

British press group launches charges for online news

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A British newspaper group started charging for online content on Monday in a groundbreaking experiment which will be closely watched by an industry battling falling advertising revenues.

Johnston Press is charging readers of three of its regional publications five pounds (5.50 euros, 8.25 dollars) for three months of complete web access.

The websites of another three of the group's titles will direct readers back to the actual newspaper after a summary of each story.

The company -- which owns more than 300 regional papers including The Scotsman and the Yorkshire Post -- is the first regional publisher in Britain to ask readers to pay for its online news.

The three titles that will start charging are the Northumberland Gazette and Whitby Gazette in England, and the Southern Reporter in Scotland.

The trial comes as Rupert Murdoch's [News Corp.](#) has indicated it will introduce some form of charging next year for the online content of titles including The Sun, The Times and The Sunday Times.

Murdoch has prompted a fierce debate among media watchers by accusing [Google](#) of "stealing" from his vast newspaper empire by offering content for free.

The Financial Times already charges a subscription for full access to its website.

Northumberland Gazette editor Paul Larkin said: "It is exciting for us as journalists to be at the forefront of this venture. All eyes in the media world are on us."

Johnston Press' latest half year results showed total advertising revenues fell by 32.7 percent compared to the previous year, as advertisers increasingly rely on the Internet.

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