



UvA-DARE (Digital Academic Repository)

There's still room for freesheets, just not too many

Bakker, P.

Publication date
2009

Published in
PaidContent: UK

[Link to publication](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Bakker, P. (2009). There's still room for freesheets, just not too many. *PaidContent: UK, 2009*. <http://paidcontent.co.uk/article/419-viewpoint-theres-still-room-for-freesheets-just-not-too-many/>

General rights

It is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), other than for strictly personal, individual use, unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

Disclaimer/Complaints regulations

If you believe that digital publication of certain material infringes any of your rights or (privacy) interests, please let the Library know, stating your reasons. In case of a legitimate complaint, the Library will make the material inaccessible and/or remove it from the website. Please Ask the Library: <https://uba.uva.nl/en/contact>, or a letter to: Library of the University of Amsterdam, Secretariat, Singel 425, 1012 WP Amsterdam, The Netherlands. You will be contacted as soon as possible.

There's Still Room For Freesheets, Just Not Too Many

Dr. Piet Bakker

Aug 24, 2009 6:12 PM ET



The [guest contributor](#) is professor of cross-media content in the School of Journalism and Communication at the [Hogeschool, Utrecht](#). Dr Bakker writes at [Newspaper Innovation...](#)

How come that the words of Rupert Murdoch, one of the most unreliable people in newspapers, is taken as a token of truth and a source of sheer wisdom by journalists? Murdoch, who said the WSJ website would go all free after he bought it (which was duly reported) and reversing that policy later by saying that all online news should be paid for? The guy is changing opinions faster than other people change underwear

His latest move - [closing London free daily thelondonpaper](#) - has taken the media by surprise, and leading to headlines suggesting that the paper is already closed down (no, it's not).

The [Financial Times](#) even wrote Freesheet no longer viable model for papers selling news which was slightly off the mark, but I admit that **London cannot support four free dailies in a recession** doesn't sound half as sexy.

FT's Salamander Davoudi also wrote News International's decision to close its only freesheet - which is not just off the mark but totally wrong (in Australia the publisher owns two free dailies, four editions in total).

What is happening in London, and in other countries like Sweden, Switzerland, Denmark, the Netherlands, Spain and Italy, is that more than two free dailies - in this case, two evening papers, one morning paper and one financial paper -

competing in a crowded market (almost a dozen paid papers, including the part-free Evening Standard) in a recession will not lead to profits for all titles. Especially free evening papers, a model proved to be very difficult in other parts of world, will suffer. In all markets mentioned above, free dailies have closed down already.

Does this mean it's the end of free daily newspapers? Not really.

It means that the combination of competition (two or more, but certainly four or five titles) and an economic recession could be lethal for free dailies - at least for the weaker ones. With one down, the remaining papers will profit from it.

Competition is worse for free than for paid papers because they are perfect substitutes for each other - which makes them an easy target for advertisers looking for discounts. A recession always hurts newspapers (paid and free) more than other media because they rely more on ads that are vulnerable (jobs, retail, cars, real estate, classified).

But with paid newspapers also losing circulation and with many of them losing money as well (where's the FT article Paid no longer viable model for papers selling news?), there certainly is room for a free paper as the young urban non-paid audience is growing and still valuable for advertisers. Room for one at least and two perhaps, but not for three or four.

Related

- [Londonpaper Closure: Murdoch Has Lost Faith In Free](#)
- [News Int. Shutting Thelondonpaper, Website Too](#)