

# Old and busted: RSS feeds. New hotness: Followers.



Lori MacVittie, 2008-21-10

According to [Steve Rubel](#) at [Micro Persuasion](#), I must be [way more geeky than your average consumer](#). (Thanks, Steve!) That's because I'm using RSS (Really Simple Syndication) and [Google](#) to peruse myriad feeds in my daily quest to "read the Internet."

Steve comments on a recently released Forrester report citing the adoption of RSS as low with no real indication it will get any better in the future.

“According to the research, of the 89% of those who don't use feeds only 17% say they're interested in using them. In fact Forrester spends much of the report helping marketers better explain the benefits of RSS to their customers. "Unless marketers make a move to hook them — and try to convert their apathetic counterparts — RSS will never be more than a niche technology," the analysts (who include [Jeremiah Owyang](#)) wrote.

Steve goes on to postulate that social networking feeds a la [FriendFeed](#), [Twitter](#), and [Facebook](#) are much more effective vehicles for opt-in communication, stating: "In each case, you're total in control. You can unsubscribe from individuals or groups and tailor the stream so that what you want finds you."

That sounds a lot like ... RSS, actually. The increase in use of social networking sites may indicate that the conclusion reached by Forrester regarding the technical difficulties with RSS are more easily overcome with the easy follow/unfollow metaphor used by social networking instead.

From the executive summary of [Forrester Research's What's Holding RSS Back?](#)

*Of the consumers who haven't adopted RSS, most don't understand how RSS is relevant to their lives and the way they seek information.*

## f5 in the Ether

Following a friend or company makes more sense, semantically. Subscribing to a feed is a bit more pedantic, I suppose.



Sharing is also simpler using social networking technologies because under the covers it's more difficult to integrate.

That doesn't make much sense at first read, but think about it a bit more: the integration between social networking sites is accomplished via APIs so developers must do the work and provide an easy interface for consumers while RSS is standards-based and doesn't require any additional work to integrate and access, you just grab a feed and go.

The difficulty inherent in integration of technology is often inversely proportional to the ease with which the end-user will be able to use the resulting technology. Standards were invented to make the lives of geeks and IT folks easier, not the lives of consumers. Yeah, how's that for crazy? If it isn't hard for us (geeks) to integrate and aggregate, we don't worry too much about how to present it to consumers. The effort involved to make it more attractive would offset the benefit in using a free, standards-based technology that doesn't require an integration effort. Besides, it makes sense to *us*. What's there not to get? The curse of knowledge strikes again, apparently.

While the reports of the demise (or lack of importance) of RSS are likely largely exaggerated, the importance of social networking feeds to individuals and businesses for sharing, marketing, and communication is certainly not exaggerated. The thing to take away from the Forrester report is this: if you're trying to offer your customers/market information, you'd better be offering it through more than just RSS, because the digital natives are coming and they don't subscribe, they follow.



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