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Monday, Oct. 5, 2009

Murdoch: Japan newspapers will have to charge for online content

By **ERIC JOHNSTON**
 Staff writer

KYOTO — Japanese newspapers are eventually going to have to charge users to read general news stories online, media mogul Rupert Murdoch said Sunday at a conference here of scientists and engineers.

"They won't have a choice," said Murdoch, chairman and managing director of [News Corp.](#) and owner of [The Wall Street Journal](#), [The Times of London](#), and [Fox News](#) in the United States.

He was responding to a question about whether [Japan's](#) news media need to charge for their online news to make up for sagging [advertising revenue](#) and declining readership of their paper versions.

Like many newspapers around the world, most of Japan's major papers offer at least a portion of their general news online for free.

Murdoch announced in August that his News Corp., the largest producer of English-language news in the world, plans to start charging for online news content by next July.

Speaking to the annual Science and Technology in Society Forum, which opened Sunday with more than 800 scientists, engineers, and academics from around the world, Murdoch said the flow of information thanks to the Internet and other digital technology will become cheaper if they're bundled and marketed properly as information that has been vetted by paid journalists and editors.

"For a long time, journalists delivered newspapers or magazines that had great brand names over decades if not hundreds of years. They'll be trusted over casual bloggers, who will come and go. Although bloggers will be an important part of democracy, they'll find it hard to make a go of it," Murdoch said.

Blogging is particularly big in Japan. An April 2007 survey of global blogs found that Japanese was then the world's most common language for blogging, accounting for more than one-third of the world's 70 million blogs.

But Murdoch reminded his audience that fact-checked information takes money.

"If information is bundled and sold through the Internet, it won't be expensive. But it has to be paid for. Otherwise it will not be possible to pay people to put it all together."

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Murdoch has said he wants to charge for all online news to save newspapers and journalism.

But skeptics abound. Eric Schmidt, chief executive of Google Inc., said in August the sheer volume of free news online will make it difficult for Murdoch to turn a profit.

Schmidt and many Internet and newspaper analysts, however, say publications that cover niche and specialty markets, such as finance and technology, may eventually make money from online subscriptions.

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Transport minister Seiji Maehara recently caused a stir when he mentioned the [need to turn Tokyo's Haneda airport into a 24-hour hub airport for both domestic and international flights](#). What's your take on this shift away from Narita International Airport?

- I'm worried about the increased risk of air flight accidents.
- It's about time. Narita is too far from Tokyo.
- I'd rather the noise stay the noise out of town.
- I'm concerned about the adverse effect on Narita's economy.
- Why all the fuss? Tokyo can handle two major airports.
- More money needs to go toward ailing regional airports.

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