

## How To Increase Sales Traffic By Publishing Customer Reviews As RSS Feeds

It is a simple truth. Yet while many of the biggest players on the web know it, most webmasters overlook the fact that customer reviews can provide for a source of constantly updated content that potential customers would find to be an invaluable source of information.

It is also true that by simply combining customer reviews with RSS feeds, you too can ride a new wave of shopping (or social) traffic.

Traffic! It is the one problem that webmasters continually face, and which can NEVER be fully solved. How to find visitors in a reliable, repeatable, and cost-effective way. Because without visitors all your beautiful content might as well be locked away in a vault--no one is ever going to see it. If the purpose of your site is to sell, you will sell nothing. If the purpose of your site is to build a social network, you might remain its only member. You need traffic to succeed. Lots of it.

In this article I am going to consider just one traffic building initiative--one that happens to be enjoying a growing wave of popularity. It involves harnessing the power of RSS (Really Simple Syndication) feeds to build traffic. You are probably aware of RSS as a means of syndicating news content. Websites that produce news have been building XML-formatted news stories for years. These files are retrieved by other websites, the new stories are extracted, and the content is placed (on these publisher sites) before a public ever-hungry for new information. The arrangement has worked well for everyone. Those who have displayed the RSS feeds have gained content to feed their visitors. Those who have produced the RSS feeds have obtained backlinks to their websites, which has helped to bring in new traffic. In fact the arrangement has worked so well that webmasters have been encouraged to move beyond simple news syndication.

This makes a lot of sense. News articles hardly represent the only content that surfers are looking for. Recipes, shopping coupons, MP3s, schedules for local events... The list of possible things that people search for is endless, and if you can provide "new" instances of such information, then RSS represents an ideal means of getting that information in front of the people searching for it. Sure, it used to be the case that everything you wrapped up in an RSS feed had to take a very simple form. Every item in your news feed was reduced to a title, a url (to the source of the information), and a short snippet, or description, to hook the reader. But RSS has sprouted wings over the years and now you can package practically any data structure into a feed that you like. Because of this there is no reason why we cannot suitably package customer reviews into a feed.

But what exactly would we put into an RSS-formatted customer review feed? And is this a good idea? Let me answer the second question first. Yes! It is a very good idea to package customer reviews as RSS feeds. Why? Because if you think about it, a customer review is very much like a news item. It is a packaged opinion that has been released for the express purpose of swaying the mindset of someone who is looking for information on the very topic it addresses, whatever that topic might be. To the person searching for the information, this review is news indeed, and more often than not it is welcome news.

So what should go into the feed? Well, a summary of the review, seems obvious. That can be used as the title element, and a snippet of the review can be used as the description. But there are other elements to a review that we have grown accustomed to over the years, and they can go into the feed too. Pros and cons of the reviewed item can be listed and highlighted. We can put in a numeric rating for several different attributes of the item being reviewed (for example, quality and robustness of the item, its ease of use, value for money, and so on). We can put in images too. Stars to represent the numeric ratings, maybe. A picture of the item. We could even put in a link to the profile of the reviewer if we wanted. When we do these things, the final formatted customer review feed can look very enticing indeed.

Of course, the prospect of collecting reviews, let alone formatting them into RSS feeds might very well seem daunting to the average webmaster. But there are low-cost commercial applications available which will do all of this work for you--for example, the review engine known as Red Queen (see the resource box below). Furthermore, you can now upload customer reviews (in RSS format) to Google Base and make them available to the various Google outlets. Admittedly these are early days for webmasters hoping to profitably hook into Google Base traffic sources, but the prospects are exciting nonetheless.

One thing that seems certain is that customer reviews as RSS feeds represent an as yet untapped opportunity for webmasters. Customer reviews have long been profitably used by big players on the web (Amazon.com being an obvious example) but have not been fully exploited. By coupling this popular opinion-based source of information with the technology of RSS syndication, savvy webmasters who take the reins today are sure to get first mover advantage on this new means of marketing, and build the traffic they need to assure the success of their online businesses. And, of course, there is really no reason why you should not be one of them!

### About the Author

Stephen Carter is the developer of [Red Queen, powerful customer review software](#) that allows webmasters to take advantage of the traffic building

potential of customer reviews published as RSS feeds. To learn more, please see the accompanying tutorial: [How To Publish Customer Reviews As RSS Feeds](#).

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