

NY Times to charge for online content

Decision raises questions about the price of quality journalism

Jack Dodson and Lindsay Kimble
Executive Editors

New York Times' readers will have to open their wallets to access some of the publication's online resources beginning in January 2011, when the company switches to a "metered" model of payment for usage.

On Jan. 20, executives of The New York Times Company announced after a year of debate, visitors to NYTimes.com have to pay a flat fee for unlimited access to online content. The price for content is yet to be announced.

The Times, which garners 17 million readers a month according to Nielson Online, joins nearly a dozen other newspapers that charge for site access, including the Wall Street Journal.

Sophomore Alex Stevens accesses the Times' Web site through an iPhone application and receives updates from the Web site via Twitter. He said a fee will end his usage of the Times online and in print.

"You can usually find most stories the Times has somewhere else for free," Stevens said. He said he never really used the Times print version before, "unless it was required for a course."

Glenn Scott, associate professor of Communications, said he's not surprised the news organization decided to charge for content.

"Theoretically it would work because they just have to have a dependent revenue flow," Scott said.

Many newspaper analysts note the Times is one of the first newspapers to begin the switch to a better generator of online revenue than advertising, which will likely be a trend throughout the industry.

"When it's happening in New York City, you can bet it's going to spread," Scott said.

Scott said advertising on news Web sites has not been as effective in the eyes of advertisers as other Web sites, and the business model for news may have to change, relying more on subscription.

Elon currently provides a free service to students that offers the New York Times print edition in the McEwen Communications building. Scott said this service may eventually expand to online, allowing students to access content for free through a package

deal the university could purchase.

This is not the first time the Times has charged for content.

In the 1990s, the newspaper charged overseas readers for some Web site access. From 2005 to 2007 the Times used a TimesSelect service that charged for access to editorials and columns.

The "metered" model method of payment allows users free access to the Web site for a certain number of articles per month. If users exceed this number, they will then be charged. The Times' homepage will remain free and subscribers to the print version of the Times will receive unlimited access to the site without any extended fees.

Readers can also read individual articles through search engines like Google without being charged.

"Quality content is not free," said Rupert Murdoch, chairman and CEO of News Corp., in a Wall Street Journal article which explained the decision to charge for site access.

Murdoch, who owns the Wall Street Journal, points out that in the future, good journalism depends on the ability of a news organization to attract customers by providing information that "they are willing to pay for."

Murdoch notes customers are smart enough to realize they cannot receive quality information for nothing. Many free online news stories are from non-reputable sites or are aggregator sites linking to esteemed journalists' work.

Naeemah Clark, assistant professor of communications, accesses the Times online but mostly gets her news from television. She said it is highly unlikely she'll continue to access NYTimes.com in light of the new fees, if it limits her access to certain articles.

Clark is currently conducting a research project to see if people would pay money to access news. She has found that most people would rather use a free source than pay for content.

"Most media outlets will realize they cannot just rely on ad revenue and provide news for free," Clark said. "Then, when there are no other options, people will pay."

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SARAH COSTELLO | Graphics Editor

2010 Census kicks off with new efforts to inspire participation

Kassandra Cloos
Reporter

Since 1790 the government has counted the number of U.S. residents through the Census, but the Census remains a widely misunderstood tradition.

"I think (the general public) understands what it is," said George Taylor, professor of political science. "But I don't think they understand the importance of it."

The 2010 Census Bureau's slogan, "We can't move forward until you mail it back," highlights a complete and accurate count of residents. It is essential for the most efficient allocation of government funding for infrastructures such as hospitals, roads and schools.

In addition, Taylor said the number of representatives for each state in Congress and the Electoral College relies strictly on the number of individuals residing there.

"The Electoral College shifts power with population," he said.

For the first time in history the Census Bureau will conduct a road tour across the United States to raise awareness. On Tuesday, Jan. 5, the Charlotte, N.C.-based vehicle began its journey. Eleven other regional vehicles, as well as a national bus, will also continue to tour the country until April when the Census officially begins.

"It's important to know why these things are happening," junior Amanda McBride said, "especially since we pay taxes."

Freshman Bobby Rawlings agreed.

"I feel like very few average Americans understand the gravity of the census—including myself," Rawlings said. "If they were versed on the importance of the census, then they may take the process

more seriously, and it would become drastically more accurate."

In an attempt to add a more human aspect to the process, the Road Tour involves creating a "Portrait of America." Those who visit the tour buses will learn more about how and why they are counted.

They will also have the opportunity to get their pictures taken and tell their own stories of how census data will make a difference in their communities. Many of these stories are featured on the census Web site, where anyone can read them.

"I think that will be really effective," freshman Sandra Weiss said. "When people fill out those forms, they're just checking boxes. They have no idea what it's doing. Adding a more personal aspect like this will make being counted more meaningful."

The Census Bureau makes it clear on the form that anyone living away from home, even college students, are not to be included in the household count. Rather, census takers will be visiting colleges in the coming months in order to get an accurate measure of residents at each school.

"It would make sense for them to do that," freshman Joshua McGee said. "Considering I spend most of my time here in this community. I might not be here five years from now, but somebody else will be."

With only 10 questions, the 2010 census is one of the shortest questionnaires in history and will be mailed to every household in mid-March. It is due back in early April.

Those who do not return the forms will be visited by census-takers, who will merely obtain the answers for the questions asked on the form.

"By law, you're supposed to answer," Taylor said. "We don't get every person, but we're probably fairly accurate."

New BioBus route offers public transportation to downtown Burlington

Mary Yost
Copy Editor

New sights, sounds and tastes can be found in a short ride to downtown Burlington. A new downtown and East Burlington BioBus route encourages students to go beyond the "Elon bubble" and discover the community and the areas surrounding Elon University.

The route is a pilot program that will run throughout the spring semester. If there is sufficient community and student interest in the route, hours will be expanded next fall, said junior Elon Volunteers intern Teri Horn.

"It is important for students to explore Burlington because the community is a part of what the university is," Horn said. "At Elon it is easy to remain inside of the bubble. We see a natural disaster in Haiti and want to help. However, there are people who need help right where we are. It is a lot easier to serve people here than to hop on a plane to Haiti."

According to Tammy Cobb, the assistant director for community partnerships in the Kernodle Center for Service Learning, during the past eight years numerous community partner agencies have said they need consistent student volunteers at their organizations.

"After considering the most heavily used organizations and service locations in our community, a route was made to support student transportation needs," Cobb said.

The one-hour bus loop will depart from the Moseley Center parking lot Monday through Thursday every hour between 2:30 and 5:30 p.m. It stops at six locations throughout downtown and East Burlington, making volunteer sites accessible by foot.

Patrick Harman, executive director of the Hayden-Harman foundation in Burlington, hopes the route will

acclimate students to the community and the opportunities it offers.

"The more students get out into the community and learn about it, the more engaged and comfortable they will be with Burlington," Harman said.

Along with providing service opportunities, the route will offer an opportunity to support local businesses in downtown Burlington.

"The Downtown Burlington Corporation will be hosting an event in early February to familiarize downtown merchants with the loop use of the Phoenix Card and marketing opportunities," Cobb said. "We expect this may have appeal as a new place to eat, have coffee, shop and visit in addition to service opportunities."

The community has generated a lot of interest in the new loop and the opportunities it provides to residents.

"Due to funding by Piedmont Authority through Regional Transportation, the public can ride any of the Elon BioBuses at no cost," Cobb said. "But this route in particular will help connect service providers and their clients to each other and Elon."

The route will help community members learn more about the benefits of public transportation.

"The BioBus is an opportunity for the community to become acclimated to what a fixed route would be," Harman said. "There hasn't been public transportation in Burlington since 1978. Therefore, some people have no knowledge of what a bus route is."

Traveling on the BioBus route offers students the opportunity to go beyond the "Elon bubble" and sustain the university's bond with Burlington.

"The new loop will better connect the students to our community and our community to campus, strengthening and creating new relationships and partnerships," Cobb said.