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## Access to Government Information Resources via RSS: Digitalized Individual Files of Self-employees in China

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### **Abstract:**

*Case investigation in China indicates that self-employed workers dealing primarily with the configuration of information technology pertaining to the market economy are beginning to acquire individualized information services through subscription to RSS Push, which is one of the ways of acquiring this information. By means of simply title and link ordering, they access Beta push, user-defined Website Push and the literature aggregate push etc. to acquire up-to-the-minute data on administrative information as well as access to official publications, including digital libraries. This information is collected in browsers or personal computer terminals and as it is completed, individual information spaces are gathered into more extensive bases for sharing. This will greatly enhance the time limited value of this information and foster the creation of individual digitized files.*

### **1. Foreword**

At present people have started to utilize the technology of RSS (Really Simple Syndication – A to B data transmission system) for information transfer through Microsoft, Google, and a variety of other information services in developing countries. Utilization of RSS data may also be organized so as to ensure completely individual access to information source selection and filtering options, with more customers attracted to Web 2.0 to maximize growth and utility of information sources. Discussion of the theories and practice of technological utilization as mentioned above, in sources such as 'Blogs, Wikis, RSS Feeds: How the new Wave of Technology is Affecting Communication in Academic Information Societies' (Michael R. Leach, 2005) and 'Blogging and RSS: A Librarian's Guide' (Michael P. Sauers, 2006), etc., presents clear insight into information exchange and shared communication.

As further development of RSS information services continues, interrelated processes such as purchase, organization, posting and communication of information, are all being significantly upgraded, thus strengthening the fundamental features of the Information Age. With this in mind, and through research and analysis of RSS information services accessed from government websites, this paper focuses mainly on the growing number of self-employed/freelance users of government websites, who constitute a growing majority of users. These self-employed users actively seek out RSS services from government websites, thus establishing a unique, digitalized personal file space of self-employed Chinese, with more and more free resources accessed and practical information stored in terminals.

## **2. Government information resources through RSS services: The current situation**

According to the latest statistics from the China Internet information Center of China (CINIC), by the end of 2007 the number of Chinese 'netizens' had risen to 210 000 000 (a little smaller than that of the USA, 215 900 000), thus becoming the world's second-largest networking country. In terms of the size and number of government websites: 76 ministries and bureaus, 33 capital cities and 333 other cities have seen a large increase in website construction, with ministries and bureaus at 96.1%, capital cities 96.9%, other cities 96.7%, towns and counties 87.1%, for an overall accessibility rate of 85.6%. Construction of government websites continues to expand at a very rapid pace. The popularity of Chinese government websites ranks at the top of government website portals worldwide. Despite this, up to 57.5% of Chinese network users have never visited government websites.

With the development of computer and internet technology, governments are more conscious of the evolving information environment, its demands and requirements as well as its management and service. Governments are therefore determined to improve information resources in order to ensure even higher achievement.

### **2.1 The establishment of government RSS information services**

Since 2004 Blog China ([www.blogchina.com](http://www.blogchina.com)) has initiated 15 different channels for RSS news service. Xinhua News ([www.xinhuanet.com](http://www.xinhuanet.com)) also initiated similar service during the 2004 Athens Olympics. Websites of both central and local governments very soon followed this trend, with the number increasing from 8 in Sept. 2004 to 800 in Jan. 2007, thus growing by a factor of 80. Provincial and municipal governments in particular see widespread use of RSS services. In the meantime, Xinhua News ([www.xinhuanet.com](http://www.xinhuanet.com)) and People Daily have become the portal websites which share equal popularity with Sina ([www.sina.com](http://www.sina.com)), Sohu ([www.sohu.com](http://www.sohu.com)) and Netease ([www.163.com/](http://www.163.com/)).

Diagram 1 Brief introduction of the RSS information service propelling of governments websites

	Central government level (Xinhua News)	Provincial government level (The government website of Guangdong)	Municipal level (The website of wuxi municipal government)	District level (Shuangdian district)
Address	<a href="http://www.xinhuanet.com/rss.htm">http://www.xinhuanet.com/rss.htm</a>	<a href="http://www.gd.gov.cn/rss/">http://www.gd.gov.cn/rss/</a>	<a href="http://rss.wuxi.gov.cn/">http://rss.wuxi.gov.cn/</a>	<a href="http://rss.qd.gov.cn/rss/">http://rss.qd.gov.cn/rss/</a>
RSS channels	26	15	81	1
RSS locations	26	15	81	1
XML supplies	N/A	15	81	N/A
RSS readers' supplies	6	5	6	5
<i>Investigation date : march 18<sup>th</sup>, 2008</i>				

**2.2 A brief introduction to fostering of government websites through RSS information services**

At present, many Chinese government websites provide RSS services such as channel tag, RSS address and XML links. The information services channel includes from 1 to more than 20 different categories, mainly covering the fields of government communiqués, government documentaries, news, government affairs, bulletins, personnel management, financial information, government purchases, statistical data, current affairs, investment activities and statistical information and recommendations pertaining to tourism. The categories involved are highly practical and individualized, representing the principal content of Chinese government information resources accessible through RSS services.

**3. The current situation regarding access to information by self-employed Chinese**

China is a country with newly established resources for retrieval of market information, with many newly created occupations not requiring that employees sign a work contract with a certain company, which is a different situation from that of private business owners and shopkeepers. Self-employees are economically established people equipped with professional skills, who provide legal services enabling companies to succeed. This group includes insurance agents, securities investors, salespersons, agents, freelance writers, private tutors, fitness trainers, etc. Compared to traditional self-employees such as salespersons and professionals, the MORE group, MO group are obviously new groupings of self-employees. Well trained and educated, they are the products of multi-market development. These new groups represent the new labor force of China. They hope to search out information independently in the areas of economy, society and culture, and to achieve access to government information resources accessible either intentionally or accidentally.

### 3.1 Basic introduction of freelance subscribers to RSS services

Normally, freelance users of RSS services are highly educated and young, with internet, fax and telephone connections. They obtain access to the outside world through blogs, personal websites, qq communication, e-mail and MSN. Compared to non-RSS users, they are more proficient at information searching.

Diagram 2 The basic introduction of freelance subscribers of RSS service.

	Freelance writers	Insurance agent	IT designer	lawyer	Real estate agent	Sales person	Advertisement intermediary	Private tutor
Percentage (%)	18(%)	5(%)	15(%)	15(%)	12(%)	5(%)	10(%)	20(%)
Average age	33	N/A	30	39	29	22	24	38
Salary(compared to the lowest in the local area)	2 . 8times higher	3. 3 times higher	2. 1 times higher	6. 3 times higher	3. 3 times higher	1. 9 times higher	3 . 3 times higher	6. 9 times higher
Education level(college education)	34(%)	20(%)	41(%)	90(%)	32(%)	14(%)	N/A	89(%)

Statistics from : sample investigation for 300 people investigation date : march 18<sup>th</sup>, 2008

### 3.2 How RSS users usually access information

Diagram 3 The information obtaining habit of RSS users

	Freelance writers	Insurance agent	IT designer	lawyer	Real estate agent	Sales person	Advertisement intermediary	Private tutor
Time spent on internet(hr)	8. 1	2. 6	5. 3	2. 6	10. 5	4. 6	10. 5	2. 5
Time spent on RSS (hr)		2. 2	1. 8	3. 5	1. 2	3. 5	1. 5	7. 6
Percentage of English readers using (%)		12(%)	N/A	26(%)	33(%)	3(%)	N/A	N/A
Percentage of Chinese readers using (%)		88(%)	87(%)	74(%)	67(%)	97(%)	62(%)	42(%)

Statistics from : sample investigation for 300 people investigation date : march 18<sup>th</sup>, 2008

The way self-employed or freelance users of RSS services access information is quite different from that of other users. The time they spend on websites, posting or retrieving information, is very similar to that of other users. But this survey also shows that self-employed/freelance users often use Chinese-language search engines such as Kantianxia, Zhoubotong, Boyue, Xinlangdiandiantong, etc. The number of Chinese-language sites used by them (160,000-180,000) is currently equal to that of English-language sites.

### 3.3 Use of RSS sites by self-employed/freelance

The rate at which Chinese self-employed/freelance users of RSS are increasing their use of web space is as high as that observed in developed countries. There is an increasing tendency by RSS users to register more than one personal site. Compared with regular internet users, this has the obvious advantage of establishing a more personal web identity or “platform”.

Diagram 4 The freelancer users information space of RSS service								
	Freelance writers	Insurance agent	IT designer	lawyer	Real estate agent	Sales person	Advertisement intermediary	Private tutor
BLOG (%)	15(%)	N/A	22(%)	22(%)	14(%)	18(%)	22(%)	N/A
MSN (%)	12(%)	15%	15%	32(%)	15 (%)	N/A	44(%)	15 (%)
QQ (%)	32(%)	25%	35%	91(%)	45 (%)	N/A	95 (%)	15 (%)
E-MAIL (%)	89(%)	55%	90%	93(%)	94 (%)	78(%)	45 (%)	93 (%)
<i>Statistics from : sample investigation for 300 people investigation date : march 18<sup>th</sup>, 2008</i>								

### 4. The trend among self-employed/freelance users towards proliferating use of RSS information sources

At present the Chinese government is in the process of actively upgrading RSS services in order to facilitate and expand access to governmental information resources. Realizing that self-employed/freelance users see themselves somewhat in the role of spiders at the centre of a gigantic web, and given their preferences for fast and direct searches for the information they seek, it is crucial that access to all relevant information—including information accessible outside RSS — be taken into consideration.

Diagram 5 The RSS service Chinese Self-employees expect								
	Freelance writers	Insurance agent	IT designer	lawyer	Real estate agent	Sales person	Advertisement intermediary	Private tutor
Exhibitions and fairs (%)	N/A	65(%)	25(%)	32(%)	54(%)	N/A	65(%)	32(%)
Bidding (%)	1%	5%	22(%)	2(%)	34(%)	24(%)	N/A	8(%)
Finance and securities (%)	15%	15%	20(%)	22(%)	34(%)	44(%)	N/A	N/A
Annual planning of government (%)	2%	8(%)	22(%)	14(%)	44(%)	5%	N/A	44(%)
Tax (%)	N/A	15%	15%	22(%)	42(%)	44(%)	N/A	22(%)
Statistic data (%)	N/A	1(%)	3(%)	2(%)	2(%)	2(%)	5(%)	22(%)
<i>Statistics from : sample investigation for 300 people investigation date : march 18<sup>th</sup>, 2008</i>								

#### **4.1 Expectations of self-employed/freelance RSS users**

These new aims and trends mean that Chinese self-employed/freelance users have new and higher expectations with regard to privacy, intellectual property, non-governmental commercial ventures,

ordinary users because it is stored dispersedly in the form of web pages and government website files, or in websites of agencies attached to government. On the other hand, according to the self-organization theory of Web 2.0, self-employed/freelance users must accept the concept of public sharing and release personal RSS information in line with wide interface RSS information resources, since such blending creates and fosters the impetus for information service development, which is also the springboard for redistribution of all elements involved in information service.

In the evolution of information services the first step is the innovative phase initiated by technology, followed by the phase of establishing a critical market driven by users' demands. The personal adaptation by self-employed/freelance users follows the same evolution. Establishing the information carrier is the first step towards achieving public sharing of information. Establishment and organization of the carrier/server should take place with a view to public access and information sharing (Zhangshuli, 2006). Thus, future governmental websites should be like those in America, with an additional category of RSS for self-employed/freelance users (G2S) alongside its main function of serving the average citizen (G2C), business (G2B), government employees (G2E) and governments (G2G). On the other hand, this requires study and experimentation with RSS service configuration for self-employed/freelance users, in order better to achieve the level that is being demanded.

## **6. Examples of reference to digitalized personal space framework**

At present, some scholars define the internet environment as a minor stratification of users, information release through certain users, and the promotion of such content based on the theory of free accessibility. They have begun to explore experimentally individual-centred combinations of personal information and integrated information, thus creating the digitalized individual. They hope as well to establish the identity of this information platform in the internet environment, presenting the personal information and online activities on the same web page in order to satisfy users' desire to make full use of the internet to record and store personal information and to identify the user quickly, accurately and at low cost. This could all be achieved on the same platform, combining functions of related research interest, evaluation of information and accurate identification. The key aim of this framework experimentation is to enable easy sharing of converging information among users in different fields and interest.



Case 1. Haoei net ([www.haoei.com](http://www.haoei.com)) is a self-organizing website driven by the leading browser web page of an individualized Chinese URL which aims at converging the most frequently used URLs in order to meet the needs of different users, with the important additional convenience of self-editing. When the user is surfing, the mouse could be used to add or delete information, modifying this personalized URL navigation, saving the different URLs into different categories, thus providing a model for an individualized navigation system, an administrators' model, a self-employees' model, an executives' model, an IT managers' model, etc.

Case 2. Yakee net ([www.iRSSer.com](http://www.iRSSer.com)) is a platform for RSS subscription, RSS source-sharing, editing and releasing, on which each user could set up his own RSS source, just as a freelance writer would do for a particular column of a magazine. The information is for other users to subscribe to, which makes the individual a concerned and responsible editor. Yakee followers not only share the RSS source, but are also able to create the RSS source on their own.



Through analysis, both cases reflect attempts to integrate website platforms of different fields and interests with the aim of constructing an accurate, unified, converging search engine based on professional RSS portals. This concept is useful and instructive with regard to digitalized personal file convergence by self-employed Chinese.

## 7. Path selection for digitalized personal files by self-employed Chinese

It is essential to discuss path selection by self-employed Chinese in consideration of their specific demands for RSS information, of the government's policy of making public affairs transparent, for interactive communication and online service, as well as for the reason that self-employed Chinese expect more clearly stratified and personalized information services, with access to dynamic link navigation.

1. Accessing RSS information resources via government website portals. Self-employees receive Beta-testing propelling, propelling by key words, user-defined website propelling, etc., all of which may be saved in the terminal's reader for browser use.
2. Designing the front page for personal RSS content. Through management of the above-mentioned RSS feed, through user-defined channels, and by adding or deleting the RSS feed at the government website portal, enabling classification management of RSS feed, the information most popular with self-employees could be added.
3. Extending personal files to permit open retrieval of information. Continuation of propelling through relevant RSS content channels; making all information (titles, excerpts, original links) accessible until this information can be propelled and retrieved by more professionals in the field.

After digitalized personal files are created, further propelling is a necessity. **First**, RSS must be introduced into the RSS search engine and RSS classification content, which are often categorized according to topics arranged for information sources, to establish RSS within the content of relevant themes ensuring more links to websites. **Second**, a more instructive introduction is necessary, which implies designing a page for introducing and explaining RSS usage. **Third**, a striking, eye-catching icon must be designed, linked to the RSS page. **Fourth**, a Bulletin Board system must be set up, informing users about RSS information sources and providing them access to RSS subscription in their blogs. The above-mentioned strategies are intended to increase the number of visits to the website, and thus a higher rate of subscriptions.

The three strategies listed above represent a three-in-one path of RSS + home page + online access for an individual-based information platform. Within practical limits, it provides users with a unified, standard design as well as a standard subscription space accessible through navigation of information resources, with unified governmental icons. This digitalized file space allows complete filtering of information sources and contents, including words, pictures, multimedia information, etc. This information is all saved in the users' own space, thus enabling freelance RSS users to transmute part of the public information into personal information in a formal, organized manner. Thus they could also participate in cyber-saving, organization and presentation of personal data in such a way as to make full, systematic use of otherwise disparate data. This whole process should make the operation simpler.

## 8 . Conclusion

To sum up, the concept of encouraging self-employees to make use of government information resources, environments and platforms, and of ensuring they have open access to a digitalized personal file while accessing government information resources, increases the usefulness of the most comprehensive and useful information released by the government, thereby enhancing self-employees' own role in the development of the economy. In the interim, the existing framework of information communication could be made more accessible to the public, service space much more extensive, and service orientation more diversified, with the result that freelance users would be more aware of the humanistic sensitivity of a modern information service.

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1. Real Estate Agents Association in Nanjing City.
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### Notes:

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