Social Media bite 1: Discovering, filtering, organising and sharing valuable content

The web can be a great source of information and knowledge… provided you can find what is of value to you among the glut of trivia, misinformation and disinformation!

The purpose of this session is:

1. to introduce social media tools (e.g. RSS feeds, Feedly, Twitter, Diigo, etc.) and practices that can help you discover, filter, organise and share content that is relevant to your information needs;
2. to enable you to make effective use of these tools for your own purposes.

How do you find content that is relevant to you? What are the challenges?

ACTIVITY: In pairs, discuss how you currently find online information that is relevant to you and what are the challenges you face in keeping track of this content.

You may have identified some of the following resources among others:

- search engines* (e.g. google.com; duckduckgo.com)
- Wikipedia (www.wikipedia.org)
- academic journals (e.g. nature.com; sf.oxfordjournals.org)
- professional organisations (e.g. historians.org; raeng.org.uk; royalsociety.org)
- specialist news websites (e.g. sciencedaily.com; sciencenews.org)
- general news websites (e.g. www.bbc.co.uk/news; www.huffingtonpost.co.uk)
- blogs (e.g. alexsarchives.org; theconversation.com)
- research councils (e.g. ahrc.ac.uk; epsrc.ac.uk; wellcome.ac.uk)

* Search engines have their limitations when it comes to finding relevant content. Despite their growing sophistication, more often than not, they still produce page after page of links to irrelevant websites.

RSS to the rescue

RSS stands for **Rich Site Summary** or **Really Simple Syndication**. It is a format for delivering regularly changing web content and is typically used by news websites, blogs and other online publishers to

'push' new content to those readers who have subscribed to their RSS feed(s). This way, readers can be kept updated without having to constantly visit the site.

To make the best use of RSS, you need to do 3 things:

1. find websites that provide RSS feeds;
2. sign up to an RSS reader (aka 'aggregator') to collect and manage your RSS feeds;
3. subscribe to feeds.

1. Finding RSS feeds

When you visit a website, look either for the RSS icon (on the right) or a link such as Subscribe to our RSS feeds or simply RSS.
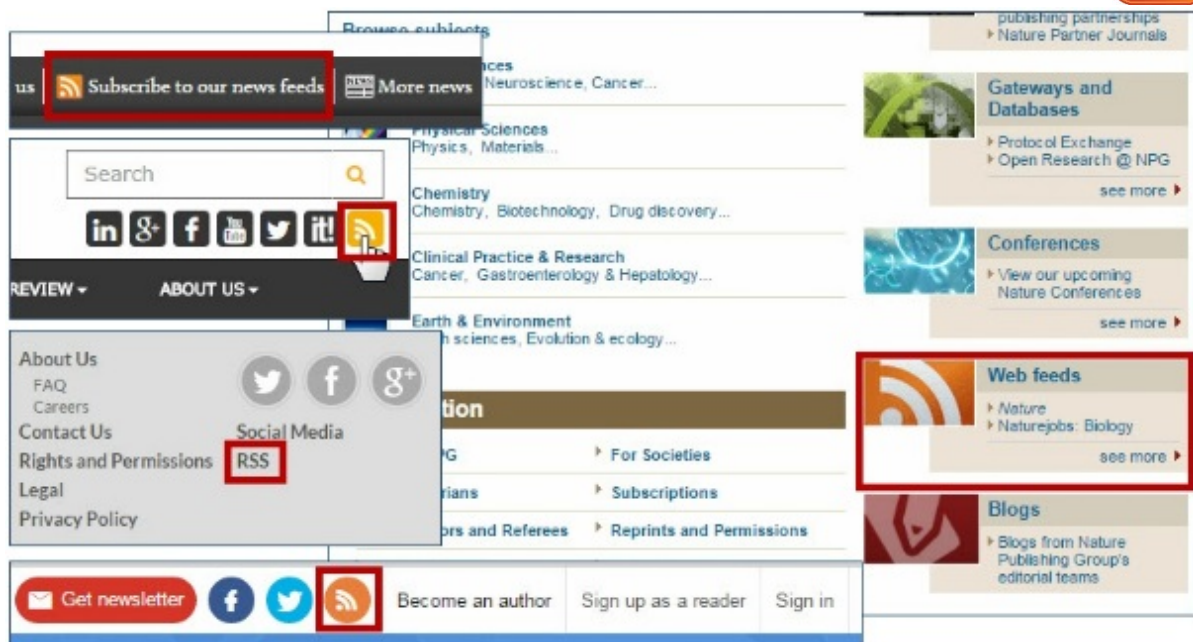
The link will either take you to a page with a list of feeds to subscribe to or directly to a feed, in which case it may look like a page of XML code:

… or a more user-friendly page like this one:

ACTIVITY: Look at a few of your favourite websites and see if they provide RSS feeds.
Tip: If you can't find an RSS link, try searching the name of the website and the key term "RSS"

2. Signing up to an RSS reader

An RSS reader is an application that aggregates the feeds that you subscribe to. It turns them into user-friendly text and images and enables you to categorise and tag them. The main benefit is that you can review large amounts on online content in a short time from your web browser or a mobile app.

There are hundreds of RSS reading applications available, many have a subscription price but some are free. One of the most popular is feedly.com which has basic free account which you can upgrade to Pro for $65 per year. The free account has enough features for most users.

ACTIVITY: Sign up to Feedly

- Go to feedly.com and click on the **Get started** button. Either create a Feedly account by clicking on **Continue with Feedly** or log in using your Google or Facebook account.

3. Subscribe to RSS feeds

In Feedly you can subscribe to feeds in different ways. Either locate a feed on a website and copy its URL in the search box or try to type the name of a website; you can also use the Starter Kit.

ACTIVITY: Add some RSS feeds to Feedly

- Once you've logged in to Feedly, start adding and organizing some feeds from your favourite sites.
  To help you, watch this short video: goo.gl/yyUucZ, or read this guide: goo.gl/9slbyN

Bookmark what you want to keep

RSS and Feedly are great tools to keep track of your favourite sites and discover valuable content. However they are not very good to store and keep content that you want to be able to go back to in the future. For this you need a space where you can store and organise content for easy retrieval.

There are a number of tools for this purpose, chief among them bookmarking applications. The best bookmarking site at present is Diigo (diigo.com), which is free to use for educational use.

Other useful bookmarking applications that you may find useful include:

- Pinterest (pinterest.com) - a visual bookmarking site using the pin board metaphor (i.e. you 'pin' websites and organise them into 'boards').
- Instapaper (instapaper.com) - a tool for saving web pages to read later using folders.
- Pocket (getpocket.com) - another read-later application where you organise your bookmarks using tags.
- Bundlr (www.bundlr.com) - another simple bookmarking tool where you create 'bundles' with any kind of content: articles, photos, videos, tweets, quotes and links.

Try them out and see which one(s) work best for you!

ACTIVITY: Sign up to Diigo and start bookmarking favourite web pages

To get you started with Diigo, watch this video: goo.gl/4Fkbdf or read this guide: goo.gl/f1uTwR

Use Twitter to discover and share valuable content

One of the main uses of Twitter is to share links to online content with your followers. So the first step when you join **Twitter** is to identify and track ('follow' in **Twitter** jargon) people and/or organisations (e.g. @ShodanAlexM; @wellcometrust) and topics (e.g. #ecrchat; #scitwittips) that are relevant to your interests because they are likely to share content that is valuable to you.

In turn, start sharing content that is relevant to your own interests and you will see that people will start following you!

ACTIVITY: Find people, organisations or topics to follow in Twitter

1. Go to twitter.com and sign in or create an account (you only need to provide your name, email address and a password) if you haven't got one.
2. Try to search for an individual, an organisation or a topic you are interested in and **Follow** them.

Further information

A list of links related to this Social Media bite is available at goo.gl/cq2J88