

Feeding Market Growth with RSS

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ContextWeb's CEO explains the opportunity for marketers of tapping into RSS.

In today's world of online media, consumers have more control than ever over the material they are exposed to. The days of successful mass marketing have long since come to a close, only to be smothered by highly targeted campaigns aimed at the most specific type of consumer.

However, with the advent of a few new technologies, marketers are again facing new challenges to reach these carefully targeted audiences. With the popularity of technologies such as TiVo, blogs, podcasts and RSS, consumers have unprecedented control over what they see, resulting in marketers having to create new and innovative ways to reach their desired audiences.

Among these new technologies is RSS, which most commonly is referred to as "really simple syndication." In the most basic sense, RSS supplies "feeds" to users on specified topics from a large variety of sources. The "feeds" are delivered to the user as they are published, making the flow of information easier to obtain, enabling the user to avoid searching for the information themselves. There are numerous RSS sites providing the service, with Bloglines currently being the most popular, according to a recent study by Pheedo.

RSS is still in its infancy, but experts are predicting it will rapidly become a key tool in today's media. According to a recent survey of 4,000 internet users by Jupiter Research, only three percent use RSS. However, this three percent is the ideal target audience for online marketers. The study found those who use the technology have high incomes and are avid online shoppers. This means marketers have a real opportunity to capitalize on a demographic that might be otherwise difficult to reach. A study done by RSS provider Nooked found 87 percent of influencers are using RSS to keep up with news and other information.

These statistics illustrate how important it is for marketers to establish a presence in RSS, as it is quickly becoming a powerful medium. However, even though it presents marketers with many opportunities, it is also a very limiting and potentially dangerous tool for advertisers. More specifically, when users typically browse for topics online they are required to click through several sites and pages, resulting in exposure to many different advertisements. RSS eliminates this process and instead feeds very specific, limited information to the user. The result is

advertisers losing potential customers who might happen to stumble upon their ads in their quest for information.

Here lies the importance of marketers tapping into RSS as a venue for advertisements. Marketers have the ability to know exactly what users are interested in, and can use this information to place relevant ads alongside feeds. This kind of targeted advertising ensures viewers will be interested in the types of ads they are exposed to, making marketers even more effective.

If it seems like the opportunity for marketers is too good to be true, why haven't marketers capitalized on RSS yet? As it is a relatively new technology in the early stages of development, marketers are just beginning to realize its potential. In addition, the measurability of RSS is still limited and will be so until the technology becomes more advanced.

Even though RSS presents a tremendous opportunity for advertisers, consumers stand to benefit from the idea as well. Users interested in a particular topic will be provided with ads highly relevant to their interests. Just as RSS eliminates user's browsing for specific articles, ads on RSS feeds can potentially save users time which otherwise might be spent searching for specific products.

It is clear RSS is quickly becoming an important medium, affecting the way and likelihood people are exposed to information. Marketers should consider RSS as a means to overcome the challenges associated with new technologies that allow consumers to act as their own gatekeepers of information, and instead use it to capitalize on niche markets.

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