

Who knits the purse-strings?

WILL GOOGLE control the shiny new pay-to-read systems that newspaper proprietors want? Since last autumn, there've been reports – on which the search engine company refused to comment – that it was planning to offer them a system. They're getting more frequent.

Many an e-commerce dream – and rather a lot of venture capital funding – has disappeared into the idea of users agreeing to pay a small amount of cash – maybe a penny or a cent or two, maybe less – to see or hear a small amount of content.

Such micropayments have been slow to take off: no-one really knows whether users are prepared to pay, because the mechanisms for them to do so have been clunky and a deterrent. And a subscription, for example giving access to an entire paper for year, is a faff to set up. (One magazine found that the volume of online comments fell dramatically when it merely suggested that drive-by commenters might like

to register, while offering an easy way to avoid doing so.)

The banks haven't been entirely keen on the idea, though PayPal has managed to gain some trust and respectability in competition with them. If anyone can take on the banks to build a non-geek system for either kind of "paywall" with small transaction costs, it may be Google. Though Google still refuses to respond concretely to queries, the *Guardian's* Josh Halliday blogged that Google chief executive Eric Schmidt had this to say at a conference the paper organised on 1 July: "We want to enable paywall and non-paywall models. The current problem in the media industry: the analog rents are being replaced by small digital rents, people are losing their jobs and that's a very real problem. It's a very severe issue. Ultimately, revenue will eventually be higher because it'll be more personal... The paywall is a model we provide. Let's run this experiment

globally and see what happens."

A hint to the nature of the experiment is contained in the experimental service at <http://fastflip.googlelabs.com>

Google itself is nervous about the possible dominance of Apple's iPad as a platform for reading news. The *Freelance* is nervous about the dominant position Google would get by being the gateway to get to that news – and would expect regulators, for whom "dominant position" means "on the face of it, an illegal monopoly" to be at least as nervous as we are.

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Books: things to do

If you have anything published in a book, don't forget to look up www.londonfreelance.org/fl/1002goog.html – the *Freelance* Google Books Settlement checklist. Now is a good time to say what happens to your book online.

Recording advice

Thanks to the seven readers who responded to our request for recommendations for technology to record phone calls. Watch for a writeup at www.londonfreelance.org – and send yours now if you forgot.

More online

See www.londonfreelance.org/fl for more stories, including:

- Rex rides again – Getty's agency takeover thwarted
- Local heroes: new models in local journalism conference
- Bauer freelances make some small gains
- Library not fine – digitising whose newspaper work?
- WIPO and out? – international copyright doldrums
- Restrictive practices – notes on anti-competition clauses
- Stockholm syndrome – Swedish TV wants repeat fees
- Headline TK TK – Johnston Press forgets to put some words in here in here



Apologetic police force

LONDON Photographers' Branch members Marc Vallée and Jason Parkinson received compensation and an apology from the Metropolitan Police following a civil action in the London County Court. In a statement on 25 June, Adrian Baxter for the Metropolitan Police admitted that it had "failed to respect press freedom in respect of Mr Vallée and Mr Parkinson" during an 8 December 2008 protest outside the Greek Embassy. Meanwhile 16-year-old Jules Mattsson is considering embarking on the legal path after twice being detained while photographing Air Cadets' ceremonies in Ilford (above).

Photo © Jules Mattsson

Quote at your peril

Fiction author, poet and journalist Blake Morrison recently warned authors of the dangers of quoting even a few words of the lyrics of a pop song, based on his own rather expensive experiences. In a *Guardian* article he listed the amounts he'd had to pay rights-holders (or rights managers) after using their words to add flavour to his fiction. Quoting a line of "Wonderwall" by Oasis cost

him £535; a single line of "Jumpin' Jack Flash" set him back £500 and one evocative line of "When I'm Sixty-four" £735.

Stylistic flourishes involving "borrowings" from pop songs have cost Blake an estimated £4401.75 over the course of his career, excluding VAT.

Rock stars and their estates and managers are quite within their

rights to claim compensation in such cases and, as Blake admits, it could have been a lot worse. The above sums were what Blake's sympathetic but wary publisher paid up front. The publisher agreed to split the costs with Blake. Had the rightsholders found and acted upon any *unauthorised* citation of the above lyrics, the bill would have been substantially higher.

Watch for Newsquest Stourbridge strikes

Staff working with Newsquest titles based in Stourbridge have voted in favour of industrial action in defence of colleagues who Newsquest plans to move to a "news centre" 30 miles away in Worcester to save money. Industrial action is imminent at the *Stourbridge News*, *Halesowen News*, *Dudley News*, *Kidderminster Shuttle*, *Bromsgrove Advertiser* and *Redditch Advertiser*. Freelancers who do work for these titles, monitor www.nuj.org.uk for dates of forthcoming industrial action, on which they may find themselves unavailable. Those suffering hardship as a result should contact the chapel.

Watch for BBC news

Journalists in various parts of the BBC have been voting for strike action against the "robbery" of their pensions. Please watch www.nuj.org.uk for news of strike days. Freelancers who suffer hardship as a result of finding themselves unavailable should contact the chapel.

Bill now, bill often

In this economic climate it's a very, very good idea to invoice clients frequently, claiming for each piece of work separately and immediately. With the change in government it's even more important if your client is a quasi-autonomous non-governmental organisation – lest, if it's consumed in the coming bonfire of the QUANGOs, your payment disappears into a void.