NY Times launches local websites network

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The New York Times headquarters is seen February 19 in New York City. The New York Times has launched an experimental network of websites providing local community news and information for residents of neighborhoods in New York and New Jersey.

The New York Times has launched an experimental network of websites providing local community news and information for residents of neighborhoods in New York and New Jersey.

The newspaper said the online project, dubbed "The Local," is "part of an exploration by The Times of ways to extend its journalistic values to serve and engage audiences in new ways."

"The sites will feature posts by New York Times journalists and community members about everyday life in their neighborhoods, including news and information about schools, restaurants, businesses and real estate," it said.

In addition, they will feature "economic life, crime, government services, transportation, volunteer opportunities, outdoor activities, parenting issues and more," the Times said in a statement.

The newspaper said the websites will initially cover the neighborhoods of Clinton Hill and Fort Greene in Brooklyn and Maplewood, Millburn and South Orange in New Jersey.

For the Brooklyn sites, The Times said it will collaborate with the City University of New York Graduate School of Journalism (CUNY) to "teach residents about reporting and the use of interactive media."

"CUNY journalism students will contribute to The Local and help area residents contribute," the Times said.

"We'll be reporting on the big concerns in these communities, from deer hunts to property taxes, crime to school budgets," said Jim Schachter, the Times editor for digital initiatives.

"And we'll be striving to empower residents to report on their own communities, as well as to contribute their creativity and ideas."

The Times said features of The Local will include a calendar of neighborhood events, wedding announcements, photos, news tips and death notices submitted by users.

The move into "hyperlocal" user-generated reporting comes as US newspapers, the Times included, struggle with a steep drop in print advertising revenue, declining circulation and the migration of readers to free news online.

Andy Newman, the Times reporter moderating the Brooklyn sites, provided an explanation for the move on the site's home page.

"There?s a growing consensus in the media world that one way that newspapers can sustain themselves is to foster what is known as participatory journalism or citizen journalism," he wrote. "The Times wants to see if it can find a sustainable way to do this."

"This is very much an experiment," he added. "As this venture grows, we?re hoping that a business model will emerge from it."

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