

## **Recommendation of Consumer Advisory Committee of the Federal Communications Commission**

### **Recommendation: Urges FCC to Adopt Use of RSS News Syndication Technology**

While other recommendations proposed to the Consumer Advisory Committee by our working group refer to specific dockets currently before the FCC, this proposal addresses the overall CAC commitment: “*to facilitate the participation of consumers in deliberations of the Commission*”

#### **Preface**

A primary challenge for the FCC is developing and maintaining the best possible communication between the Commission and the citizens it serves. The commissioners and staff recognize that broadly-based consumer input is vital to their work in establishing balanced, effective regulatory policies. Unfortunately, due to the scope and complexity of FCC activities, member of the public sometimes feel that it is difficult to identify, understand and participate in FCC proceedings.

Therefore the FCC has initiated active efforts to encourage public participation. Some notable examples include the “*Bienvenidos*” program, which provides information and links for Spanish-speaking people, and the *FCC Consumer Information Registry* which can be customized to deliver FCC consumer information by direct email on specific topics selected by the subscriber.

Another important resource is of course the FCC Electronic Comment Filing System, permitting interested parties to file comments much more easily by using online information forms. This has also been supplemented by the TCRC unofficial “FCC Input” project, a non-FCC channel to not only encourage use of regular FCC Comments processes but additionally collect informal public comments for input to the Commission via a CAC member organization.

We now urge the FCC to take an important next step to inform consumers and engage their participation in telecom policymaking by adding a continuing news feed on FCC events and issues. Merely adding today’s widely-used and proven “RSS” (Really Simple Syndication) technology to existing FCC online information sources would provide a continuing stream of news on FCC consumer issues, proposed rulemakings and commission activities.

RSS provides a simple method of syndicating, aggregating and managing rapidly changing web content and news items. RSS technology use is well established among government agencies and departments. Some examples of federal organizations currently offering RSS newsfeeds include:

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|---------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| The White House                       | Department of Transportation       |
| The United States Congress            | Federal Bureau of Investigation    |
| The United States Courts              | Centers for Disease Control        |
| Department of Agriculture             | Environmental Protection Agency    |
| Department of Commerce                | Food and Drug Administration       |
| Department of Defense                 | Consumer Product Safety Commission |
| Department of Education               | General Services Administration    |
| Department of Energy                  | National Institutes of Health      |
| Department of Health & Human Services | Computer Emergency Response Team   |
| Department of Homeland Security       | Office of Personnel Management     |
| Department of Interior                | Government Printing Office         |
| Department of Justice                 | U.S. Geological Survey             |
| Department of State                   | Small Business Administration      |

U.S. Census Bureau and many, many others  
NASA <[www.nasa.gov/rss](http://www.nasa.gov/rss)>, the National Weather Service <[www.weather.gov/rss](http://www.weather.gov/rss)> and another regulatory agency, the EPA <[yosemite.epa.gov/opa/advpress.nsf/RSS](http://yosemite.epa.gov/opa/advpress.nsf/RSS)> provide good examples of federal RSS feed sites. Each offers simple explanations plus a wide range of RSS feeds which allows users to select specific information categories that interest them. Some other public RSS resources are listed at <[www.firstgov.gov/Topics/Reference\\_Shelf/Libraries/RSS\\_Library.shtml](http://www.firstgov.gov/Topics/Reference_Shelf/Libraries/RSS_Library.shtml)>

Syndicated newsfeeds can provide audio and video content as well as print. The White House, for example, offers podcasts (audio files) from the President and Executive Branch which are archived and can be played at any time. The U.S. Courts site also provides podcasts, allowing anyone interested to listen to actual oral arguments presented in some cases being heard.

For the FCC, one beauty of this powerful resource is its simplicity and very modest cost. The commission only needs to add free open source XML software to generate a comprehensive RSS stream of FCC information, in an ongoing manner much like a traditional broadcast medium.

For consumers, RSS feeds would mean freedom from information overload; no longer would they need to constantly monitor and search the FCC website for relevant news. Using RSS they could simply “tune in” their news reader software (also free and open source) by selecting key words and specific topics which match their personal interests. From then on their computer software would parse all incoming FCC news automatically, retrieving only items they consider relevant, which would be collected and available to them at any time with a single click in their browsers.

FCC information sources for RSS feeds could include the Daily Digest, press releases, consumer information, commissioners’ comments, NPRMs, proceedings, docket filings, FCC.GOV site update notices, enforcement actions, news from various bureau, and other relevant content. And since the Electronic Comment Filing System already searches by docket number, party, dates, etc. any of those standard EFCS fields could also be used for consumer access to specific information.

In addition to timely news on selected FCC topics, RSS users can also elect to receive immediate email alerts whenever key items appear in their news. As an example of this, the free Google News RSS service can be configured to send users an email alert whenever an item on a topic of their choosing appears in the continuing news stream.

Since additional newsfeeds can be easily set up for individual sources and topics, even the CAC itself could adopt RSS newsfeeds and related technologies for providing information to the public or for sharing items and issues of interest among the members of different CAC working groups.

Though each group focuses on its own mission, topics frequently overlap. For example, rural and underserved populations can be affected by matters being considered within CAC working groups on disability access, homeland security, and other issues. So while it’s not humanly possible for every CAC member to monitor every current issue, we could use online tools (with appropriate safeguards for privacy and confidentiality) to remain more aware of other groups’ activities.

A final note: Though the goal of this recommendation is richer communication between the FCC and consumers, an added benefit is that automated RSS technology may also reduce overall FCC costs by freeing public information staff members’ time for other important and productive work. As a practical matter, implementation of RSS feeds is neither difficult nor costly; all necessary software is free and unlicensed. And to demonstrate our belief in its value, several CAC members have volunteered to assist RSS implementation if commission staff would find that helpful.

Submitted For Consumer Advisory Committee Approval:

**Recommendation: The FCC Should Implement Online News Syndication**

*The Consumer Advisory Committee recommends that FCC Commissioners and staff assess the benefits and adopt the use of Internet syndication technology, such as RSS, to enable easier access to, and more effective dissemination of, all public information available from the FCC. We feel this will help encourage and enable wider and more effective participation of consumers and citizens in FCC public policy considerations.*

*We further recommend the use of appropriate electronic communications technologies to expedite and improve the awareness and sharing of relevant information among Consumer Advisory Committee members, CAC working groups, and FCC staff.*

*Adopted November 3, 2006*