

Waasan Päivälehti

Supplement

Wasa Dagblad

Wasa Daily



Does the daily paper newspaper have a future?

PRESS

Does the daily paper newspaper have a future?

For two hundred years, the daily newspaper has been delivered in printed form on paper, often distributed early in the morning by clever girls and boys. During this long period, it has been the main source of news and opinion formation in democratic societies. No other form of media has been able to offer the well-argued editorial, through which the newspaper clearly expresses its position and thus functions as a central organ for the public debate. The paper newspaper has not only been a news provider, but also an institution, a hub and a unifying force at a time when individualized algorithms increasingly control what news we consume.

Since the turn of the millennium, however, the digital revolution has fundamentally changed the media landscape. The transition from print to digital has meant a structural upheaval that questions the very prerequisites for the existence of the dai-

ly paper newspaper. This article analyzes the current situation of the paper newspaper, its challenges, and the strategies that can secure its future. The question is no longer whether the paper newspaper will change, but how it can be developed to survive in an increasingly digitalized world.

Historical background and the traditional role of the paper newspaper

The history of the daily newspaper stretches further back than the two hundred years that are often stated. The first newspaper in the modern sense, the *Ordinarie Zeitung*, was printed as early as 1605 in Strasbourg by Johann Carolus. During the 19th and 20th centuries, the paper newspaper was established as the undisputed dominant of the mass media, with a daily circulation that reached broad layers of the population. The morning paper became a natural part of everyday life – the companion of the break-

fast table, the arena of social debates and the mirror of those in power.

The special position of the paper newspaper rested on several foundations: the daily regularity, the editorial curation of the news selection, the geographical anchoring and, not least, the editorial page – the well-articulated expression of opinion that gave the newspaper a voice in social issues. Unlike digital platforms, which are often governed by algorithms and user behavior, the paper newspaper offered an edited, thoughtful and cohesive package of news, ads, sports and debate. It thus fulfilled a democratic function that went beyond the mere dissemination of information: it constituted a public sphere in which different opinions could be met and tested.

The current state of the paper newspaper: an inexorable decline

The digital transformation has meant a dramatic reduction in the print news-



paper's circulation and reach. According to the Nordic Media Barometers 2025, the daily reach of daily newspapers in Sweden fell to 60 percent, a decrease of six percentage points compared to 2024. Even more telling is that only 14 percent of the population reads a printed newspaper daily, while 54 percent read digital news. Among the oldest population – people aged 67-79 – the daily reading of print newspapers fell from 41 percent in 2024 to 32 percent in 2025. Paper newspaper subscribers are declining by about ten to twelve percent annually, according to data from Hudiksvall's newspaper.

Globally, the newspaper industry's revenue is expected to decline from \$82.17 billion in 2025 to \$76.85 billion in 2030. While digital reader revenue is growing, print advertising revenue and subscription revenue continue to fall. In Sweden, several newspapers have been forced to reduce their publication from six to three or four days a week. In western Sweden, over 10,000 Stampen Media subscribers have completely lost their paper dividends.

This development is not a temporary slump but

a long-term trend. The younger generations do not replenish their paper newspaper subscriptions; The average age of subscribers continues to rise. As older subscribers disappear, so does natural demand. At the same time as digital reading is increasing, the paper newspaper is facing a generational change that it cannot compensate for.

Challenges: finances, distribution and changing reading habits

The challenges of the paper newspaper are multidimensional.

First, the economy is increasingly unsustainable. Printing and distributing paper newspapers are costly processes that require large-scale operations to be profitable. As editions drop, the cost per copy rises. As Bonnier News Local points out: "Given the high costs associated with printing and distributing paper newspapers, this measure and savings are required if we are to be able to offer our subscribers a really good paper newspaper in the long term."

Distribution is a particular bottleneck. In rural areas, delivery is becoming more and more expensi-

ve, and the future delivery frequency of the postal service is uncertain. Pia Rehnquist, Head of Publicity at Bonnier News, states: "There will come a day when the dividend will be too costly, and the business is no longer sustainable." Mail delivery is more expensive than in-house distribution, and newspaper companies also do not dare to trust that the post office will continue to deliver regularly.

Secondly, reading habits have changed fundamentally. Digital platforms offer instant access to news, interactivity, sharing opportunities and a wider range of offerings. The strength of the paper newspaper – the in-depth, casual reading – is becoming less and less in demand in a society that values speed and accessibility. In addition, the paper newspaper competes with a stream of free online content, making it difficult to justify paid subscriptions.

Thirdly, the democratic role of the paper newspaper is threatened by the decline itself. Researchers and debaters warn that the decay of paper newspapers poses a threat to democracy. The future of the editorial pages is uncertain,

and the party-politically bound opinion journalism seems to be on its way out. Without a living paper newspaper, the public debate risks fragmenting and losing its unifying power.

Strategies for the future: how the paper newspaper can survive

Despite the gloomy forecasts, there are ways forward. Several newspaper companies have begun strategic adjustments to secure the future of the paper newspaper. These strategies can be summarised in four main tracks.

1. Reduced release frequency and repositioning

The clearest trend is to go from daily to fewer release days. Vestmanlands Läns Tidning (VLT) plans to publish the paper newspaper three days a week – Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday – from November 2026, while the e-newspaper will continue daily. The aim is to free up resources for local journalism and create long-term sustainable conditions. Similar changes have been implemented for several titles within Bonnier News Local, with positive effects both financially and journalistically.

Even more radical is the decision of Turku Intelligence to switch from daily to weekly publication of the paper newspaper. Editor-in-chief Susanna Landor explains that the change is being made so that the newspaper can continue to live for another two hundred years. The new paper magazine will be more of a weekly magazine – fuller, more elaborate and with a different profile, with investments in personal portraits and in-depth content.

This repositioning means that the print newspaper is abandoning its role as the primary news source and instead becoming a premium format for in-depth, analysis and curated content – a complementary product to digital daily news coverage.

2. Digital first – paper as a complement

A second strategy is to fully embrace digital as the primary channel, with the paper newspaper as a valuable complement. Svenska Dagbladet (SvD) is a role model: the newspaper has reached close to 130,000 digital subscribers, an increase of 35 percent in one year, and 70 percent of subscribers are now complete-

ly digital. The growth is not driven by a shift from print to digital, but represents real net growth.

CEO of Gota Media, Mats Ehnбом, emphasizes that one should not accelerate the decline of the paper newspaper, while at the same time prioritizing digital growth. Gota Media is the group that still publishes the majority of its titles in paper form six days a week or more often, which shows that there are different strategies within the industry.

The digital transformation requires investments in data analytics, personalization, and user experience. Dynamic paywalls, such as the one developed by SvD and rewarded with the INMA Global Awards, are examples of how technological innovations can drive growth. At the same time, newsrooms need to work digital-first: instead of writing content to fit into printed pages, journalists create digital, first-hand content that can then be reused.

3. Quality journalism as a differentiating factor

In an age of disinformation and algorithm-driven feeds, quality journalism is becoming an increasing-

ly important competitive factor. Trust in journalists and good journalism is increasing on online platforms. The paper newspaper can tap into its historical heritage of credibility and quality. As an industry analysis states: "Print media continues to be an attractive option for image advertisers and premium segment readers across the world."

The future of the paper newspaper lies in offering something that digital platforms cannot: a curated, edited and well-thought-out whole. The in-depth review, the long reportage text and the well-founded editorial – these formats have a hard time asserting themselves in the digital noise but can become the paper newspaper's main asset. Weekly or weekend editions that emphasize in-depth and analysis can become a successful niche.

4. Cost efficiency and collaborations

To reduce costs, more and more newspaper companies are cooperating. Printing companies are consolidated, and editing of paper newspapers can be moved to other countries. Bonnier News' newspapers in Finland (e.g.

Hufvudstadsbladet and Vasabladet) have moved the editing of the paper newspaper to Sundsvall in Sweden to ensure sustainable publishing. Globally, more and more newspapers are outsourcing their printing to reduce costs and competition for infrastructure.

At the same time, publishers are exploring new revenue streams: events, merchandise, and partnerships complement the declining ad revenue. Diversification of revenue sources has become a key issue for global publishers. In Sweden, the new media subsidy has partly compensated for the financial losses, but the subsidy is not sufficient to maintain a daily paper newspaper in its current form.

5. But above all, it is about something that the global media giants can never offer: the local news.

The big players are hardly interested in what is happening on Långskär or in Köklot. The local newspaper has a very special and irreplaceable role in this. These are the kinds of news that affect people in their everyday lives – the decisions of the municipi-

pal council, the closure of the school, the events of the district and the joys of association life. Without the local newspaper, these events would remain unreported, and democracy at close quarters would lose its most important examiner.

Digital platforms cannot fulfil this function. Their algorithms reward what evokes strong emotions and reaches many, not what is important for a small town. Therefore, the paper newspaper – and by extension the entire newspaper building – must continue to prioritize local journalism. It is it that creates commitment and community, and it is this that makes the magazine indispensable for those who live outside the big cities. Without local coverage, the entire countryside risks becoming a news desert.

And new digital printing technology can enable economical publishing of very small editions. It could be possible to make a differentiated daily newspaper for each and every one of all the districts in Vaasa.

The future of the paper newspaper: a new role in the media landscape

The question is not

whether the paper newspaper will survive, but in what form. Most observers agree that the daily paper newspaper, as it has existed for two hundred years, is on the verge of disappearing. A German industry survey shows that 59 per cent of publishers expect the printed newspaper to cease within the next fifteen years. At the same time, the digital newspaper market is growing, and the global newspaper market as a whole is expected to grow from \$230 billion in 2025 to \$395 billion in 2032, driven by digital revenue.

The future of the paper newspaper probably lies in a hybrid model where the printed edition becomes a premium complement to the digital daily coverage. Fewer publication days, higher quality and clearer profiling – such as a weekly magazine for in-depth study – is one possible way. Another is that the paper newspaper will become a niche product for an older, more willing target group, while the general public consumes news digitally.

However, the democratic role of the paper newspaper must be safeguarded. The editorial page and independent opinion journalism need to remain, re-

gardless of format. As one columnist puts it: "A newspaper is a hub, a campfire, even an institution." Whether printed on paper or delivered digitally, the daily newspaper must continue to fulfil this function – to collect, review and debate.

Conclusion

The daily paper newspaper has been a cornerstone of democratic societies for two hundred years. However, digitalisation has undermined its economic and social conditions. Circulation is falling, readers are getting older and costs are increasing. The future of the paper newspaper is not a given, but it is not impossible either.

To survive, the paper newspaper must undergo a fundamental transformation. Reduced publication frequency, digital-first strategies, investment in quality journalism and cost-efficiency are all necessary parts of this transition. The paper newspaper cannot compete with digital platforms in terms of speed and accessibility – but it can offer something else: immersion, curation, credibility and a unifying public voice.

The question is no longer whether the paper newspaper has a future, but what future it has. The daily paper newspaper in the traditional sense is about to disappear. But the paper newspaper as a format – as a premium medium for quality journalism and opinion formation – still has a role to play. It will be different, less frequent, and more niche, but it can survive – if it dares to change.

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