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Tuesday, March 9, 2004

Costa Mesa tries RSS for news

BY [Brian Robinson](#)
March 8, 2004

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The California city of Costa Mesa is using the Extensible Markup Language-based Really Simple Syndication (RSS) format to publish news items it now sends to people via e-mail, a route it considers increasingly suspect. City residents and other users can subscribe to a news feed that the city then sends out on a regular basis via e-mail, according to Thanh Bui, Costa Mesa's Webmaster.

But the city would eventually like to stop doing that because of the increased danger that viruses could be inadvertently included with such messages. "We hope to eliminate e-mails," Bui said. "We think the RSS technology is pretty good, so we decided to experiment with it to see how effective it would be."

Instead of having e-mails sent to them about news items, people who want to see new items posted about Costa Mesa can subscribe to the city's news Web site by inserting the RSS feed's URL into a news aggregator program, which sits on the user's computer and regularly polls the site for updates. Those new items then appear in the aggregator's window as a headline and short description. The user can click on the item to go directly to the Costa Mesa news site if they want to read the full item.

The RSS feed is being used to publish only selected items for now, Bui said, since it's still very much an experimental process for getting information out to people. The problem, he said, is that Costa Mesa has no means to publicize the new technology and educate people on how to use it. E-mail subscribers are being told about it, Bui said, but nothing is being done to educate the public at large.

Still, he said, the early experience with RSS in other government venues such as Utah state agencies suggest it will be useful for publishing information on a broader scale in the future.

Robinson is a freelance journalist based in Portland, Ore. He can be reached at hullite@mindspring.com.

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