



RSS for Business

Reference Guide

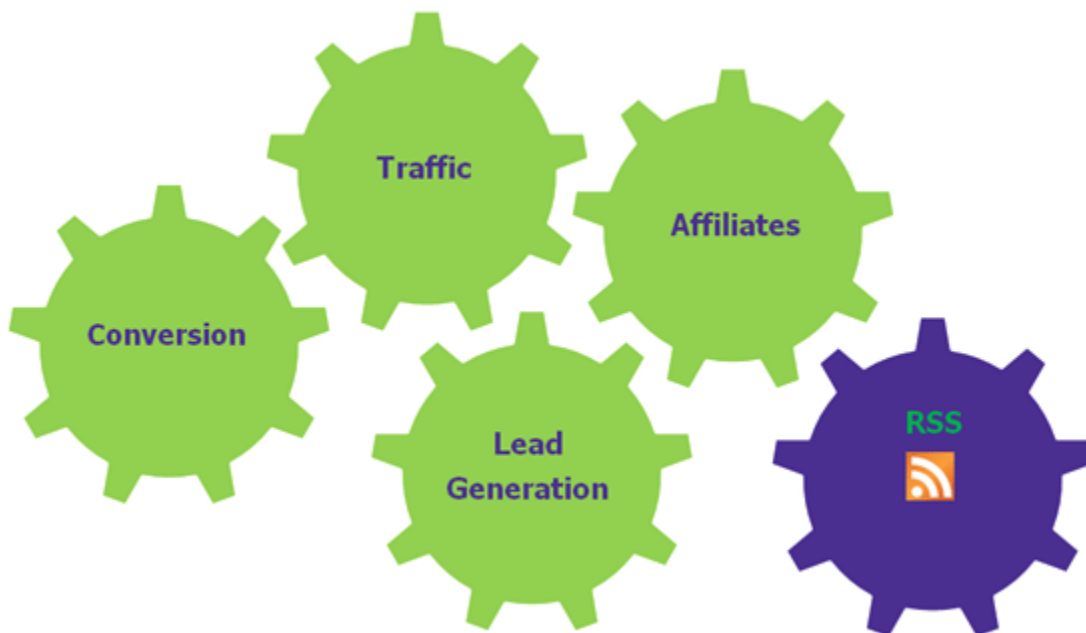
701 South Broad Street
Lititz, PA 17543
717.627.4528 x 330
darmstrong@vertexinternet.com

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I. Webinar Series Overview

The basics of ECommerce are often so simple to comprehend that the details of execution can sometimes be missed. We have created a Webinar series to support your efforts of re-assessing your business and taking incremental steps to improve it.



Vertex offers a series of ECommerce webinars that will help you understand the steps you must take to increase the amount of traffic visiting your website and the overall conversion of sales. To watch previous webinars, or to sign up for future events, click on the links below:

September 6, 2007 – [RSS for Business](#)

September 13, 2007 – [Conversion](#)

TBD – Viral Marketing

TBD - Distribution

Additional dates for encore live presentations may be added. Visit www.vertexinternet.com for additional information, or contact David Armstrong at 717.627.4528 x 330 or darmstrong@vertexinternet.com.

II. What is RSS?

Technology often gets ahead of itself as it sometimes seeks out a problem to fix rather than solves a pending issue. RSS, which stands for Really Simple Syndication, was such a

technology. Even though RSS has been around since the mid 1990s, its potential as an essential marketing tool is just beginning to be realized.

RSS is a broadcast distribution method that allows you to push your content to your audience rather than pull them into your websites to read your latest news. This distribution method has been proven to work by newspapers, radio, and television stations, and it is finally in practice online. For example, if you wanted to know what the weather will be like tomorrow, you can simply turn on the local news or pick up the latest edition of your local newspaper – you do not have to drive down to the weather station and make an inquiry. Television, radio, and newspaper publishers deliver the news that you want and are interested in directly to you. And now, thanks to RSS, you can have the information that you are interested in delivered directly to you online as well.

However, RSS takes it a step further by allowing you to choose which information you receive. Radio, television, and newspapers provide the latest information on “sports”, but if you are only interested in the Philadelphia Eagles, you will have to sort through the information to find what you are looking for using those methods. RSS allows you to sign up for information on the Philadelphia Eagles and all of the latest headlines will be delivered directly to you as soon as they are published online.

A good analogy to use for RSS is to think of it as TiVo for your computer. In the past, the broadcasting stations decided what shows to air in each time slot, and you either watched it or flipped to another channel. However, with TiVo, or any other DVR, you choose which shows you like and you watch them at your convenience.

RSS is similar. Instead of publishing content on your website for your audience to search for and view, which is similar to flipping through channels trying to find a show to watch, you are pushing the content to your audience directly, which is similar to TiVo. Members of your audience that subscribe to your RSS feeds are similar to TiVo’s customers that record shows they want to watch as they both select the content they need and review it when they want.

A. How RSS Works



Website visitors that are interested in receiving your content subscribe to your RSS feeds simply by clicking on the RSS Icon, or other Subscribe Icon, on your website and adding it to their Start Page, such as MyYahoo, MSN or iGoogle. It is estimated that over 400 million people use Start Pages, with over 50 million using MyYahoo alone. Most users set their Start Pages as their home

pages so it is the first page they see when they log on and it is the page that is viewed, on average, at least three times per day.

While RSS is a highly technical tool, most users are not aware that they are subscribing to RSS feeds. Companies found that the orange RSS icon confused a lot of their visitors, so they switched to



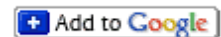
simpler, more self-explanatory icons, such as a button that says “Add to Google”. This way, visitors simply click on the correct button and your information is automatically added to their Start Page.

If you are still unsure how users subscribe to RSS feeds, follow these steps to learn how easy it is to set up a Start Page and subscribe to new feeds:

1. Go to www.google.com.
2. If you do not already have a Google account, sign up for one (it's free).
3. Click on iGoogle and select the content you would like posted on your home page. Even though it is not labeled as RSS, you are subscribing to different RSS feeds.



4. To learn how to subscribe to an RSS feed from a website, go to <http://creative.blog.listrak.com/> and click on the Add to Google button in the right column.
5. Click the Add to Google Homepage link. You will be taken to your iGoogle Start Page and you will notice that the Listrak Creative Side blog now appears in the upper left corner of the page. You have just subscribed to one of Listrak's RSS feeds.



Every time the RSS feeds that you are subscribed to are updated, the new content will appear on your Start Page. This means that you do not have to revisit websites to search for the news you want – it is sent to you automatically.

From a business perspective, you can see how easy it is to get your information in front of the audience that cares about it the most. Allowing your website visitors to subscribe to your company controlled RSS feeds is the easiest way to keep your audience informed.

1. Company Controlled

Company Controlled RSS are RSS feeds that an organization decides to offer its subscribers. For example, you may offer news feeds, product announcement feeds, newsletter feeds, etc. A good example of company controlled RSS Feeds may be found online at [The New York Times](http://www.nytimes.com). The editors have decided what feeds to publish and users may subscribe to the feeds that they are interested in simply by following the instructions above to add the information to their Start Pages.

As you are creating your RSS feeds, remember to include a keyword tag with each article (or product) and to generate an RSS feed for each tag.

For example, a toy store that offers toys for children aged 0-15 should include keywords like "age=3" so the keyword tags populate in more than one RSS feed. Visitors will only subscribe to the feeds that offer toys in their childrens' age groups, so if a toy is for toddlers, the keyword tags should be "age=2", "age=3", and "age=4" so it spans the entire age range and will therefore be included in the RSS feeds for each keyword.

While this method is a great way to keep a specific message in front of people that have visited your website, there is another method that allows for even more customization to be made on the users' ends.

2. Customer Controlled

Customer controlled RSS allows users to subscribe RSS feeds based on search criteria that they control. For example, a visitor on the Nordstrom's website may enter a keyword in the search field box, such as Ecco shoes. After performing the search, the visitor may click on the RSS icon to add that page to his or her Start Page. Anytime that Nordstrom updates their site with Ecco shoes, the information will automatically appear on the subscriber's Start Page. This means that the subscriber does not have to return to the Nordstrom's website to see if there is a sale on Ecco shoes or if there are new styles in stock.

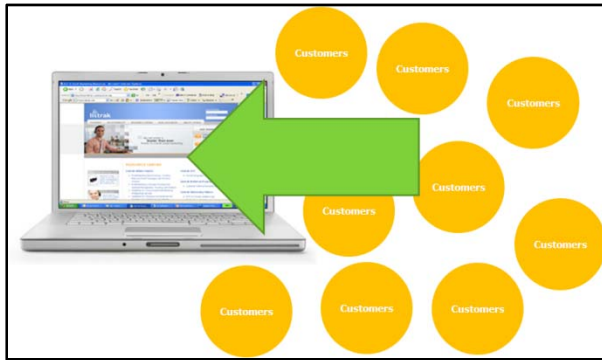
Subscribers may even add feeds directly from search sites such as Google News. To do this:

1. Go to <http://news.google.com/nwshp?tab=wn&hl=en>.
2. Type in your search criteria and click "Search News".
3. Click on the RSS link on the left side of the screen.
4. Copy the URL address.
5. Go to your Start Page, such as iGoogle.
6. From iGoogle, click on "Add Stuff" and then "Add by URL".
7. Paste the URL into the text box and click "Add".
8. Return to your iGoogle Start Page and you will notice a new RSS based on your search term.

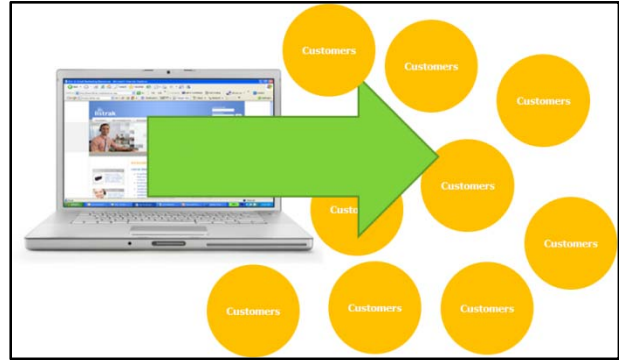


Many people are using this method to build personalized Start Pages based on their own interests, hobbies, and needs. Publishing your RSS feeds to news feeds will greatly increase your marketing scope as you can send your news to people without them visiting your website.

It is easy to broadcast your RSS feeds in this method. If your site has a search feature you are already 75% there. Enabling those results to broadcast RSS and have users subscribe to them is opening many new channels, taking the guessing out of the process and providing your customers what they want, at a lower cost to you.



Instead of making your customers come to you



Distribute content to your customers directly

B. Get More for Less - Automatically

Some companies spend a lot of time creating newsletters, which is a great tool for customer retention. Using a combo RSS/Email strategy can really enhance this effort to retain customers. In addition to the custom newsletters you are offering, you can offer newsletters that come from the content already on your site, automatically. One of the often missed uses of RSS is that it can be sent via email by creating an RSS to Email conversion. This is perfect for those users who do not have a Start Page, or for ones that have already filled their Start Pages as your customers subscribe to your RSS feeds via email, which means that the new information is email to the users automatically every time you update the content on your website.

To learn more, read Listrak's white paper "[Implementing RSS as a Marketing Tool: Delivering Content to Drive Leads](#)".

For a free website analysis, contact David Armstrong at 717.627.4528 x 330 or darmstrong@vertexinternet.com