



OXITEMS: a  
provider of  
newsfeeds for  
Oxford  
University

Barry  
Cornelius

Newsfeeds

An example  
using  
OXITEMS

Where next?

# OXITEMS: a provider of newsfeeds for Oxford University

Barry Cornelius

Oxford University Computing Services



# Outline

OXITEMS: a  
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Where next?

## 1 Newsfeeds

## 2 An example using OXITEMS

## 3 Where next?



# Newsfeeds

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## Newsfeeds

An example  
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Where next?

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- 3 Formats abound
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- 6 Producing newsfeeds
- 7 Using OXITEMS to set up newsfeeds
- 8 Using OXITEMS does not involve OUCS
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# Newsfeeds abound

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## Newsfeeds

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Where next?

- Establishing newsfeeds is a relatively new mechanism for delivering information.
- Essentially, a newsfeed is a collection of related items.
- For example, there might be newsfeeds for:
  - this term's music events in Balliol College;
  - the latest news from Computing Services;
  - the current vacancies in the Economics department;
  - the latest world news from the BBC;
  - today's Radio 4 programmes.



# Examples of newsfeeds

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Where next?

- The BBC's web site provides many newsfeeds. The web page  
`http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/help/3223484.stm`  
provides links to some of their newsfeeds.
- OUCS's web site also provides access to many newsfeeds. The web page  
`http://www.oucs.ox.ac.uk/`  
displays some of these newsfeeds.



# Formats abound

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Where next?

- In the same way that web pages are coded using a markup language (HTML), newsfeeds are coded using a markup language.
- Unfortunately, there are several markup languages that are often used.
- They include: RSS 1.0, RSS 2.0, Atom 0.3, Atom 1.0.
- You can see examples of the first three by clicking on an item of the *Director's Cut*.
- and then clicking on each one of the RDF, RSS and Atom buttons:

```
http://ramble.oucs.ox.ac.uk/blog/stuart/  
rdf.xml
```

```
http://ramble.oucs.ox.ac.uk/blog/stuart/  
rss.xml
```

```
http://ramble.oucs.ox.ac.uk/blog/stuart/  
atom.xml
```



# Which format?

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Where next?

- Atom 1.0 was released in August 2005.
- It is probable that Atom 1.0 will become more dominant.
- Reasons are given at  
<https://kwiki.oucs.ox.ac.uk/information/index.cgi?AtomAndRSSFormats>
- Does it matter?
- Although it is useful to know that there are different formats, in many respects it is irrelevant.
- If you store your news items in OXITEMS, you are (nearly) independent of these formats.
- This is because you can ask OXITEMS to deliver any of the RSS 1.0, RSS 2.0, Atom 0.3 and Atom 1.0 formats, ...
- ... i.e., it allows consumers to read the information in any of these formats.



# Reading newsfeeds

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Where next?

- Some web sites provide a web page that lists the items of a newsfeed.
- Some web browsers (e.g., Firefox) allow you to establish a *live bookmark* to the URL of a newsfeed.
- Some email clients (e.g., Thunderbird) allow you to get the items of a newsfeed delivered into the email client like ordinary messages.
- Instances of Bodington such as the University's WebLearn enable you to set up a resource that is a *news feed display*.
- There are also various feedreader sites and programs: <http://www.threadwatch.org/node/4443>



# Producing newsfeeds

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Where next?

- Although there are numerous ways in which you can obtain the information of newsfeeds, ...
- ... there are no common ways of maintaining news items.
- OXITEMS is a system for members of the University to store news items.
- It assumes that any unit of the University will want to create news items.
- *unit* means any department, college, society, club or some other project.



# Using OXITEMS to set up newsfeeds

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Newsfeeds

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Where next?

- The ITSS person of a unit can use OXITEMS to set up newsfeeds.
- So the ITSS people within Economics, Medical Sciences, and Balliol College might set up the following newsfeeds:

[econ/vacancies](#)

details of the current vacancies in Economics;

[medsci/news](#)

latest news from Medical Sciences;

[ball/music-events](#)

news items for this term's music events in Balliol.



# Using OXITEMS does not involve OUCS

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Where next?

- The main ITSS person can use OXITEMS to set up newsfeeds now without any involvement of OUCS.
- For example, in Medical Sciences, Anne Bowtell and Damion Young are experimenting with using newsfeeds.
- They have set up a number of newsfeeds:  
medsci/notices-medicine-year4  
medsci/notices-medicine-year5  
medsci/notices-medicine-year6  
medsci/notices-medicine-years4to6
- And are looking at how these may be displayed:
  - on their web site;
  - using WebLearn.



# Societies/clubs can produce newsfeeds

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Where next?

- OUCS can arrange for a member of a society/club to be the administrator of the newsfeeds for that society/club.
- Having done that, that person can then set up newsfeeds (without any involvement of OUCS).
- For example, the appropriate member of the Change Ringers Society could set up the newsfeeds:

[societies/change-ringers/events](#)

events of the Change Ringers Society;

[societies/change-ringers/news](#)

news of the Change Ringers Society.



# An example using OXITEMS

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Where next?

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- 3 Altering the newsfeed
- 4 Setting up a new newsfeed
- 5 Reading the new newsfeed
- 6 Creating a newsfeed resource in WebLearn
- 7 Viewing the newsfeed resource
- 8 Configuring the newsfeed resource
- 9 Other ways for a web page to read a newsfeed



# Reading a newsfeed

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Where next?

- Suppose some department (or college) has a web site.
- Here is a link to its home page:  
`http://www.oucs.ox.ac.uk/oucsweb/oxitems/pages/zero.html`
- Suppose that the University's admin stores its press releases in an OXITEMS newsfeed.
- Suppose the department wants to output the items of this newsfeed on its home page.



# Instructions to read a newsfeed

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Where next?

- This can be done by adding lines like the following to the head of the web page:

```
<script type="text/javascript"  
  src="http://rss.oucs.ox.ac.uk/oxitems/output_newsfeed.js"  
  language="JavaScript">  
</script>
```

- And then at the point in the web page where you want to output a newsfeed, include something like:

```
<script type="text/javascript">  
  output_newsfeed("oucs/test-university-news", 2)  
</script>
```

- Here is a link to a new version of the home page:  
[http://www.oucs.ox.ac.uk/oucsweb/  
oxitems/pages/one.html](http://www.oucs.ox.ac.uk/oucsweb/oxitems/pages/one.html)



# Altering the newsfeed

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Where next?

- Now suppose you are the press release officer of the admin and you want to add a new news item.
- The URL for OXITEMS is:  
`https://rss.oucs.ox.ac.uk/oxonly/oxitems/`
- As this has been webauthed, it is available from anywhere.
- Click on the *Add an item* link.
- Enter the news item, preview it and then add the item to the newsfeed.
- If you now visit the department's home page, the new item will appear.
- Here is the URL again: `http://www.oucs.ox.ac.uk/oucsweb/oxitems/pages/one.html`



# Setting up a new newsfeed

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Newsfeeds

An example using OXITEMS

Where next?

- Suppose the department now wants to produce its own newsfeed.
- The main ITSS person of the department can set up newsfeeds.
- They go to:  
`https://rss.oucs.ox.ac.uk/oxonly/oxitems/`
- And select the *Add a newsfeed* link.
- They need to enter information such as the name of the newsfeed, its title, its description, who is going to manage the newsfeed, and so on.
- If the person is in Economics, they could set up a newsfeed with a name like `econ/events`.
- Having set up the newsfeed, they can add items to the newsfeed in the way described previously.



# Reading the new newsfeed

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Where next?

- Then at the point in the department's home page where they want to output this newsfeed, they can include:

```
<script type="text/javascript">  
  output_newsfeed("econ/news", 3)  
</script>
```

- Here is a link to a new version of the home page:  
<http://www.oucs.ox.ac.uk/oucsweb/oxitems/pages/two.html>
- Here is a mock-up page that illustrates other possibilities: <http://www.oucs.ox.ac.uk/oucsweb/oxitems/pages/lots.html>



# Creating a newsfeed resource in WebLearn

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Where next?

- The department may also want to output the contents of this newsfeed on their WebLearn pages.
- `http://www.weblearn.ox.ac.uk/site/testarea/asuc/barry/`
- In WebLearn, they can click on *Create a new resource here*.
- Then click on *News Feed Display*.
- Then enter some appropriate values in the *Name*, *Title* and *Description* boxes.
- In the *URL of Feed* box, they need to enter a URL like:
- Then click on the *create now* button.
- That has created the resource.



# Viewing the newsfeed resource

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Where next?

- The new resource can be viewed by clicking on *Back to the menu of resources* and then scrolling to the bottom of this screen.



# Configuring the newsfeed resource

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Where next?

- It is best to configure the resource to display the titles of each item as links.
- This can be done as follows. Find the > symbol that is associated with the new resource. Click on the > symbol. Then click on *Modify News Feed Display*. Ensure that the box to *display the titles as links* is checked. Ensure that the box to *display the title of each entry* is checked. Click on *save* and then revisit the menu of resources.



# Other ways for a web page to read a newsfeed

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Where next?

- The OUCS web pages are coded using TEI.
- If you are using TEI, a newsfeed can be displayed using:

```
<xptr rend="rss" type="transclude"  
url="http://rss.oucs.ox.ac.uk/oucs/test-university-news/rss10.xml"/>
```

- An example is:  
<http://www.ict.ox.ac.uk/team/news/>
- If a web site is using PHP that has CURL installed:

```
<?php  
header("Content-Type: text/xml");  
$uri = "http://rss.oucs.ox.ac.uk/oucs/test-university-news/rss10.xml";  
$cobj = curl_init($uri);  
curl_setopt($cobj,CURLOPT_RETURNTRANSFER,1);  
$xml = curl_exec($cobj);  
curl_close($cobj);  
echo $xml;  
?>
```



# Where next?

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Where next?

- 1 Now
- 2 Later
- 3 Acknowledgements



# Now

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Where next?

- Medical Sciences are experimenting with using OXITEMS: <http://www.weblearn.ox.ac.uk/site/medsci/undergrad/medicine/year4/>
- Lou is experimenting with using OXITEMS for releasing information about the ECE: <http://www.ict.ox.ac.uk/team/news/>
- I need to talk about newsfeeds and OXITEMS to staff in the University Offices.
- I plan shortly to talk to those people involved with the existing OUCS newsfeeds ...
- ... and move those feeds to OXITEMS before Christmas.
- Any new OUCS newsfeeds will be established using OXITEMS.



# Later

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Where next?

- I need to talk to Tony about how to get ITSS people involved.
- Next term, there will be a *ByteSize* presentation about OXITEMS.
- Another member of my group is looking at deploying Urchin for commonly-requested aggregations.



# Acknowledgements

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- Thanks to those people who have previously reviewed OXITEMS, and supplied comments.
- I have made a lot of changes as a result of these comments.
- Thanks to Joe Talbot for providing the initial design of the *department's home page*.
- Thanks to Pete Robinson for being a real *help*.