# 7 Ways To Turn RSS Into R$$

by Antone Roundy

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**To receive a free download of CaRP (my RSS to HTML converter script) and updates to this eBook, click and subscribe here.**

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### About the Author:

Antone Roundy has been programming computers since before the invention of the IBM PC, when he was introduced to the TRS-80 in grade school.

He has been working with RSS feeds since 2002, when he built the first precursor to CaRP (an RSS to HTML converter) for use on his own websites and began distributing it for free.

As comments and suggestions came in and features were added, the "Caching RSS Parser" was officially named "CaRP", and a commercial version was created.  Since then, Antone's RSS-related tools have grown to become a core part of his business.

Through his work on CaRP and other RSS tools, Antone became aware of shortcomings in the RSS format and got involved in the creation of the similar Atom format.  He participated actively in the IETF Atom Publishing Format and Protocol Working Group until "Atom 1.0" was finalized, and continues to comment from time to time on other working group discussions.

Antone now publishes a variety of tools and websites for webmasters and internet marketers.

# SEO Using Auto-Updating Website Content

Welcome! Thank you for joining me in this mini-course on making money using RSS feeds.  I hope that you'll be able to apply a few of the lessons I've learned over the years to help your websites and businesses grow.

A few of the techniques I'm going to cover require an RSS to HTML converter – a script that takes RSS feeds, turns them into HTML content and inserts it into your webpages. Naturally, I recommend the one I created, which is named CaRP. You can purchase CaRP Evolution here or download a free copy of CaRP SE when you join my mailing list. You'll receive an email with a link to click to confirm your subscription.  When you've done so, you'll be sent to the download page immediately.

Once you've installed CaRP or your preferred RSS to HTML converter, you're ready to start using RSS feeds to get auto-updating content for your website.  Fresh, relevant content from RSS feeds is obviously going to look good to the people who visit your site.  But today, I'm going to talk about maximizing the Search Engine Optimization value of the feeds.

**Tip #1: Use relevant feeds**

Auto-updating content is an SEO tool in and of itself, because search engines reward sites that are updated frequently.  While it's true that search engines may consider old content authoritative, especially if lots of sites link to it, fresh content is also ranked highly because it's current.  An added benefit of frequently updated content is that search engines will visit your site more often, so when you post new content or links on a page that is frequently updating

using RSS feeds, they get picked up and indexed faster.

But auto-updating content for its own sake is only the beginning. The first optimization you need to make is to choose a feed with content that's relevant to your site. In the early days, most feeds were about technology, politics, or some lone blogger's personal life. These days, chances are good that someone (hopefully someone who isn't your competitor!) is publishing a feed more or less focused on the exact topic of your website. If you find a feed that covers your site's topic, but also contains irrelevant information, you can use filtering to remove entries that don't contain the desired keywords. Syndicating a relevant feed will give you fresh content containing the keywords that you want your website optimized for.

For links to places where you can find relevant feeds, visit the resources page for this chapter:

[Chapter 1 Resources](#)

**Tip #2: Don't use JavaScript feeds**

Some sites publish their feeds in two formats: RSS and JavaScript. You can add JavaScript feeds to your site simply by pasting a script tag into your webpage. Although it's easy and doesn't require an RSS to HTML converter, you get no SEO benefit at all from JavaScript feeds. Why? Because search engines don't execute JavaScript, so they don't have any idea what content the script displays. If all you use is JavaScript feeds, your website will appear static to search engines. So be sure to use an RSS to HTML converter that integrates the feed content into the source of your webpage. You can tell whether that's happening by opening your webpage, selecting "view page source" or a similar command from your browser menus, and looking for the text of the feed. If you don't see it, search engines won't either.

**Tip #3: Use "semantic markup" to emphasize keywords**

First of all, what is "semantic markup". Make that second. First of all, what is "markup"? Markup in a webpage means HTML tags. Semantic markup

means HTML tags that indicate some meaning.  An example of a non-semantic tag is the "DIV" tag.  It sets off a block of content, but it doesn't say anything about the meaning or significance of it's content.  An example of semantic markup is the "H1" tag.  The content of the "H1" tag is the most significant type of header on a webpage.  When search engines see an H1 tag, they give the words in the tag lots of extra weight in determining the topic of the page.  Consider the following:

### &lt;h1&gt;RSS is good for SEO&lt;/h1&gt;

### Has your search engine position gone to the dogs?

When a search engine sees that, it's much more likely to think that the page is about RSS than about dogs, because "RSS" appears in the header or headline, and "dogs" just appears in the content.  If you can tell your RSS to HTML converter to put your keywords in the right semantic markup tags (like H1, H2, H3..., B, STRONG, etc.), search engines will consider your site to be more relevant to those words.

So how do you do it?  If you're using CaRP, the following configuration code will, for example, put the title of each RSS item in an H3 tag (it will put an &lt;h3&gt; tag "before the item link" and an &lt;/h3&gt; tag "after the item link"):

### CarpConf('bilink', '&lt;h3&gt;');

### CarpConf('ailink', '&lt;/h3&gt;');

Assuming the item titles often contain relevant keywords, that will emphasize your keywords for the search engines.  If you have CaRP Evolution, you can go one step further and, for example, make specific words in the item description bold using this code (in this case, the word "pets" will be bolded):

```
CarpLoadPlugin('replacetext.php');

ReplaceTextConf(1, 'desc', 0, 'pets', '<b>pets</b>');
```

The resources page for this chapter has a link to the documentation for the Replace Text plugin:

Chapter 1 Resources

Take a few minutes now to find some feeds that are relevant to your keywords and set up CaRP to display them on your site using semantic markup.

# Read RSS Feeds Yourself

This may be obvious, but it bears mention that if you want to maximize the value you get from RSS feeds, you need to subscribe to RSS feeds yourself.  If you're not using RSS feeds to keep an eye on what people are saying about your company or industry, there are resources available that you may not know about that can help you stay on top of what's happening out there.  If you're visiting webpages multiple times a day to check for new information, you're doing it the hard way!

Let's talk about feed sources.  Initially, the most common source for RSS feeds was weblogs.  Then "serious" news sites got into the game.  These days, all sorts of companies in just about every industry are publishing feeds – CEOs and other employees are blogging about their companies and industries, marketing departments are publishing PR feeds, product update information is available through feeds, etc.  If you're not interested in reading the rantings of your friendly neighborhood blogger, there are many other sources of feeds that you might be interested in.  Search a feed directory, or watch the sites you visit for the orange XML button or the new subscribe button (you can see it on the resources page for this chapter) and subscribe to a few feeds.

Chapter 2 Resources

Aside from subscribing to feeds from the original publishers, you may want to look into search-based feeds that are available from sources like Google News, Technorati, etc. (links available on the resource page).  To keep on top of "serious" news, do a search on Google News or Yahoo! News and then look for the RSS subscription button or link on the search results page.  Subscribe to those to see new news search results as they're published.

To read what bloggers are saying about you, your company, or your competitors, do a search at a site like Technorati, Feedster or DayPop and subscribe the the RSS results feed (you may need to register and create a search feed at some sites).  If somebody starts ranting or raving about your products on their blog, you'll want to know about it quickly so that you can respond when necessary.  And remember, customer complaints are just suggestions in disguise —seek them out rather than insulating yourself from them, and you'll know how to make more customers happy.

If you're convinced that reading feeds is a good idea but don't have a feed reader yet, see the resources page for this chapter for my recommendations and links to a few free and commercial options.

### Chapter 2 Resources

Get a feed reader if needed and subscribe to a few feeds now before you put it on the back burner and forget about it.

# Publish Your Own Feeds

Publishing your own feeds does not have to be a painful experience.  These days, any weblogging tool worth the bits it's saved on can generate RSS feeds, as can many other tools from forums to wikis to CMSs to help desk systems.  If you don't already have a weblog, go to Blogger.com and create one before you get up from your computer.  (Blogger has its limitations, but it certainly gets the job done, and creating a Blogger weblog is about as easy as falling off a log.  You can switch to a different system later if you decide you need more or different features.)

If you don't think blogging is for you, let me share my perspective on a few possible objections:

**"I don't have enough to say/enough time to write every day."**

That mattered before RSS, but not so much now.  Before, if you didn't write frequently, you'd lose readers because they'd get tired of checking your site and not finding anything new.  But if they subscribe to your blog via RSS, their feed reader will tell them when you've posted something new without them having to check all the time.  Many readers are subscribed to more feeds than they can keep up with, so if you only post when you've got something worth saying, all the better.

**"Blogs don't convey the professional image that I want for my business."**

Tell that to Jonathan Schwartz (president of Sun Microsystems), Mark Cuban (owner of the Dallas Mavericks), Robert Lutz (vice chairman of General Motors), and a lot of other corporate bloggers.  Sure, a bad blog will project a bad image, but by no means is blogging only for greasy haired hackers.

**"Setting up a blog is too much trouble."**

Not necessarily.  Go to Blogger.com and give it a try – you'll have a blog up and running in a matter of minutes.

**"But Blogspot.com addresses are too unprofessional."**

Not a problem – choose "advanced blog setup", and your Blogger-powered blog can be hosted on your own site.

Assuming you already have or are going to set up a blog, here are a few ways to build readership:

1) Get listed in blog and RSS directories.  The resources page for this chapter has links to directories, directories of directories, and tools that can help you submit your blog to multiple directories at once.

[Chapter 3 Resources](#)

2) Put "autodiscovery links" in your webpages (instructions below).  When an autodiscovery link is seen by an RSS-aware web browser, it shows a button or some other user interface element telling the user that there is a feed associated with the webpage.  As of this writing, the majority of web browsers are not RSS-aware, but when Microsoft releases the next version of Internet Explorer, that will change.  Autodiscovery links are also used by some feed readers when they are pointed to a webpage to subscribe to the related feed.

Autodiscovery links are small pieces of HTML code which go in the HEAD section of your webpage.  Here's an example:

<link rel="alternate" type="application/rss+xml" title="RSS feed" href="http://example.com/feed.rss" />

If your feed is in RSS format, change the "href" and optionally "title" attributes and leave "rel" and "type" as they are.  If your feed is in Atom format, also change "type" to "application/atom+xml".

3) Link to your feed from your webpage using either the orange XML icon or the new subscribe icon (which will be used by various web browsers in the

future).  Both icons can be seen on the resources page for this chapter.

Chapter 3 Resources

4) Post replies on weblogs that you read with links to relevant entries in your weblog.  Make your weblog part of the conversation.

If you don't have a weblog yet, go to Blogger.com now and set one up.

# Where Will The Revenue Come From?

It's time for the really fun part of this eBook: let's talk about exactly how RSS feeds make money.

Making money with RSS isn't all that different from making money with any other communication medium, but there are a few unique opportunities and considerations to keep in mind.  Here are a few approaches you might take.

**Method #1: Use feeds to get your name out and build goodwill**

You might decide not to use feeds to make money directly, but to keep your business in peoples' minds and provide useful information.  The next time your readers are shopping in your market, they'll be more likely to think of you, and more inclined to buy from you. If you're not concerned about whether readers view your content via your feed or your website, you might consider publishing full content feeds (feeds containing all of the content found on the webpage they link to) rather than using summary feeds to drive traffic to your website.

Personally, I'd rather make money more directly!  The good news is that these methods aren't all mutually exclusive.

**Method #2: Use feeds to get inbound links for SEO purposes**

Inbound links are an absolute must for search engine optimization, so you should ensure that your feeds are optimized to entice other webmasters to syndicate them (ie. post the feed's content on their websites in HTML format).

If you've studied search engine optimization, you know that there's only so much you can accomplish by optimizing the content of your webpages.  That's

because, while on-page optimization can tell the search engines what your site is about, only inbound links tell them how **important** your site is. Unless you have the only site in the world covering your particular topic, it needs to be both relevant to the topic **and** important (as evidenced by many inbound links) to rank high in search results.  Inbound links are SEO silver, and inbound links from related sites are pure SEO gold.

How do you maximize the number and value of inbound links generated by your feed?  Here are nine key tips:

**Tip #1: Keep your feed focused on one topic.**  If someone is looking for a feed use to add content to their site and your feed covers exactly the topic they're interested in, you'll have a better chance of getting syndicated than if your feed contains information irrelevant to their site.  If you publish information on a variety of topics, publish multiple feeds, each covering one topic area, either instead of or in addition to a monolithic feed containing everything.

**Tip #2: Publish only interesting information.**  If the temptation arises to trade quality for volume, consider this: if someone syndicating your feed decides that the signal to noise ratio is too high, they may go looking for a better source.

**Tip #3: Publish often.**  You'll have to figure out for yourself the optimal balance between this and the previous tip.  But keep in mind that if someone is syndicating your feed to get regularly updated content, they'll be less likely to look for a different feed if you provide new content regularly.  If you can't always publish regularly, publish anyway, but if you can publish regularly, by all means, do.  If you tend to write in bursts, you might save some of your entries as drafts when they're first writen, and post them to your blog over time while waiting for your next burst of inspiration.

**Tip #4: Write well.**  "Well" is, of course, defined in relation to your subject matter and target audience.  If your target audience uses lots of slang, write with lots of slang.  Just don't let your writing style stand between you and

your target audience.  Webmasters want content that speaks to their target audience.

   **Tip #5: Publish summary feeds instead of full content feeds.**  There are two reasons for doing this.  First, most people who syndicate only want to display a summary of each item, and some webmasters won't know how to make their RSS to HTML converter truncate the content.  Second, there are those who want to rip off the full content of your site and use it as the sole content of their site.  A summary-only feed won't help them do that.

   **Tip #6: Tell people how to syndicate your feed.**  Provide a link from your website or feed to an RSS to HTML converter like [CaRP](#) with a brief note about what it's for.  Become a [Gecko Tribe affiliate](#), and get paid for your referrals.

   **Tip #7: Give explicit permission to syndicate your feed.**  Even among those who know that it **can** be done, not everyone will be comfortable syndicating feeds without the express permission of the publisher.  Don't wait for them to ask—post a note in the feed or on your website giving permission to syndicate your feed.  You may wish to include a condition requiring that they preserve links back to your site in a search-engine-visible fashion (eg. no use of JavaScript links or 'rel="nofollow"').

   **Tip #8: Don't put ads in your feed.**  Advertisements, especially banners, are likely to mess up the formatting of sites on which they're syndicated.  And obviously, other webmasters don't want to display advertisements on their site if you're going to be the one making money from them.  Most webmasters won't know how to filter the ads out of your feed when syndicating it, so if you include ads, they'll probably look for another feed instead.

   **Tip #9: Consider not offering a JavaScript version of your feed.**  A JavaScript feed has no SEO value, because it's not visible to search engines.  The tradeoff is that JavaScript feeds are easier for many webmasters to use, so by not offering a JavaScript feed, your feed might get syndicated on less sites, and thus

bring in traffic from less sites.  You'll need to decide which is more important to you: the SEO value of being syndicated, or clicks from sites that syndicate you.

## Method #3: Use feeds to drive traffic to your website, and advertise there

If your goal is to get people to your website so that you can advertise there, you'll want to either publish summary feeds or include links to related webpages on your site in the feed content.

Wherever you put the ads, you might consider a variety of options: advertising your own products, affiliate links to recommended related products, and AdSense and other ad networks.  If you use CaRP to display feeds on your site, you can join the Gecko Tribe affiliate program and place affiliate links to CaRP near the feeds.

## Method #4: Require payment for access to the feed

Feeds can be password protected just like web pages.  Most feeds are freely available, but if your feed's content is particularly valuable, you may be able to get people to pay for access to it.  If you sell access to your feeds, you should consider publishing free feeds too in order to ensure that your audience is as large as possible.  You might publish a less detailed version of the same information and note that more details are available with a paid subscription.

## Method #5: Put advertising in the feed

Although advertising is not nearly so prevalent in feeds as on webpages, the fact that many high-profile feeds do contain advertising suggests that readers are willing to subscribe to advertising supported feeds.  The resources page for this chapter has links to a few advertiser networks that you can use to put advertising in your feeds.  If you want to do more work and get a larger share of the pie, you can of course sell space directly to advertisers.

One point to consider when placing advertising inside your feeds: your subscribers might be more tolerant of advertising if your feeds contain full content rather than only excerpts.  And some systems like Blogger/Google AdSense require the feed to contain full content before it can carry advertising.

If you don't have an account with an advertising network like AdSense, sign up for one today.  You'll find a link to the AdSense signup page on the resources page for this chapter.

[Chapter 4 Resources](#)

# Don't Forget To Display

# Your Own Feeds On Your Site

This chapter is short, but it covers and important content and linking technique that's often overlooked: using feeds to move information around your own website. If you have a weblog, use CaRP or another RSS to HTML conversion tool to display excerpts from your weblog on your homepage in a "company news" or other relevant section.  It's a great way to make more of your webpages dynamic while helping your visitors find their way to the content you're producing.

Before I created CaRP, if I wanted to display content from one part of my site (eg. a discussion forum) elsewhere on my site, I'd write custom code to query the database where the content was stored, format it as needed, and display it. After I had CaRP, if the content source was already producing a feed, I found it easier to use CaRP to display it than to write the custom code.  As an added bonus, whenever I decided to display different content (for which there was a feed) in the same spot later, all I had to change was the feed URL, not the database code.

If you'd like to maintain consistent formatting of your feeds as you display them in various places on your site, and make it easy to update the formatting all in once place, CaRP's "themes" feature might be helpful.  A link to the themes documentation can be found on the resources page for this chapter.

[Chapter 5 Resources](Chapter 5 Resources)

Every once in a while, I find that I need data formatted in a way that isn't available coming from the RSS feed, and then I'll write the custom database query and formatting code.  But ninety-nine percent of the time, CaRP is the

quickest and easiest tool for reusing my own content in various parts of my site.

# Use RSS Together With
# Other Communication Methods

Some people seem to think that RSS feeds are the holy grail of business communication tools.  It's true that, unlike email, RSS feeds don't get blocked by spam filters (though I wouldn't be surprised to see filters used soon with search-based feeds or to remove advertising).  And once a feed is published, any number of people can subscribe to it without your having to track their subscriptions.

But email and other communication methods are far from dead.  Case in point: you're reading either an email or a PDF that you received by email right now, right?  A lot of people use RSS today, and now that all the major web browsers have RSS feed reading capabilities built in, the number is growing faster than ever. But a lot of other people still don't use RSS and won't or will only occasionally in the future.  Don't limit your reach by sticking to only one or two communication media.

Rather than competing with each other, different communication media are most effective when they support each other.  RSS feeds to drive traffic to websites by publishing teasers in the feed and linking to the website.  Websites drive readers to RSS feeds by publishing RSS subscription buttons and autodiscovery links.  Websites drive traffic to eZines through subscription forms, and eZines drive traffic back to the web with links to related websites.  Also, delivering the same message through multiple channels increases the probability of achieving the number of impressions needed to move a potential customer to action.

If you publish an eZine, you might consider offering the same content via a blog/RSS feed.  You might consider offering weblog readers the option to receive

new entries by email if they prefer email over RSS readers (or just haven't tried an RSS reader yet).

While it is possible, by giving each RSS subscriber unique password or feed URL, to deliver a sequence of messages using RSS, an email "autoresponder" like the one I use to deliver this eBook also works well.  You might deliver the same content using either or both methods.

Most article directory sites allow you to post your website URL in you byline. You might consider posting some articles and putting your feed URL there, especially if you are allowed to include more than one URL.

Finally, since I'm on the topic of cross promotion, I should mention the URLs for a few of my weblog's category pages.  You can find links to the category feeds under the photograph at the top of each page:

Marketing:

> http://WhiteHatCrew.com/blog/category/marketing/

RSS and Atom:

> http://antone.geckotribe.com/alpha-gecko/categories/technology/xml/atomrss/

Where do you have the opportunity to cross promote your communications? Links to some useful tools can be found on the resources page for this chapter.

Chapter 6 Resources

# RSS Ethics

I've discussed how to use RSS feeds to generate VALUE.  In closing I'd like to say a few words about VALUES or ethics.

There are a million ethical ways to make a buck.  There are a lot of ethical ways to make a buck using RSS feeds.  Unfortunately, some people seem to prefer unethical methods.  What ethical considerations are there in the use of RSS, and why shouldn't you cross the line?

Before I get into that, the obligatory disclaimer: I am not a lawyer, and nothing said here should be considered legal advice.

When someone produces content, it is automatically copyrighted, which means that the publisher has the right to restrict reuse.  Most RSS publishers want people to syndicate, or republish, their content (that's what RSS was invented for in the first place: "<u>R</u>eally <u>S</u>imple <u>S</u>yndication").  But not all do.  Here are a few guidelines to consider when syndicating RSS feeds:

- If a feed states that it's for private use only, please don't syndicate it.

- If the feed contains full content, please don't syndicate the entire articles without permission – just display the first 500 or so characters and let people who are interested follow the link to the publisher's site.

- If the feed contains advertising, it may not be intended for syndication.  At the very least, please don't syndicate the full content.

- Please always link to the publisher of any content you syndicate (the link to the full content may be enough, but you might consider naming the source too).

- Please don't use feeds as the sole source of content on your site – be sure

that you're contributing something of value and not just mooching off of the efforts of others.

- Please don't syndicate "scraped" feeds (feeds generated by third parties) unless authorized by the original publisher.

If you're thinking of crossing the ethical line (unless you've already gone over to the dark side, in which case, by all means, cross the line back to the good side!) consider this: would you rather live in a world full of crooks trying to mooch off of everyone else (including you) or a world full of honest people who are all contributing value and generating more wealth and abundance to go around?  I don't know anybody – I don't WANT to know anybody – who'd prefer the world of crooks.

You might think that the world is full of crooks already and one more isn't going to make a difference, but ultimately, you're either part of the problem or part of the solution.  Be part of the solution.  Don't become what you despise.  If you already are, I hope you can see that there are plenty of ways to prosper ethically, and that you'll redirect your efforts in ways that make the world a better place for everyone.

Enough preaching.  I hope you've enjoyed this eBook and have learned some new ways to build your business using RSS feeds.  There's no resources page for this chapter, but you'll find more about ethical internet marketing at:

http://WhiteHatCrew.com/

If you know someone who could benefit from a free copy of CaRP SE or this eBook, please send this eBook to them or point them to the CaRP homepage so that they can subscribe:

Thank you and all the best to you,

Antone Roundy

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