

US newspaper owners are 'mad as hell'

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News Corporation founder Rupert Murdoch. US newspaper owners, their advertising revenue evaporating, their circulation declining and their readership going online to get news for free, are fighting mad

US newspaper owners, their advertising revenue evaporating, their circulation declining and their readership going online to get news for free, are fighting mad.

The enemy? Websites that use their stories without paying for them.

"We are mad as hell, and we are not going to take it any more," said the chairman of the Associated Press, a cooperative of over 1,400 US newspapers, borrowing a line from the anchorman character in the 1976

movie "Network."

"We can no longer stand by and watch others walk off with our work under misguided legal theories," Dean Singleton said at a meeting this week of the [Newspaper](#) Association of America (NAA) in San Diego, California.

Singleton's battle cry came just a few days after News Corp. chairman Rupert Murdoch launched a broadside against Internet giant Google, whose Google News website is one of the most popular news aggregators on the Internet.

"Should we be allowing Google to steal all our copyrights?" asked Murdoch, the owner of newspapers in Australia, Britain and the United States, where his holdings include The [Wall Street Journal](#) and New York Post.

"Thanks, but no thanks," the News Corp. chairman said.

Robert Thomson, the managing editor of The Wall Street Journal, used even harsher language than his boss in describing the situation.

"There is no doubt that certain websites are best described as parasites or tech tapeworms in the intestines of the Internet," Thomson said in an interview with the newspaper The Australian.

"It's certainly true that readers have been socialized -- wrongly I believe -- that much content should be free," he said. "And there is no doubt that's in the interest of aggregators like Google who have profited from that mistaken perception."

The salvos by Singleton, Murdoch and Thomson appear to have been uncoordinated but they reflect rising anger among an industry facing a

deepening crisis.

Two newspapers, the Rocky Mountain News of Denver, Colorado, and the Seattle Post-Intelligencer, have shut down in recent weeks and several big newspaper groups have declared bankruptcy, including the Tribune Co., publisher of the Chicago Tribune, Los Angeles Times and other dailies.

Hearst Corp., owner of the San Francisco Chronicle, has threatened to shut down the paper unless unions agree to major staff cuts and The New York Times Co. has threatened to close the Boston Globe unless unions there do the same.

According to the NAA, last year was the worst ever for the US newspaper industry with print [advertising revenue](#) falling 17.7 percent and even online advertising revenue dropping -- by 1.8 percent.

The decline in print advertising revenue has been exacerbated by the global recession but the more fundamental problem according to media analysts is that the business model that has sustained the industry for decades is broken.

The counter-attack by US newspaper owners has met with a mixed reaction from analysts, with some saying it's about time they went on the legal offensive to defend copyright and others saying they're wasting their time.

"What the AP is doing now, like many newspapers, is too little too late in recognizing the threat of the Internet," said Tom McPhail, professor of media studies at the University of Missouri, St. Louis.

"The court system is too slow for their needs and purposes," McPhail told AFP. "They need a short term victory and that isn't going to

happen."

Peter Kafka, writing on his blog MediaMemo, derided the efforts.

"AP shakes fist at Google. Tells Internet to get off its damn lawn," read the headline on a post Kafka wrote about the AP threat to go after websites that use its content or that of its member newspaper without permission.

A Google lawyer, Alexander Macgillivray, on Tuesday defended the practice of linking to newspaper articles from Google News, saying it was driving traffic to newspaper websites and providing them with advertising revenue.

Google chief executive Eric Schmidt walked into the lion's den himself on Tuesday, appearing before the assembled newspaper executives in San Diego just a day after the AP chairman issued his rallying cry.

Schmidt said the reality is the "vast majority" of readers are going to opt for news for free and that newspapers should see Google as a partner and not as a rival as they try to increase their online advertising revenue.

"We have to embrace what users want together and by doing that I think we can win big," he said.

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