

# Top 3 Must-Use Online Tools for Journalists

By Amy Gahran

Web: RightConversation.com & Contentious.com

E-mail: amy@gahran.com

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These are the barest online essentials I think any journalist needs in order to keep doing your job well in the online age.

**1. Furl ([www.furl.net](http://www.furl.net)):** Free service where you can store a complete copy of any web page to create your own personal online *full-text-searchable* library of interesting stuff. You can categorize and rate entries as you like, e-mail links to a contact list, make notes, etc. “Furling” a page takes only a few seconds, via a browser toolbar button. You can share and download your archive, and make individual items public or private. Virtually unlimited storage space. Disadvantage: Doesn’t archive pdfs or other non-HTML documents.

*SO WHAT?* If you routinely “furl” any pages of potential interest, you’ll be able to do things like have a record of what a controversial web page (such as a proposed regulation) looked like before it was quietly altered or removed. And you’ll be able to instantly answer questions such as, “Hey, didn’t I read a study a few months ago about PCB-contaminated dredging sediments?”

- **Similar services:** Spurl ([www.spurl.net](http://www.spurl.net)), Blinklist ([www.blinklist.com](http://www.blinklist.com))
- **Related tool:** Firefox search toolbar plugin: My Furl Archive (<http://snipurl.com/vcm9>). Lets you search your Furl archive without having to go to the Furl site.

**2. Feeds (RSS):** A way to read the internet without having to visit every site. Alerts of fresh content that come directly to you, but that don’t rely on e-mail. Benefits over e-mail alerts: more reliable, less clutter, totally spam-proof.

*SO WHAT?* Makes it faster and easier to keep an eye on your beat. Easier and more organized than getting press releases by e-mail. Can fetch feeds on mobile devices and read offline. **Search feeds** (feeds generated from saved search queries) can be an excellent, ongoing, automated source of leads way ahead of the curve.

You need a **feed reader** tool to subscribe and read feeds. Don’t get trapped: Use only feed readers that allow you to import/export your feed list (which is an OPML file).

### Some feed reader options (all free):

- **Bloglines** ([www.bloglines.com](http://www.bloglines.com), click “full bloglines” to register and learn more): Web-based, versatile service, good support for net access via mobile devices.
- **Newsgator** ([www.newsgator.com](http://www.newsgator.com)): Very nice interface. Offers a free web-based version (sign up at: <http://snipurl.com/vcng>). If you like the free Newsgator, they offer a lot of reasonably priced tools you can install on your computer (like NetNewsWire), and premium services.
- **Sage** ([sage.mozdev.org](http://sage.mozdev.org)): Very bare-bones, basic feed reader plug-in for the Firefox web browser. Amy uses this.
- **Pluck** ([pluck.com/products/rss-reader.html](http://pluck.com/products/rss-reader.html)): More sophisticated browser plug-in feed reader. Available for as a plugin for either internet Explorer or Firefox.
- **Safari**: The default Mac OS X web browser comes with a built-in feed reader.

**3. Feed search engines**, such as **Technorati** ([www.technorati.com](http://www.technorati.com)): Best way to quickly learn what’s *new* online, as opposed to simply what’s available online. Great for staying abreast of weblogs and niche news sites, breaking news, and any online resource that publishes feeds. These sites aggregate millions of feeds. So if a feed gets submitted to, say, Technorati, then within an hour or so after an alert of a new content item hits that feed, it’ll start appearing in Technorati search results – whereas it may take days, weeks, or months for Google to index that content. Drawback: spamming is common.

Similar services:

- **Icerocket** ([www.icrocket.com](http://www.icrocket.com)): Amy’s favorite – less spam, nice interface
- **BlogPulse** ([www.blogpulse.com](http://www.blogpulse.com)): Also allows you to track conversations

**Other cool stuff we can discuss.** Ask Amy about:

- Conversational media (You’re working in it!)
- Firefox (Or: Why you should run screaming from Internet Explorer)
- Podcasting
- Blogging tools
- Ego surfing
- Citizen and participatory journalism
- Digital voice recorders & audio editing software
- Multimedia search (Podzinger, Podscope, tv.blinkx.com, etc.)
- Flickr
- Moblogging
- Google Maps
- How blogs can help journalists do their job better
- Social bookmarking (del.icio.us, tagfetch, digg etc.)
- How tagging makes your work findable
- Why news organizations should care about net neutrality
- Blog comment tracking