The timeline apps are here, and they’re awesome

The folks at Iconfactory, which once made a wonderful Twitter client called Twitterrific, launched a new app on Tuesday. It’s called Tapestry, and it’s a cross between a social app and a news reader. The app can ingest feeds of all kinds: someone’s Bluesky posts, your favorite YouTube creator’s videos, a blog’s new posts, all your go-to podcasts. You add the feeds, and Tapestry shows them to you in chronological order. No recommendations, no algorithms, just what Iconfactory calls a “personal, unified timeline” of content you care about.

Tapestry has a bunch of clever ways to filter your content, too. You can pick keywords to “Muffle,” which will make their entry in Tapestry much smaller, or you can mute them and remove them from your timeline entirely. You can search across all your feeds at once, too, and create timelines within your timeline — I set one up for my podcast feeds, for instance, and now Tapestry is a passable podcast player. Tapestry syncs both your content and your place in the timeline across devices, and it gives you lots of control over how things look.

I’ve been using Tapestry in beta for a while, and I quite like the app. It’s fairly basic so far, though, and a lot of the best customization features are locked behind a $2 monthly or $20 yearly subscription. But Iconfactory’s colorful aesthetic is all over this app, and there’s a lot of Twitterrific design DNA in Tapestry.

What I like even more, though, is the idea behind Tapestry. There’s actually a whole genre of apps like this one, which I’ve taken to calling “timeline apps.” So far, in addition to Tapestry, there’s Reeder, Unread, Feeeed, Surf, and a few

others. They all have slightly different interface and feature ideas, but they all have the same basic premise: that pretty much everything on the internet is just feeds. And that you might want a better place to read them.

Timeline apps are sort of a spiritual successor to RSS readers like Google Reader and Feedly

Timeline apps are sort of a spiritual successor to RSS readers like Google Reader and Feedly. (Some of them, like Reeder and Unread, are just updated versions of longtime RSS readers.) Years ago, RSS readers were designed to help you keep all your blogs and websites in order, back when maintaining your blogroll was a lot of work. Now the job is vastly more difficult. You're following creators on TikTok and Instagram and YouTube, keeping up with your favorite memes on Tumblr and all the news on Bluesky, refreshing your favorite subreddits over and over all day, and checking your favorite news sites a few times, too. None of these platforms interoperate because their business incentives are to make your life miserable, but when you boil all those things down, they're just feeds of content.

You can't *quite* replace your entire internet existence with a timeline app because so much of all of our internet existence is interactive. You can read Bluesky posts in a timeline app, but you can't like or reply; you can watch a YouTube video, but you can't wade into the comments. Maybe you'll be able to someday — open, federated social networks make that interoperation possible, which is why I think Surf, which lets you like and reply and comment in addition to just reading, is such a cool and ambitious idea.

Even in the worst cases, though, I like timeline apps as shortcuts; it's actually much faster to open Tapestry and find the latest MKBHD video than to open YouTube, tap on Subscriptions, and sidescroll until I see the logo.

In Reeder and other timeline apps, you can add almost any type of feed you can think of.

The biggest challenge for timeline apps is that they are essentially required to be all things to all people. A great timeline app has to offer a top-notch reading experience one swipe away from a full-featured podcast platform and one more swipe away from a beautiful video player. So far, Reeder is the app I've tried that does this the best — it lets you filter by content type or by source, can play almost anything in line, and is just really nice to look at. Even it has a long way to go, though, and most of these other apps are even further behind.

These apps can also take some getting used to. If you're coming from an RSS reader, where everything has the same format — headline, image, intro, link — a timeline app will look hopelessly chaotic. If you're coming from social, where everything moves impossibly fast and there's more to see every time you pull to refresh, the timeline you curate is guaranteed to feel boring by comparison.

But I suspect timeline apps are exactly the thing we need for the internet we have now. Maybe someday we'll get fully interoperable everything and life will be magical. Until then, there's something powerful in taking all your favorite stuff — and I really recommend picking only your favorite stuff — and putting it into one place. Build a timeline you can finish every day, maybe even every time you open the app. Scroll only what you've chosen to scroll. And then close the app, confident in the fact that you've seen the stuff you cared about, and go do something else. There'll be more to catch up on next time.

https://www.theverge.com/apps/605756/tapestry-reeder-surf-time

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