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# EEVL: The Internet Guide to Engineering, Maths and Computing



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## Pilot to release metadata for content provided by a consortium of engineering trade information publishers: Final Report

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### Document Summary

This Report summarises the background to the Metadata & Interoperability Project: *Pilot to release metadata for content provided by a consortium of engineering trade information publishers*; and outlines the rationale, aims and objectives, methodology and activities, outputs and future possible impact of the project, including comments on the potential for further work.

#### **Acknowledgement**

The Project partners would like to thank JISC for funding this project, and for the assistance received from Helen Hockx-Yu, Manager of the JISC PALS Metadata and Interoperability Projects. EEVL would like to thank the publishers Pro-Talk Ltd., Centaur Communications Ltd., and GoJobSite for their enthusiastic cooperation.

#### **Project Background**

This project was funded under strand A of the JISC Metadata & Interoperability Projects (5/03) funding call, namely; *Publisher and aggregator interoperability pilots which enable sharing of news/alerts in a machine readable format (RSS)*.

In brief, the four-month project involved the Resource Discovery Network (RDN) hub for Engineering, Mathematics and Computing (EEVL) working in partnership with a range of publishers to encourage the exposure of metadata for their engineering trade information content in RSS format. In addition, EEVL investigated the possibility of aggregating this RSS content within the framework currently being developed by the JISC funded Subject Portals Project (SPP).

#### **Rationale for Work**

Engineering has been defined as "The application of scientific and mathematical principles to practical ends such as the design, manufacture, and operation of efficient and economical structures, machines, processes, and systems." The *applied* nature of much academic engineering study and research means that the information needs of engineers often extend beyond scholarly peer-reviewed literature to include engineering trade information, publications and services.

Trade information is extremely important for those studying engineering in further education, where vocational courses are common, and as a result library services in FE have traditionally had a significant emphasis on trade publications and product sources. It is also important for those in higher education whose study or research of engineering is of an applied nature (the latter need has already been identified by EEVL via engineering portal focus groups held as part of JISC 5/99 Subject Portal Project scoping study).

Numerous engineering trade information sources are currently produced by a variety of independent commercial publishers and companies. Their content includes industry news and analysis, product and market information, news about technical developments, materials and processes, job vacancies, and reviews of software. Some of the most popular engineering Internet resources are of this kind, and range from trade journals and product information services, to recruitment agencies.

Bibliographical control of engineering trade publications is extremely patchy, with many sources neither indexed by bibliographical databases nor available through full-text aggregators. Despite the fact that many such resources are freely available on the Web, they are delivered from a large number of different sites, without aggregation of content. As a result, access to, and exploitation of, trade information is difficult.

Although many commercial and business news feeds are currently available, few if any of these address the engineering sector's particular need for detailed, less financially-orientated, industry-specific items including product news, industry news and jobs news.

There is, therefore, a pressing need to develop better interoperability of trade publication information. The publishers of engineering trade information are numerous, but most have little or no experience or knowledge of the JISC Information Environment (IE), or of RSS. It was, therefore also very important that the issues associated with allowing delivery and presentation of their metadata were explored and disseminated.

It is hoped that this project may act as a pilot to encourage additional publishers of trade information, and also small publishers of specific types of information, in engineering and other subject areas, to release metadata of their content. Another intention of this project has been to document the issues associated with this process.

### ***Project Timescales***

*Project Length:* 4 Months

*Key Project Dates:* Start date 1<sup>st</sup> May 2003, End date 31<sup>st</sup> August 2003

### ***Partnership arrangement***

The project partnered EEVL, the Internet guide for engineering, mathematics and computing, based at Heriot Watt University, with a consortium of three publishers of trade information: Pro-Talk Ltd, GoJobSite and Centaur Communications Ltd.

Pro-Talk Ltd, based in the United Kingdom, publishes a series of technical and professional websites and newsletters, including Engineeringtalk, Electronicstalk, Manufacturingtalk, Subcontractingtalk, CIMtalk, Processingtalk, Laboratorytalk, QA-talk, Printingtalk, Buildingtalk.

Centaur Communications Ltd is a publisher of leading trade publications such as The Engineer, Design Engineering, Process Engineering, Metalworking Production, What's New In Industry.

GoJobsite is the UK's leading Internet recruitment service providing details of UK job vacancies.

### ***Aims and Objectives***

***Aim:*** To encourage key publishers of engineering trade information to release metadata in RSS format, to explore issues associated with this process, and to investigate the aggregation of this content within a JISC funded Engineering Portal.

#### ***Objectives:***

- Investigate with the consortium publishers the virtues of sharing news via RSS and issues associated with the release of metadata.
- Provide guidance and assistance for the consortium publishers as required.

- Work with the consortium publishers to produce RSS feeds for their content.
- Produce publisher friendly guidelines for RSS production (including practical examples, recommendations, details of useful tools & services).
- Write up experiences as reports.
- Disseminate results.

## ***Methodology and Activities***

A consortium of partners was formed, and all partners were asked to sign a Project Consortium Agreement, which detailed the programme of work to be carried out, the intended deliverables, the allocation of project resources, and project management responsibilities.

Detailed work packages were agreed amongst the consortium. All work packages were completed on schedule.

### *WP1 Preliminary Guidelines*

Preliminary guidelines (which were eventually published in document form as *A Primer for Publishers & Content Providers*), were written by the EEVL staff. One of the aims of the guidelines was to enable the publishers to identify suitable metadata, and to create RSS feeds. The guidelines also outlined the benefits of exposing metadata in this format, from the publishers' perspective. The publishers in the consortium provided valuable feedback about the guidelines. A demonstrator RSS Aggregator was created, to show the potential of collecting together RSS feeds with similar subject content.

### *WP2 Publishers identify suitable content*

A meeting of all of the project partners was held to discuss the project. With assistance from EEVL, publishers identified suitable content that could be delivered by RSS to JISC portals, or to institutional portals and learning environments.

### *WP3 RSS feeds created, with assistance of technical officer*

RSS feeds were created by the publishers, with technical support and information from EEVL.

### *WP4 Reports produced*

Reports were written by publishers to document issues, concerns and problems associated with the creation of RSS feeds. These are available from the project website: [http://www.eevl.ac.uk/projects\\_503.htm](http://www.eevl.ac.uk/projects_503.htm). They show some interesting issues and benefits – e.g. one publisher is investigating encouraging the manufacturers featured on its sites to take advantage of the RSS feeds produced as a result of this project on their own sites; another publisher is concerned about control over tracking access to RSS feeds, and states a desire for the feeds to be used only by EEVL. In addition, the potential of RSS feeds for Tenders and Contracts was revealed, and as a result of feedback from elsewhere about the RSS Primer, the potential for Tables of Contents (TOC) feeds has also been revealed.

### *WP5 Guidelines finalised*

Guidelines finalised in light of the findings of the projects, and made available via EEVL and JISC website. A final version of the guidelines was produced and entitled *A Primer for Publishers & Content Providers* and made available at: [http://www.eevl.ac.uk/rss\\_primer/](http://www.eevl.ac.uk/rss_primer/)

### *WP6 Dissemination of Project findings*

A paper has been accepted for IADIS International Conference, WWW/Internet 2003, Algarve, Portugal, 5-8 November 2003.

A Web site for the project was created: [http://www.eevl.ac.uk/projects\\_503.htm](http://www.eevl.ac.uk/projects_503.htm)

A Press release announcing the RSS primer was produced: <http://www.eevl.ac.uk/pressrelease/pressrelrssprimer.htm> and press information was sent to numerous magazine editors and weblogs

Publicity received includes:

- Web4Lib Electronic Discussion 25 Aug 2003, business-information-all 25 Aug 2003, portals 25 Aug 2003, aggregators (Yahoo! Group) 26 Aug, Free Pint 25 Aug 2003, ResourceShelf 25 Aug 2003, SiteLines 1<sup>st</sup> Sept, RDN News 29 Aug 2003, The Shifted Librarian 25 Aug 2003, WIFLblog 25 Aug 2003, SOAP\_XML-RPC 25 Aug 2003, Bruce Landon's Weblog for Students 25 Aug 2003, cogdogblog 25 Aug 2003, To Talk of Many Things 25 Aug 2003, PR news 25 Aug 2003, Confessions of a Science Librarian 25 Aug 2003, Internet Resources Newsletter Issue 108, The Sci-tech Library Question 26 Aug, Editor & Publisher 28 Aug, (Update Week 128) ResourceShelf, Library Stuff 25 Aug, EduResources Weblog – Higher Education Resources Online 25 Aug, bLOGical 25 Aug, OJC World Overview 27 Aug, NHS eLibraries 28 Aug, ResearchBuzz #247 September 4, 2003

Some of the comments received or gleaned about the *RSS - A Primer for Publishers & Content Providers*:

"If you are a content publisher, whether it be a company wanting to keep your customers informed, a CTO wanting to disseminate information throughout your organization, or anyone else wanting to publish information, you'll want to check out this RSS primer. It's written for non-propeller heads and talks about why you should do it, how you can do it, and how you can do it well. A great resource." James R. Regan, Gray Goo

"EEVL has put up an RSS Primer for Publishers and Content Providers. A quick glance is quite impressive -- something I wish I had a few months ago when I was trying to figure out what the fuss was all about." John Dupuis, Confessions of a Science Librarian, <http://jdupuis.blogspot.com/>

"Another fantastic resource to point to when doing presentations on RSS." Library Stuff 25 August

"...an excellent resource: RSS - A Primer for Publishers & Content Providers. Here are a couple of points that should interest PR professionals..." PR news <http://prnews.blogspot.com/>

"Just to say good job on the RSS Primer, I think its just what a lot of people have a been waiting for. There seems to be a lot of confusion amongst providers about what RSS is and what they might do with it (and why!). Its nice to have something digestable to point people at." Liz Pearce, PORTAL Project Researcher, University of Hull.

"This article by M. Moffat of EEVL, cited in the Resource Shelf, provides a good introduction to RSS." Bruce Landon's Weblog for Students <http://radio.weblogs.com/0101747/>

"I'd like to compliment you on your RSS primer. It's fantastic. A big problem with RSS right now is educating potential users about syndication. Your primer will be a big help in that regards, so thanks!" Mark Fletcher, Bloglines, <http://www.bloglines.com>

"Excellent work! FYI - I already posted this out to the CrossRef Technical Working Group as we've raised this topic a couple times on that list recently. Not sure if you've come across some early work that ourselves (Elsevier) and Nature have been doing for syndicating TOCs." Tony Hammond Advanced Technology Group, Elsevier Ltd

"The primer has no equal. Congratulations on achieving an outstanding result." Clinton Gallagher, Web Design, e-Commerce Software Development.

"It looks like a very useful resource which I'll certainly link to." Tom Heath, Web Developer, UK Centre for Materials Education

Within two weeks of being made available, the Primer received over 4,000 downloads. In view of the considerable interest by the media in the RSS Primer (it rose to 23 in Daypop's hot topics in the weblogging community, August 29), promotion is continuing for a period after the project end date. In addition, information about EEVL's use of the RSS feeds produced through this project will be promoted in various outlets, including Ariadne.

## Summary of Outputs

### Project Deliverables were:

- RSS feeds from a number of engineering publishers. Details of these are available from the project website at: [http://www.eevl.ac.uk/projects\\_503\\_feeds.htm](http://www.eevl.ac.uk/projects_503_feeds.htm) . This content will be included in EEVL's forthcoming One Step aggregated RSS services. It could also be utilised within an SPP aggregated news feed service which would incorporate aggregation, searching, browsing, landscape selection and alerting.
- *A Primer for Publishers & Content Providers*. Available from: [http://www.eevl.ac.uk/rss\\_primer/](http://www.eevl.ac.uk/rss_primer/) and [http://www.eevl.ac.uk/rss\\_primer/rss\\_primer.doc](http://www.eevl.ac.uk/rss_primer/rss_primer.doc)
- A demonstrator RSS Aggregator, available from the project website at: [http://www.eevl.ac.uk/projects\\_503\\_feeds.htm](http://www.eevl.ac.uk/projects_503_feeds.htm)
- Reports on the project experience, including individual reports from the participating publishers.
- A paper that disseminates project results in relevant publications, and press coverage for the project and its outcomes.

All project deliverables have been made freely available via a project web site, available at: [http://www.eevl.ac.uk/projects\\_503.htm](http://www.eevl.ac.uk/projects_503.htm) . Reports have been made available to JISC in a format suitable for transfer to the JISC web site.

## Impacts and Future

Although, as can be seen from the project outcomes, this has been a successful project, a considerable effort was needed, before the project commenced and during the period that the bid was being written, in order to persuade a selection of publishers to participate. This is understandable, as one aim of the project itself was to show publishers the importance of releasing metadata via RSS - but at the bid stage the publishers contacted by EEVL were not aware of the benefits of RSS and the RSS Primer did not exist. The publishers who joined the project therefore had to 'buy in' to the project without fully understanding the benefits. The benefits to the three participating publishers have now been shown, and the value of the RSS Primer is being shown by its very impressive reception in various circles.

This project has demonstrated how publishers (especially smaller scale industry publishers) can produce news feeds, see the benefit of sharing news in a machine readable format, and exploit the potential widening of their market. It has allowed concerns that publishers had about news sharing (e.g. branding, IPR, publishers' own distribution channels) to be addressed. It has demonstrated the benefits of interoperability and possibilities arising out of increased interoperability for wider exposure of publishers' content. It has spread knowledge and awareness of the JISC Information Environment, and has encouraged publishers to allow their content to be integrated within the JISC IE

It will have further future impact when those RSS feeds are incorporated into JISC services or institutional portals, and if it helps to persuade other publishers and content providers to use RSS.

The RSS feeds which were produced as an outcome of the project have been included on the current EEVL site (a press release about this is available: Industry and job announcements news from top engineering publishers added to EEVL: <http://www.eevl.ac.uk/pressrelease/newsandjobsfeeds.htm> ) and in the near future they will be included by EEVL in new aggregated news/product/jobs feed services ('One-Step Industry News', 'One-Step Product News' and 'One-Step Jobs'). The *further* technical development of these RSS services is currently being explored by the Subject Portal Project with the aim of providing search facilities across a number of feeds, and allowing end-user customisation and alerting facilities. Such a service will be made available at the EEVL hub, and could also be embedded as a 'portlet' in institutional portals. The RSS feeds also have the potential to be incorporated into the increasingly popular desk-top feedreaders. In such ways there is a large potential audience for the RSS feeds produced by this project.

RSS is now being seen as a viable means of disseminating content at exactly a time when, due to spam overload and email viruses, email delivery of content is being questioned ("...with email under siege and no relief in sight, radical measures are required. It's time to move on to something that's (we hope) spam-proof" Steve Outing, Editor & Publisher, 27 August 2003). An opportunity now exists to build on the work of this project.

This project has resulted in content (the RSS feeds) which will be utilised shortly by EEVL in its new 'One-Step' services. In the coming year, EEVL will also be able to showcase subject-specific content delivery via RSS News Portlets which could, in turn, be embedded in institutional portals. Opportunities will arise in the interim period to encourage other publishers and content suppliers within the engineering sector and also in other sectors to release their metadata via RSS. Opportunities will later arise to encourage the uptake of the RSS portlets into institutional portals. One of the publishers in the consortium has suggested that guidance, similar in format to the RSS Primer, for web site owners on how to include RSS feeds within their own websites would be very useful. We would hope that JISC would consider the benefits of funding further effort in these areas. We would also encourage JISC to enable the RSS Primer to be maintained and further promoted, and to consider alerting the educational community to the benefits of not only aggregation of content from third parties via RSS but also delivery of content via RSS.