Under Surveillance

Teaching Topic Monitoring as a Research Skill with RSS Feeds and Email Alerts

Mira Foster mira@sfsu.edu
San Francisco State University
Q: How do people seek information?

A: There’s more to it than searching.
Consider Marcia Bates’ model for information seeking and searching:

4 MODES

- Searching
- Browsing
- Monitoring
- “Being Aware”
Information Seeking

**Active**
- **Searching**
  - Google

**Passive**
- **Monitoring**
  - Email
  - RSS Feed

**Directed**
- **Browsing**
  - Choice...
  - Serendipity....
  - Discovery...

**Undirected**
- **Being Aware**
  - My Yahoo!
  - Facebook

Bates, 2002 Modes of Information Seeking
Searching = Directed + Active
Browsing = Undirected + Active

- Surfing
- Shelf Reading
- Following citations
- Choosing which article to read from a list of results
- Reading!

- Enjoy…
- Amble…
- Dwindle…
- Discover….
Monitoring = Directed + Passive

• Following a chosen topic or source.
Being aware = Undirected + Passive
Your awareness depends on

- Your friends…
- Your colleagues…
- Your world of information…
You can decide.
Monitoring = Directed + Passive

CHOSEN SOURCES

Q: How do you choose?
A: Ask a librarian.
There are online tools for monitoring.
Have you ever seen one of these?
RSS is ubiquitous.
Easy to use…

• If you know how to use it.
Setting up RSS feeds in EBSCOHost databases...
Healthcare reform law challenged on religious grounds, too.
Database: Academic Search Premier
Setting up RSS feeds in Proquest databases...
Your RSS feed has been created

Feed Name: ProQuest: San Francisco Chronicle; San Francisco, Calif.
Publication: Feed expires if unused for 3 months
Expiration: Feed expires if unused for 3 months

Close

Changed your mind? Delete this feed

Set Up Alert | Create RSS Feed | Publication Information

View issues from: Any month [ ] To: Any month [ ]
RSS Feed Readers…

• Allow users to monitor multiple sources at a glance.

• Provide easy links to full text content.

• Include tools for tagging, storing, and sharing important articles.
Why Teach RSS?

- Many do not know how to use it.
- Others do not know how to use it with library resources.
- It can be used in informal learning.
- RSS helps harness and organize exposure to information.
Ex: RSS feed in Google Reader
Email Alerts…

• Use a technology everybody knows.

• Can be limited to one source.

• Can include updated results of a continuous database search.

• Can clog your email inbox.
Why Teach Email Alerts?

• Save users money on online subscriptions.
• Easy continuous access to library resources.
• Easy to overlook in database interfaces.
• Easy to mention, and students will thank you for showing them.
**Ex: Wall Street Journal Email Alert**

![Image of Gmail search results for "Wall Street Journal" showing email alerts](image-url)
How do you teach students the benefits of online monitoring tools?
Professors can…

• Assign online periodicals for course readings.
• Refer to the news in class discussions.
• Assess students on their knowledge of recent news stories.
• Create assignments that apply timely developments.
Current Events in the Classroom

• In the good ol’ days teachers forced students to get newspapers subscriptions.
• It felt like a chore.

• RSS feeds and Email alerts can be accessed anywhere.
• Students like to learn about technological tools.
Librarians can…

1. Teach users how to set up RSS feed readers.

2. Show users how to find and create alerts and RSS feeds.

3. Suggest useful feeds and sources for specific courses and topics.
Create an RSS Starter Pack!

• Here is one created using Libguides:
FREE source
Library Database custom search