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CNN HeadlineNews **buzz FACTOR** HEADLINE NEWS

Welcome to the 'new' Web, same as the 'old' Web

By Christine Boese
CNN Headline News
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(CNN) -- Do you remember the day you first surfed the Web, stretched out your arms over the vastness of cyberspace, teleported from site to site with an almost exhilarating power? Or alternately, sat waiting for "fat" pages to load?



Well, hang on to your hats boys and girls, because your experience of the World Wide Web is about to change, possibly for the first time since Mosaic, one of the first graphical browsers, was unleashed in 1993 from Champaign-Urbana, Illinois.

If I'm saying the Web is changing and that you'd better get on board or miss out, I'd better be prepared to back it up. I believe I can.

In a previous column, (To Blog or not to Blog?), I wrote about how the blog movement is changing the Web by giving more people a voice online. But a parallel movement is also changing the online experience for ordinary surfers.

The point of entry into this efficient and focused style of surfing does not involve search engines. Instead, many users, learning from bloggers, are setting aside their browsers at certain times to use news feed readers, sometimes called "news aggregators," instead.

Try out the new on-ramp

If you are still attached to your daily newspaper or CNN Headline News fix, don't worry. News feed readers are less about "news" as they are an alternative on-ramp to the Web.

Web pages are getting smarter than they used to be. More of your favorite sites are making content summaries and updates available for syndication, just like the syndicated advice columns in your newspaper. Only this kind of syndication is free and "really simple." It is called "RSS" for "really simple syndication."

All that means for you is that you can download a free or low-cost news feed reader

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and "subscribe" to a number of your favorite Web sites. You might have seen odd little orange "XML" rectangles on some sites. The URL when you click on the rectangle is the address of the news feed.

Don't throw away your browser yet

Instead of opening your Web browser when you sit down at the computer, you open your news feed reader, usually a 2- or 3-paned window that allows you to see at a glance which sites have added content, and to scan clickable headlines and summaries of that content. Imagine looking at update info on 10-20 sites at a single glance, and never waiting for a single page to load!

If you see an update or topic that interests you, clicking on the link will launch your browser.

Less wasted time and more efficient surfing might appeal to folks dealing with harassing pop-up windows and masses of spam. It helps to balance the signal-to-noise ratio back in our favor.

Professional news sites aren't the only ones converting to RSS feeds. Hobbies and fan sites, blogs, and other special interest and community sites are going to feeds, as well. Google is still there when you have to find specific information. As Web pages get smarter, search engines will have an easier time indexing them.

How to find feeds and readers

This landscape is changing, but several feed readers are more popular than others. They don't take much hard drive space. Think of them as lean little utilities that can sit on your desktop, a customizable service.

Several of the best feed readers are:

- NetNewsWire (Mac OS X 10.1)
- FeedReader (PC)
- NewzCrawler (PC)
- AmphetaDesk (PC, Mac, Linux)

Radio Userland is a news aggregator available across platforms, integrated into weblog software. It can be used separately, however. Links to these readers are available in the box at the right.

Most feed readers have starter feeds available in the software. You can find other feeds at the sites below. The blog community links to quite a lot of feeds, as well, for nearly every hobby and special interest. One of the best ways to tap into the weblog feeds is to surf around at Technorati.com.

Three of the most comprehensive (and international) news feed sources are Moreover, News is Free and Syndic8.

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