

# Is the Washington Post trying to alienate subscribers?

Over the past five years, since I moved to Washington, I have seen the Washington Post decline as its price continues to climb. When I got here, you could get the paper for 50 cents. Now, it is 75 cents. Subscription costs also continue to rise. And yet, the paper gets smaller and more irrelevant. It's almost like the Post wants to get rid of its subscribers and print edition readers.

Here are several questionable moves the Post has engaged in over the past couple of years:

- Increased subscription rates and got rid of the ability to pay for more than 8 weeks at a time (there used to be an option to pay for 12 weeks, etc., thus locking in a price)
- Made TV Week opt-in and then charged 15 cents for each copy
- Got rid of separate business section and folded it into front section
- Created Capital Business "for subscribers only" and is charging \$50 per year for it
- Posts print content online a day or two before it is published, effectively making newspaper content available sooner to the entire world for FREE.
- Cut back substantially on copy editors and other newsroom personnel, making the newspaper rife with errors (grammatical, spelling and factual)
- Publishes the Express, a smaller version of the Post, for FREE

All these moves seem (with the exception of publishing all content online for free) seemed to be designed to increase the Post bottom line AT THE EXPENSE OF ITS BASE. The most loyal

readers are those that pay to get the newspaper, and yet, the Post is basically screwing those readers by charging them MORE to get what others get for free.

Clearly, it is not a financially wise move to subscribe to the Post, so why do we continue to subscribe? Often, it is because of habit. Many of us still like reading a paper newspaper with our morning coffee. And some of us love the puzzles. Otherwise, the printed Washington Post has NO value. Everything in the printed edition is available online, for free. If I want to take it with me, I can pick up an Express. There is absolutely no financial incentive to subscribe. And the Post seems to be doing everything in its power to get me to stop subscribing.

If the Post continues down this path, it will reduce its circulation numbers substantially, which in turn will affect the amount of money they can charge advertisers. As ad revenue goes down, along with subscriber revenue, the newspapers bottom line will suffer. And then they will want to charge for online content. Online readers will probably not pay since plenty of other quality content is available elsewhere for free.

Can the Post reverse course? Probably not thus leaving us with a crappy newspaper we are paying more for...good thing some of us have birdcages to line.

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## Why bother with print?

A Caffeinated Op-Ed

Today I want to question the Washington Post. Specifically, I want to know why it bothers searching for subscribers, and indeed, printing its newspaper every day. It seems to me, more and more, that the Post wants to get rid of subscribers and concentrate on giving away its content for free.

I often visit [washingtonpost.com](http://washingtonpost.com) to see the weather, latest news, blogs, etc. I also get a subscription to the paper because I like to read printed material with my morning coffee. Today, as I was checking the WaPo website I saw that they have redesigned the Sunday magazine. And this is the kicker—all of it is available online for free, two days earlier than subscribers get the same material.

Subscribers PAY. Website visitors do not pay. Why on earth would you make MORE content available earlier at NO COST? How is this a smart business decision? Why would you not embargo content until paid subscribers can access it?

It seems to me that the Post is doing what it can to make sure people do not buy or subscribe to the printed newspaper. Anyone looking to save 75 cents per issue can just log on to the website and get all the content of the printed piece plus early content and not pay a cent. That translates to at least a \$6.00 per week (the Sunday paper costs \$1.50).

Should I cancel my subscription? I ask that to the Washington Post. Why on earth should I continue to pay for something I could get for free????

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## How Newspapers Are Killing

# Themselves

We can dub it newspaper suicide when newspapers do things that are guaranteed to reduce subscription rates, and I don't mean by endorsing an unpopular candidate or showing bias on their pages. It is by cannibalizing their own print readers.

Let me give you a case in point about my local newspaper, the fabled Washington Post. Last Friday, I am checking the weather and blogs on the Washington Post website, and lo and behold, I see columnist Mark Fisher's LAST column. I read it to learn that he is leaving the Post, why, etc. Fast forward to Sunday. I settle in with my ever-thinner newspaper, and guess what, I see Mark Fisher's last column in PRINT. Now let me rephrase this in monetary terms. I read Mark Fisher's column on Friday online for FREE, and I read the same column in print for a price. (P.S. you can read lots of Sunday print columns online, on Friday).

Then, if this is not enough to get me thinking that I am a sucker for paying to have the newspaper delivered to me when all I have to do is turn on my computer to read the same stuff online, that I see that TV Week has now become an opt-in to the paper, meaning I have to actually call the Post to tell them that I want to continue receiving this handy-dandy TV guide. Let me repeat this again: I have to tell them to deliver it.

A couple of months ago, the Post folded its printed Book World supplement, making it online only. And in fact, if you want a listing of paperback bestsellers in the DC area, you have to go online, because the printed edition just lists the hardcover bestseller list.

And here's another piece of the suicide pact that the Post seems to have: they are now touting a special online only investigation on the front page of the printed paper. So, it

seems, they want me, a reader of the print version, to go online. If I haven't been online before, then I will realize that the entire newspaper plus much more is available for free.

In effect, the newspaper is driving me to go online. Special investigations, columns available before their print date, up to date event reviews, blog posts, discussions...why would I want to pay to get a newspaper delivered? I am asking that every day, and I bet a bunch of people are too. The thing is the paper is still making money from subscriptions and print advertising, right? So why are they not giving subscribers more not less????

In my opinion, this is a conscious attempt to drive people to the online version so that they can stop issuing a print version. Then, they will save printing and delivery costs, and finally, start charging for the online version once the printed version disappears. You will only pay for something if there is no alternative, right? The Post has been doing this piecemeal, but we are seeing the effects in a much reduced printed version, a heftier online version and a mandate for all reporters to blog, Tweet, and have a Facebook page. Obviously, the future is online.

What do you think?

