

Newsday to charge online fees for non-subscribers

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(AP) -- Newsday will start charging some readers \$5 per week for access to its Web site beginning next Wednesday, a move many newspapers have been contemplating but few have yet to try for fear of driving readers away.

Rather than looking to find a significant new revenue source online, though, Newsday's parent company, Cablevision Systems Corp., hopes the move will make subscriptions to the printed newspaper and its Internet access service more attractive. Customers of either will still get the Long Island newspaper's site for free.

Cablevision said it already reaches about 75 percent of Long Island households with either or both services, meaning it won't be charging those it considers its core readers.

"We recognize that our overall (Web) traffic is going to decline," said Debby Krenek, Newsday's managing editor and senior vice president for digital media. "But we're really focused on our Long Island audience."

Newsday plans to start restricting Web access to non-subscribers beginning next Wednesday - though the home page, classified ads, weather, movies, stocks, obituaries, school closings and community programs will still be accessible for free.

The newspaper, the 12th top-selling newspaper in the U.S. with average Monday-Friday circulation of about 368,000, has stepped up efforts to

improve the site this year, creating features to sort news by ZIP code and offering customized updates on different topics. It also added a high-definition video player.

Cablevision, which acquired Newsday from Tribune Co. last year, indicated in February that it was contemplating Web access fees.

Newspaper publishers, including The New York Times and the Star Tribune of Minneapolis, are increasingly considering fees for at least some of their online content as a way to boost revenue in light of steep declines in print advertising.

But many are also worried that such a pay wall could push readers to abandon newspaper Web sites for free options elsewhere. That, in turn, would drive down ad revenue.

Still, the growth of online revenue has not kept pace with the decline in print advertising, which quickened during the recession. Many readers and advertisers are shifting to the Web, but competition there is higher and online ad rates are typically much lower than those for print.

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