



Keeping Current – Part Two: No Time for Print

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The twofold challenge of staying abreast of new technologies and keeping current with the literature of the field is thwarted by the crush of too many information feeds and what feels like fewer minutes and hours in each day. How can anyone keep a running picture of the state of affairs of library information technology amid the swarm of webpages, blogs, podcasts, webinars, ejournals, ebooks and feeds? The very nature of these information streams is sometimes oppressive, forcing one to learn a new form of communication before even sampling the content within.

There is hope. There are easy ways of doing this. Keep in mind that no one has the time to read everything. There are far too many virtual/online 'places' to go for anyone to do a good job reviewing them on a regular basis. The key concept is to make the information come to you. What follows are three ways to make keeping current less of a burden. Only one of these involves use of a 'new' technology, and its learning curve is as flat as Kansas. As I said in the previous article, a review of print resources that I find helpful (http://www.hrlc.org/technology/keeping_current.pdf), what follows are three tools that work for me, that help ease the information overload that I feel on a daily basis.

Listserv

Dissemination of content using various forms of listserv software has been around for about 20 years. The original Listserv was run on BITNET, the ancestor of the internet, as a way for member institutions to report computer downtime to other subscribers. The concept caught on quickly and it was easy to find other ways to exploit a system that had a list of subscriber's email addresses and was able to route and distribute email widely. I began using listservs in library school in 1993 and have relied on them ever since to keep my mailbox quota in excess of established limits. Depending on which ones you choose, they can sometimes contribute to information overload by overwhelming you with posts. I've asked for it, because I subscribe to a lot of them. Here are some that I recommend (with an indication of intended audience):

Web4Lib – discussion of library-based web services. This has been, in the past, a very active list. Managed by Roy Tennant of the California Digital Library, it is aimed at librarians and library staff involved in web management, but anyone can join. It is a great list for seeing what topics are of current interest and for getting web-related questions answered. There are over 3,000 members from 54 countries. The archive is browsable and searchable. Topics covered in October 2005 included flu wikis, web survey software suggestions, using two keyboards



and two mice on a PC, review of an RSS tutorial, and wireless computing and the Patriot Act. Full information including how to subscribe is at <http://lists.webjunction.org/web4lib/>.

LIBREF-L – discussion of library reference issues. I found that this was an invaluable resource as I learned about the real-life issues facing a public service librarian. Information at <http://www.lsoft.com/scripts/wl.exe?SL1=LIBREF-L&H=LISTSERV.KENT.EDU>

PUBLIB – discussion list for public librarians and those interested in public libraries. Information at <http://lists.webjunction.org/publib/>

COLLIB-L – discussion list of the College Libraries Section of ACRL/ALA. One facet of some listservs, like this one, is that they are used widely as a place to post job announcements. More information at <http://www.ala.org/ala/acrl/aboutacrl/acrlsections/collegelibraries/collibdisc/collibdiscussion.htm>.

STUMPERS – one of the first listservs I joined and one of the most enjoyable. Here is where questions go when all local resources fail. This list provides a lot of entertainment along with its role as a reference resource. More information at <http://domin.dom.edu/depts/gslis/stumpers/index.htm>.

LITA-L – discussion list sponsored by LITA, the Library and Information Technology Association. I have come to rely on this list as a barometer of current topics in my field. Information at <http://www.ala.org/ala/lita/litamembership/litaldisclists/litalotherdiscussion.htm>

This list could go on further. I am a member of a systems librarianship list, one for those participating in the Q&A NJ program, Endeavor/Voyager users, Voyager system managers, user interface managers and EZProxy users. There are probably one or two ‘quiet’ lists that I have forgotten about. Here are two “lists of listservs” that are focused on librarianship and its many specialties:

- Library Related Listservs http://mingo.info-science.uiowa.edu/courses/adults/library_listservs.html
- Library-Oriented Lists <http://www.aladin.wrlc.org/gsd/cgi-bin/library?e=p-000-00--0liblists--00-0-0-0prompt-14-Document---0-1l--1-en-10000---20-about---001-001-0-0isoZz-8859Zz-1-0&a=d&cl=CL2>

Listsers have their place. They bring information to your email inbox, so you don't have to hunt for it. Their archives provide rich databases of user-derived information. On the other hand, they can contribute to overload some are very high volume. Look for the “digest” subscription option which sends only a weekly summary of topics discussed and provides links to the full content.



RSS Feeds and Aggregation

Perhaps the ultimate in postmodern information technology that is easily had by anyone is the combination of RSS feeds and an aggregator. The basic concepts are fairly simple. First, a source of information segments its content into a 'feed' using XML (a markup language). This feed has a web URL. Next, an aggregator such as Bloglines (www.bloglines.com) is employed to house a set of selected feeds. The result is that instead of going to a dozen separate webpages each day to look for updated information; I go to my customized Bloglines page where I can tell at a glance which of my feeds contain updated content.

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RSS Feeds **XML**

Making this work is pretty simple. I recently was browsing websites and navigated to the Library Journal page

My Feeds | My Blog | Clippings

Add | Edit | Reorder/Sort | Options

24 Feeds Mark All Re.

- [Ain't It Cool News](#)
- [Bloglines | News \(1\)](#)**
- [Boing Boing \(32\)](#)**
- [Book News](#)
- [Breaking News \(22\)](#)**
- [CNN.com - Technology](#)
- [CNN.com - World \(68\)](#)**
- [EurekAlert! - Breaking News \(97\)](#)**
- [Infotech News \(25\)](#)**
- [Librarian's Index to the Internet](#)
- [LISNews.com: News For Library Geeks \(9\)](#)**
- [LITA Blog](#)
- [LJ Tech Blog](#)
- [NASA Watch \(3\)](#)**
- [North Haledon, NJ \(73\)](#)**
- [NYT > International \(76\)](#)**
- [NYT > National \(41\)](#)**
- [NYT > Science \(18\)](#)**
- [NYT > Technology \(21\)](#)**
- [Scientific American \(2\)](#)**
- [SPACE.com Amazing Images \(60\)](#)**

www.libraryjournal.com. There, I saw a distinctive RSS icon. Many pages have one of these or one like it. When I clicked this link I went to a page that offered to connect it to a variety of web-based readers. I was already using Bloglines, so I clicked on the SUB BLOGLINES icon. At the Bloglines page, you set up a free account to establish 'your' page. Whenever you click a SUB BLOGLINES icon, this feed is associated with your page. Eventually, 'My Feeds' began to take on the appearance of the things I am interested in and the list of the types of resources I look at on a regular basis.

That is all there is to it, in terms of setup. No coding, nothing to download. Once you have added the desired feeds to Bloglines, they appear **bold** when there is new, updated content and revert to plain text after being read. Bloglines is only one of many choices that include NewsGator, My Yahoo! RSS, Pluck, and Rojo.

RSS feeds can be found on all the major news outlets that have online content. Many scholarly publications are adding feeds as well, such as AAAS – Science and the journal Nature. Many authors of blogs publish RSS feeds as well. Add the feed to your list, and whenever the blog is updated you will know.



Libraries are using RSS feeds in a number of ways. Hennepin County Library has a list of feeds (<http://www.hclib.org/pub/search/RSS.cfm>) that do such things as repeat an OPAC search and let you know when there are new results; display lists of new books, on order titles, or bestsellers; or show assortments of subject guides. Minneapolis Public Library uses RSS feeds to provide updated lists of electronic resources and a daily calendar of events (<http://www.mplib.org/rss.asp>).

The use of RSS is nearly limitless. It is already beginning to move beyond simple text and links. The combination of Podcasting and RSS will enable audio to be syndicated. Apple now has iTunes Feed Generator which lets you update your MP3 library. Image and video blogging is next.

But back to where we started – the most basic combination of an aggregator/reader like Bloglines lets you pull together a set of feeds, know when there is updated content, and then browse and read without the need to visit multiple sites or consult bookmarks or favorite lists.

The Informed Librarian

A good clipping service is a blessing. This is run by Arlene L. Eis, an experienced librarian. Subscribers receive a monthly email containing a link to refreshed content via a web page. You receive about a dozen articles from all aspects of librarianship extracted from over 275 titles. Full table of contents of each journal is available. The editor's picks articles are highlighted, along with a monthly article by a featured author. The October 2005 issue included:

- The Art of the Accessibility Statement
- Debates and Paradoxes Surrounding the Use of Qualitative Methods
- Developing Netref: The Evolution of a New Reference Model
- Evidence-based Librarianship: Utilizing Data From All Available Sources to Make Judicious Print Cancellation Decisions
- International Phenomenon? Amateur Journalism? Legal Minefield?: Why Information Professionals Cannot Afford to Ignore Weblogs
- Marketing Library Computers to Young Children Using Multimedia
- Mother Goose, Spud Murphy and the Librarian Knights: Representations of Librarians and Their Libraries in Modern Children's Fiction
- Person First, Disability Second: Disability Awareness Training in Libraries
- Wikimedia Worlds

The advantage of The Informed Librarian is that you get timely, evocative content from Sage, Emerald, Haworth, Elsevier, IOS and Taylor & Francis without expensive specialized subscriptions to pay for or databases to search. It provides an excellent slice of the print literature in a very convenient online format. Packaged thusly, I can usually manage to read ten or twelve articles a month. If I was left to search the



databases or browse current editions of various library journals I know I could not get this level of focus.

Individual subscriptions are \$29/year and bulk memberships are heavily discounted. For more information go to <http://www.informedlibrarian.com/index.cfm> .

Keeping current is an endless task but an essential one in the quick moving world of technology. As much as I rely on services like listservs, RSS feeds and The Informed Librarian, there are always other sources that have interesting and useful content. I like looking at ResearchBuzz (<http://www.researchbuzz.com/>) which provides updates on new search engines, software, browsers, and anything related to the web. This is another site that provides an RSS feed. Roy Tennant's Current Cites (<http://lists.webjunction.org/currentcites/>) is another indispensable resource, making use of a team of librarians and staff to select the best articles, books and digital documents which are reviewed and annotated here.

I'll end by saying keeping current is more of an aspiration than a reasonable objective. By using some of the resources here, you can at least stay *reasonably current* and feel at least your chin is above the water.

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