarian Law, International Institutions, International Security, Science and Technology, Trade and Investment, and Transnational Litigation and Arbitration.

Law Department Management

(http://lawdepartmentmanagement.typepad.com/law_department_management/): Begun in Feb. 2005, this blog “comments on every aspect of how best to manage a law department, including how to manage outside counsel.”

V. General Interest Information Sources

It’s natural for an attorney to subscribe to feeds that apply specifically to the interests of the profession, but there’s a wealth of information that can come from non-legal sources as well. One finds that discussion about the law and how it develops parallel events that occur locally, nationally, and globally. Furthermore, as RSS becomes a part of your daily life, you will find that there is an RSS feed for almost any interest that catches your eye. Some news outlets that offer such general information include:

Atlanta Journal-Constitution

(<http://www.ajc.com/services/content/services/rss/index.html>): Offers a wide variety

of feeds from the AJC that are presented in different categories, including locations (State news , Metro news, Gwinnett news) and topic (Trial, Tech, Top news).

CNN (<http://www.cnn.com/services/rss/>): The news organization offers a concise, yet encompassing, list of feeds accessing information from its world-wide news service.

BBC (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/10628494>): News from a non-U.S. source not only provides a different perspective on current event, but they will also report on stories not addressed outside of Europe.