UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM

Intranet Newsfeed Experiment - Feedly

1. Purpose

Feedly is a news aggregator application for various web browsers and mobile devices. It is available as a cloud-based service. It compiles news feeds from a variety of online sources for the user to customize and share with others. It can also act as a browser add-on for Google Chrome, Firefox, and Safari that delivers news feeds to the user's browser and syncs to Android and iOS mobile apps. Moreover, Feedly can be integrated with Wordpress for blogging and shared with other social media.

In this article, we will explain the concept and functions of Feedly, and testing the feasibility of embedding Feedly feeds on the IT Innovation Intranet site. The purpose of this experiment is to update our readers with the latest technology news, but with the minimal maintenance work required.

2. Feedly Overview

2.1 What is Feedly

Feedly is very similar to Google Reader. After the announcement that Google Reader would not exist beyond 1st July 2013, Feedly has gained a tremendous of users and it also rapidly improved its functions by adding new features which Google Reader lacked. Feedly can aggregate or collect RSS feeds. An RSS feed enables the websites to publish information once and syndicate it automatically amongst the subscribers. An aggregator captures and organizes the feeds to simplify the user's reading experience. With Feedly, users only need to login to their account and the news will come to them.

Feedly has three advantages compared with other RSS aggregation services:

1. Feedly provides its own hosting service, meaning Feely stores RSS feeds on its own servers.
2. Feedly is operating system agnostic, and the most widely used reader currently on the market. It supports a great variety of extensions in Chrome and Firefox, it also has mobile apps on iOS and Android system.
3. Feedly supports "Share" features. Users can share the content via email, Dropbox, social media etc, moreover the new Feedly team version provides the users with collaboration feature like annotation, highlights, shared knowledge boards and sources.

2.2 Feedly Extensions & Apps

Feedly has extension available for many web browsers, including Google Chrome and Mozilla Firefox. Users can simply install the corresponding Feedly plug in to their web browser. Feedly integrates into the web browser, appearing as a clickable icon that redirects the user to their Feedly page, where all of the news feeds are found. Figure 1 shows the Feedly extension for Chrome. When the user starts up Chrome, the user will see an "Apps" icon at the top bar, Click on the Apps icon, user will be navigated to the Apps page where Feedly is installed.
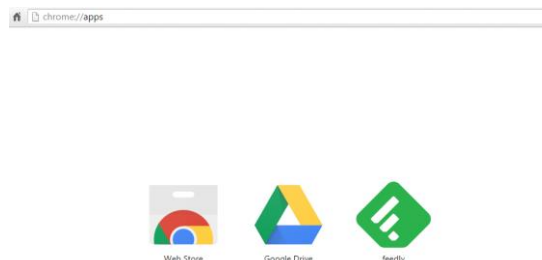

Figure 1 Feedly Chrome Extension

After user login, Feedly interface is shown as Figure 2. It has a navigation menu at the left, and the latest news is displayed at the reading panel at the right.
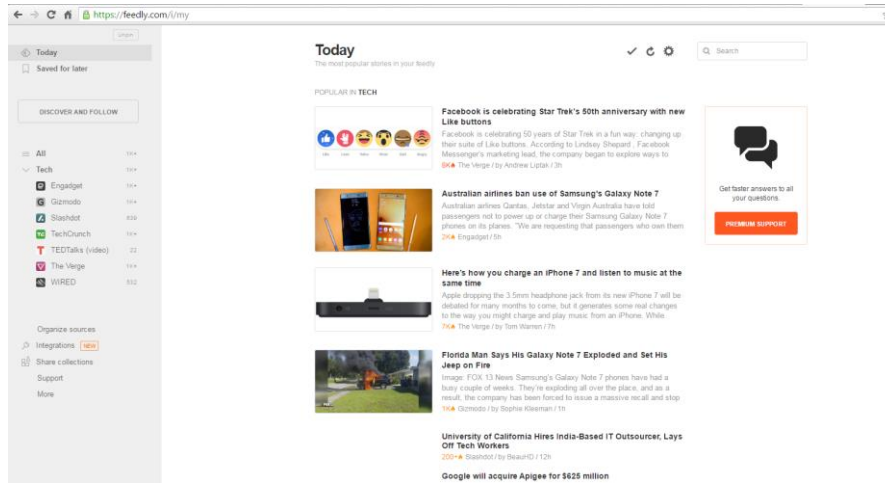
Figure 2 User's Feedly Page

Feedly also has mobile applications for iOS and Android device. The mobile application employs a minimalistic interface that imitates a magazine spread. It will present a summary and a link to the actual article. The mobile application acts as a browser on its own, so any redirects happen inside the app itself.
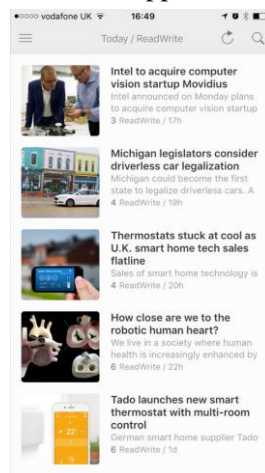

Figure 3 Feedly mobile App

2.3 Feedly License

Feedly provides three different kinds of accounts to suit the user's different requirements.

- Basic Account: free account, user can subscribe up to 100 sources, organized source into collections, share to Twitter, interest and Facebook, and it has mobile and desktop app.
- Pro Account: monthly subscription fee of $5.41 if billed annually. Besides the functions of basic account, Pro account can subscribe unlimited sources; user can search, annotate and automate workflows; It can also save the content to Evernote, Pocket and OneNote, share to LinkedIn, WordPress, back up to Dropbox.
- Team Account: it costs $18 per user per month. Team account enables users to follow the sources together and created a shared knowledge board, annotation highlights. It also provides an API to enable further user customerization.

3. Feedly Demo

3.1 How To Use Feedly

Feedly is based on user subscription. So setting up a user account is the first step to use Feedly. Depending on the user's account type (free account, pro account or team account), the user has some different levels of functionality. Below are the steps that the user may need to follow to use Feedly:

1. **Account registration:** in order to use Feedly, users will need to login. Users can either register with Feedly, or use their own Google+, Facebook, Twitter, Microsoft or Evernote account. Feedly allows users to manage all interests in an easy to read format, saving time on research and content sharing.

2. **Source subscription:** user can subscribe to news source using the search bar in the top right or by clicking "Discover and Follow" on the left menu, see Figure 2. Free account can subscribe up to 100 sources, while the pro account and team account can subscribe to unlimited sources.
3. **Organizing the content:** Sources can be categorized into different collections, each source will be listed under the category. Organizing the content can also be achieved by adjusting the views, title only for news, magazine for rich content etc. Pro and team account can also annotate, highlight the content, search and filtering the content.
4. **Sharing content:** Feedly provides useful tools and help the user to connect with other users. User can share the individual content to social media including Twitter, Facebook and Pinterest. Pro and Team account can share the content to Dropbox, email, LinkedIn and WordPress. Moreover, with the team account, users will be able to share the collections.
5. **Feedly mobile:** Feedly is now available on iOS and Android, its mobile app optimizes user's Feedly experience on the mobile devices.

3.2 Embeddable Feedly Mixes

Embeddable Feedly mixes allow power users/bloggers/media companies to bundle, curate and embed a set of feeds in their own web pages. As an initiative, mikiane.com is the first website using the Embeddable Feedly mixes. The content of the mix is driven by:
1) The set of sources users have defined in the category that are publishing and
2) The latest articles users have shared in Feedly.

Feedly will collect new articles every 10 minutes, enrich them and filter them based on the curation rules. The filtered articles are then assembled into a mix which can
1) Be embedded in a web page
2) Be embedded in a Ning Social Network or
3) Accessed via an API (pro version)

However, this feature is now obsolete. So users can't create the Feedly widget to be embedded directly on the web pages. According to the Feedly support, Feedly is in the process of relaunching a new version of Feedly mixes. Currently, Feedly can only be embedded to Wordpress, however, support for the other content framework such as university intranet "Contensis" is still in development and there is no confirmed date of when the new feature will be released.

It is not feasible to test the Embeddable Feedly mixes on our intranet system at the moment. There are two options to move forward. One is to set up a Wordpress website, which may be possible to request through the service desk. The other option is to look at the market for alternative news aggregator products.

4. Findings

Feedly as the most popular RSS reader, provides the user an "all in one place" solution for blogs and news sites; it increases users' productivity, provides efficient ways to read and sharing content; it also consolidates resources on user's desktop, mobile phone and the tablet.

Feedly offers features that no other RSS service can match.

1) It has a variety of highly useful features including the browser extensions and mobile applications;
2) It is available as a cloud-based service, which is supported on all major operating systems;
3) Its rapid news aggregation speeds and suggesting new contents to the users;
4) Its ability to share content to Wordpress, Dropbox and other social media channels;
5) It has a large user community. At the end of May 2013, the total user number was up to 12 million.

Embedded Feedly mixes is a feature which has great potential to enable automated news update. Although this feature is only available for Wordpress at the moment, it is worth to keep an eye on its further development for other content management system.