

How to Make Your Own Custom News Page

[RSS is a very powerful technology](#), useful for anyone to gather and digest many information sources in one place — and even more useful for nonprofits to get their information out to their members and supporters. If you were to put all of your most important news sources onto a single web page, what a useful resource that could be!

Remember when we mentioned the [launch of Alltop.com](#), earlier this year? Alltop collects the most recent stories from the [RSS](#) feeds of selected sites, and shows the headlines as a link to the original story. Whatever your interest might be, one topic-specific news page lets you see at a glance the latest “top” stories in that subject area (e.g. <http://nonprofit.alltop.com/>).

What if you could do the same kind of thing as Alltop — but hand-pick those RSS feeds of greatest interest to your organization and its members?

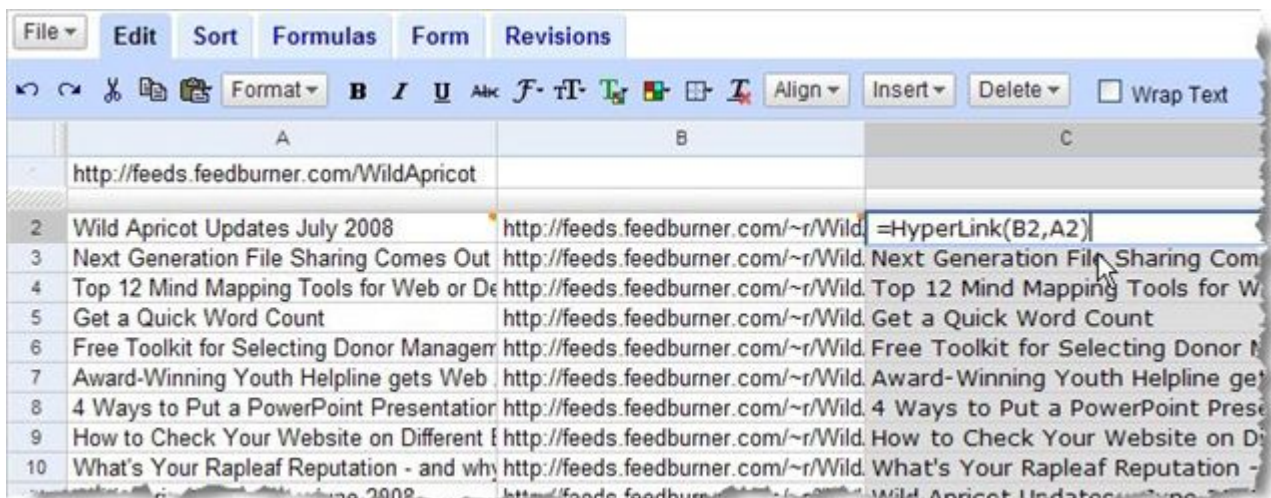
- Professional associations could help to build community and promote their membership by displaying content from member sites;
- Charities and advocacy groups might tap into Google Alerts to track keywords related to their cause and share the breaking news with readers;
- Clubs could give members and the public an easy way to keep up-to-date on events as well as highlighting members with blogs.

Any page with an RSS feed is content that could be served up on a news page.

How might your organization use a custom news page to help your members feel more informed about your cause and more connected as an online community?

There are a number of ways to create custom news pages, using any of a variety of widgets and feedreaders and feed aggregating software, but here's one option:

Amit Argawal recently posted a clever tutorial for [using Google Docs to create a custom news page](#) at Digital Inspiration. It's easy enough for even a spreadsheet novice to accomplish this, following Amit's step-by-step instructions.



If you do get an error, however, it's probably due to one of three causes — any of which are simple enough to correct:

- **Did you give a URL (website address) with a valid RSS feed?** Check the website or blog for a “Subscribe” button and make sure that's the address you're using.
- **Did you type in the code correctly?** A missing comma or other small typo can often be overlooked by the human eye, but will cause an error in execution.

- **Did you copy-and-paste the code, instead of typing it?** If so, check to see if the plain quotes required for code were converted to “curly quotes” (smart quotes) in the process. If so, just replace the “ and ” characters with the ordinary “ marks straight from your keyboard.

When you’ve got the spreadsheet calling up feeds to your satisfaction, and styled as you like it, publish the spreadsheet document (which makes it viewable by others) and embed the results in your web page — see [Easy Embedded Tables for Your Website or Blog: Part 2](#) for more about embedding an interactive spreadsheet like this.

Not everyone who uses the Internet is comfortable with using RSS and feedreaders, we know that. But even the least-savvy of Internet users soon learn to ‘Favorite’ a web page they plan to visit again.

With a little thought and careful feed selection, your news page could be one of those web pages your readers will want to bookmark and revisit on a regular basis.

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