Creating an RSS news feed - by Michael Ahgren

First let's take a look at what RSS can do for you and the people who visit your site.

If you have a page or a number of pages that you update frequently, then there are probably people who want to stay up to date with that information. Using RSS they can automatically monitor all changes without even visiting the site.

What do you need to receive the RSS feed?

You need either an RSS client, there are a number of free feed readers you can download, or a browser that supports RSS. Firefox is one of the browsers with RSS support. In Firefox you can create "active bookmarks" which is a type of feed subscriptions.

Is it complicated to set up an RSS feed?

No, you only need three things.

- An XML document that contains all the data.
- A link to that XML/RSS document.
- Another link to the XML/RSS document, this one goes into the head section of your html code.

The XML.

Let's start by taking a look at the XML document. First some information for those of you who haven't worked with XML, XML looks very much like HTML, but it's much stricter and you can create "your own" tags. There must always be a start and an end tag!

Here is an example of an XML/RSS document:

```
<?xml version="1.0"?>
<rss version="0.91">
<channel>
<title>GoLiveCentral.com Channel</title>
<link>http://www.GoLiveCentral.com/</link>
<description>GoLiveCentral.com news channel. Read about the latest additions to the site!</description>
<language>en-us</language>
<copyright>GoLiveCentral.com 2005</copyright>
<image>
<title>GoLiveCentral.com</title>
<url>http://www.golivecentral.com/images/chrome/mainlogo.gif</url>
<link>http://www.GoLiveCentral.com</link>
</image>
```

```
<item>
<title>The new and free GoLive Co-Author has been released!</title>
<link>http://www.golivecentral.com/pages/news.shtml</link>
<description>Links to the download page and more info can be found in the news flash.</description>
</item>
</channel>
</rss>
```

You can actually just copy the code above, enter your own data and then publish the file!

Let's take a closer look at the content.

```
<?xml version="1.0"?>
<rss version="0.91">
```

These two tags tell us this is a XML document and that it's based on the RSS 0.91 standards. There are other standards that you might want to try, but this one is solid and a good starting point.

```
<channel>
<title>GoLiveCentral.com Channel</title>
<link>http://www.GoLiveCentral.com/</link>
<description>GoLiveCentral.com news channel. Read about the latest additions to the site!</description>
<language>en-us</language>
<copyright>GoLiveCentral.com 2005</copyright>
<image>
<title>GoLiveCentral.com</title>
<url>http://www.golivecentral.com/images/chrome/mainlogo.gif</url>
<link>http://www.GoLiveCentral.com</link>
</image>
```

In this part of the code the channel is declared. Everything is very logical. Please note that all tags have end tags!

- The title of the feed.
- A link to the site (usually the index page).
- A description.
- Language code.
- Copyright message.
- A title for the image that will be displayed with the site name.
- A link to that image on your server.
- A link from the image to some page (usually the index page).

Now comes the interesting part!

```
<item>
<title>The new and free GoLive Co-Author has been released!</title>
<link>http://www.golivecentral.com/pages/news.shtml</link>
<description>Links to the download page and more info can be found in the news flash.</description>
</item>
```

This is the actual feed. Each section is called an "item". Each item has:

- A title.
- A link to a page.
- A description.

When you listed all your items all you need to do is to close the two tags that still are open.

```
</channel>
</rss>
```

The link in your html page.

First you need a link to your XML document, future browsers will be able to handle everything automatically when you click this link, but at the moment you are forced to copy the URL and paste it in your feed reader.

The link looks like any "normal" link, but with a small addition. Here is an example:

```
<a title="Link to our RSS feed" type="application/rss+xml" href="feed.rss">RSS feed</a>
```

The new thing here is the type="application/rss+xml" part that tells future browsers that this is a link to an RSS feed.

The link in the page head section.

Some browsers, like Firefox will display a small icon when a page offers an RSS feed. If you click that icon an "active bookmark" is created.

To tell the browsers that there is an RSS feed available we need to put this in the head section of the html code:

```
<link title="RSS feed for GoLiveCentral.com" href="feed.rss" type="application/rss+xml" rel="alternate">
```

I think the content is very self-explanatory, so I'll skip the details… (href="feed.rss" is the reference/URL to the XML/RSS document on your server)

We have now created an XML document, let's upload it.

We have created two links in our html document, let's upload that document too.

We are now set up and people can start subscribing to our news feed!

Now it's time to test the feed with a couple of different feed readers and browser to make sure everything works as expected.

If you have more than one page that is updated on a regular basis it's probably a good idea to create a separate news feed for each page.

Here are some useful links:

http://www.feedreader.com/
http://www.mnot.net/rss/tutorial/
http://www.downes.ca/cgi-bin/page.cgi?db=post&q=crdate=1059503386&format=full
http://www.xml.com/lpt/a/2002/12/18/dive-into-xml.html