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RSS: The HOV Lane on the Information Highway

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Today's world suffers from no lack of readily available information. The challenge is rarely the finding of information; it is rather laying your hands on just the right piece at just the right time. While attorneys have a duty to be well-informed about the state of the law, remaining current can be difficult. The goal should be to have information delivered and organized in a timely, convenient way that both maximizes exposure—assuring that you aren't missing that perfect nugget that will give you the competitive edge—yet minimizes time-investment in retrieval and scanning through items that may be of no use at all.

Complete mastery of the information universe requires an array of tools. The one we'll be looking at here is **RSS**, for "**Really Simple Syndication**." There are many varieties of RSS readers available. What they all share is the ability to identify sources of information that fit your needs, and then to alert you when new content becomes available from those sites. This service spares you the need to visit each site individually, which is not only time-consuming, but also ineffective. While some sites update only once a day or even less, others continually generate new information. Relying upon manual visits to homepages will only show you what is the most recent, not necessarily everything that has been added since your last visit. That is the job of RSS.

Beyond this basic capability, RSS readers differ in some of the extra features they make available. This presentation features two of the most popular readers, **Bloglines**, and **Google Reader**.

I. Getting Started: RSS Fundamentals

WHAT IT IS

RSS ("**R**eally **S**imple **S**yndication" or "**R**ich **S**ite **S**ummary") allows you to designate multiple blogs and other information providers whose information is then aggregated into a single reader. The RSS reader continuously visits each site to which you have subscribed, and signals you whenever new content is available. You then have the option either to peruse the summary provided in the reader, or to click through to the original source to get the full content.

WHY YOU'LL LOVE IT

The primary advantage of using an RSS aggregator is everything that comes with "one-stop shopping." Think how much time is required to regularly visit one site that you have found especially helpful or interesting. You must first remember to check it regularly, log on to the site, and then search the homepage for new content. This can be harder than it sounds, depending upon whether the design of the homepage facilitates this kind of browsing. You may even have to search several pages on the site. Then multiply these time-consuming tasks by the number of sites with which you want to keep current. In very short order your entire day can be spent visiting all your sites, and then, just when you're done, you have to start all over again. RSS does the logging on and searching for you. All you have to remember to do is to visit your RSS page. The good news is that all new content identified by the reader will stay on the page until it has been read. While content on the actual pages

ages out, all "new" content in the RSS reader stays available, no matter how old it gets. While under the old system you must conform your habits to the flows of the internet, using the RSS makes it work around you.

CHOOSING A READER

A large number of readers are available, each offering its own styles and features. Which you use is therefore largely a matter of personal preference. An extensive list of RSS readers is available at http://www.newsonfeeds.com/faq/aggregators. From among this wide variety this presentation looks at only two of the most popular of those available:

> **BLOGLINES** (www.bloglines.com): Founded in 2003, and sold in 2005 to Ask.com, the Bloglines iPhone version became available on July 23, 2007. Registration is required, but free. Although Bloglines is a hosted reader—meaning that there is nothing to download, everything occurs at a website you log into—some versions exist which are totally self-contained by the person's computer. According to this site, the key features include:
>
> - All-in-one Blog and news feed search, online subscriptions, news reader, blog publishing and social sharing tools
>
> - Available in 10 languages
>
> - Quick Pick Subscriptions get new users started quickly and easily
>
> - Bookmarklet for single-click subscriptions to any source
>
> - Notifiers for all browser types to remind you when new articles have arrived
>
> - Bloglines Saved Searches deliver future articles matching your key words and phrases

- Most Popular lists show the days hot topics and which blogs are getting the most noticed

GOOGLE READER (www.google.com/reader): Google's version of the RSS reader merged from beta in September 2007, with an iPhone version released on May 12, 2008. New users may find helpful the videos (http://www.youtube.com/GoogleReaderHelp) and "Getting Started" page (http://google.com/support/reader/bin/answer.py?answer=113517).

Special features include:

- A front page that lets you see new items at a glance

- Allows sharing items with other users

- Keyboard shortcuts for main functions

- Choice between *list view* or *expanded view* for item viewing (showing either just the story title or with a description, respectively)

- Automatic marking of items as read as they are scroll past (expanded view only)

- Search in all feeds, across all updates from subscriptions

Users will also find interesting the "Trends" function, which allows the subscriber to track the quantity of content collected and consumed through the reader.

II. Lists of Sites Available for Subscription

Now that you have selected and familiarized yourself with an RSS reader, you are ready to subscribe to content. Where to look? The next sections suggest specific sites that legal specialists are likely to find interesting. This section takes a more

general approach, allowing the new user to broadly sample from a true smorgasbord of available offerings.

BLAWG (www.blawg.com): Blawg has been tracking legal blogs, podcasts, and newsfeeds since 2002. It currently tracks over thirteen hundred active blogs. The site conveniently groups its blogs by useful subject areas, making it very easy to find just the resource you would like to follow.

BLOGCATALOG (http://www.blogcatalog.com/directory/law-legal): Currently listing 1394 blogs in its legal category, this listing is notable for giving the viewer a snapshot of the blog itself, as well as including a significant number of non-English language offerings. The order of presentation of blogs on its pages is not obvious to the browser, so the user may want to experiment using the available search box to find candidate blogs for subscription.

USLAW BLOG DIRECTORY (http://www.uslaw.com/law_blogs): As part of a wider range of law-related offerings, USLaw.com includes a listing of over 1000 legal blogs easily divided by both topic and jurisdiction for ease of browsing. Although no Georgia-specific blogs are currently included in the index (but are included in the subject-matter listing), the site allows nomination of candidate sites for inclusion in the directory, as well as updates for descriptions.

BLAWG REPUBLIC (http://www.blawgrepublic.com/dir): "Blawg Republic is a real-time search engine that monitors the legal blogging community every hour. People can browse excerpts on discussions, from Appellate Law to Technology Law. They can keep up with their favorite legal bloggers and track evolving discussions moving through the blawgosphere - the world of legal oriented weblogs." Unlike other directories, this one is alphabetically arranged.

Which sites a user subscribes to will, of course, be determined by the person's individual needs and interests. A cautionary word should be offered, however, to discourage oversubscribing. RSS reading, much like Facebooking, can become a time-consuming activity. The urge to "keep up" with all the information pouring into your reader can become an obsession. Be sure to pace yourself not only in the total number of sources you add to your reader, but also the cumulative number of posts you'll receive. If a blog is only updated once a week, for example, it may make sense to add many of those to your list. On the other hand, users may wish to keep to a minimum the number of blogs that have thirty or more posts per day. This information can be obtained by using analytic tools such as found by USLaw.com, and Google Reader will tell you this information for every blog you subscribe to under the "Trends" analysis. For example, the Georgia Family Law blog (http://gafamilylawblog.com) averages 3.3 posts per day, while CNN.com typically receives more than thirty items every day. Using tools such as these will help you keep your subscription list trim and manageable so that RSS feeds will save you time, not provide a new way to devour it.

III. General Legal Information Sources

New RSS users can begin by scanning the catalogs of available blogs described above, or by using the "quick start" selection of popular sites that many readers make available. Users interested in the law will, however, see these sites 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): Although the (Fulton County) Daily Report is a subscription periodical, many of its stories are available without charge. Even for nonsubscribers, though, the first few lines will still be available 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

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.COM (http://www.scotusblog.com): Unquestionably the premiere resource for up-to-the minute news from the U.S. Supreme Court. Sponsored by the law firm of Akin, Gump, Strauss, Hauer & Feld.

BESPACIFIC (http://www.bespacific.com): "beSpacific 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." Winner of the 2006 AALL/West Excellence in Marketing Award for *Best Use of Technology*.

VOLOKH CONSPIRACY (http://volokh.com): Founded by Eugene Volokh, a UCLA law professor, the Volokh Conspiracy "is a weblog which

mostly covers United States legal and political issues, generally from a libertarian or conservative perspective."

IV. Specialized Legal Information Sources

While the sources suggested above offer a broad view of legal news, other sites are tightly focused to provide information about trends and developments in well-defined legal specialties. Examples of this genre include:

LABOR AND EMPLOYMENT LAW

(http://laborandemploymentlawblog.com): Publishing over 100 articles since its inception in 2006, 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."

LESSIG BLOG (http://www.lessig.org/blog): Written by noted

intellectual property lawyer and professor Lawrence Lessig, this blog offers his cutting-edge perspective, especially on the intersection of IP law and the internet.

CORPORATECOUNSEL.NET

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

MYSINGLE (http://www.myshingle.com): Geared toward the solo practitioner, *MySingle* was "the first of the now dozen or so blogs by other solo and small firm lawyers who generously offer their wisdom on a range of issues like starting a firm, working from home, maximizing use of technology and share their own personal experience of the process of going solo."

INSIGHTS (http://www.asil.org/insights.htm): ASIL *Insights* provide decision makers, the general public, and members of the legal profession around the world with brief, balanced accounts and analyses of significant legal developments and newsworthy events involving international law. Topics addressed by ASIL *Insights* may include but are not limited to the following: 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 by the leading consultant to law departments and associated with ALM (publishers of *American Lawyer* and the *Fulton County Daily Report*), 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

While it will be natural for the attorney to subscribe to blogs and sites targeting the interests of the profession, much useful information can be obtained from nonlegal sources. Moreover, once RSS feeds become a part of your daily life, you'll discover that content can be collected on any imaginable interest you might have. The following news outlets offer a good place to begin for general information of this type.

ATLANTA JOURNAL-CONSTITUTION

(http://www.ajc.com/services/content/services/rss/index.html): A user can subscribe to a wide variety of newsfeeds from the Atlanta paper that are packaged in a variety of ways, such as locality (metro, DeKalb, Cobb) or topic (general news, state news).

CNN (http://www.cnn.com/services/rss/?iref=rsssvcs): CNN offers a full range of tailored options for information from its world-wide news services.

BBC (http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/help/3223484.stm): News from a non-American perspective not only offers a different view on many of the stories available from U.S. sources, but contains many stories that are not covered outside Europe.

VI. Blogs about Blogs: Keeping Current

Even after your RSS reader has been set up, you will want to keep your ear to the ground for new resources. Several sources to which you can subscribe that will alert you to potential blogs of interest include:

ROBERT AMBROGLI (http://www.legaline.com/lawsites.html):
"Tracking new and intriguing Web sites for the legal profession." Robert Ambrogli is a Massachusetts lawyer, writer and media consultant. He is author of the book, THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO THE BEST (AND WORST) LEGAL SITES ON THE WEB. He also writes the blog Media Law, co-writes Legal Blog Watch and cohosts the legal affairs podcast Lawyer2Lawyer.

INTER ALIA (http://www.inter-alia.net): An "Internet Legal Research Weekly newsletter that delivers relevant and timely legal research information, and other fun stuff, to your inbox every Sunday." Highlights a "Blawg" of the day, which can be a convenient way to identify and sample new services in your specialty.

LAWTECH GURU BLOG (http://www.lawtechguru.com): Operating under the dictum that "If you continue to do what you've always done, you deserve to get what you've always got," this source will keep the practicing attorney up-to-date on time and money saving technologies.