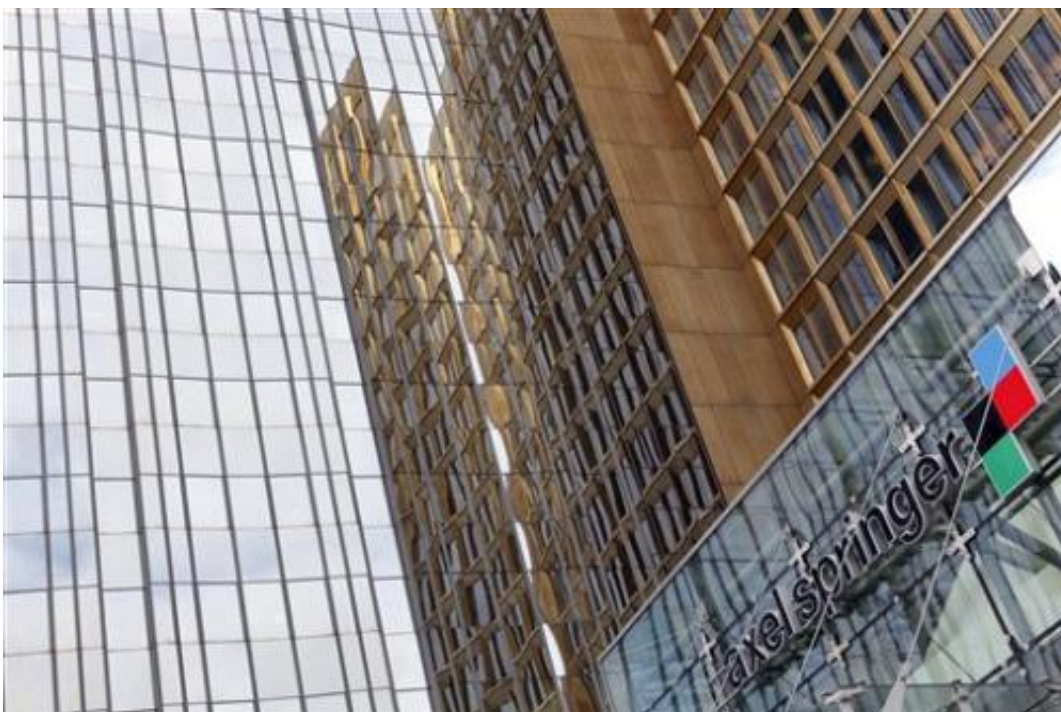


Germany's top-selling tabloid to introduce paywall

May 27 2013, by Juergen Baetz



This March 11, 2009 file picture shows the Axel Springer AG publishing house headquarters, in Berlin. Europe's most-read newspaper is introducing a paywall for part of its online offerings next month. Bild - Germany's top-selling newspaper and Europe's biggest by circulation - says main news stories will remain free of charge online but a subscription will be required to view features, interviews and other exclusive content. The basic digital subscription will cost 4.99 euros (US\$6.50) per month starting June 11 and twice that for a premium version that includes the tabloid as an e-paper. The Axel Springer AG-owned newspaper will also offer readers buying a print copy, at 70 euro cents a day, a pass to its online content. The pass is unique to each reader, thanks to a new printing technique. Bild's daily print circulation is about 2.5 million, 200,000

more than Britain's The Sun. (AP Photo/Franka Bruns,File)

Europe's top-selling newspaper said Monday it will introduce a paywall for part of its online offerings starting next month. Main news stories will remain free of charge online, but a subscription will be required to view features, interviews and other exclusive content, German tabloid Bild said.

The basic [digital subscription](#) will cost 4.99 euros (\$6.50) per month starting June 11, and twice that for a premium version that includes the tabloid as an e-paper. The Axel Springer AG-owned newspaper will also offer readers buying a print copy, at 70 euro cents a day, a pass to its online content. The pass will be unique to each paper, thanks to a new [printing technique](#), which the company calls a "world premiere" for the industry.

The move comes as Europe's newspaper publishers struggle to make up for lost [advertisement revenue](#) and shrinking circulation numbers. Analysts say publishers across Europe will be closely watching whether Bild's paywall will succeed, as many of them hope to follow the move of Europe's biggest publishing house.

"It is a change of paradigm toward a culture of paying for journalistic content online," said Donata Hopfen, managing director of Bild's digital division. "It's a mammoth project."

Bild's online offering is currently Germany's No. 1 news website—a position it hopes to defend by hiding only some content behind the paywall. The company decided against a metered paywall—which limits users to a number of free articles per month, a model championed by The [New York Times](#). Instead, Bild will decide on a daily basis which

articles or video products will be labeled as premium content that requires a so-called Bild plus subscription. It is planning to increase the share of paid content over time, hoping that readers will be increasingly ready to pay for it.

"We know it can also go wrong," acknowledged Axel Springer CEO Mathias Doepfner. "But the tendency is clear toward pay models online," he said, adding that it is without alternative to seek opening new revenue streams to fund quality newsgathering and in-depth reporting.

An additional service featuring video footage from soccer games—to which Axel Springer acquired the rights for Germany—will cost an extra 2.99 euros a month—a product the company has high hopes for in football-crazy Germany.

Bild's move is the first significant attempt to make users in Europe's biggest economy pay for reading their news online.

Doepfner said the company has no expectations for the new business to generate millions of euros in new revenues right away.

"We cannot say how many subscriptions we will have. The genius who would have a complete business plan right away, he would get a job with Springer immediately," the CEO said. "We cannot do it."

Germany's other leading news website, Spiegel Online, has so far rejected the idea of a paywall. That appears poised to change following a leadership shake-up earlier this year, but the company has not announced any plans.

Axel Springer launched a test balloon earlier this year and put some content on the website of its daily Die Welt behind a paywall.

"We now sell more digital subscriptions than normal ones. That is encouraging," said Doepfner, without providing specific figures.

Axel Springer also publishes, among others, Poland's biggest tabloid, the conservative daily Fakt. Bild's daily print circulation has been falling for the past few years and now stands at about 2.5 million, 200,000 more than Britain's The Sun.

Rupert Murdoch's British tabloid, which is still struggling from the fallout of a phone hacking scandal that dented its reputation, recently announced plans to implement a paywall, charging 2 pounds (\$3) per week in return for access to the tabloid's website and a package of Premier League soccer highlights.

An increasing number of U.S. newspapers also are starting to charge customers for online content; most recently The Washington Post announced the introduction of a digital subscription plan.

Trends in the European newspaper industry overall appear to follow those set by their U.S. peers, with falling revenues leading to paper closures as readers switch to view their news online or on tablet computers.

Germany's second-largest business daily, Financial Times Deutschland, was shut late last year, and the newspaper Frankfurter Rundschau filed for insolvency and laid off all but a core staff. The German news agency dapd went bankrupt this year, and most newspapers are currently seeking to cut costs amid falling advertisement revenues.

Newspaper readership in Germany has been falling over the past few years. From 2000 to 2011, the daily circulation of all newspapers fell by about 22 percent, from 24 million to 18.9 million copies, according to the BDZV lobby group of newspaper publishers.

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