

Publisher's Report on the "Pilot to release metadata for content provided by a consortium of engineering trade information publishers" Project, one of strand A of the JISC Metadata & Interoperability Projects (5/03). Project lead by EEVL, the Internet guide to engineering, mathematics and computing.

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Brief Summary of Involvement:

Producing an RSS feed for Centaur Communications' www.e4engineering.com has allowed part of the e4engineering content to be placed in a format on the Internet where it can be picked up by other content providers and more widely disseminated - providing greater traffic to the e4 site.

We have currently produced three RSS feeds. One is a news feed from www.e4engineering.com. The second is a jobs feed from our sister site www.theengineerjobs.co.uk. The third is a feed of engineering tenders from our www.e4subcon.com site.

Our involvement in the production of the RSS feed has allowed our Internet Systems developers to gain experience in the production of the feeds which we can deploy over a number of other Centaur web sites should we wish to do so.

Benefits of RSS:

Because the e4 content is now available in an RSS format, it is possible that we may be able to provide the newsfeed to other organisations and engineering companies who may wish to pick it up.

It is difficult to judge how successful the RSS feed might be for e4engineering. To ensure its success at this stage, it is important that we inform other content providers of the fact that we have a feed and then educate them as to how they can incorporate it into their site.

We would encourage other content providers to provide an RSS feed as a means of generating more hits to their sites. But we would also remind them to place some information on their home page stating that

the feed is available and provide details as to how the feed can be incorporated into a web page.

So far, there have been no downsides to using the RSS feed.

Future Usage of RSS:

Because we have now mastered the technique for developing an RSS feed, we have the potential for developing dedicated feeds based on specific subjects areas from our e4engineering web site, such as a feed dedicated to aerospace, civil engineering or automotive engineering.

We also have the potential to develop feeds based on the type of content we have on the site. So far, we simply have a news feed, but, in the future, we could develop a feed for our features, analysis, comment and products sections. Other web sites within the organisation, such as our www.mad.co.uk site could generate their own feeds too.

We are currently discussing the many ways we could use the RSS feeds to draw traffic to the Centaur sites. We have announced the availability of the feed in our weekly e4 newsletter which reaches 3,000 engineers and engineering managers who may wish to pick up on the feed on their own Web sites.

We are certainly comfortable with the idea of our feed being picked up by other sites and portals as a way of generating traffic to our own site. We do not believe that there are any disadvantages to the feed.

Technical Implementation:

To implement the e4engineering feed, our Internet development team created a couple of applications that use our existing Content Management components to generate the RSS XML. Our Content Management solution is an ASP front end talking to a COM middle tier and a combination of SQL Server for metadata and simple document data, and an XML file store for the main content data.

The nature of our existing code, and structure of the data, made this a relatively easy process.

There was only one technical hurdle that our Internet team had to overcome. There was an issue with the specification of a Date format - our initial feeds used a date format supplied by EEVL. However, their technical team informed us this didn't match ANSI standards, and we

had to change this.

Approximately 6 hours was spent on the technical implementation.

Comments on RSS Guidelines:

The RSS primer (http://www.eevl.ac.uk/rss_primer/) provides publishers with a lot of useful information on the rationale behind the usefulness of an RSS feed, the differences between the different types of RSS feeds and how an RSS feed can be produced by a publisher.

The document also includes a lot of links to web sites that will allow publishers to promote their RSS feeds once they have been developed.

The one area that is currently only briefly touched upon, which publishers may find useful but which is currently out of the scope of the document, would illustrate to a third party how he or she might incorporate the RSS feed into his or her web page. This would be a useful marketing tool for publishers who would be able to show their customers a simple 'how to' which would help them to promote their own web site.