

The Times starts charging for online content

July 2 2010, by Katherine Haddon



A man is seen looking at The Times newspaper's new website. One of Britain's most famous newspapers, The Times, started charging readers to access its website Friday, the first non-specialist daily here to do so.

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It will now cost one pound (1.4 dollars, 1.2 euros) for a daily subscription or two pounds for a weekly one to The Times or sister publication The Sunday Times, owned by media baron Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation.

With newspaper sales around the world in decline and advertising increasingly moving online, owners have been searching for profitable business models for struggling newspapers, many of which have been

forced to close in recent years.

Last August, Murdoch announced plans to charge for all his firm's news websites.

Business paper The [Financial Times](#) makes readers pay for online content, while the [Wall Street Journal](#) -- also part of Murdoch's media empire -- is currently the only major US paper charging readers for full access online.

The [New York Times](#) announced in January that it would start charging for online content in early 2011.

Rebekah Brooks, chief executive of News Corporation's main British subsidiary News International, said it was the start of the new era.

"We believe the new sites offer real value and we look forward to continuing to invest and innovate for readers," she said.

Figures from Britain's Audit Bureau of Circulations for May, the most recent available, show the circulation of all British quality daily papers falling year-on-year.

The figure for The Times was 515,379, down nearly 13 percent, while The Sunday Times stood at 1,117,749, a drop of over six percent.

Experts warn that newspapers are taking a gamble by launching paywalls, while predicting many more will be forced to do so.

"I expect that we will see more paywalls in the future, but many of them will fail to produce desired results," Robert G. Picard, a media economics expert from Sweden's Jonkoping International Business School, told AFP.

"Paywalls will only work if the news and information behind the wall is not available elsewhere for free -- such as television, radio, free papers, or the Internet -- or if it is of such high quality or adds services not available in print versions."

Robin Goad of Experian Hitwise, a firm which monitors web traffic, told BBC radio that traffic to The Times website had fallen significantly since it started asking readers to register in May, ahead of the charging deadline.

"Since the registration wall has gone live, we've seen about a 60 percent drop in traffic over the last couple of weeks," he said, adding this was "probably a little bit less" than had been expected.

Earlier this week, a survey by YouGov SixthSense found that 60 percent of British adults thought it was worth paying for a "good newspaper" -- but 83 percent said they would refuse to pay for online content.

A greater proportion of young people aged between 16-24 said they were willing to pay for online newspaper access, though.

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