Broadcast Your Own News Feed
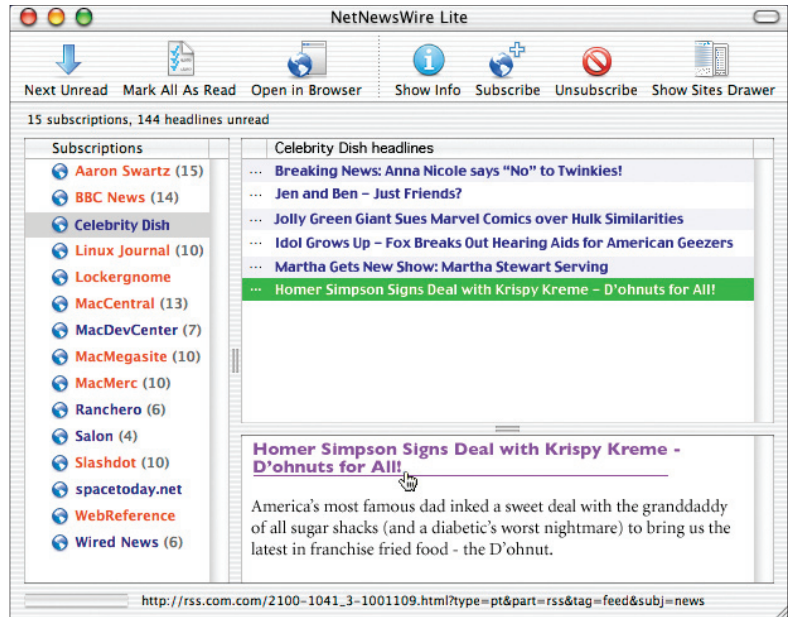
by Mary E. Tyler

TRICKY

WHAT YOU NEED
- TextEdit (part of Mac OS X)
- Web site
- NetNewsWire Lite (free, http://ranchero.com/netnewswire)

Got something to say (and readers who give a darn)? Broadcast your Web site headlines by creating a news feed.

You've always been somewhat of a gossip king or queen—and at some point you decided to take your knack for dishin' it to the next level in the form of a celebrity gossip site. Now that you've got some pretty good Web traffic, you're looking for a way to alert your reader faithful whenever you post juicy new stories. Rather than spam your mailing list, why not provide a news feed?
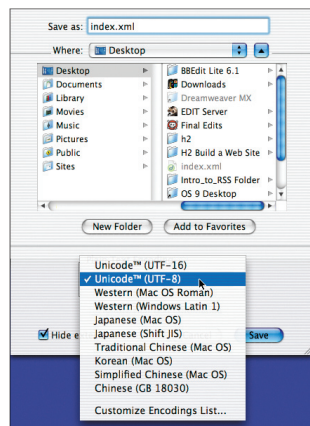
Most of you have probably seen a news feed—it's the ticker in AOL Instant Messenger (AIM), the scrolling text that squishes the picture on ESPN, and the latest-posts listing on Slashdot.org. Though a news feed looks like a dynamic text

ON THE DISC
NetNewsWire Lite 1.0.3

stream, it actually works more like an MP3, where the music is all there in the file and the player streams it to your ears. With a news feed, the text is contained in a file and a news-ticker app broadcasts it to your eyeballs.

Providing a news feed for your site is really simple—Really Simple Syndication, that is. RSS (aka RDF Site Summary or Rich Site Summary, depending on whom you ask) is the standard way of delivering headlines to the Web masses. It's much like HTML in that it's a markup language. If you'd like to let your site fans know about the big headlines of the moment (even if you just want to keep your friends and family updated about your so-called life), here's how to create your very own news feed.
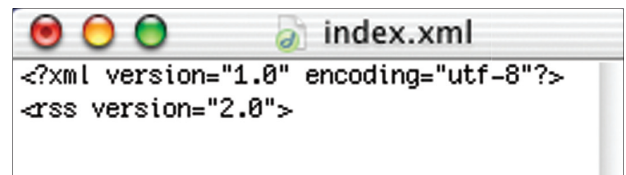
1 Make It Plain, TextEdit

Launch TextEdit to open a new document. From the Format menu, select Make Plain Text (if TextEdit isn't already set to open PlainText as its default). From the File menu, select Save; in the resulting dialog, type *index.xml* in the Save As field, select Unicode (UTF-8) from the Plain Text Encoding pop-up menu, and click Save.

In TextEdit, create a plain-text document to serve as your RSS code sheet.

2 Define XML and RSS

Because RSS is XML-based, you must first specify the XML version you want to use and the encoding. In the first line of your document, type, `<?xml version="1.0" encoding="utf-8"?>` to do this.

The next line describes what version of RSS the file uses. Current news tickers can handle both RSS 1.0 (RSS-DEV) and RSS 2.0 (Userland) feeds. Because RSS 2.0 is much easier to use (RSS 1.0 is more verbose), type `<rss version="2.0">` in the second line. Then press Return twice to create a line break.


```
<?xml version="1.0" encoding="utf-8"?>
<rss version="2.0">
```

Define what version of XML and what type of encoding to use in the first line.

3 Create a Channel

Create a Channel The next block of code creates an RSS channel for your Web site and operates much like a TV channel—it's your brand. The ‹channel› element features several subelements, displaying information about your site to viewers. Press the Tab key, type `<channel>`, and press Return. Then give your site a title: Press Tab, type `<title>`, type the name of your site, and then type `</title>` to end the code. To add your Web address, press Return, Tab. Then type `<link>`, your site's URL, and `</link>`. Our screenshot shows the other required elements and a few optional ones. Just copy our code, but apply your own variables.


```
<?xml version="1.0" encoding="utf-8"?>
<rss version="2.0">

        <channel>
        <title>Celebrity Dish</title>
        <link>http://www.celebritydish.com</link>
        <description>Hot news, gossip, and rumors about your
            favorite celebrities</description>
        <language>us-en</language>
        <copyright>Copyright 2003 Dish-It Delirium</copyright>
        <managingEditor>Max</managingEditor>
        <webMaster>Funky Junky Web Monkey</webMaster>
```

Create an RSS channel for your site to establish who you are.

4 Link a Logo

Link a Logo An RSS channel can also display a logo. To do this, create a couple of line breaks (press Return twice), press Tab, and type the subelement `<image>`. Press Return, press Tab twice, and type `<title>`. Type your logo's name, and then type `</title>`. Press Return and press the Tab key twice. Then describe where to find the graphic by typing `<url>`, the server location of your logo, and `</url>`. Again, copy our code, but use your own variables. For the ‹link› element, type the location to which you want to take viewers when they click your logo (say, your home page). RSS displays logos at a default 88 pixels wide by 31 pixels high, but you can dictate your own size using the ‹width› and ‹height› elements (the maximum is 144 by 400 pixels). Finish the code by typing the ending subelement `</image>`.


```
<image>
    <title>Celebrity Dish</title>
    <url>http://www.celebritydish.com/images/CDlogo_small.jpg</url>
    <link>http://www.celebritydish.com</link>
    <width>144</width>
    <height>52</height>
    <description>Hot news, gossip, and rumors about your favorite
    celebrities</description>
</image>
```

To add a logo, just use the ‹image› element code and then tell the file where to find it using the ‹url› element.
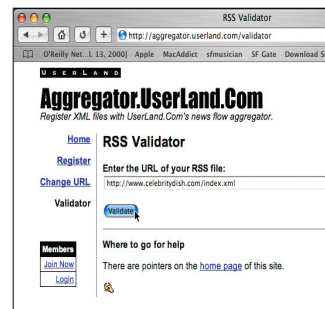
5 List Your Headlines

List Your Headlines Create a line break, press Tab, and type the subelement `<item>`. Press Return, press Tab twice, type `<title>`, type in your headline news flash (one short sentence), and end by typing `</title>`. Press Return and press Tab twice. Then type `<link>`, the URL to the full story on your site, and `</link>`. Press Return and press Tab twice. Type `<description>`, enter a short synopsis of your story, and type `</description>`. End the item listing by pressing Return, then Tab, and typing `</item>`. Repeat for other headlines. When finished, type `</channel>` on a new line to complete the channel code, press Return twice, type `</rss>` to end the RSS file, and save it.


```
</image>
<item>
        <title>Breaking News: Anna Nicole says "No" to Twinkies!</title>
        <link>http://www.celebritydish.com/news/071503/anna.html</link>
        <description>Double-wide diva gives up the junkfood
        lifestyle.</description>
</item>
```

You can create as many headlines as you want—just list each one under its own ‹item› listing.
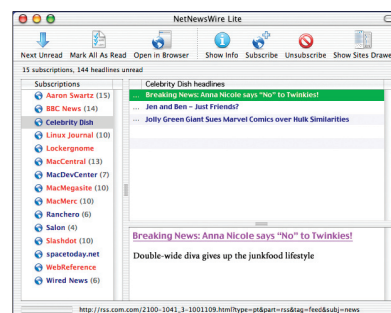
6 Validate Your File

Validate Your File Time to upload your news feed to your server. Using your FTP method of choice, upload the index.xml file into the same directory as your home page. But before you publicize your news feed, first make sure it's working by validating it. Head over to Userland's RSS Validator site (http://aggregator.userland.com/validator), type the URL to your index.xml file in the field, and click Validate. If you've made any errors, the site will list them for you to fix. Otherwise, it'll give you the green light to tell the world.

Userland will check your server-stored RSS file to ensure that you haven't made any mistakes.

7 Feed Me

Feed Me To view your feed, you need a news-ticker app—we're using NetNewsWire Lite. Launch the ticker and click the Subscribe button. In the resulting panel, enter your RSS file's URL and click OK. Once it loads, click your site's name in the Subscriptions panel, and then click a headline to view it. Looks good, doesn't it? Click the headline again in the description panel to open the article in your default browser—bravo! Then just give your audience the RSS file's URL so they can subscribe to it themselves. To update news, just change the ‹items› stuff in the index.xml file.

Mary E. Tyler is a tech journalist who firmly believes that no news is not good news.

Once you tell a news ticker to subscribe to your site, it'll stream in the headlines based on your RSS file.