

CAREER ADVICE

FEED YOUR MIND

STAY ON TOP OF YOUR CAREER WITH AN RSS FEED READER

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To stay competitive as a paralegal, it is important to keep your skills up to date and remain apprised of what is happening in the legal world. Online reading - including blogs, Web sites, news publications, legislative updates and Twitter feeds - is a great way to stay current, especially with fewer CLE dollars available in this down economy. However, the sheer magnitude of helpful information online can seem overwhelming, especially after a long day at work, with family and other obligations competing for your free time. Sometimes

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keeping up with the latest legal news and ever-evolving technology can feel like trying to climb a mountain without the right tools and no summit in sight.

You may feel like you do not want to read a word about the law, practice management or technology when you are not at work, but it is critical to stay current in order to advance professionally. It is easy, not to mention free, to catch up on your reading by using an RSS ("Really Simple Syndication") reader, also called a feed reader, to manage the online information most helpful to your career. An RSS reader is a news aggregation software program that publishes updates from Web sites that you designate. It uses software to pick up "feeds" or updates from your favorite blogs, news sources and other sites as they are posted and delivers them to you in an easy-to-read format. You select, add or subscribe to the Web pages that you want to follow, and your RSS reader does the rest.

An RSS feeder is an efficient and time-saving way to consume the information that you need to grow professionally. An RSS reader will prevent you from spending long hours online in your free time, engaging in the time-consuming process of sporadically visiting your favorite sites for news and updates and potentially missing key information.

Although an RSS reader may seem like a deceptively simple, low tech application, nationally recognized legal experts rely on their RSS readers. "I couldn't imagine keeping up with my current awareness activities without an RSS reader," said Tom Mighell, lawyer, legal technology expert, author and blogger. "Nowadays, there's just so much valuable information out there, but it's all on dozens if not hundreds of Web sites.

To visit each one of them every day would take hours. That's where an RSS reader comes in handy. By

subscribing to the RSS feeds in these sites, the new posts or news items come to me, not the other way around. I save time, and don't miss out on any of the latest news."

Kevin O'Keefe, the CEO and publisher at LexBlog, Inc., believes that an RSS reader is an essential tool for paralegals. "A critical job function of paralegals is research and situational awareness, both in transactional and litigation work," he said. "An RSS reader pulling in content referencing subjects, witnesses, clients and the like is absolutely necessary for a paralegal looking to do his or her job. In addition, following key sources and subjects in an RSS reader is a tremendous resource to learn from and to grow one's network, both key to professional growth."

Setting Up Your Own RSS Reader

Using an RSS reader is a timesaver for a busy paralegal. Most professional blogs and online publications feature a subscribe button or RSS symbol that enables you to add the

Web page to your reader with a click of your mouse. You can even follow your favorite Twitterers via an RSS feed; it's a great way to keep up with your favorite legal professionals' tweets if you do not want to use Twitter directly.

By setting up your own RSS reader, you will create a single central location to receive updates from Web sites that are most helpful to your career. The information appears in your feed reader in chronological order and does not disappear until you clear it or mark it as read. You can quickly process an extraordinary amount of information by scanning headlines and deciding what you want to read in more detail. You can also mark items as favorites, organize them in folders and share them with colleagues.

"Readers are also fantastic research organizers. I use Google Reader as my primary RSS tool. I can create folders to hold stories I want to come back to, e-mail posts to others, tag them for easy finding later or share them with other people who read RSS feeds - all with a few mouse clicks. And searching with the Google engine makes it dead simple to find old posts," Mighell said.

Since many RSS readers are available (see the sidebar for a list of popular readers), I recommend reviewing several of them to see which format you like best. Google Reader is a popular choice because of its easy-to-use format and because many people use other Google applications as well such as Gmail and Google Calendar. In January 2010, Google Reader announced an exciting change that allows users to subscribe to any Web site, even if the page does not offer subscriptions or feeds. This is a great way to keep up with your paralegal associations' Web site updates, especially if they do not have an RSS or subscription feature.

Getting Started

Once you choose an RSS reader, start small with around a half dozen legal, technology and practice blogs, including at least one in your specialty area. While professional blogs

Popular RSS Feed Readers

Google Reader

www.google.com/reader/view/#welcome-page

Newsgator

www.newsgator.com

Netvibes

www.netvibes.com

Feedly

www.feedly.com

My Yahoo

<http://my.yahoo.com>

Feedreader

www.feedreader.com

Bloglines

www.bloglines.com

are not the only resources you should include in your RSS reader, they are particularly valuable because they often have minutes-old news from some of the best legal minds in the world and are essential to staying current on the latest legal, technology and specialty area news.

If you are overwhelmed by the thousands of legal professional blogs on the Web, ask for recommendations or check out the blog directories at the *ABA Journal* (<http://www.abajournal.com/blawgs/>) or *USLaw.com* (http://www.uslaw.com/law_blogs). You may find a number of excellent blogs and Web sites in your specialty areas. Review them and subscribe to those that appear to be a good fit for your career needs. Your favorite bloggers' blog rolls can also lead you to other blogs and resources that you may want to subscribe to as well. RSS readers also make it easy to unsubscribe from blogs or sites that you do not find useful after a trial run.

I would be lost without my Google Reader and my daily influx of helpful posts and articles in the areas of legal and paralegal news, practice management, ethics and technology. To obtain the same information I

receive for free online, I would need to attend a dozen CLE conferences every year and spend thousands of dollars in tuition and travel expenses.

Rob Lee, a paralegal specialist employed by the Department of Veterans Affairs in Waco, Texas, also views his RSS reader as a free continuing education resource. "Due to my enormous case load and budget constraints, I use RSS feeds as a pseudo CLE. They allow me to stay on top of current trends in this ever-changing career field," he said.

Recommended Feeds

For some ideas to get started on your own RSS reader, here are a few of my favorite sites:

Legal News

- ABA Journal Top Stories
<http://www.abajournal.com/news/>
- Above the Law
<http://abovethelaw.com/>
- Legal Blog Watch
http://legalblogwatch.typepad.com/legal_blog_watch/
- The Am Law Daily
<http://amlawdaily.typepad.com/amlawdaily/>
- The BLT: The Blog of LegalTimes
<http://legaltimes.typepad.com/>
- Wall Street Journal Law Blog
<http://blogs.wsj.com/law/>

Technology

- Business Hacks
<http://blogs.bnet.com/businessstips/>
- Engadget
<http://www.engadget.com/>
- Friedbeef's Tech
<http://www.friedbeef.com/>
- Futurelawyer
<http://futurelawyer.typepad.com/futurelawyer/>
- Practicing Law in the 21st Century
<http://21stcenturylaw.wordpress.com/>
- Social Media Law Student
<http://socialmedialawstudent.com/>

Practice Management

- Divorce Discourse
<http://divorcediscourse.com/>
- Jim Calloway's Law Practice Tips Blog
<http://jimcalloway.typepad.com/lawpracticetips/>

- Law Business Tips Blog
<http://www.lawbusinessstips.com/>
- Law Practice Today
<http://www.abanet.org/lpm/lpt/>
- Lawyerist
<http://lawyerist.com/>
- My Shingle
<http://www.myshingle.com/>

Paralegal Blogs

- The Paralegal Mentor
<http://www.paralegalmentorblog.com/>
- The Empowered Paralegal
<http://theempoweredparalegal.com/>
- Mid-Missouri Paralegals
<http://blog.midmoparalegal.com/>
- Paralegalese
<http://para-mel.blogspot.com/>
- Patti's Paralegal Page
<http://lglduck.blogspot.com/>

I hope you will visit my blog, *Practical Paralegalism* (<http://www.practicalparalegalism.com>), as well, where I frequently discuss using social media for career and case development.

Daily doses of legal humor and business fashion also provide welcome mental breaks in the life of a hard-working paralegal. You might enjoy the hysterical musings of a self-deprecating lawyer at *The Namby Pamby, Attorney-at-Law* (<http://thenambypamby.blogspot.com/>); the amusing (and just to shake things up, sometimes fictional) news stories at *Lowering the Bar* (<http://www.loweringthebar.net/>); and the fashion advice for professionals at *Corporette* (<http://corporette.com/>).

If you are not already using an RSS reader to stay current in your specialty areas, technology, practice skills and news, I hope you will give one a try. RSS readers are an essential tool to help you reach the summit of your paralegal career and keep you there. □

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