



BY STEVE MATTHEWS

TECHGEAR

The portable Sony Reader (\$350) allows you to store about 80 electronic books (more if you buy a memory card). The device's "paper-like" display allows it to be read in any light, from any angle.



WEBLINKS



SHARON SANDLE

is the director of TexasBarBooks, the publisher of practice manuals such as the *Texas Family Law Practice Manual* and the *Texas Pattern Jury Charges* series.

The TexasBarBooks Forum

<http://texasbarcle.com/CLE/PMPortal.asp>

The TexasBarBooks Forum is a Web page where the drafting committees collaborate on drafts of the *Texas Pattern Jury Charges*. You can access these drafts and post comments or suggestions for the committees. To my knowledge, no other state has a similar method of inviting participation in the process of drafting jury charges.

Plain Language Action Network

www.plainlanguage.gov

One of TexasBarBooks' goals for our publications is to reduce "legalese" and promote the use of plain language in legal documents. This site has some great examples of what to do and what to avoid, as well as articles and tips for improving your legal writing.

The U.S. Copyright Office

www.copyright.gov

This is the place to look for answers about basic copyright questions. As a publisher, I face copyright issues pretty frequently. With the explosion of new technology for exchanging information, you may need to know a few copyright basics even if you're not planning to publish a book.

My Handprint:

The Blood Center of Central Texas

www.lonestardonor.com

The Blood Center of Central Texas maintains a website where you can find information about local blood drives, make an appointment to donate, or access your donation history. For years, I had every intention of donating blood regularly but never found time to call and make an appointment; now it's so easy that I can't use that excuse anymore!

Top 10 Uses for RSS Feeds in Law Firms

RSS stands for Really Simple Syndication and is best described as a technology that automates Web surfing. With an RSS reader, Internet users can scan the most recent articles from their favorite publications, as soon as they are available online.

RSS readers, also known as "aggregators," are the software tools you use to access and read RSS feeds. This capability is built into the Firefox browser and will be in the next version of Internet Explorer (to be released soon). Both Google and Yahoo! offer free Web-based RSS readers. Or, you can download a stand-alone reader such as FeedDemon or SharpReader.

RSS is revolutionary because it changes the way we consume information online. Prior to RSS, we "surfed and searched" for online content, which was extremely time intensive. With most online publishers now providing RSS feeds, Internet users don't have to surf and search — they can easily monitor news or updates on the content they care about.

For example, a lawyer using an RSS reader could track a client's publications,

press releases, or product recalls. RSS feeds can also include event notifications, patent and trademark applications, SEC filings, stock quotes, online forums, and blogs — the list is growing by the day.

Imagine being notified every time a new court decision is published that contains the words "bad faith litigation" (or another keyword phrase). Or, receiving notice when a piece of legislation changes. Whatever information you need, RSS delivers a just-in-time solution.

Here are my top ten uses for RSS feeds in a law firm setting.

1) Current awareness — Surfing your favorite websites, newspapers, and blogs is a waste of time. Smart firms and lawyers need to automate Web content to come to them via RSS. These personalized collections can then be customized (through mixing and filtering) to deliver only the content that matches a lawyer's interests.

2) RSS for firm marketing — From blogs to press releases to firm newsletters and publications, adding an additional delivery channel using RSS feeds is not a

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huge investment. And speaking from experience, those clients who do use it will tell you how much they love it!

3) Vanity feeds — Every time one of your lawyers, or the firm, gets mentioned in the news media or blogosphere, someone should be notified by RSS. Your firm's ability to use RSS could be the difference between finding out immediately or days later.

4) Internal research collections — Your library catalog should offer an RSS feed for newly added materials that match your lawyers' research interests. The same thing goes for internal knowledge management (KM) and research collections. In the future, I expect internal RSS to be as important to law firms as RSS is to bloggers today.

5) Client news — Do your clients have their press releases RSS-enabled? Are you tracking your clients in the news media? What do you know about their latest products, disputes, and business initiatives? Knowing more about your clients' business is always good for firm business.

6) Feeding on marketing content for KM — Do your firm members have blogs? Do they contribute to industry discussion forums or wikis? Are you feeding those public Internet contributions back into your internal KM repositories? It's something to think about.

7) Caselaw and legislative changes — The importance of RSS notification for new and changing legislation cannot be underestimated. Nor can receiving the newest judgment just minutes after it has been published on a court's website. In the future, searches on those websites will, via RSS, enable us to receive exactly the legislation and topical cases we desire. Commercial services such as Westlaw Watch already offer this capability.

8) Aggregated tagging — Do your lawyers tag with a tool like Del.icio.us or Furl? (If they don't now, they might in the future, read on ...) Tagging is the new "favorites" or "bookmarking" for online reading. Rather than creating a browser-based bookmark, these "gems" are classified and kept in an online Web collection, which just happens to be RSS-enabled! Does it not make sense to take those feeds, from multiple firm members, and aggregate them behind the firewall into a searchable repository? The line between public Web vs. behind-the-firewall collections is blurring. In the future, your KM efforts should be capturing firm members' public Web contributions, and RSS technology will be right in the middle of that.

9) RSS republishing — RSS helps to move Web content to where it needs to be. We can automate the republication of any firm content — from story headlines to full-text publications — to anywhere on a law firm's Intranet or public website. RSS is a powerful website maintenance tool.

10) Feed mixing and filtering for subject collections — RSS should be easy for the end user, and starting from scratch to build a personal feed collection doesn't always make sense. One new task I see for law librarians will be to create, remix, and filter groups of feeds for different subjects. Creating and offering these pre-fab feed widgets that your lawyers can plug into their aggregator could be a valuable tool.



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