

# **Using RSS For Corporate Communications**

A White Paper From

**G2B Group**

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By

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## **Content Syndication's Recent History**

In the late 1990s, Pointcast was the pre-emptive metaphor for a technology that people labeled "push." You just told the Pointcast software the kind of news you wanted to receive and the program dutifully updated its cache of wire stories, sports scores, stock quotes, and so on according to your preferences. The thinking at the time was that net users wanted their Web experience to behave more like broadcasting and would eschew their trusty browsers for the privilege. Owing to the resource-intensive nature of the software, however, Pointcast's user turnover was famously and furiously rapid. Pointcast was eventually sold to Idealab startup Launchpad Technologies, ending as merely a noble bubble-age experiment in news distribution and technology marketing,

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Meanwhile, another Internet darling — Netscape — was working on the germ of what is today called "RSS." Based on the "XML" (eXtensible Markup Language) you may have heard of, RSS openly, amply, and elegantly delivers on much of Pointcast's original promise of syndication to the desktop and even to the Web. By virtue of its openness, however, RSS offers far more intriguing possibilities for corporate communications than "push" ever did.

Today, companies — and, by extension, even the agencies that represent them — that have a critical mass of activity can consider publishing their own corporate communications content in their online press rooms using RSS-supported, weblog-rooted principles. While perhaps not in widespread use now, the day will come when the online location of a company's RSS feed will be just as much of a PR pro's email signature file as his or her email address, homepage, and phone number.

## **RSS: A Working Definition And Basic Principles**

According to [CMP's Techencyclopedia](#), RSS stands for:

- RDF (Resource Description Format) Site Summary
- Rich Site Summary

However, to most, RSS stands for "Really Simple Syndication."

RSS allows updated headlines and summary content from news sites, discussion groups, or [blogs](#) to be syndicated to 1) other web sites, or 2) programs for your PC called "news aggregators." In the latter sense, the desktop news aggregator program I use helpfully pings me with an unobtrusive message in the lower-right-hand corner of my screen as news develops. As we'll see later, though, this Pointcast-like use of RSS is just the light under the door in terms of the possibilities.

The multiplicity of acronym possibilities perhaps reflects the forked roads that the RSS standard has taken. For the purposes of exploring what this technology means to corporate communications, however, we'll shelve the topic of standards purity and allow you the opportunity to drill down further on your own.

***RSS holds... significant promise for corporate communications and media relations. By using this technology, certain companies can become content syndicators themselves through their online newsrooms.***

### **RSS As A Media Relations Tool**

While the Pointcast-like use of RSS feeds certainly makes keeping up-to-date on important news much easier, RSS holds far more significant promise for corporate communications and media relations. By using this technology, certain companies can become content syndicators themselves through their online newsrooms.

On his own blog, *InfoWorld* Test Center Lead Analyst Jon Udell [described a possible RSS-enabled PR call of the future](#):

*Hi, I'm [NAME], [CTO, Architect, Product Manager] for [COMPANY] which does [PRODUCT OR SERVICE]. I have started a weblog that describes what we do, how we do it, and why it matters. If this information is useful and relevant, our RSS feed can be found here. Thanks!*

Udell points out that having an RSS feed gives a corporate communications department a new insight into what news online press room visitors find valuable: server logs would show whether the RSS feed was accessed and how often.

### **RSS And Corporate Blogging In Theory And Practice**

In order to make maximum, practical use out of RSS as a media relations tool, your company's online press room must feature frequently updated content that befits a busy, dynamic organization with a steady stream of news. Fortunately, in very large organizations or companies with multiple divisions and product lines, this isn't usually a problem.

By supplementing press release wire transmission with RSS, the people who are most interested in your company will receive a link and synopsis to your announcement within moments of posting the link to a blog-based newsroom. Additionally, since not *all* announcements are wire-worthy — despite what your “Assistant Marketing Director, Luxembourg Region,” might try to tell you — company events of slightly less significance might be posted to the company’s RSS feed as the sole means of transmission, giving subscribers a richer view of the company.

Here’s an example of how this might take shape within a technology company’s tactical news distribution policy:

<b>Topic</b>	<b>Release/RSS</b>	<b>RSS Only</b>
Quarterly earnings	<b>X</b>	
Executives’ or engineers’ commentary on industry trends		<b>X</b>
Major product announcement	<b>X</b>	
Minor upgrades or product plug-ins		<b>X</b>
Keynote or strategic speaking placement at a major tradeshow or conference	<b>X</b>	
Multi-vendor panel participation at a small tradeshow or conference		<b>X</b>

As an illustrative example, Web services software provider Cape Clear Software offers multiple RSS channels [through its corporate newsroom](#). These channels include: press releases, miscellaneous corporate news, the company’s Web services online developer community, and even the personal blog of the company’s chief scientist, Jorgen Thielen. By maintaining several feeds as opposed to a single corporate newsfeed, companies can further refine their notions of what topics hold the most interest, based on the activity recorded in their server logs. (Beware: Clicking on the RSS feeds themselves will put the less-than-pretty, XML-tagged documents into your browser. For most, it’s enough to know *where* those feeds are such that one can point a news aggregator at them, which will generate a more refined view.)

**Conclusions: RSS And A Syndicated Media Relations Future**

RSS holds the promise of becoming a key part of a company's media relations strategy and execution. As much as Federal regulations, corporate strategies, competitive concerns, and partner relations allow, your company can consider setting up a blog and posting news release teasers — or even headlines and synopses — hours or maybe a day prior to transmission. This could be reasonably expected to elevate users' perceived value of subscribing to your RSS feeds, which would help in terms of interest measurement and create a closer relationship between your company and those it most wants to influence.

***As the public relations industry begins to slowly take the blogging community more seriously, it will be expected not only to view its most influential participants as important, but to adopt elements of that community's principles and techniques as well.***

Supported by creative strategies and judiciously applied traditional media relations techniques, news syndication through RSS offers one of the most intriguing possibilities for Internet-supported corporate communications. As the public relations industry begins to slowly take the blogging community more seriously, it will be expected not only to view its most influential participants as important, but to adopt elements of that community's principles and techniques as well.

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**About The Author**



*Photo Credit: Shari Fisher*

Identified as one of the "Top Fifteen To Watch" by *PR News* in 2002, Phil Gomes' career has been characterized by his passionate interest in the technology industry. He is the co-founder and senior manager of technology programs at G2B Group, a technology public relations consultancy in the San Francisco Bay Area.

Phil was instrumental in launching Matrix Semiconductor through a program focused on the most respected science and technical publications. His programs developed on behalf of SRI International have elevated general awareness of the institute, as well as interest from the business and engineering communities in licensing the institute's technologies. These efforts were independently recognized in 2002, when the agency team Phil led took "honorable mention" for "Best Media Event" in that year's *PR News* Platinum Awards for the media program supporting SRI's 55<sup>th</sup> anniversary — with just 10% of the award winner's budget.

During his prior agency tenure, Phil lent his PR and competitive intelligence skills to the likes of Hitachi Semiconductor, SRI International, J.D. Edwards, National Semiconductor, and Phoenix Technologies.

Before his public relations career, Phil was an associate systems administrator for Saint Mary's College Library, responsible for training employees and maintaining over 60 PCs, servers, and other systems. Concurrently, Gomes also served as Web developer for CD-ROM multimedia firm Graphix Zone.

Phil has been an invited lecturer on online public relations at San Francisco State University and SFSU's College of Extended Learning. He is a contributing writer for *ExpertPR*, and has been quoted in various PR trades.

Phil earned a B.A. in communications from St. Mary's College of California, graduating at the top of his department. He has taken additional coursework in computer programming.