

Using RSS on the HRS Web Site

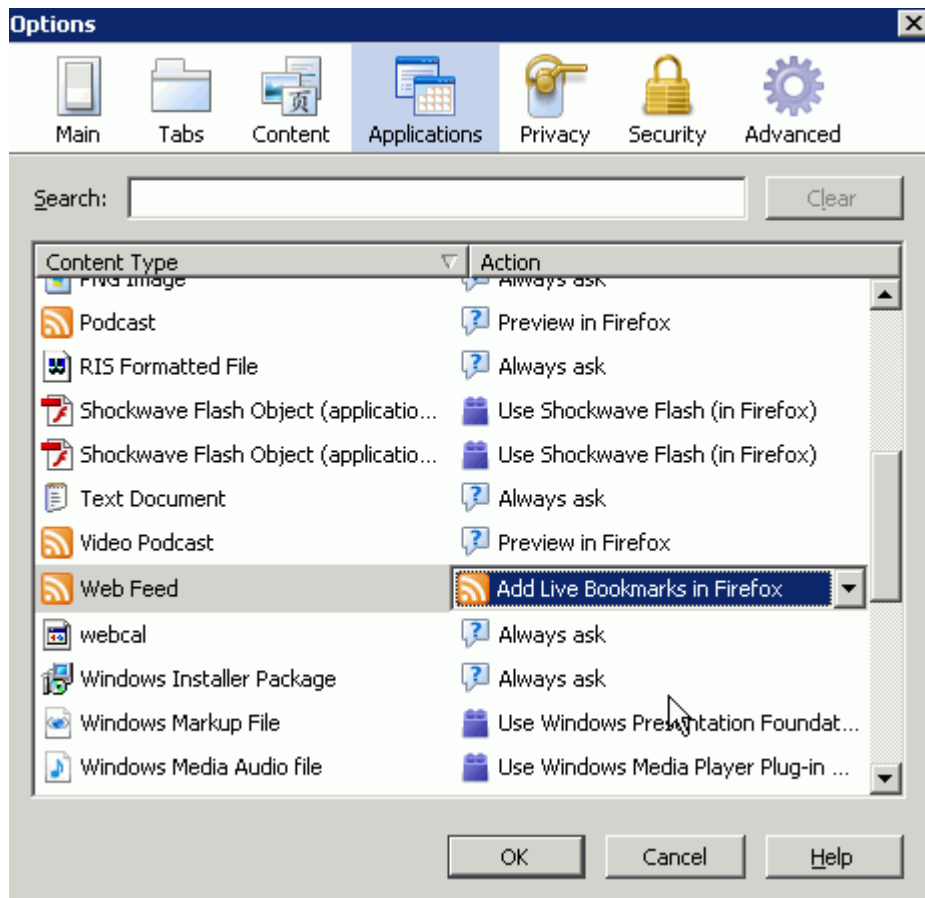
Background

Really Simple Syndication (RSS) is a format for easily sharing content such as news items on the Web. On the Health and Retirement Study Web site News Items and Data Alerts are ideal candidates for RSS, since they are already reported in list-orientated formats. This document is intended to provide a short guide to using and maintaining the HRS RSS Web feed. If you want to know more about RSS, the explanation at the [BBC News](#) Web site should help. You may also wish to review [RSS - A Primer for Publishers & Content Providers](#).

How to Use the HRS RSS Feed with Firefox 3.x*

For the user, RSS provides an easy way to set up automatic delivery of updated information from Web sites to browser. Content is delivered directly to the user without cluttering his/her inbox with e-mail messages. Mozilla Firefox provides support for parsing RSS and Atom feeds as [Live Bookmarks](#). Unfortunately it's not all that clear how to import the live bookmark link into your browser. What follows is a feeble attempt to outline the necessary steps.

Step 0: Make sure that Firefox is using the Live Bookmarks feature

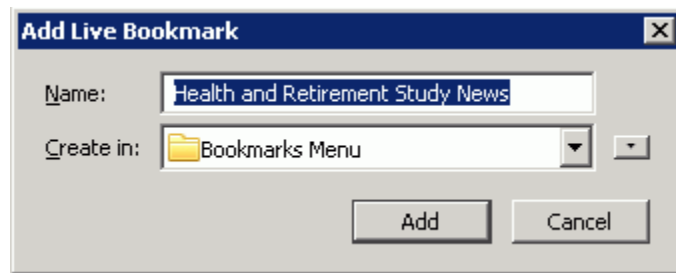


* For a super-quick introduction to using RSS with Firefox, visit this site: <http://johnbokma.com/firefox/rss-and-live-bookmarks.html>

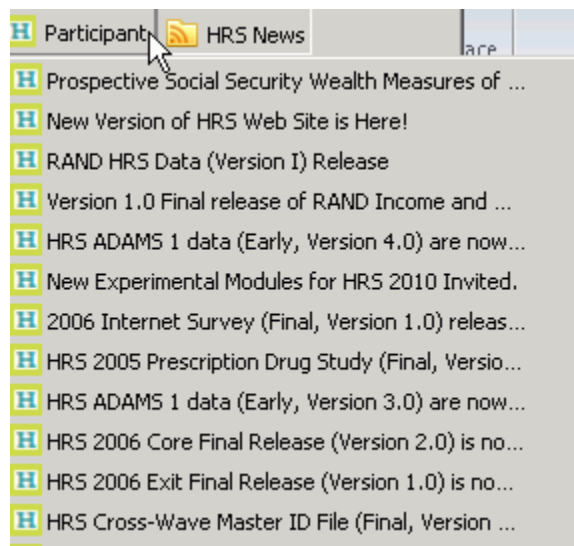
Step 1: Find the RSS feed link on the site you are visiting. In this case we will use the HRS Public Web site as an example. Links to the HRS RSS Feed can be seen on the front page lower right [1], on the [Additions and Changes](#) page upper left [2], and in the URL entry space (RSS subscription icon) [3].



Step 2: Click the feed location link or icon; the *Add Live Bookmark* popup should appear.

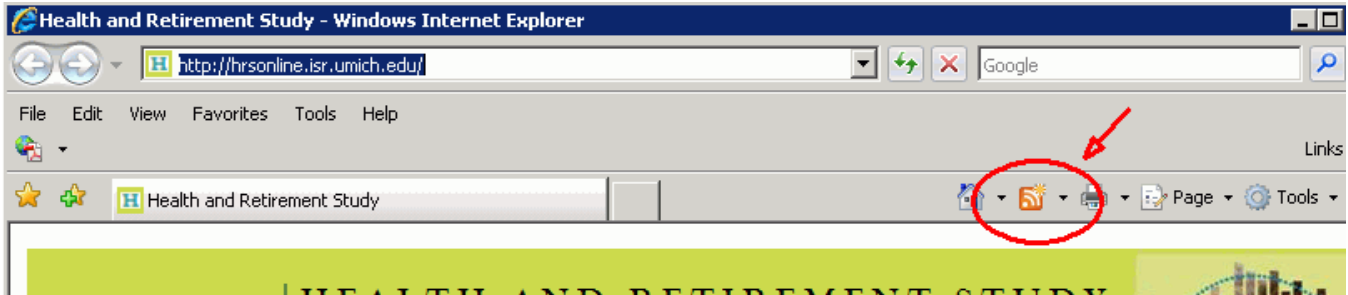


Step 3: Choose where you want the feed icon to appear: toolbar or menu. Now you're finished. Just click on the feed icon to see the site content.

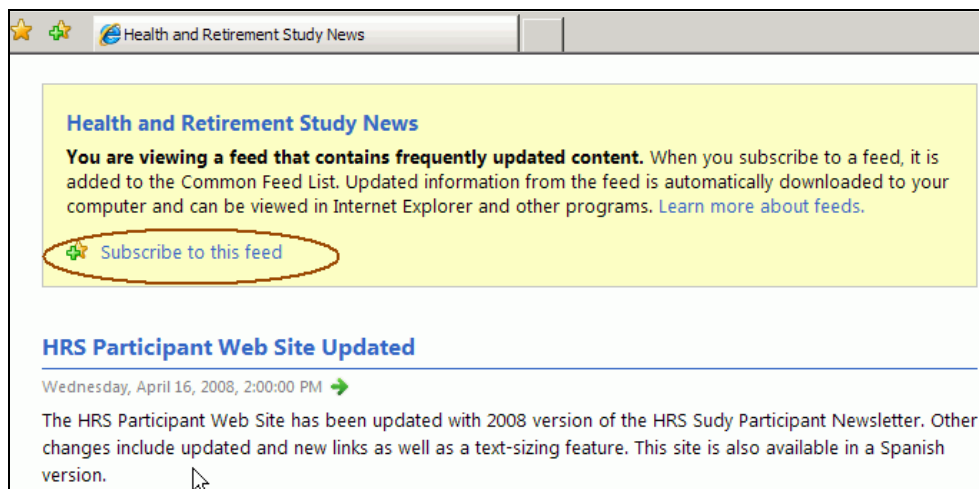


How to Use the HRS RSS Feed with Internet Explorer 7

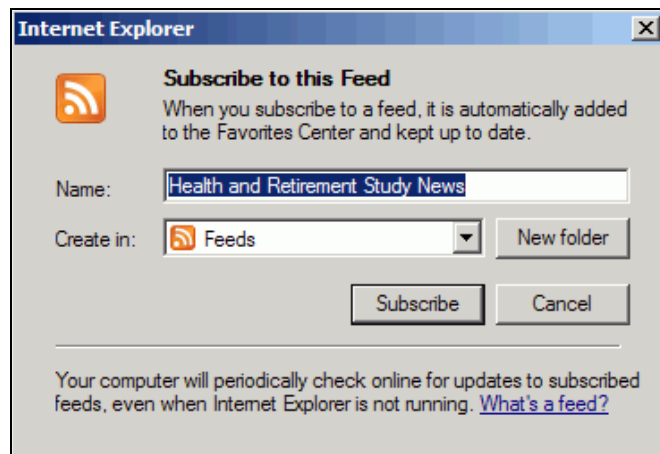
Historically, Microsoft’s Internet Explorer browser did not support RSS technology. This changed with the introduction of Internet Explorer 7. The new user interface presents a simple icon; clicking on it will present RSS content on the current page in an appropriate format.



Here’s what results:

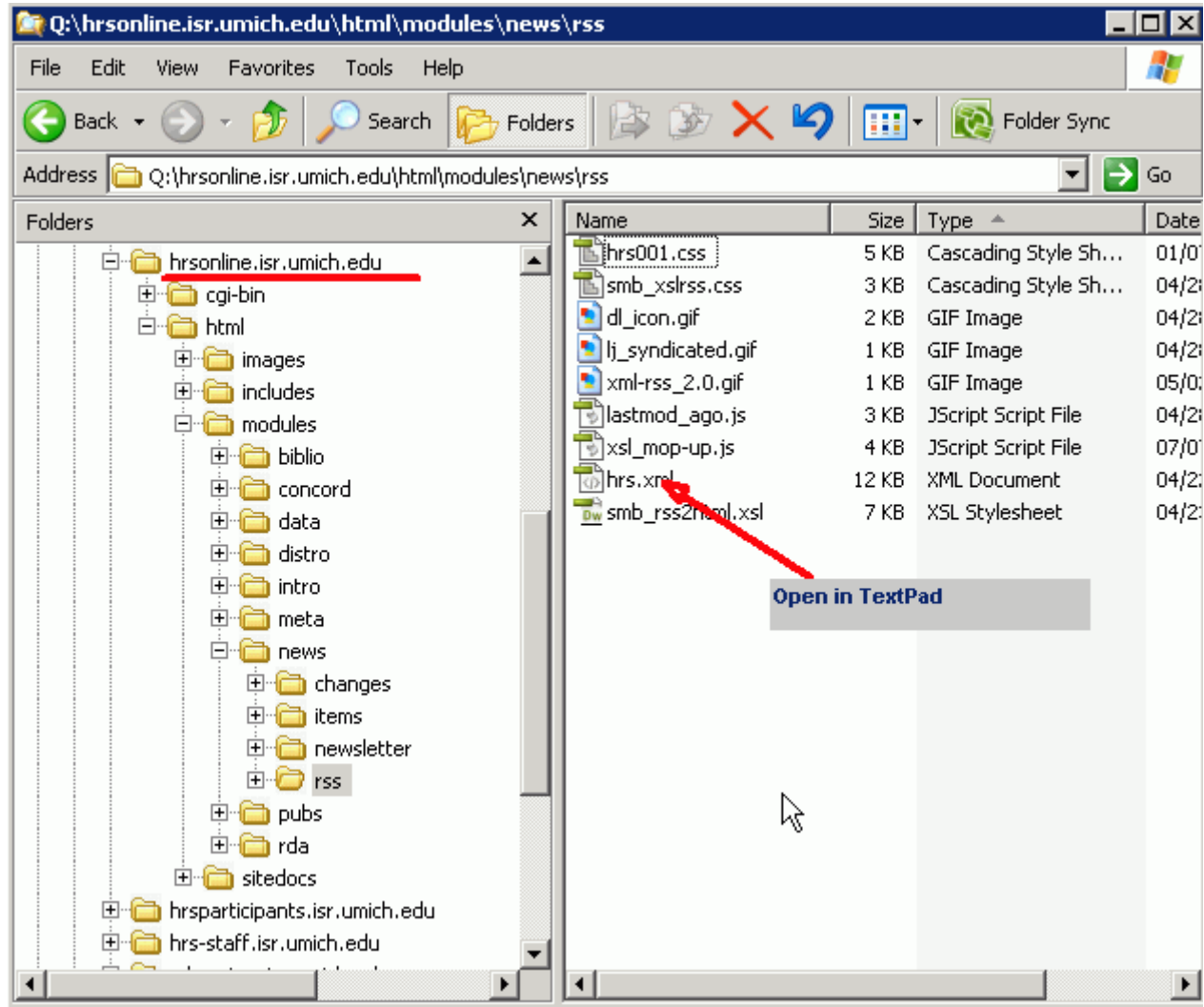


Now if you go ahead and subscribe to the feed, the latest version will appear as one of your “favorites.”



How to Maintain the HRS RSS File

At this point in time, the HRS RSS file is maintained “by hand” using a text editor. To add a new item, navigate to the [\\linux-src\www\vhosts\modules\news\rss](http://linux-src/www/vhosts/modules/news/rss) sub-directory on the HRS Web server:



We are using the RSS 2.0 format; thus the file's basic structure is:

```
<rss>
  <channel />
    <image />
    <textinput />
    <item />
    <item /> ...more items
  </channel>
</rss>
```

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New information is added to the file by inserting text between `<item>...</item>` tags. It is possible to include links and HTML formatting within this text, but there are some tricks, as we see below. For lots more information, see *Hacking RSS and Atom*, by Leslie M. Orchard [ISBN 0-7645-9758-2].

Let's assume that we already have an XML file that contains news items. The actual file looks like this...

```
<?xml version="1.0" encoding="ISO-8859-1" ?>
<rss version="2.0" >
  <channel>
    <title>Health and Retirement Study News</title>
    <description>
      This document contains a date-ordered summary of items that may
      interest HRS users. For additional information on new products,
      data alerts, news items, and event announcements, please visit
      the HRS Home Page.
    </description>
    <language>en-us</language>
    <link>http://hrsonline.isr.umich.edu</link>
    <pubDate>Mon, 01 May 2006 00:00:01 GMT</pubDate>
    <lastBuildDate>Wed, 16 Apr 2008 18:00:00 GMT</lastBuildDate>
  <item>
    <title>HRS Participant Web Site Updated</title>
    <link>http://hrsparticipants.isr.umich.edu/</link>
    <description>
      The HRS Participant Web Site has been updated with 2008 version of the HRS
      Study Participant Newsletter. Other changes include updated and new links
      as well as a text-sizing feature. This site is also available in a Spanish
      version.
    </description>
    <pubDate>Wed, 16 Apr 2008 18:00:00 GMT</pubDate>
  </item>
</channel>
</rss>
```

If we want to add a new item, we can use the existing item as a template.

```
<item>
  <title> </title>
  <link></link>
  <description>
  </description>
  <pubDate> </pubDate>
</item>
```

Here's our new item

```
<item>
  <title>Hot HRS News!!!</title>
  <link>
    http://hrsonline.isr.umich.edu/news/sho_news.php?hfyle=news246&xtyp=1
  </link>
  <description>
    HRS has done some <b> really great </b> stuff.
    Check it out!
  </description>
  <pubDate>Fri, 23 May 2008 18:00:00 GMT</pubDate>
</item>
```

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Note that we can't use standard HTML notation in the XML file. Instead we need to "spell out" the desired tags. Thus `` becomes `` and `news246&xtyp=1` becomes `news246&xtyp=1`.

We insert the new item before the other items on the page. The result looks like this.

```
<?xml version="1.0" encoding="ISO-8859-1" ?>
<rss version="2.0" >
<channel>
  <title>Health and Retirement Study News</title>
  <description>
    This document contains a date-ordered summary of items that may
    interest HRS users. For additional information on new products,
    data alerts, news items, and event announcements, please visit
    the HRS Home Page.
  </description>
  <language>en-us</language>
  <link>http://hrsonline.isr.umich.edu</link>
  <pubDate>Mon, 01 May 2006 00:00:01 GMT</pubDate>
  <lastBuildDate>Fri, 23 May 2008 18:00:00 GMT</lastBuildDate>
<item>
  <title>Hot HRS News!!!</title>
  <link>
    http://hrsonline.isr.umich.edu/news/sho_news.php?hfyle=news246&amp;xtyp=1
  </link>
  <description>
    HRS has done some &lt;b&gt; really great &lt;/b&gt; stuff.
    Check it out!
  </description>
  <pubDate>Fri, 23 May 2008 18:00:00 GMT</pubDate>
</item>
<item>
  <title>HRS Participant Web Site Updated</title>
  <link>http://hrsparticipants.isr.umich.edu/</link>
  <description>
    The HRS Participant Web Site has been updated with 2008 version of the HRS
    Study Participant Newsletter. Other changes include updated and new links
    as well as a text-sizing feature. This site is also available in a Spanish
    version.
  </description>
  <pubDate>Wed, 16 Apr 2008 18:00:00 GMT</pubDate>
</item>
</channel>
</rss>
```

Note that we change the `<channel><lastBuildDate>` value (highlighted) so that it matches the reflect the `<pubDate>` of the new item.

Now save the file, open it in your browser, and check the format and contents to make sure that everything is correct.

Important note on RSS dates: The correct format is <i>Day, dd mmm yyyy hh:mm:ss GMT</i>
