

Atom, ASF, APP

WHAT IT STANDS FOR:
Atom Syndication Format,
Atom Publishing Protocol

WHAT IS ITS PURPOSE?

The Atom Syndication Format (ASF) defines a new XML-based syndication format for lists of entries in feeds. This follows in the wake of the popular explosion of RSS and its many incompatible variant versions, leading to the need for a single, formally standardized syndication format.

The Atom Publishing Protocol (APP) is a related but separate initiative to define a new formal standard application programming interface (API) for publishing Web resources. As with RSS and its many versions, several prominent but incompatible publishing APIs (including the Moveable Type, Blogger, and MetaWeblog APIs, among others) have been used for several years. This has made it difficult to standardize software support for posting to Weblogs from diverse applications, which APP is intended to solve.

GROUP BEHIND IT:

The Internet Engineering Task Force (IETF) Atom Publishing Format and Protocol (atompub) working group (www.ietf.org/html.charters/atompub-charter.html)



DOES IT REPLACE OR UPDATE A PREVIOUS STANDARD?

The Atom Syndication Format is intended to replace RSS and its variants.

The Atom Publishing Protocol is intended to replace the Moveable Type, Blogger, MetaWeblog, and similar incompatible Web publishing APIs.

WHAT STAGE OF DEVELOPMENT IS IT AT?

The Atom Syndication Format, published in December 2005 as RFC 4287, is complete and is already widely used.

The most recent draft (at the time of this writing) of the Atom Publishing Protocol is Version 13. Support for recent versions exists in many popular Web applications, and it is expected that the final version of APP should be completed soon (sometime in 2007), after which time it will be very widely used.

PROS & CONS:

Pros: Both ASF and APP are milestone Web standards, and each should be the preferred standard in its area. This is due to the formal standardization process followed by the IETF, guided by acknowledged leaders in the field, and developed in a public manner with a great deal of public feedback considered along the way. Each is at least as good or better than the specifications it is intended to replace in every significant area each addresses, and widespread support is expected for both.

"IF YOU CARE ABOUT RSS AND

WEB PUBLISHING, YOU SHOULD KNOW

ABOUT THE ATOM STANDARDS,

AND YOU SHOULD LOOK FOR AND ASK FOR

ATOM SUPPORT IN THE TOOLS YOU USE."

Cons: On the other hand, because both are intended to replace well-used standards, it is possible that both existing and newer Web applications might need to continue to support the older standards. In the worst-case scenario, it might be that the Atom standards will become just another pair of specifications that developers must support, with neither immediate nor long-term benefit to users like us.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS:

This worst case seems unlikely. If you care about RSS and Web publishing, you should know about the Atom standards, and you should look for and ask for Atom support in the tools you use.

WHERE YOU CAN LEARN MORE:

The Atom Syndication Format is available online at <http://rfc.net/rfc4287.html>.

Version 13 of the Atom Publishing Protocol, along with all prior (and any subsequent) versions, is available online at <http://bitworking.org/projects/atom>.

Tutorials and software supporting both ASF and APP are widely available.

—Daniel Chudnov
Information Technology Specialist
Office of Strategic Initiatives
Library of Congress
Washington, D.C.