

Media Contacts Thinks The Times they are a - changin'



News International has decided to pull the plug on free browsing across its Times websites, which were re-launched last week. News International is the first mainstream provider in the UK to try this.

The Times and Sunday Times is losing £250,000 every week as circulations are falling and consumers increasingly migrate to the web where they can read content from both titles for free.

The Times now sells 502,000 copies every day down 16% year on year and the Sunday Times sells 1.1m copies every week down 10% year on year. The latest available data shows that 7.1m unique users access the Times and Sunday Times websites every month. These figures emphasise the challenge for newsprint but also the potential opportunity offered by the web.

From the end of June 2010 both titles will be only be available if readers pay £1 for 1 days access or £2 for a week – just like the days before the internet - if you wanted to read a newspaper, you had to pay for it.

Will it work?

Current research indicates only 9% of consumer's claim they will be willing to pay for access. Commentators speculate that those who will pay will be more upmarket and therefore potentially more attractive to advertisers.

Few expect newspaper circulations to grow in the future so newspapers must find a way to monetise the web if they are to survive.

In the short term at least, The Times websites unique user volume will definitely decline, only time will tell if paying users will grow substantially.