

# The daily press is dying

Monday 19 October 2009, by [RAMONET Ignacio](#) (Date first published: 7 October 2009).

The disaster is huge. Dozens of newspapers are bankrupt. In the United States, no less than 120 papers have shut down. And the tsunami is now striking Europe. Not even the former “newspapers of reference” are safe. *El País* in Spain, *Le Monde* in France, *The Times* and *The Independent* in the United Kingdom, *Corriere della Sera* and *La Repubblica* in Italy, etc. All of them are experiencing heavy economic losses, a collapse in distribution and a dizzying drop in advertising. [1]

The prestigious *New York Times* had to ask for help from Mexican millionaire Carlos Slim; the publishers of *The Chicago Tribune* and the *Los Angeles Times*, as well as the Hearst Corporation, owner of *The San Francisco Chronicle*, have gone bankrupt. The News Corporation, Rupert Murdoch’s powerful multimedia group, which publishes *The Wall Street Journal*, has suffered annual losses of 2.5 billion euros.

To trim costs, many publications are reducing the number of their pages. *The Washington Post* folded its prestigious literary supplement, *Bookworld*; *The Christian Science Monitor* decided to end its newsprint edition and exist only on the Internet; the *Financial Times* is asking its staff to work three-day weeks and has drastically reduced its personnel.

The firings are massive. Since January 2008, 21,000 jobs have been eliminated in U.S. newspapers. In Spain, “between June 2008 and April 2009, 2,221 journalists have lost their jobs.” [2]

The salaried press finds itself at the edge of the abyss and desperately searches for formulas for survival. Some analysts believe that that form of information is obsolete. Newser’s Michael Wolf predicts that 80 percent of the American newspapers will disappear. [3] Even more pessimistic, Rupert Murdoch predicts that, within 10 years, all newspapers will cease to exist.

What is so lethally aggravating the decline of the daily press? One current factor is the worldwide economic crisis, which is provoking a drop in advertising and a restriction of credit. And, at the most inopportune moment, that crisis has worsened the sector’s structural ills: the marketing of information, an addiction to advertising, a loss of credibility, a drop in subscriptions, competition from the free (unpaid) press, the aging of readers.

Add to this, in Latin America, the necessary democratic reforms initiated by some governments (Argentina, Ecuador, Bolivia, Venezuela) against the “media empires” created by private groups in the form of monopolies. And those reforms trigger a string of slander aimed at those governments and their presidents from the leading and disenchanted media and their usual accomplices (in Spain, it is the newspaper *El País*, which keeps railing against Prime Minister José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero.) [4]

The daily press continues to practice an economic and industrial model that doesn’t work. The creation of large, international multimedia groups that took place in the 1980s and ’90s no longer works. It has been overtaken by the proliferation of the new modes of diffusion of information and entertainment via the Internet or cell phones. [5]

Paradoxically, newspapers have never had a larger readership as they do today. With the Internet,

the number of readers has grown exponentially. [6] But the newspapers' interfacing with the Web is unfortunate, because it creates an injustice. It forces the newsprint buyer to subsidize the computer user, who reads the online edition (more extensive and entertaining) for free. And because advertising in the Web version does not bring in enough revenue, since it is cheaper than in the newsprint version. [7] Losses and profits don't balance.

Striking about like blind men, the newspapers search desperately for formulas to deal with the hyperchange and survive. Following the example of iTunes, some papers ask for minimal payment from their readers to allow them exclusive access to the news online. [8] Murdoch decided that, beginning in January 2010, he will demand payment for every access to *The Wall Street Journal* through any technology, including Blackberry or iPhone, Twitter or the Kindle electronic reader. Google is looking for a recipe that will permit it to charge for every reading of any digital newspaper, so as to revert a fraction of that cost to the publishing house.

Will these Band-Aids be enough to save the terminal patient? Few believe that [9], because the most worrisome factor is added to all the others: the collapse of credibility.

The current obsession of newspapers to be first with the news causes them to multiply their mistakes. The demagogic request to "reader-journalists" to upload to the newspaper's website their blogs, photos or videos increases the risk of disseminating misinformation. And defending the company's strategy as an editorial line (as the leading newspapers do today) imposes a subjective, arbitrary and partisan view of information.

Confronted by the new "capital sins" of journalism, citizens feel that their rights have been violated. They know that having trustworthy and quality information is more important now than ever before, for them and for democracy. So they ask themselves: where can we find the truth? Our regular readers know part of the answer: in the truly independent and critical press – and, obviously, in the pages of *Le Monde Diplomatique*.

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## P.S.

\* From Progreso Weekley, Wednesday, 07 October 2009 15:55:

[http://progreso-weekly.com/2/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=1235:the-daily-pres-s-is-dying&catid=40:lastest-news&Itemid=59](http://progreso-weekly.com/2/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1235:the-daily-pres-s-is-dying&catid=40:lastest-news&Itemid=59)

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## Footnotes

[1] Inés Hayes, "The world's main newspapers are bankrupt," *América XXI*, Caracas, April 2009.

[2] According to the Federation of Journalists' Associations of Spain, Madrid, April 13, 2009.

[3] *The Washington Post*, April 21, 2009.

[4] About *El País*' attacks against Zapatero, read Doreen Carvajal's "El País in rare break with socialist leader", *The New York Times*, Sept. 13, 2009. The Spanish version appears in [www.internautas.org/html/5722.html](http://www.internautas.org/html/5722.html)

[5] Luis Hernández Navarro, "The crisis of the printed press," *La Jornada*, México, March 3, 2009.

[6] Read the report : "Newspapers in Crisis":  
[www.emarketer.com/Reports/All/Emarketer\\_2000552.aspx](http://www.emarketer.com/Reports/All/Emarketer_2000552.aspx)

[7] In 2008, The New York Times' readership on the Internet was 10 times that of its printed version, but its advertising revenue from the Web was one-tenth that of its printed version.

[8] Read: Gordon Crovitz, "The future of newspapers on the Internet," *La Nación*, Buenos Aires, Aug. 15, 2009.

[9] Read Serge Halimi's article "The battle of Le Monde Diplomatique". See on ESSF: [Where do we go from here?](#)