

NMA CEO: Preserving Journalism's Future Is A Crucial Responsibility

By News Media Association chief executive Owen Meredith

This week, we are celebrating Journalism Matters week, dedicated to honouring the extraordinary work that UK journalists carry out, day in, day out – from shining a light on corruption, holding power to account and reporting from the halls of Westminster to warzones in Israel, Gaza and Ukraine, all in the public interest.

For this vital component of our democracy to continue, the government must ensure a sustainable environment for our free press through measures such as standing up for press freedom as journalism faces an increasing array of threats, supporting our brilliant local news media which reaches huge audiences in print and digital, and maintaining our robust gold standard copyright regime to ensure content creators control use of their works as AI technology continues to develop.

While AI presents immense and exciting opportunities for all of us, these new tools are developed and trained on 'large language models' which depend on huge volumes of reliable data and content, such as journalism. To ensure both can not only survive but thrive, AI must grow alongside a highly transparent ecosystem that rewards trusted journalism. It is only right that news publishers (and other creators) are fairly compensated for the use of their work by AI firms. As AI continues to transform the way news is consumed and produced, we must establish a framework that protects the integrity of news content and publishers' ability to invest in the very journalists who are on the ground reporting and news gathering every day. This is not just a matter of economic fairness, but also of preserving the quality and diversity of news available to the public.

It is also crucial we acknowledge the economic value that the creative economy has brought to the UK for decades. This sector has contributed billions to the UK, providing millions of jobs and is envied worldwide. We have the opportunity to harness the potential of AI - but we must do so in a way that supports the sustainability of journalism by upholding our gold standard intellectual property and copyright laws, which are a powerful driver of revenue and growth across many industries. The news media industry is not against generative AI, but it cannot be allowed to dismantle existing industries that are so important culturally and financially to the UK.

Curbing the dominance of Big Tech goes hand in hand with this – there is no doubt these firms are dominant players in the online ecosystem, wielding significant control over the distribution and dissemination of news and journalism. With the Digital Market Unit's guidance soon to be approved, Google's ad tech services, Meta's Facebook and both Google and Apple's mobile ecosystems must be among the first designations from the Competition and Markets Authority – with Google Search to be its top priority. To prioritise economic growth and innovation, designating these services quickly will be crucial.

Local news brands are personal in a way no other media is. They act as a watchdog for communities, bringing social, economic, and democratic benefits. They campaign on issues that are close to people's

hearts and push for meaningful change, fostering open democracy and debate. '[Local Matters](#),' our report published earlier this year, highlights numerous examples of innovation across the sector, from podcasts, video news, and the exploration of how AI can enhance newsrooms, to the joint industry initiative: the Public Notice Portal.

For this innovation to continue, the government should divert a greater proportion of its advertising spend from Big Tech to local media – a platform that enjoys high levels of trust, engagement and huge audiences, with over 40 million readers a month. In fact, the Government Communications Service highlighted a previous advertising partnership with the media, 'All Together', as a "best-in-class example" of collaboration between the government and the private sector. By government building on these efforts, and leading the way where other advertisers should follow, we can ensure that local journalism continues to flourish.

In accomplishing these goals, we can guarantee that the exceptional work of UK journalists not only survives but thrives, safeguarding their crucial role in our democracy for many years to come.