News Feeds with RSS

RSS has stood for Rich Site Summary, Really Simple Syndication, and RDF Site Summary. By now it doesn't stand for anything. But it has become a very popular way to provide news bulletins over the Internet. Many (if not most) news web sites are now using it, ranging from newspapers like the New York Times to government sites such as NOAA, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

RSS is a valid subset of XML. It has a number of standard tags that are known to aggregator programs. These programs receive the news feed in RSS and turn it into an html web page. Other web sites can sign up to receive the feeds in order to get current news bulletins. And the XML is really simple. So turning the description of a news story into RSS is very easy.

An example from the New York Times on October 6, 2004 follows.

```
<rss version="2.0">
    <channel>
        <title>The New York Times > Books</title>
        <link>
            http://www.nytimes.com/pages/books/index.html?partner=rssnyt
        </link>
        <description>
            Find book reviews & news on authors, best sellers, fiction &
            non-fiction, literature, biographies, memoirs, children?s books,
            Pulitzer Prize, Nobel Prize & first chapters.
        </description>
        <copyright>Copyright 2004 The New York Times Company</copyright>
        <language>en-us</language>
        <lastBuildDate>Wed,  6 Oct 2004 03:00:00 EDT</lastBuildDate>
        <image>
            <url>
                http://www.nytimes.com/images/section/NytSectionHeader.gif?partner=rssnyt
            </url>
            <title>The New York Times > Books</title>
            <link>http://www.nytimes.com/pages/books/index.html</link>
        </image>
        <item>
            <title>Life Among the Yankees in King George's Court</title>
            <link>
                http://www.nytimes.com/2004/10/06/books/06marg.html?
                ex=1254801600&en=0bc115b8dd3fe5e6&ei=5088&partner=rssnyt
            </link>
            <description>
                Buster Olney's account is critical of George Steinbrenner,
                but it's a love letter to many of the players.
            </description>
            <author>By DAVID MARGOLICK</author>
            <pubDate>Wed, 06 Oct 2004 00:00:00 EDT</pubDate>
            <guid isPermaLink="false">
                http://www.nytimes.com/2004/10/06/books/06marg.html
            </guid>
        </item>
```

```
<item>
    <title>So You Thought You Knew Dylan? Hah!</title>
    <link>
        http://www.nytimes.com/2004/10/05/books/05masl.html?
        ex=1254801600&en=d71def4fbb5973b7&ei=5088&partner=rssnyt
    </link>
    <description>
        In a new memoir, the Sphinx holds forth with what is,
        to put it mildly, atypical frankness.
    </description>
    <author>By JANET MASLIN</author>
    <pubDate>Tue, 05 Oct 2004 00:00:00 EDT</pubDate>
    <guid isPermaLink="false">
        http://www.nytimes.com/2004/10/05/books/05masl.html
    </guid>
</item>
    </channel>
</rss>
```

From this you can see that the essential outline of an RSS file is

```
<rss version="2.0">
    <channel>
        <title>...</title>
        <link>...</link>
        <description>...</description>
        <copyright>...</copyright>
        <language>en-us</language>
        <item>
            <title>...</title>
            <link>...</link>
            <guid isPermaLink="false">...</guid>
            <pubDate>...</pubDate>
            <description>...</description>
            <author>...</author>
        </item>
    </channel>
</rss>
```

Most of the tags are self-explanatory, except perhaps <guid isPermaLink="false">. It says that the link given is not guaranteed to be permanent. Instead it might be deleted sometime in the future. For most news feeds, this is probably in a day or so.

RSS is just one of the many applications of XML that have been standardized with DTDs and schema. But in a very short time it has become one of the most common.