RSS Feeds: Promoting New Materials at Mississippi State University
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Every librarian knows how to promote the library's new books? Just display them in a special area near the library entrance. Anyone who comes in can browse through them easily. Mitchell Memorial Library at Mississippi State has been displaying new books for years. But in 2006, I wanted to promote new books to people who aren't in the library. I've often been enticed into visiting a library just to check out something listed on their new book web page. Of course web pages can take lots of time to update, but I'd heard that some integrated library systems have reports that make updating their web pages easy. I asked our Systems staff if we could create a new book webpage that could be easily updated. The reply? Sure! But have you considered RSS feeds?

I wasn't sure what RSS feeds were, although I'd seen the RSS symbol on websites. Clay Hill and Bobby Goff in Systems enlightened me. RSS stands for Really Simple Syndication. It's a way to format text on the web so it can automatically be sent to another website or a handheld device. Suppose I visit a dozen websites every day for business news, favorite comic strips, political columns, and updates on library legislation. If I set up an RSS reader and subscribe to RSS feeds, the information I want will be collected in one place. I can save time by checking my RSS reader instead of visiting a dozen websites. I won't miss news because I forgot to check a site. And my email box won't be cluttered with emailed news articles. Best of all, the RSS feeds are an extension of the web page I asked about originally, so we could offer both options to appeal to users with different needs and preferences.

The first step in the project was figuring out how to get information about new materials out of our integrated library system, Sirsi, into a spreadsheet. I met with Anita Winger in Systems to discuss what information should be extracted from SIRSI. Saying "new materials" is easy, but identifying the exact criteria to use took several attempts! I wanted recently added books and media, whether we purchased them or acquired them as gifts.

If you're interested in more ideas for using RSS feeds in libraries, I highly recommend the SirsiDynix Institute podcast, "Free Your Content! RSS for Libraries", available at http://www.sirsidynixinstitute.com/archive.php.