

Free Daily Newspapers

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Closures	Launches	Sweden	Denmark	Poland
Israel, Philippines, Austria (p. 2)	Israel (<i>24 Minutes</i>) & India (<i>Ergo</i>) (p. 2)	<i>Metro</i> again best-read paper (p. 5)	Dagsbrun sells <i>Nyhedsavisen</i> (p. 3)	<i>Metro</i> banned from metro (p. 4)

US METRO SALE

After sales of Metro Finland and Czech Republic also the US branch is up for sale. The operations in Boston (2001), New York (2004) and Philadelphia (2000) have been losing money since launch. The loss in the last year was \$10.6m.

Metro will also cut costs in US; 27 people will lose their jobs. The actions in Boston have been agreed by The New York Times Company, the 49% owner of that operation. Robert Patterson, Executive Vice President, said: "These measures are part of a comprehensive plan to move all of Metro International's US operations to profitability. With this cost-efficient setup we have established a platform from which we can continue to develop Metro in the US." The restructuring costs will deliver annual cost savings of \$4.6m.

Philip Anschutz' Clarity Media, publishing the free Examiner in San Francisco, Baltimore, and Washington, was mentioned as a possible bidder. Anschutz, however, does not want the US Metro papers according to Clarity spokesman Jim Monaghan. Interesting, however, is that Metro has been turned down at least twice already: "Our people responded [to a sales offer for the papers] that they weren't interested". (Denver Business Journal)

After Anschutz, new potential bidders have been mentioned. The obvious choice was 49% Boston owner New York Times. Any sale would be impossible without consulting the minority shareholder. According to MediaBistro the New York Times Company could also be a possible buyer for the New York edition.

The next suspect was Icelandic publisher Dagsbrun, owner of free Boston Now. Our Icelandic sources, however, think this is not very likely because of the current financial situation in Iceland, where an economic crisis could show in the near future.

The sale might look like a desperate move; selling (or even closing) operations is nothing new while the company is also holding minority stakes in some operations. Sale, in total or in part, would move Metro not out of business but more to the franchise organization it already is becoming.

Operations in Argentina, Switzerland, the UK and Poland were closed down as were weekend papers (Sweden, the Netherlands), real estate weeklies (Sweden) and local editions (Spain). Finland was sold in total while also the majority of the shares in the Czech operation were sold. Both editions are now Metro franchises. Also the Korean, Mexican, Russian and Croatian operations are franchises as are some Spanish editions. In Brazil and Canada Metro is a minority shareholder.

Metro brands in Belgium, the UK and Ireland are also part of the global network, although they are owned by other companies and do not even carry the familiar green Metro logo - Metro has a minority stake in the Irish operation. In Denmark Metro owns 70% while also the French and Portuguese operations are not fully owned.

What we see in the US is probably not the exception but the expansion of the franchise model although disappointing sales are the most important factor. A global franchise network would mean joint advertising campaigns, using Metro's International's news service and franchise income.

MediaInfoCenter quoted 'industry insiders' about the New York free dailies. AmNew York (2003) is making a profit while advertising revenues have grown with 12 per cent in 2007. According to the insiders the annual revenues must be between \$18m and \$20m. Metro has seen revenues grow with more than 20 per cent according to publisher Daniel Magnus while it is 'flirting' with being profitable. The insiders estimate the advertising revenues at \$14m. Another 'newspaper source' estimates the monthly losses at \$500,000, which would make 'flirting' pretty difficult.

FDN - BAROMETER

The FDN barometer measures free dailies and circulation, comparing 2005 with February 2008.

Free Dailies 2005 / February 2008 (circ. * 1000)

	Countries		Titles		Circulation	
	2005	2008	2005	2008	2005	2008
Europe	24	31	80	137	15,291	27,227
America's	8	9	44	72	4,439	6,606
Asia/Pac/Afr	7	14	16	36	4,224	7,826
<i>Total</i>	39	54	140	245	23,954	41,659

LAUNCHES

24 Minutes Israel

Jerusalem Post reports that free daily 24 Minutes by paid paper Yediot Ahronot has been launched January 1. With this launch the number of Israeli free dailies has returned to three after the closure of Israeli in 2007. Also Israel Today and afternoon free paper Metro are published.

The new title is the successor of closed down 'Israeli'. The morning edition will look like the closed down paper, the afternoon edition will have a new "24 minutes" look.

Globes reported that the new paper was distributed in railway station without permission of Israeli Railways and that distributors were removed from the stations. Content is taken from Yediot's website Ynet. Israel Today secured the rail distribution contract after the closure of Israeli.

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Metro Halifax

Metro and Transcontinental launched a Halifax edition February 14. The new free daily with a circulation of 25,000 will be the successor of the Halifax Daily News that closed Monday February 11. The edition is the seventh Canadian edition of Metro. (Canadian Press)

First free daily India

On December 10 2007 the first Indian free daily was launched in Chennai (Madras), the fourth biggest city in India. The tabloid Ergo, has a page count of 16 and is published by Kasturi and Sons Ltd, also publisher of paid daily The Hindu and Sportstar. The print run of Ergo is 50,000 while there are a dozen people on the staff of the paper. Ergo is mainly distributed to the target audience: IT professionals in their twenties and thirties.

The publisher is also thinking about launching Ergo in other cities with a high number of IT-professionals, like Bangalore and Hyderabad. (Mint)

Metro International talked to the ABP group. When it became clear that Metro was looking for partners, English language dailies The Times of India (circulation 2.5 million) and the Hindustan Times (1.1 million) joined forces and launched Metro Now in February 2007: a 48-page morning tabloid with a circulation of 85,000 and a cover price of one rupee (less than 2ct). Plans are to increase circulation to 350,000. Metro International needed a partner because foreign firms can only own one quarter of an Indian media company.

Newspaper circulation in India grew from 59 million in 2001 to 79 million in 2005, which makes it one of the fastest growing markets together with China. After China it's the biggest newspaper market in the world.

One million readers for pdf-paper

A new Italian free pdf paper Sera Quotidiano claims a million readers. The Darwin Media Group in Verona publishes the paper that counts 20 pages. The paper started in December and is published from Monday till Friday at 16.30. Readers can download it online or subscribe to it via e-mail or mobile phone.

Pdf's were introduced in 2006 on a worldwide scale but so far without too much success. One of the first efforts: FTpm (also launched as a print product) by the Financial Times was terminated within a few months in 2006.

Dutch Volkskrant 16.00 edition was closed down - only a few thousand subscribers bothered to download the paper. Danish Information's 15.15 pdf disappeared. The page for the Toronto Star P.M. pdf returns an error. Also the Daily Telegraph's afternoon pdf-paper Telegraph PM was closed down.

El Pais' 24 Horas, however, is still around although most issues contain no or hardly any advertising. The same goes for Guardian's G24. German Financial Times Deutschland afternoon pdf FTD 17.00 is available to subscribers to the paper version only.

Free Swiss model moves to Sunday

In Switzerland the market share of free papers is more than 45%, with five national titles in the German speaking part and two in the French speaking part. In Winterthur paid weekly Das Stadtblatt moved to free Sunday distribution in January. Competition from free dailies might have been one of the reasons for the switch; on Sunday there is only competition from paid papers.

Until the end of 2007, the paper was published on Thursdays and did cost three Swiss franks (almost two Euros). Publisher Guido Blumer hopes to break even in two to three years. The paper will home delivered in 46,000 copies. (Persoenlich)

US daily goes all free - part print

Philip Stone's Follow the Media reported on the Capital Times, a paid paper in Madison (Wisconsin, USA) that will move from broadsheet to tabloid and drop four of the six print editions. The two remaining days the paper will be free available in boxes and will be inserted in the morning paper that is also owned by the same publisher.

ORBITUARIES

Israeli

The first free paper in Israel stopped publishing in December 2007. This paper was partly financed by US billionaire Sheldon Adelson but disputes between him and other financiers led to the closure of the paper.

Neue Express

Austrian free daily Neue Express, launched in June 2006 in Innsbruck closed down in October 2007. The paper was published by Moser Holding, publisher of paid papers Tiroler Tageszeitung and Neue Zeitung für Tirol.

Neue Express was the fourth closure in Austria in 2007. Earlier both editions of OK (Graz and Kärnten) by Styria and the Graz edition of Heute were closed down. Circulation in Austria dropped from 830,000 halfway 2007 to 670,000 at the end of the year.

Two national titles remain: Heute with editions in Vienna, Niederösterreich (St. Pölten) and Linz and Österreich with a mixed paid/free model and editions in Vienna and Oberösterreich (Linz, Wels, Steyr). In the Linz area Österreich and Heute compete with Oberösterreichs Neue from local publisher Wimmer Verlag, also publisher of local paid paper Oberösterreichische Nachrichten.

Free dailies in Austria also compete with the free weeklies. Styria and Moser, closing their free dailies, plan to incorporate their free weekly newspaper activities in "Regionalmedien Austria AG". Both publishers own free weeklies in several parts of Austria.

Standard Xpress

Manila free daily Standard Xpress was closed down in November, a year after it was launched. Xpress was the answer by paid paper The Standard to the free daily Inquirer Libre, by The Inquirer.

Libre was one of the first free dailies launched in Asia, in November 2001. The paper survived not only Xpress but also free paper Pasa 'Yo, which was published in 2005 and 2006. Pasa 'Yo was launched in February 2005 by Anthony Abaya, a supporter of president Gloria Arroyo. In some reports, however, it is referred to as a weekly. It apparently closed down in the beginning of 2006.

PLANS

Springer's cheap Sunday compact

Publisher Axel Springer, owner of Europe's best selling newspaper Bild Zeitung, is thinking of launching a cheap compact Sunday newspaper. The model of broadsheet Die Welt and cheap tabloid Welt Kompakt (also by Springer) will be used for Bild am Sonntag and BamS Kompakt as well. (Persoenlich)

Springer is the most outspoken adversary of free newspapers in Germany. In 1999-2001 the publisher countered 20 Minuten by Schibsted in Cologne while it has plans ready to counter any entrepreneur that wants to launch a free daily in Germany.

Instead of free, German publishers went for the 'cheap' model, so far without too much success. Direkt in Cologne by DuMont Schauberg was closed down, 20 Cents by Holtzbrinck is not attracting much advertising while News by the same publisher converted to the free Business News and closed within a year.

Only Welt Kompakt seems to have some success although the publisher does not break out separate data for the circulation of Welt and Welt Kompakt. Joined circulation increased from 250,000 in 2005 to 275,000 - the increase can probably be attributed to Welt Kompakt.

Bild went down from 3.7 million in 2005 to 3.3 million in 2007 - in 1995 it sold 4.5 million copies. Bild am Sonntag had a circulation of 2.1 million in 2003 and was down to 1.8 million in 2006 - no data were submitted for 2007 yet.

20 Minutos Brazil?

According to Brazilian economic magazine Valor Econômico, Norwegian publisher Schibsted is looking for partners in Brazil to launch their daily concept 20 Minutes. Partners are needed in Brazil because foreign ownership is limited to 30%. Also Destak (by Cofina) and Metro in São Paulo have Brazilian partners. (Midiablog)

CIRCULATION & READERSHIP

First UK 2008 circulation

Metro distributed 1,364,000 copies in January 2008. London Lite had a circulation of 399,000 while the London paper distributed 501,000 copies. Business free paper City AM had a circulation of 84,000. The Sun (3 million) and The Daily Mail (2 million) have the highest circulation in the UK. Metro is 4th behind the Daily Mirror (1.4 million readers). (Publicitas)

Czech 2007 circulation

Free Czech daily Metro saw its readership increase to 393,000 from 387,000 in 2006. Ringier free daily 24 Hodin now has now 200,000 readers (156,000 in 2006) while Metropolitní Expres has 202,000 readers (not audited in 2006). Metro is the 4th paper in the country after Blesk, MF Dnes and Pravo - all lost readers. (Publicitas).

Metro best read Swedish daily

With 1.571,000 daily readers Metro is Sweden's best-read paper in the last four months of 2007. Paid papers Aftonbladet (1,255,000 readers), Expressen (1,040,000 readers) and Dagens Nyheter are 2nd, 3rd and 4th. The second Swedish free daily City had 600,000 readers, while Punkt SE followed with 594,000 readers. In Stockholm Metro leads with 650,000 readers before City (512,000) and Punk.se (338,000).

Metro Sweden is also starting a partnership with May Way 'fast shops'. Within one year 80 shops will be opened while aiming at 200 shops by 2009.

Compared to 2006 Metro lost some readers, although the national (riks) edition had more readers than in 2006. Stockholm City also lost readers compared to last year while Punkt SE gained readers in the first full year. According to Schibsted, the readership of Punkt SE "shows good growth in recent readership reports. However, there is a time lag before this materializes into increased sales, as expected".

Israel Today up

Israel Today, the free newspaper owned by American billionaire Sheldon Adelson is according to the last TGI readership audit the third paper in Israel. The paper reached 15 per cent of the population. Total newspaper readership has not changed; indicating that the paper is stealing readers from paid papers - or their readers are reading paid newspapers at the same time. Yediot Ahronot is still the best-read paper, Ma'ariv is second.

Portuguese readership Q4 2007

Metro is the third best-read daily in Portugal and Destak is the fourth after paid dailies Jornal de Noticias and Correio da Manhã. Both have a readership of over one million. Metro has 773,000 daily readers (9.3% of population) while Destak had 739,000 readers (8.9%). Free daily Meia Hora, launched last June, had 241,000 readers (2.9% of population) while Global Noticias, launched in September had 291,000 readers (3.5% reach).

Dutch frees increase circulation

Amsterdam public transport company GVB and free newspaper Spits (Telegraaf Media Group) renewed their contract. Spits will be available in trams, busses, subways and ferries in the next years too. Circulation will be more than half a million copies also because of distribution in 130 Plus supermarkets, more schools and universities.

Metro increased circulation with 5,000 copies by distributing in 54 shops of retailer Jan Linders in the Southeast of the country. The paper was already distributed in stores of retailer Super De Boer, a nationwide chain with more than 300 shops. In 2007 Metro increased distribution 550,000 copies.

The average circulation will be less - circulation in the summer months and during holidays is usually less. The average circulation for Spits for the first three quarters of 2007 was 413,000; Metro distributed 509,000 copies, De Pers 475,000 and DAG 334,000 copies.

The circulation increase, however, is still remarkable because in 2007 two new titles were launched on the Dutch market. Total circulation is 1.73 million, almost a third of the total Dutch newspaper circulation.

In the last readership audit data Spits had 1.85 million readers against 1.95 for Metro; De Pers had 705,000 readers while DAG was not audited.

With rising competition, finding new distribution channels is a clear trend. In the Netherlands the last free paper, DAG, by PcM publishers and telecom operator KPN, is distributed in the retail chain (750 shops) of Albert Heijn. Also in other countries (Spain, Switzerland, Estonia, Iceland) retailers, gas stations or even books shops and newsstands are used to distribute free dailies. In the Netherlands Spits is distributed through AKO newsstands while De Pers is available in Bruna bookshops.

If retailers normally selling paid papers are accepting offers to distribute free dailies, this would mean they don't fear too much competition from free papers or do not sell too many of them anyway (or are very well compensated).

HOY New York

Impremedia took over the New York edition and Fin de Semana from the Tribune Company last year. HOY New York publisher Jorge L. Ayala now contains more local content than before. The paper does not cooperate with the editions in Chicago and Los Angeles. Circulation of the paper is 41,500 while the readership is over 200,000. (Portada)

Metro 2007 results

For 2007 Metro International reported an operating loss of \$15.2m excluding a disputed Advertising Tax provision in Sweden of \$10.2m and a net gain of \$4.7m from the sale of 60% of Metro Czech Republic. In 2006 Metro reported a profit. There was a 8.8% year-on-year increase in net sales to \$453m (2006: \$416.5m). Operating profits (before disputed taxes) were delivered in 10 out of 14 operations, with the exception of the Czech Republic, Spain, the US and Bostad. (Metro International)

Metro editions will use CNN content for the upcoming US elections from Super Tuesday February 5 on - when half of the US population participated in the primaries. The joint effort of all editions is another sign of strengthening the global brand of Metro and work together on content.

New design for DAG

Dutch free daily DAG introduced a new design. DAG struggled as last kid on the block but also it had a very 'red top' design, dominated by one picture. The new 'more subtle' design is meant to 'upgrade' the paper, attract more 25-34 higher education readers and make the front page more a 'reading' page.

The 4th national free daily is competing with established brands Metro and Spits and 'quality' free paper De Pers, launched in January of 2007. DAG was launched in May 2007 by PCM Publishers. Both Metro and Spits have almost 2 million readers - De Pers was read by 700,000 people. There are no audited readership data for DAG yet. The new Dutch readership data are expected within one month. Together the four free dailies have a circulation of 1.8 million and a market share of more than 30 percent in the Netherlands.

DAG will also provide news for the Mia Media network, mainly active in health institutions in the Netherlands. The in-house TV screens will give viewers information about the institution itself. DAG is also providing news for narrowcasters ON en TENQ. In total the three networks have an audience of more than 300,000.

MatinPlus becomes DirectMation

Paris free paper MatinPlus, by the Bolloré Group and Le Monde (30%) changed its name to DirectMatin on January 18. With the new name it moves closer to the 'Direct' brand of Bolloré's commercial TV channel Direct 8 and to the free evening paper DirectSoir.

On the 11th the last issue of MatinPlus was published. Next Monday the 'Direct' name appeared in small print left above the title. On Monday January 18 the new title was fully introduced, the 'Plus' brand is still in small print to the right of the masthead. With maintaining the Plus-brand the paper will still be part of the plus-network with free dailies in Marseille, Bordeaux, Lille, Lyon and Bretagne.

France 20 minutes print profits

The French edition of free daily 20 minutes reports a profit of €400,000 for the print edition in 2007, the first time since launch in 2002. The combined print and internet activities result in a loss of €1.6m. Total revenues for 2007 amount to €44.8m. In 2006 there was a loss of €5.1m. The positive results are attributable to cost-saving plans implemented in 2007. (Nouvelle Observateur)

G + J buys all of FT Deutschland

German publisher Gruner + Jahr, owned by the Bertelsman Group, will acquire the shares of Financial

Times Deutschland. G + J was already owning 50%. FT Deutschland also publishes the light free version FTD Kompakt, distributed in first class trains. The free version started five years ago with a circulation of 40,000 but is now down to 8,000 to 10,000 copies. FT Deutschland will be operated under a franchise contract with Financial Times owner Pearson. (Persoenlich)

Metro strategy

At the Free Newspaper Seminar in Dublin, organized by Metro Ireland, Metro International CEO Per Mikael Jensen talked about the new strategy of the company, which will put more emphasis on the global brand, so more news from headquarters in London. More journalists will be working from London in the near future. Because of the global brand and the 25 million daily readers Metro can interview people like Al Gore, Bill Gates and the Clintons and publish these interviews on a near-global scale. In total Metro employs more than 500 journalists.

In March the new Metro website will be launched. France will have the first go on that.

Belarmino García leaves Vocento

The CEO of the Spanish media group Vocento, Belarmino García, was forced to step down from his position. Official explanation was that he stepped for personal reasons but according to El Confidential Digital the board of directors forced him to. The CEO was said to be not familiar enough with the media sector. One of the actions of Belarmino García was the acquisition of free daily Qué! from the Recoletos group.

Swiss battle undecided yet

Swiss media watchers are convinced that the market is not big enough for the last two additions to the Swiss free market .ch and News. According to the Persoenlich newsletter, one of them has to go "in the next recession."

Distribution of .ch is said to be weak while News is profiting from the editorial force of the publishers behind the operation were .ch is running as an independent company. As News is seen as a spoiler product, it is expected that it will close down if .ch will. No readership or official circulation data are available for both papers.

Lund takes over Nyhedsavisen

Investor Morten Lund has taken control over Danish free paper Nyhedsavisen after buying 51% of the shares from Dagsbrun Media, owned by the Icelandic Baugur group. Lund was one of the early investors in Skype and invested also in dozens of other Internet start-ups.

Nyhedsavisen was launched in October 2006. The paper was introducing a home delivery system like Icelandic free paper Frettabladid (also by Dagsbrun). It was an expensive business plan, also because it had a Saturday edition and employed far more journalists (more than a 100) than commuter free dailies MetroXpress and Urban.

Although readership and revenues are both rising, Nyhedsavisen is still losing money. According to Danish paper Berlingske, Nyhedsavisen lost 420m Danish crowns (€56m) in 2007. Both Lund and Dagsbrun will invest in the paper and expect break-even in November 2008. The price of the 51% is said to be only 1 crown.

Nyhedsavisen will close the Odense edition and stop home delivery in that area as well.

David Trads, editor in chief of Nyhedsavisen stepped down after the take-over. In order to reach break-even the company is letting go half of the staff. Trads always was a

defender of the 'quality' model with a substantial staff - which might explain his leave. Trads is going to work for competitor Berlingske Officin. (Business.dk)

Mecom Netherlands cuts jobs

European newspaper conglomerate Mecom is cutting cost in the Dutch operation by sacking 80 people at the two regional newspapers in the Southern province of Limburg. Also the company is planning to sell free weekly De Trompetter (circulation more than one million), distributed in the Southern provinces of Limburg and Noord-Brabant.

In Denmark Mecom also owns free newspaper Urban that is integrating its operations with paid paper Berlingske, also to save money. Mecom CEO David Montgomery earlier launched a free home delivered paper in Denmark, Dato, but closed the paper after half a year. Apart from launching (and closing) Dato, Montgomery's main job is cutting costs in all operations.

In the beginning of January the share price of Mecom dropped by almost 50 per cent. The company said that earnings would be 'within expectations' but later revealed that it had higher costs than expected and wanted to divest some operations. Mecom's share dropped to a third of their value within a year. (FT)

De Pers cutting costs

Dutch free daily De Pers celebrated its first anniversary on January 23 but as the paper spent more money than expected in the first year, 2008 will be the year of truth. The contracts of at least half a dozen columnists were ended while there will be also other costs cuts according to an internal memo according to Business News Radio.

Publisher Cornelis van den Berg, however, denied that sacking columnists had anything to do with cost cutting; their quality was simply not good enough. He told BNR new columnists will be hired. Costs, however, might not be the problem. Income is more problematic as De Pers is still performing weak in terms of ad sales.

Owner Marcel Boekhoorn has been talking with at least four publishers in the Netherlands, but according to publisher Van den Berg never about selling the paper, suggesting that other parties wanted to buy De Pers: "there must be other parties interested because De Pers has a unique position in the Dutch media landscape. If somebody is prepared to spend a lot of money, Marcel is business man enough to let the paper go." This, in fact, is not very likely, particularly if 'a lot of money' is involved.

Owner Marcel Boekhoorn, one of the richest men in the Netherlands, is "reasonable satisfied" with De Pers according to Van den Berg. The paper has seen its circulation go up to 450,000 while it had 700,000 readers in 2007. It introduced a Saturday edition in September.

Canada wants new ownership rules

Canada's broadcasting regulator CRTC wants to introduce new media ownership rules. One company will only be permitted to control two media outlets in the same market. The Canadian Media Guild said the regulator "has blown a chance to address Canada's highly concentrated media landscape" because the market is already highly concentrated. The rules are not retroactive. Now CanWest and Quebecor control media, including paid and free dailies in most major markets in Canada. (AFP)

New rules on Calgary paper boxes

Canadian city Calgary will increase the fees for papers racks and limit the number of racks in the streets to 7000.

The city council was concerned about newspaper boxes blocking sidewalks and increasing litter in the streets.

Although the new rules are not directed to free dailies, the launch of free dailies Metro, 24 Hours and RushHour in 2007 has made the problem more visible. Apart from the free dailies also free non-daily publications and paid papers are distributed through racks.

There were 8,750 newspaper box permits issued in 2007, up from 4,600 a year earlier. Fees will go up from \$10 to \$50 per box. Paid paper Calgary Herald is in favor of only permitting paid papers to use racks. (Calgary Herald)

Warsaw metro to ban Metro

The Warsaw subway operators announced that all free papers racks in or near the subway stations have to be removed. The racks are operated by the Polish Metro (Agora) who pays a fee for the racks. Reason is according to the authorities that racks could be used for other purposes (terrorist attacks?) and might get in the way if the subway has to be evacuated.

As all newspaper racks are open and accessible and anybody can see what's in it, they do not seem to be a very obvious place to hide a bomb. In most subway stations racks are not in walking corridors or before doors - but that might be different in Warsaw. The obvious thing would be moving them if they are in the wrong place.

Complaints about free papers in subway or train stations were mostly about waste (London) or even fires and floods (New York) but that they would be removed as a tactical move in the war on terror is probably new.

Free paper waste

Both thelondonpaper and London Lite started recycling newspapers discarded by the public in a deal struck with Westminster City Council. The publishers pay the £35,000 bill to provide Westminster with 70 newspaper-recycling bins at 56 spots in the West End. The publishers will also be responsible for emptying them and recycling of around 400 tonnes of newspapers per year. (Press Gazette)

Artist Sumer Erek will erect a house in London build from discarded free newspapers. The project will be dependent on the public bringing in as much papers as they can.

On February 27, a walkabout to gather free newspapers will be organized. Aim is to gather 10,000 newspapers and display them at City Hall near Tower Bridge.

Free SA Times sold in newsstands

Free weekday paper The Times, delivered to Sunday Times subscribers in South Africa is moving towards a paid model as well. The paper will be available in newsstands for 3.50 Rand in the Gauteng area (Johannesburg). The paper hopes to attract people that will take a subscription later - in which case they will get the daily for free.

Publisher Avusa's CEO Prakash Desai said that The Times had cost Avusa R21m (€2m) in the first four months since its June launch. It had helped drive up Sunday Times subscriptions by 20,000. (AllAfrica)

Metro Holland in audio

Also blind people can hear the Dutch Metro. In cooperation with website www.slechtziend.nl a special tool, the 'Orion webbox' will be distributed. With this blind people and people with 'low vision' can access Metro's audio files every weekday.

Italian ad revenues

Ad revenues for Italian media have increased with almost 3 per cent in January - November 2007, compared to the year before. Free dailies City, Leggo, Metro, 24 Minuti and EPolis had a joint ad revenue of €114.5m.

Ringier targets the Ukraine

Swiss publisher Ringier is promoting their tabloid Blik in the Ukraine by distributing every Monday 150,000 copies for free. A team of 200 promoters will be on the streets of Kiev every Monday. With other actions (sweepstakes) the publisher is trying to boost paid circulation on other weekdays as well. Blik was launched in May 2006 and has a circulation of 93,000 on weekdays.

Ringier owns tabloid Blick in home market Switzerland where it also publishes magazines and free newspapers 'heute' and Cash Daily. The Blick concept is also published in Hungary (Blikk) and Serbia (Blic). In the Czech Republic, Serbia, and Romania Ringier publishes free dailies: 24 Hodin, 24 Sata and Compact. In the Ukraine Blik competes also with free papers: 15 Minut by KP Media and Obzor by Dutch publisher TMG.

Israel Hayom "not a newspaper"

In the heated Israeli political environment the tensions between Sheldon Adelson's free newspaper Israel Hayom (Israel Today) and the government seems to escalate. Israel Hayom is through its owner Adelson connected to Netanyahu's Likud party.

The paper now accuses the Olmert government of a boycott by refusing to respond to queries from the paper's correspondents. A spokesman from the government denied that but added "I doubt very much that Israel Hayom can be called a newspaper. A 'printed product', I think, better describes Israel Hayom. (Haaretz)

Valerie Decamp to La Tribune

Valerie Decamp, managing director of Metro France since 2002, will become director of French business paper La Tribune. Michaël Bitan, also with Metro since the launch in 2002 will take over from Decamp. La Tribune is owned by entrepreneur Alain Weill since November 2007.

Looking for a job? Grab a paper!

Until 2006 newspapers in the Netherlands were losing ground when it came to finding a job. In 2003 61% of people looking for a job went for a newspaper, 56% went online. In 2005 newspapers lost the first place to online. In 2006 and 2007 online is still no. 1 but newspapers went from 46% in 2006 to 52% in 2007. According to the researchers of the Intelligence Group who interviewed 16,000 people, free newspapers might be responsible for the growing popularity of the newspaper.

Simpson's dominate Metro Canada

The Simpson's' hometown Springfield Shopper was published as an advertising wrap for the Simpson DVD movie release. The ad ran on Tuesday December 18 in the English language editions of Metro Canada. The issue can be downloaded from Metropoint.com.

There have been discussions about the dependence on advertising by free papers, mainly because it could hurt an independent editorial policy on advertisers. It was interesting therefore to read the review on the Simpson movie by Rick McGinnis in the same issue. McGinnis rates the movie with 3 stars out of 5, and while he had some 'decent laughs', he was not impressed by the movie, the article ran under the headline "Simpsons

Movie too little, too late". So no moving too close to the advertiser in this case.

Eureka Reporter from 7 to 5 days

The US local free daily Eureka Reporter will move from a seven to a five-day schedule in 2008. The Monday and Tuesday editions will be dropped because of disappointing ad sales. Also some comics and the weekly TV-book will be dropped. The title is introducing a new website next week while the paper can also be read online as e-paper. (Editor & Publisher)

Metro sells Czech operation

The majority (60%) of the shares of the Czech Metro were sold to competitor Mafra, owned by German publisher Rheinische Post. Metro will be operated under a trademark license. The paper will be merged in the near future with Mafra's free daily Metropolitni Expres.

Metro is the best read free daily in the Czech Republic before 24 Hodin and Metropolitni Expres. In December business free paper E15 was launched in Prague. There is also competition from paid papers; with 341,000 readers Metro was the 5th paper in the country.

There were frequent management changes in the Czech operation, but apparently no profits, although Metro reported net sales of €7.4m in 2006. The Czech Metro was the first outside Sweden. It was launched in 1997. In 2006 regional distribution started. There are 78 employees working for Metro. Mafra will offer joint advertising in Dnes, Lidové Noviny and Metro. As Metropolitni Expres was not mentioned, it could mean that this paper will be closed down.

US new free titles

Some local new (almost) free dailies have emerged in the US last year. The Boca Raton News in Boca Raton (Fl.) is planning to go all free in 2008. The paper has a circulation of 25,000 on Sundays and 10,000 on weekdays. In racks the paper costs 25c (weekday, 75c Sunday) but it is also home-delivered for free in some neighborhoods.

The East Valley Tribune (Phoenix, Arizona) moved in October to a part-free model. The paper got a tabloid wrap-around with local and national news that is also available for free in racks. Total circulation is 102,000 but how much of the 'lite' version is given away is not clear. With drop-offs in 500 locations it must be at least 20,000.

A model somewhat similar to Boca Raton is applied by The Messenger in Mount Airy (N.C.). The paper is distributed to homes for free but is paid-for in racks. (free-daily blog)

Also new is the Sky-Hi Daily News (Colorado Mountain News Media), the 6th daily of the chain in Colorado. It was launched after acquisition of Granby Ski-Hi News, Winter Park Manifest and Middle Park Times (Kremmling) by Colorado Mountain News Media. The Daily News succeeds the weekly Granby paper. The Middle Park Times is published as a weekly while the Manifest folded.

RESEARCH

Europe: growth and decline

Nine countries in Europe might be defined - in terms of free newspapers - as mature markets: Iceland, Denmark, Sweden, Greece, the Netherlands, Spain, Italy, the Czech Republic, and Switzerland. Free dailies were introduced at least six years ago while they have a substantial market share, at least 25% of total newspaper circulation. In five of these markets circulation went down in 2007.

In the Netherlands, Switzerland, Iceland and Greece, circulation is still growing. In the last two countries growth is rather slow in the last years; in the Netherlands and Switzerland, growth is spectacular, mostly because of the launch of two national titles in both countries in 2007.

In the other five markets, free newspaper circulation is going down, mostly because of closures of papers in the last year. In the Czech Republic Kuryr closed down while Metropolitni Expres is about to close down. In Sweden Bonnier closed one of its City editions, in Spain and Italy sports papers folded while in Denmark the number of titles went down from nine in 2006 to four in 2007.

Free newspapers and politics

Paid newspapers always have been regarded as being important for society. Most of all because they offer news and opinions so readers can participate in discussions about politics. Whether free newspapers can play the same role is not clear. They often don't offer editorials, try to be as neutral as possible, have less news and don't publish too much background and investigative news.

Professor Stig Hjarvard from the Copenhagen University asked readers how they evaluated paid and free newspapers in this respect: do they really see free dailies as more neutral or do recognize political views in these papers as well? And how are voters for different parties distributed over different newspapers in Denmark.

Results show that the readers of Danish free papers resemble the average Danish voter, meaning a similar distribution of left-right voters; which is very different from paid papers. In general readers of free newspapers seem to be more inclined to vote for the 'centrum' party or answer 'don't know' if asked for their political preferences. They also see their papers as more neutral.

Madrid immigrants' media use

The Association for the Understanding of the Immigrant Population released a study about media consumption of Madrid's immigrants. Almost 2,000 immigrants from Latin America, Eastern Europe and Asia was researched. Madrid's total immigrant population is around 630,000.

"The study (...) found that general market free papers achieved the highest penetration among the immigrant community, with 51.2 percent of respondents claiming to read them regularly. Weekly immigrant-focused publications garnered the next highest percentage of readers at 46.7% General Market paid circulation papers took third place, capturing 22% of Madrid's immigrant population." (Portada)

Experiencing newspapers

Newspapers are after radio the most valued medium by Dutch media users, but when paid and free newspapers are not taken together, paid newspapers are the most valued while free newspapers are much less liked.

Dutch newspaper marketing organization Cebuco published a report on different experiences of free and paid newspapers. Background is that (paid) newspapers might see circulation and readership go down but that they are still very much valued by their readers.

Keyword in the research is 'engagement' which expresses the idea that readers are attached to different media for different reasons. Readers express engagement when they call a particular medium their 'favorite', when they are 'close' to them, when they 'miss' it when they are not there, when no other medium can replace it.

Both media seem to fulfill rather different functions for readers. While paid papers are rated much higher on 'giving information' and readers identify themselves more with paid papers which are also much more used to talk about, free dailies score better on 'passing the time'. On items like 'excitement', 'makes me curious' and 'originality' both forms of newspapers scored alike.

Advertising in newspapers is still very valued, when asked about 'new information' and 'useful information' newspapers outranked all other media. When asked whether they 'believed' what was in the ads, newspapers ranked third, just after free weeklies and magazines.

People were also asked what they thought about newspaper websites. They were seen as more recent, more informative and more interesting than printed papers. The printed-paper, however, was seen as a better read, more relaxing and more reliable.

Research on London brands

London has Metro in the morning and London Lite and thelondonpaper in the afternoon. The last two titles were introduced in late summer 2006, Metro was launched in 1999. Lars Thomas Klausch researched for his thesis at the Imperial College in London how readers in London experienced and valued the different 'brands'.

240 respondents were interviewed; half of them read a free paper several times a week or every day. The well-written thesis contains interesting results on how the different brands are seen by the public. Metro, is seen as much more traditional-journalistic than the afternoon papers, while thelondonpaper is seen as more juvenile-modern and London Lite as more stereotype-tabloid.

In general, the two afternoon papers don't seem to be valued very differently. Their content is seen by readers as similar. When people read free papers more often they tend to have a more positive attitude towards the paper, but even non-frequent readers of Metro rate the paper quite high. Non-frequent readers of the afternoon papers have a rather negative attitude towards them.

Also new on the 'resources' page are articles by Ingela Wadbring and myself.

American outlook gloomy

Most newspaper publishers in the US and Canadian fear circulation and ad revenues will drop in 2008. Kubas Consultants surveyed over 500 daily newspaper executives and managers and found that Canadians seemed to be more positive than Americans while publishers of larger newspapers had less confidence in the future than CEO's and managers of smaller papers.

Print advertising will decrease according to most publishers while online, preprint and direct mail is seen as a positive. Cutting costs and improving online is mentioned most often as the main strategies for 2008. About 30 per cent of the publishers plan a format reduction, the same percentage has already done so. Format reduction mostly means cutting a few centimeters off - tabloid switch is only considered by 2 per cent.

Although a third of the publishers are considering a free weekly, less than 10 per cent is really planning this, 10 per cent has already done so. Free dailies are thought about by 20 per cent but only 2.5 per cent are planning to do so (meaning 10 new free dailies for 2008).

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