



OXITEMS: a
provider of
newsfeeds for
Oxford
University

Barry
Cornelius

Newsfeeds,
formats and
OXITEMS

An example of
the use of
OXITEMS

Where next?

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Oxford University Computing Services



Outline

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Where next?

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3 Where next?



Newsfeeds, formats and OXITEMS

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Newsfeeds, formats and OXITEMS

An example of the use of OXITEMS

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Newsfeeds abound

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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:
 - the latest news from Medical Sciences;
 - the current vacancies in the Economics Department;
 - this term's music events in Balliol College;
 - the latest world news from the BBC;
 - today's Radio 4 programmes.



Examples of newsfeeds

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An example of the use of OXITEMS

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.
- Some of the web sites for departments at the University of Oxford provide access to a newsfeed, e.g. <http://www.chem.ox.ac.uk/>
- 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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Newsfeeds, formats and OXITEMS

An example of the use of OXITEMS

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 an item of *Director's Cut* from the OUCS main web page.
- 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 <http://www.oucs.ox.ac.uk/oucsweb/oxitems/formats/>
- 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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An example of the use of OXITEMS

Where next?

- If you want to set up a new OXITEMS newsfeed, this can only be done by someone that OXITEMS has been told is the *administrator* of a unit.
- The OXITEMS system has been seeded with data saying that the main ITSS person of a unit is an OXITEMS administrator for that unit.
- So, the ITSS people of Medical Sciences, Economics and Balliol College might set up the newsfeeds:

[medsci/news](#)

latest news from Medical Sciences;

[econ/vacancies](#)

details of the current vacancies in Economics;

[ball/music-events](#)

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



Normally 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.
- The OUCS can add other people as administrators.
- 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?

- For societies and clubs, the username associated with the society/club is the administrator of the newsfeeds for that society/club.
- So a person who authenticates with that username can set up newsfeeds (without any involvement of OUCS).
- For example, a person who has webauthed with the username `ouscr` can set up the newsfeeds:
[societies/ouscr/events](#)
events of the Society of Change Ringers;
[societies/ouscr/news](#)
news of the Society of Change Ringers.
- The above is not as it is currently implemented.



OXITEMS uses three levels of authorisation

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Where next?

- It is appropriate for one or two people in a unit to control what newsfeeds get set up.
- E.g., to ensure a sensible naming scheme is employed.
- The administrator can delegate the day-to-day running of a newsfeed to another person (called a *manager*).
- For example, this person could be the head of a research group.
- The latter can in turn allocate *authors*, people who add news items to the newsfeed.
- Although OXITEMS provides three roles (administrators, managers, authors), this need not be too much bureaucracy: ...
- ... when an administrator creates a new newsfeed, they can quickly establish the initial values of the manager and the authors.



An example of the use of 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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An example of the use of OXITEMS

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 administration 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>



Altering the newsfeed

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An example of the use of OXITEMS

Where next?

- Now suppose you are the press officer of the administration 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 news item to the newsfeed.
- If a person now visits the department's home page, the new news 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, formats and OXITEMS

An example of the use of 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 Medical Sciences, they could set up a newsfeed with a name like `medsci/news`.
- Having set up the newsfeed, they can add news items to the newsfeed in the way described previously.



Reading the new newsfeed

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An example of the use of OXITEMS

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("medsci/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:
`http://rss.oucs.ox.ac.uk/medsci/news/rss10.xml`
- 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 built using Plone, a template to deliver an RSS newsfeed can be used.
- If a web site is using PHP that has CURL installed:

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



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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/>
- Some OUCS staff are experimenting with OXITEMS newsfeeds.
- Any new OUCS newsfeeds will be established using OXITEMS.
- I need to talk about newsfeeds and OXITEMS to staff in the University Offices.
- It will be useful for IT Support Staff to test the system.



Later

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Where next?

- I need to talk to those people involved with the existing OUCS newsfeeds ...
- ... and move those feeds to OXITEMS early in the New Year.
- Next term, there will be a *ByteSize* presentations about newsfeeds and OXITEMS.
- Another member of my group is looking at deploying Urchin for commonly-requested aggregations.



Acknowledgements

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Where next?

- Thanks to those people (mainly in OUCS and Medical Sciences) who have 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 home page that I've used for the *Department of Running*.
- Thanks to Pete Robinson for supplying lots of useful feedback at each stage.