

Lawyers seek replacement for Google Reader

Internet giant to retire popular news tool this summer

BY CHARLOTTE SANTRY

Law Times

When Google announced it would be retiring its popular RSS feed reader as of July 1, many lawyers who use it to track developments in their practice area started wondering what to do next.

The service makes it easy for users to get notice of updates to blogs and news sites through Google's search function or by entering an RSS address. Sites with RSS feeds include the Supreme Court of Canada and the Ontario Court of Appeal.

Google announced its decision on March 14. "We launched Google Reader in 2005 in an effort to make it easy for people to discover and keep tabs on their favourite web sites. . . . Usage of Google Reader has declined and as a company we are pouring all of our energy into fewer products," the company said.

Before long, the topic was trending worldwide on Twitter and U.S. lawyer Dan Lewis was petitioning Google to reverse its decision.

Lewis' mission seems unlikely to succeed, but there

are several other services touted as possible alternatives.

Law Society of Upper Canada legal information manager David Whelan is a loyal Google Reader fan left in the position of deciding where to switch his allegiances. "The ones that seem to be getting the most attention are Feedly and NewsBlur," he says.

Feedly is an RSS reader billing itself as the alternative to Google Reader. It works on desktop computers, Android devices, iPhones, and iPads and uses an interface that's similarly clean.

NewsBlur also has mobile applications but limits users to 64 feeds before charging them.

Whelan says the ability to access feeds on smartphones and tablets is a feature of most of the newer readers.

But he recommends firms consider switching to a platform hosted on



'I don't see Twitter as being a replacement for RSS,' says David Whelan.

their own server, such as Tiny Tiny RSS, in order to reduce their reliance on an external provider that might then close its service.

"Even a small firm would be able to do it," he says.

"It means they might not find themselves jumping from product to product."

Some have questioned whether RSS has become old hat given the growth of other platforms, such as Twitter, that provide quick access to news sources.

Whelan strongly disagrees. While Twitter is useful for monitoring news on a minute-by-minute basis, it's sometimes challenging to find posts from the previous day or week while important updates can get lost.

"I don't see Twitter as being a replacement for RSS," he says. **LT**

TRIED AND TESTED:

Two alternatives to Google Reader

Taptu for BlackBerry, tested on a Z10 phone by David Campbell, corporate finance and mergers and acquisitions lawyer at Gowling Lafleur Henderson LLP

"For corporate/commercial work, an RSS is useful for seeing what's going on in the world. On Taptu, the story [displays] are really short with nothing too detailed. If you're on the subway and pick up the Metro, it's like that: just three to five sentences. It was very easy to set up, very intuitive.

"However, I have a new phone and am happy with how fast it is, but the [Taptu] app lags as you scroll down the screen. There are a lot of thumbnails and text to load.

"You can add Facebook and it reformats your news feed, but I couldn't get Twitter [integration] to work."



David Campbell

Flipboard, tested on an Android tablet by Rikin Morzaria, partner at McLeish Orlando LLP

"I loved it as a recreational reading tool. It's somewhat limited using it as a tool to keep up to date with cases and other legal research.

"The visual display is beautiful and it makes it a pleasant experience to read through decisions but it doesn't let you see at a glance which decisions are new, which ones you've already started reading, and which ones you've already read.

"I've tried Netvibes, too, which is pretty comparable to Google Reader and you can use it offline."



Rikin Morzaria