

German Internet community cries foul over Google news law

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"This draft is completely backward," fumed Bernhard Rohleder, director general of Bitkom, the German federation representing high-tech industries.

"We understand that [media](#) firms are looking for new ways to make money" when pitted against the Internet and free press, but a new tax "cannot be a substitute for developing genuine strategies for the digital

era," he added.

The [draft legislation](#), dubbed the "lex [Google](#)" as it targets mainly the Internet giant's "[Google News](#)" service, has recently been drawn up by Chancellor Angela Merkel's centre-right coalition.

Demanded for many years by powerful media groups such as Axel Springer and Bertelsmann, the government will put before parliament a law forcing Google and certain blogs and other sites to remunerate the papers providing the content.

The media groups argue that a user of "Google [News](#)" can simply read the short summaries offered on the front page to get his or her fix of the daily news, rather than clicking through to the paper concerned.

The US Internet giant, so the argument goes, therefore benefits via advertising without paying a penny for the actual content.

On the other side of the fence is an unusual coalition bringing together Google and campaigners for [Internet freedom](#), who say the papers receive more clicks from the service and also gain more visibility.



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firms for content.

[Eric Schmidt](#), the executive chairman of Google, who opened the [CeBIT](#) high-tech fair along with the leaders of Germany and Brazil, said the tax "could slow the development of the Internet," according to local news agency DPA.

"It's a bit like the Yellow Pages paying companies for showing consumers their names and addresses," said the blogger Stefan Niggemaier, who believes the tax is akin to a government hand-out to the rich and powerful media lobby.

Bitkom's Rohleder said that two scenarios were now possible, both catastrophic in his view.

The first would be that "Google closes down its news service in Germany."

"The other is that Google and the media barons come to some sort of understanding. But it is very unlikely that the other sites apart from Google would be able to pay.

"They would probably go under ... which would result in a media monopoly organised by the state," he said.

The tax would hit not just behemoths like Google, but also small news sites for cultural information such as "Perlentaucher", whose co-founder Thierry Chervel told German radio recently that this "absurd" draft would never get the green light from the country's top court.

Media lobby groups VDZ and BDZV are, perhaps unsurprisingly, in

favour of the "lex Google", deeming it "indispensable to protect journalists' work" and to assure "the survival of an independent press."

For its part, the German media union DJV has adopted a more measured tone, calling for journalists to receive themselves an "equitable, transparent and reasonable" part of the proceeds of this tax if it comes into force.

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