

Facebook launches a news section

By BARBARA ORTUTAY AND TALI ARBEL
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AP Photo/Thibault Camus

A Facebook logo is displayed during a start-up companies gathering at Paris' Station F, in Paris.

MENLO PARK, Calif. — Over the course of its 15-year history, Facebook has variously ignored news organizations while eating their advertising revenue, courted them for video projects it subsequently abandoned, and then largely cut their stories out of its newfeeds.

Now it plans to pay them for news headlines — reportedly millions of dollars in some cases.

Enter the “News Tab,” a new section in the Facebook mobile app that will display headlines — and nothing else — from the *Wall Street Journal*, the *Washington Post*, *BuzzFeed News*, *Business Insider*, *NBC*, *USA Today* and the *Los Angeles Times*, among others. Local stories from several of the largest U.S. cities will also make the grade; headlines from smaller towns are on their way, Facebook says.

Tapping on those headlines will take you directly to publisher websites or apps, if you have any installed. Which is more or less what publishers have been requesting from Facebook for years.

It’s potentially a big step for a platform that has long struggled with both stamping out misinformation and making nice with struggling purveyors of news. Though media watchers remain skeptical that Facebook is really committed to helping sustain the news industry.

Facebook declined to say who is getting paid and how much, saying only that it will be paying “a range of publishers for access to all of their content.” Just last year, CEO Mark Zuckerberg said he wasn’t sure it “makes sense” to pay news outlets for their material.

But now, as Zuckerberg told *The Associated Press* in an interview, “there’s an opportunity to

set up new long term, stable financial relationships with publishers.”

News executives have long been unhappy about the extent to which digital giants like Facebook make use of their stories — mostly by displaying headlines and short summaries when users post news links. A bipartisan bill introduced in Congress this year would grant an antitrust exemption to news companies, letting them band together to negotiate payments from the big tech platforms.

“It’s a good direction that they’re willing for the first time to value and pay for news content,” said David Chavern, head of the News Media Alliance, a publisher trade group. “The trouble is that most publishers aren’t included.”

Zuckerberg said Facebook aims to set up partnerships with a “wide range” of publishers.

“We think that this is an opportunity to build something quite meaningful here,” he said. “We’re going to have journalists curating this, we are really focused on provenance and branding and where the stories come from.”

In a statement, the *Los Angeles Times* said it expects the Facebook effort will help expand its readership and digital subscribers.

Facebook killed its previous effort to curate news,

the ill-fated Trending topics, in 2018. Conservatives complained about political bias, leading Facebook to fire its human editors and automate the section until it began recycling false stories, after which the social giant shut it down entirely.

But what happens when the sprawling social network plays news editor? An approach that sends people news based on what they’ve liked before could over time elevate stories with greater “emotional resonance” over news that “allows public discourse to take place,” said Edward Wasserman, dean of the graduate journalism program at the University of California-Berkeley.

“It deepens my concern that they’ll be applying Facebook logic to news judgment,” he added.

The social network has come under criticism for its news judgment recently. In September, it removed a fact-check from Science Feedback that called out an anti-abortion activist’s video for claiming that abortion is never medically necessary. Republican senators had complained about the fact check.

Facebook says a small team of “seasoned” journalists it employs will choose the headlines for the “Today’s Story” section of the tab, designed to “catch you up” on the day’s news. The rest of the news section will be

FACEBOOK CLARIFIES POLITICAL AD POLICY

WASHINGTON — Facebook reiterated its policy of not removing misleading or bogus political ads Thursday, clarifying its own policies after CEO Mark Zuckerberg offered Congress confusing and sometimes incomplete testimony on the subject. On Wednesday, in response to questions from House Financial Services Chairwoman Maxine Waters, Zuckerberg seemed to suggest Facebook did use third-party fact-checkers to verify political ads. He contradicted himself moments later, saying the company did not want to get involved in verifying the truth of political claims. Facebook on Thursday sought to set the record straight, noting that while it will not fact check political ads from candidates, it does evaluate the accuracy of political ads from political advocacy groups or political action committees.

— Associated Press

Business Oregon director resigns, heads for private sector

Chris Harder has led Business Oregon since March 2016

By CLAIRE WITTHYCOMBE
Oregon Capital Bureau

ment needs of communities throughout the state.”

“I’m looking forward to seeing the work of our team at Business Oregon continue with its focus on rural areas and its efforts to make sure that prosperity is shared by all,” Brown said.

Harder is leaving after setting ambitious goals for the agency through 2022.

Last year, Business Oregon adopted a five-year strategic plan, focused on pushing technical innovation, economic stability in rural areas, growing small and middle-market companies, and creating more economic opportunities for people of color, immigrants and tribal communities.

“We are committed to working with our customers, public and private partners, and local and regional communities across Oregon to continue to make our state economy one of the most competitive and successful anywhere,” according to a report on the plan issued by Harder and Kanth Gopalpur, chair of the Oregon Business Development Commission.

The strategic plan also calls for the agency to look internally to make sure it is “inclusive, transparent and fiscally healthy.”

In April 2018, allegations emerged of a hostile work environment at the agency for older employees and women. Several months later, independent investigators reported they found no “evidence of a widespread toxic work environment or a pattern of discrimination against females or older employees.”



Harder

Natural gas rates to increase

Cascade Natural Gas receives approval for 8.5% increase

By JADE MCDOWELL
East Oregonian

UMATILLA COUNTY — The Oregon Public Utility Commission has approved a rate increase for the state’s three regulated utilities, including Cascade Natural Gas, starting Nov. 1.

According to a news release by the commission, the cost of natural gas being supplied to the utilities “spiked” over the last year due to a pipeline explosion that affected the regional supply. In the past 10 years, the commission stated, Oregon residents have seen a decrease in their rates, other than in 2013

and 2014. PUC chair Megan Decker said in a statement that they appreciated those who testified to remind the committee that rate increases impact customers negatively.

“We recognize that existing low-income programs are inadequate at meeting the needs of all customers to help address adjustments in rates, but we’ll continue to find ways to close that gap,” she said.

Cascade Natural Gas, which serves Hermiston and Pendleton, received approval for an overall increase of 8.5%, raising \$5.3 million. Residential customers using 62 therms per month will see an increase from \$46.69 to \$50.58.

Commercial customers using 264 therms per month will see an increase of 11.5%, from \$156.73 to \$174.69. Industrial customers using

1,742 therms per month will see their bill increase from \$983.63 to \$1,119.13.

Avista Natural Gas, which covers parts of Eastern Oregon and Southern Oregon, received approval for an overall increase of 10% in November, plus a 2.5% increase in January to cover non-gas costs.

When both increases are in place, typical residential customers using 46 therms per month will see their bill increase from \$48.11 to \$55.41 at a 15.2% increase. Commercial customers using 197 therms per month will see an increase from \$174.15 to \$194.66. Industrial customers using 3,990 therms per month will see an increase from \$1,640.57 to \$1,910.06.

On the west side of the state, NW Natural received approval for a 2.4% increase.

BRIEFLY

New homes sales fell in September

WASHINGTON — U.S. new home sales fell slightly in September with all regions of the country except the Midwest showing declines.

The Commerce Department reported Thursday that sales of new homes fell 0.7% last month following a big 6.2% surge in sales in August. Homes were sold at a seasonally adjusted annual rate of 701,000, 15.5% higher than a year ago.

Many economists had expected sales to keep rising in September, reflecting declining mortgage rates and ultra-low unemployment.

The median price of a new home fell 7.9% last month to \$299,400, down from an August price of \$325,200.

The only region to post a sales gain was the Midwest, where sales rose 6.3%. Sales in the West fell 3.8%

and were down 2.8% in the Northeast and a slight 0.2% in the South.

Developer awarded grant for new windows

PENDLETON — Developer Nate Brusselback was recently awarded a \$10,000 grant from the Energy Trust of Oregon for upgrades at his South Hills Apartment Complex, 248 S.W. 28th Drive. The grant will help pay for the replacement of the complex’s aging aluminum windows with energy-efficient vinyl-frame windows in an effort to help save residents money on their energy bills.

While the grant is helpful in breaking up the cost of upgrades, Brusselback says that it amounts to a small percentage of the \$150,000 he expects to spend updating the units. According to Brusselback, the incentives will cover approximately one-third of the purchase

price of the new windows, however, Energy Trust will not cover labor, trim, reframing or any other additional project costs.

Despite the cost of the upgrades, Brusselback maintains that they provide a win-win situation for himself and the building’s residents.

“It makes the units nicer for the tenants, and it gets me a little bit more bang for my buck when it comes to renting them out,” said Brusselback.

As residents move out, Brusselback’s team goes through and upgrades each unit’s windows in addition to any necessary maintenance before renting the unit to a new tenant.

Built in the 1970s, the South Hills Apartment Complex is made up of 80 one- and two-bedroom units and is one of four apartment complexes that Brusselback owns in Pendleton.

— Associated Press and East Oregonian staff

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