

# Hearst looks to digital readers of the future

December 5 2009, by Chris Lefkow

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Pedestrians walk past the new Hearst Tower in 2008 in New York City. With an eye on the readers of the future, US publisher Hearst Corp. announced plans Friday to launch a digital newsstand, advertising service and electronic reader for newspapers and magazines.

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Hearst, whose stable includes the San Francisco Chronicle and Houston Chronicle newspapers as well as Esquire, Cosmopolitan and Good Housekeeping magazines, said the platform known as "Skiff" is expected to debut next year.

As print [advertising](#) revenue evaporates and circulation erodes, US newspaper and magazine publishers have been looking to carve out a future on the Internet and with e-readers and mobile devices.

Online advertising revenue has been disappointing, however, and advertisers and readers have been generally underwhelmed by the presentation of newspapers and magazines on e-readers and smartphones.

Skiff's stated goal is to "connect publishers and marketers with consumers" and to deliver "enhanced content experiences" to dedicated e-readers as well as smartphones and the low-cost laptop computers known as netbooks.

Skiff would provide advertising alongside [newspaper](#) or magazine articles -- a feature that is not currently offered by e-readers on the market such as Amazon's Kindle, which is tailored more to [e-books](#) than periodicals.

"The Kindle's a closed system," Skiff president Gilbert Fuchsberg told AFP in a telephone interview. "Publishers are looking for good alternatives, an alternative eco-system.

"We're responding to a clear need of publishers," he said. "Newspapers and magazines today generate the majority of their revenue from advertising.

"So to bring those businesses into this category in a bigger way requires that advertising be part of the mix," Fuchsberg said.

"It's been part of our design and strategy from day one and it needs to be to create a viable long-term business model for periodical content," he said.

Fuchsberg said there will "dedicated devices" for Skiff and it will "also show up in a range of devices that will come to the market over the next year."

Skiff said telecom carrier Sprint has signed on to provide 3G wireless connectivity for its dedicated e-reading devices in the United States.

Advertisers have decried the lack of color in e-readers but Fuchsberg said he expects color devices that feature the Skiff service on the market before the end of 2010.

Skiff would involve other publishers besides Hearst and would feature e-books and blogs in addition to newspapers and magazines, Fuchsberg said.

"It's not intended to be a Hearst-only platform," he said.

"We'll have a competitive e-books offering," he added. "We think e-books are an important component of a broad e-reading service.

"Consumers want to have the ability to get anything they want to read from any e-reading service they join," the Skiff president said.

"People are not going to carry a separate device for newspapers and magazines and a different device for e-books," he said. "They want to get access to their content on whatever device they want to consume it on."

The launch of Skiff follows reports that Hearst was partnering with other major publishers Time Inc., Conde Nast Publications Inc. and Meredith Corp. to launch an online newsstand described as an "iTunes for magazines."

According to The New York Times, the new venture would offer print and electronic copies of their magazines from a single website.

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