

RSS Learning Communities User Manual

Overview

Participating in learning communities using current networking technologies is easy, efficient, and extremely flexible. Additionally, it can be a powerful collaborative tool that lets peers interact with each other without any type of administrative oversight. The benefit is less administrative overhead, more flexibility for the peer group, no limits as to the content areas that can be addressed, and minimal or no cost other than Internet access.

The essence of the model is that peers are able to research content, provide salient content via *RSS Feeds*, and to easily and automatically look at the content provided by their peers. All of this can be done with free or inexpensive software using whatever peer-to-peer model is desired by the participants. Interaction can be facilitated from anywhere on the Internet, so the only requirement is a computer with Internet access.

Hardware

Participants must have access to a computer that is connected to the Internet. If a participant does not have his/her own computer, a lab computer can be used, but data must be stored on the student's own removable storage in order to make the data portable.

Software

Students will need to download *FeedForAll* software. We have a site license for EIU, so students will be provided with a key code to unlock the permanent version of the software once it is downloaded. This is commercial software and only registered students, staff, or faculty at EIU are eligible to unlock a working copy of the software using the provided code. The registration key is +G)J-v8Jt-Xgvu-4JqC. When you fill in the registration form, it should look exactly like this or the registration code won't be valid:

Enter Registration Information

License Name	Eastern Illinois University
Contact Name	Melissa Gordon
Company Name	Eastern Illinois University
Address 1	600 Lincoln Ave
Address 2	3011 Lumpkin Hall
City/Town	Charleston
State/Province	IL
Postal Code	61920
Country	US
Registration Key	+G)J-v8Jt-Xgvu-4JqC

Paste Registration From Clipboard Cancel Register

Students will also need to download a copy of *Sharp Reader* software. This software will be used to subscribe to feeds from peers and stay updated on those feeds. The software can be set to run in the background and automatically check feeds at user-configured intervals. Sharp Reader is freeware.

FeedForAll

Feed for All is a software package that will allow you to edit any number of RSS feeds. Figure 1 shows the main FeedForAll screen. This screen is used to edit your feeds, each of which is an XML (Extensible Markup Language) file.

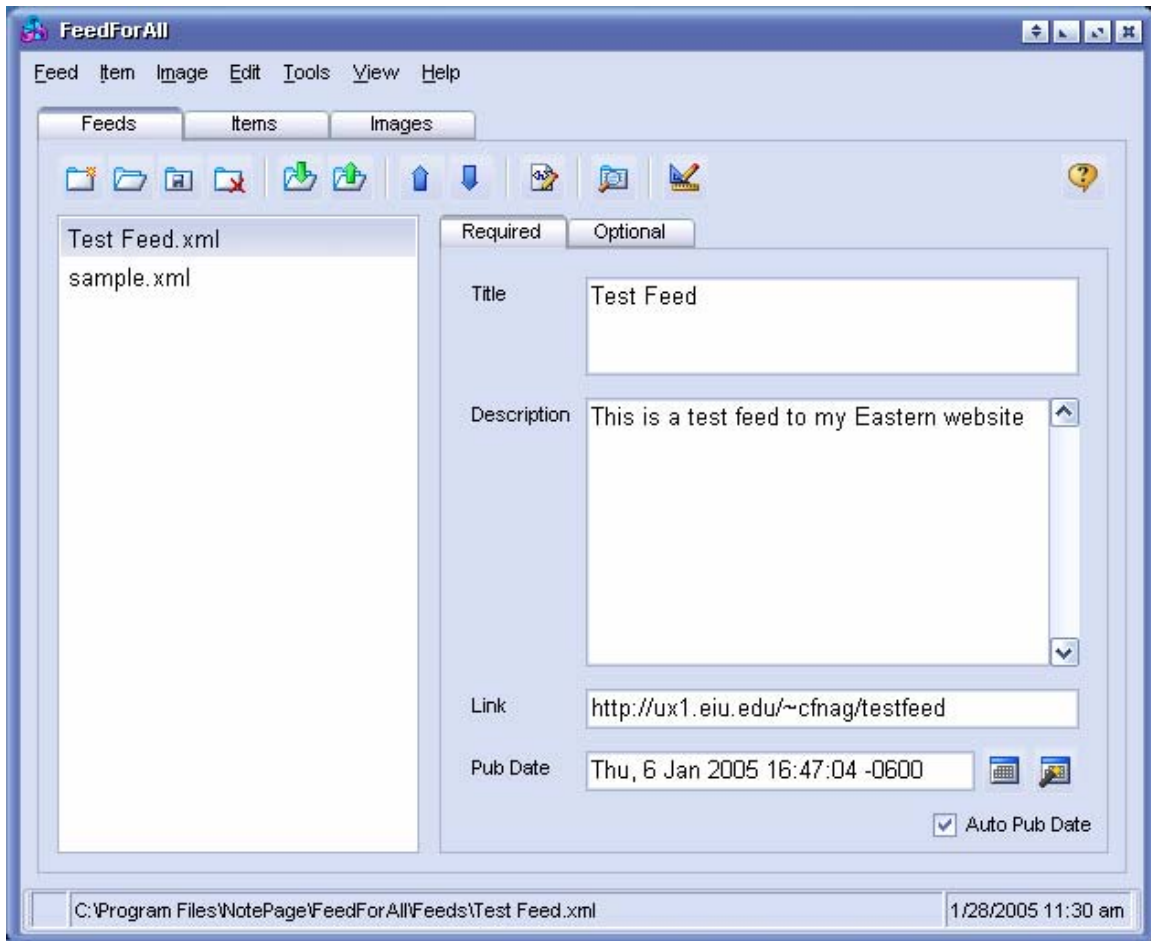


Figure 1 - FeedForAll

Each feed consists of any number of *items*. The items are linked to the feed, which is published to a web site. Images can also be linked to the items.

Usage

In a learning community, publishing a feed allows an individual to gather information, organize it into items, and put the items on a specific feed. Publishing the feed to the web site then updates that feed. Other users with whom you interact are then, using an RSS reader, able to check your feed and see what new items have been added or what old items have been updated. Their RSS reader will automatically gather this data whenever they have it set to check the various feeds that it monitors.

When you decide to upload a feed, you will be prompted to enter information regarding the site where you wish to publish your feed. Prior to uploading, you should have created a directory in your EIU webspace to house the feed. For example, if your feed is called *sample*, then you would telnet to your EIU web space (pen.eiu.edu for students and ux1.eiu.edu for faculty/staff), log in using your username and password, and then issue the following unix commands:

- **chdir www** (if using ux1) OR **chdir http** (if using pen)
- **mkdir sample**

Then log off from your telnet session.

Back in FeedForAll, when prompted for the ftp server, use *pen.eiu.edu* (or *ux1.eiu.edu* if using the faculty server). For the path, you should type *www/sample* (if using *ux1*) or *http/sample* (if using *pen*). Note that you would substitute the name of your target directory for “sample.”

Sharp Reader

Sharp Reader is a freeware package that is used to monitor all of your chosen feeds. You simply set up a feed, set up the checking interval for the feed, and Sharp Reader will monitor that feed and let you know when there has been new information posted there. Figure 2 shows the basic Sharp Reader screen.

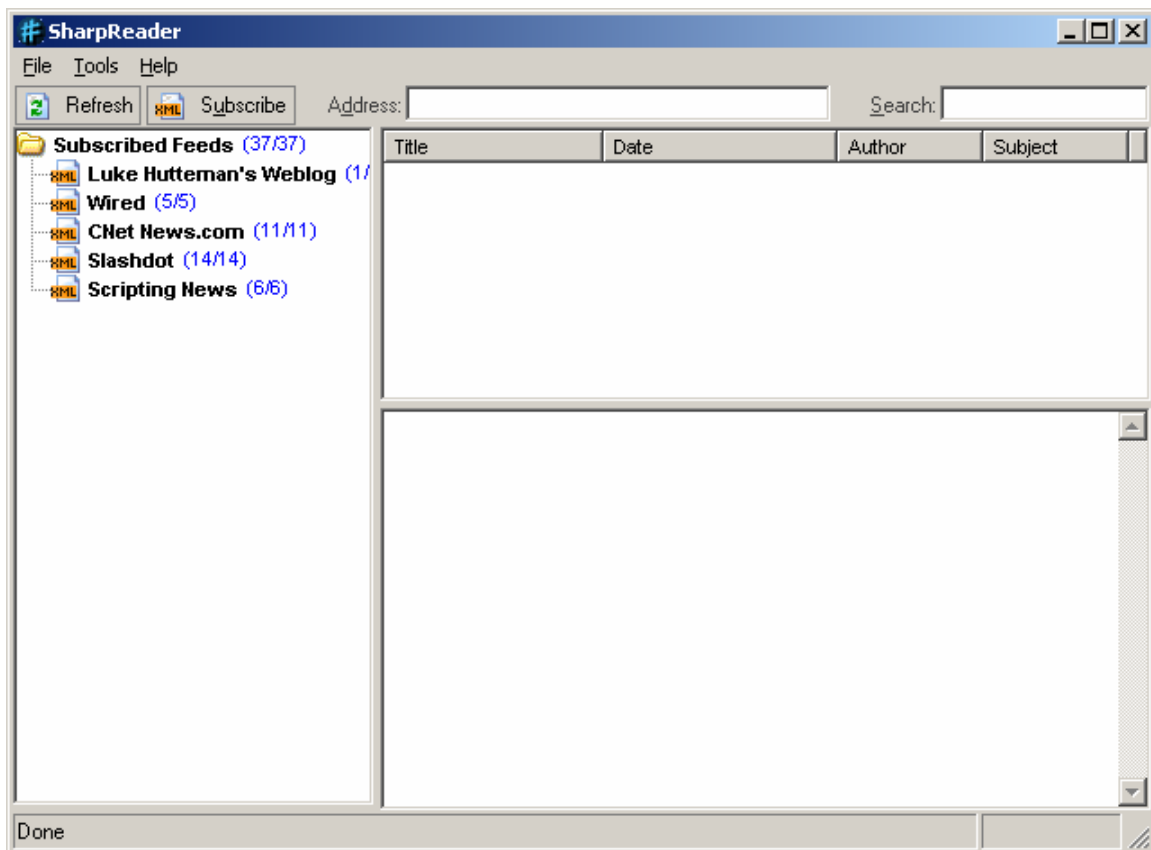


Figure 2 – Sharp Reader

Note that the reader is simple and straightforward. You subscribe to a feed by putting its URL in the address block and then obtaining the feed. Once the feed has been obtained,

you can subscribe to it by simply pressing the subscribe button while looking at that feed. The new items will be displayed. You can double click on an item to display the actual information in the panel on the lower right, which acts as a web for that feed. Various options are available for display, checking feeds, and subscribing/unsubscribing to feeds.