

## Reading Industry Blogs – Time Well Spent?

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Suggesting interesting Internet sites to a working writer feels a little like offering crack to a baby. Net surfing is a productivity killer with no equal. (An unnamed member of this chapter and I once spent an entire afternoon looking at pictures of Viggo Mortensen. It goes without saying that no words were written that day.)

However, if you are pursuing publication you owe it to yourself to read blogs. There is simply too much information in agent, editor, and author blogs to miss, all of it fresh and much of it uncensored. This is where you'll discover agents' pet peeves, editors' observations on trends too new to cite officially, from-the-horse's-mouth tales of selling and negotiating, and even red-hot hints at all the juicy scandals simmering below the surface.

(Oops. I guess that would go under "evil distractions." Strike that.)

The trick to making the most of your blog-reading time is to be selective and organized.

### READ ONLY WHAT'S RELEVANT TO YOU

First, determine which blogs have the most valuable information.

It's rare that I've read an agent blog and not learned something. Explore several, including those who don't represent your genre. While Miss Snark has retired her popular blog, you'll get a strong grasp of the realities of querying and agenting by reading over her old posts.

Editors' blogs are a mixed bag. Some are mostly promotional tools; others have helpful cross-industry information.

Finally, it goes without saying that many romance authors are eager to help each other out, linking to useful sites for other writers on their blogs and web sites.

I've put a link list at the bottom of my own blog to get you started. Go to [www.sophielittlefield.blogspot.com](http://www.sophielittlefield.blogspot.com) and scroll to the bottom. It's labeled "For My RWA Pals."

#### USE AN AGGREGATOR

I bet there's not a writer among us who hasn't uttered some variation on this oath: "I'm not checking my email until I've written for an hour." Blog updates can be just as tempting.

When you do sit down to catch up on your reading, there are tools that can make the process more efficient (and less prone to leading to a click-trail to obscurity from which you never return, a side effect of crack-baby-writer syndrome.)

Called web-based personal news aggregators, or sometimes "news readers," these sites allow you to collect all your blogs under one roof, so to speak. You add blogs to your account by supplying any URL with an RSS or Atom feed. (More on that in a moment.) When you log in to the aggregator, it displays all unread posts for all your blogs, so you can see at a glance what's new.

I use the free Google Reader and find it perfect for the job. It has some nifty features like generating statistics on your blogs and reading trends, but mostly I just like the clean, spare, simple-to-use interface. Find it at [www.google.com/reader](http://www.google.com/reader)

Other popular aggregators include Bloglines and RSSReader.

RSS stands for "RDF Site Summary." RDF stands for Resource Description Framework. So I guess RSS really stands for Resource Description Framework Site Summary...But luckily, you don't need to know any of that! Just think of RSS and Atom/XML as different techniques for putting information into a format that lets you look at it easily.

Sites created with any of the major bloggers (including Blogger, TypePad, LiveJournal, WordPress, etc.) will work. If you find an RSS or Atom feed on an author's website or other site, it will work, as well.

## BUILD OVER TIME

Like all good blogs, your aggregator should be a work in progress. Add to it when you discover an interesting link. Occasionally weed out blogs that no longer suit your needs.

The average aggregator user monitors over twenty feeds. It's tempting to start adding "fun" blogs, which reflect your interests outside of writing. Do so with caution: all the careful organization in the world won't help if you get stuck in a Viggo blog frenzy.