

Dear ACCC,

I respond to the call for input into the ACCC's Digital Platforms Inquiry.

I am the publisher and owner of Post Newspapers Pty Ltd., a group of suburban newspapers operating between the cities of Perth and Fremantle.

We are aware, as clearly you are from submissions, of the devastating effect of the unpaid use of journalists' work by large platforms such as Facebook, Google, Apple and many others.

The problem is simple: Journalists are being paid by their employers to provide original news coverage.

Yet the platforms pay nothing to re-use it, and to add insult to injury, make enormous profits by selling advertising content that accompanies the cost-free (to them) journalism they publish.

At the same time the big digital platforms are hollowing-out the advertising content of conventional publishers, the advertising revenue used to pay journalists.

The end result could well be that independent journalism is so diminished that real, verified information the public needs for our democracy to function will dangerously diminish in both quantity and quality, if it has not already done so.

**The solution:**

The problem of journalists/publishers not being paid for secondary use of their work could be fixed by an amendment to the Copyright Act.

Under the proposed Free Trade Agreement with the US, now apparently dead, Australia's copyright laws were to be watered down.

Now we have an opportunity to strengthen them, and extend a scheme that already operates very successfully through the Copyright Agency Limited.

Working journalists well are aware of CAL's good work. Publishers registered with CAL receive micro payments when their original journalism is reproduced - Federal, State, local government, quangos and private companies must report this secondary use and are charged accordingly under the Copyright Act.

CAL actively polices this - they trawl the Net for illegal uses and ping the culprits.

At the Post we receive regular payments via CAL which we share with our journalists. Although individual payments may be a matter of cents, the totals can be very worthwhile amounts.

It would be relatively simple by legislation to extend this scheme to Google, Facebook, Apple etc in Australia.

These giants make billions by selling advertising around the news content they now obtain free from publishers.

My scheme is simply to require Google, Facebook etc. to make a small copyright payment whenever a platform customer reads real journalism that appears on their sites, journalism that must have an identifiable source if reproduced or extracted.

Developing this software should be a simple matter, given that engineers for Facebook etc. have written highly complex algorithms, so complex that the platforms can predict the moods of its users and then sales-target for advertisers this "mood window" at the most vulnerable times.

It would be quite simple for them to write programs that identify whenever an Australia-originating story, produced by a registered publisher, is being read by one of their customers.

To discourage publishers from putting up clickbait and to encourage high-quality journalism, the payment needs to be graduated. The longer a reader spends on reading a piece original journalism, the higher the payment.

The collection and distribution of funds would be managed and policed by CAL, which performs exactly this function now, and takes a cut for its work.

I am happy to expand on this submission if required, either in writing or in person.

best wishes

Bret Christian

Owner/Editor

Post Newspapers Pty Ltd.

postnewspapers.com.au

276 Onslow Road

Shenton Park, 6008

Western Australia