

Readers' Representative Journal

A CONVERSATION ON NEWSROOM ETHICS AND STANDARDS

Readers respond to ad's fake front page

September 29, 2010 | 2:47 pm



An advertisement that appeared to be the front page of The Times took readers by surprise Wednesday morning. Many of them called or sent e-mails to protest the fake news reports of vandalism and murder at NBC in Burbank. As of noon, The Times had received 61 e-mails, all but one of them critical, and 51 phone calls.

The ad, which readers discovered after unfolding the page, was for the TV show "Law & Order Los Angeles." The actual front page, with a lead story about the [debate](#) between gubernatorial candidates Meg Whitman and Jerry Brown, was just behind the ad.

Nancy Sullivan, The Times' vice president for communications, said: "The Times collaborated with NBC to launch 'Law & Order Los Angeles' in a big, creative way for the hometown audience. This is an exciting, innovative ad that takes the show's beloved, 20-year 'ripped from the headlines' concept and puts it front and center for Southern California."

Here is a sampling of the reader response:

"The Times stooped to a new low in its business practices today (Sept. 29) when it published a wrap-around advertising section for the NBC TV network, disguised as the newspaper's front page. Yes, the fake news section was marked 'advertisement,' and yes, your company needs advertising revenue in order to survive. But if the Times and other American newspapers are ever going to reverse the trend of declining readership, it is essential for newspapers to be taken seriously by their reading audience."

--James W. Ragsdale, Newport Beach

"We were punked. The ad's intent was, of course, to get people to look at it, an intent which was achieved. But it also very much offended me, one of your last faithful subscribers."

--Sandy Sudweeks, Costa Mesa

"To wrap the paper in an advertisement for a TV show is making a mockery of the actual news this paper is supposed to report. I have enjoyed many thoughtful journalistic articles by Times writers through the years. But I can only imagine the frustration of the fine reporters on the staff, to be reduced to a billboard for a fictional TV show."

-- Miriam Ellis, La Canada

"Since when does the L.A. Times run fake news stories under its valued masthead? Or should I say 'once-valued' masthead?"

-- Rhys Thomas, Valley Glen

"Today's paper has a full page ad with a fake headline and police tape over NBC. I work in Burbank, and every single person in our office and stopped and picked

up the paper in concern. It is in extremely poor taste and offensive for those who have been victims of non-fake violent crimes.”

-- Cynthia Appel, Los Angeles

“Let me be one of the first to express my total support for ad revenue any way you can get it, including selling a cover of your front page, presumably for an unusually large sum of money. I hope all Times readers realize the financial pressures on all print media today and, like me, hope the day never comes when we have to get our Times on a digital reader.”

-- Jim Carroll, Burbank

Photos: The advertising section (left) and Wednesday's front page. Credits: Los Angeles Times

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[what's this]

Comments (16)

This may be the end of the print newspaper as we have known it. At least it will be if they do it again. This makes a mockery of our loyalty as readers. Readers that expect to see 'actual' news on the front page. Readers that 'used to' value the front page of the LA Times over the nonsense shoved down our throats on primetime evening news. This was obviously a huge mistake. It may be a long time, if ever, that I pick up a print copy of the LA Times again. I really don't think the genX brain trust at the LA Times / NBC thought this one through. The last bastion of loyalty in news is the printed newspaper. At least it was. If they were looking for a reaction, they got it. Maybe this was a subconscious suicide attempt. Either way, I'm done with the LA Times.

Posted by: Pete Sake | September 29, 2010 at 10:06 PM

Well that did it for me. When I saw the fake ad I was so furious that I call LA Times subscription services and canceled my long time partnership with the LA Times. All for the sake of money? Really! I have an idea, why don't you sell the second page to CBS, and the third page to FOX. Yea, that's a good idea....you can make ads for worthless tv shows the first thing people read about and make the boring news about the war, the economy, the elections an afterthought. Wall Street Journal here I come.

Karl Ingram, Walnut

Posted by: Karl Ingram | September 29, 2010 at 10:27 PM

It is a great insult to the historic front page headlines that you've run over the years that you've rolled over for an advertisement dollar. When you've spent that dollar and this important paper has to close it's doors and die, I will attend the funeral and shed a tear for the next generation of real reporters that this paper will not train in excellence and integrity.

Posted by: Beanie Butler, Hollywood CA | September 30, 2010 at 02:16 PM

Since I live just down the street from NBC in Burbank, I'm glad I saw this in online articles before I ever saw the actual print ad. That's my neighborhood, and if that were real, I'd find that pretty distressing.

Posted by: DougieB | September 30, 2010 at 04:42 PM

It was dispiriting to see. I cordially detest the TIMES, but its embarrassing to see it treat itself this way.

Posted by: Smith | September 30, 2010 at 05:12 PM

Wow! You guys really got me there with that front page. I'm serious about getting my news, don't get me wrong, but my feathers aren't ruffled after seeing this bold money making move like some people.

Posted by: El ey! | September 30, 2010 at 10:08 PM

This is a new low for journalism..

Now, it appears to be obvious literally for all to see, that the Los Angeles Times no longer takes itself seriously as a once valued news source.

Posted by: Marjorie Margel | October 01, 2010 at 04:46 AM

This isn't the first time the LA Times has been caught putting in advertising as news. It makes the entire paper untrustworthy and suspect, and gives its diminishing readerbase even more reason to switch to other sources. I cannot imagine the short-sighted thought process that lead to this being even considered as an option.

Posted by: JamesK | October 01, 2010 at 12:33 PM

Wow you people need to chill it was just an advertisement. Its not like the whole publishing world is going to fall apart from one little prank. Stop acting like children who don't get their way.

Posted by: Ashley | October 01, 2010 at 01:08 PM

Personally i don't get what the big fuss is. Yes, it's a newspaper, but come on...I think this was a neat idea. So maybe the front page wasn't the best place for it, but take a chill pill. You all seem to be seriously overreacting!

Posted by: Desiree | October 01, 2010 at 04:37 PM

The Times has been a fake newspaper for some time now, so I really don't see the problem.

Posted by: DPierre | October 02, 2010 at 05:19 AM

When enough subscribers drop the LA Times, they may get it.

These comments will do nothing but give the NYTimes fodder for their follow up piece.

Good Job LA Times You Wrote The Worst Headline Of All Time -

"LA Times Forced To Shut After They Finally Convinced The Last Reader It Was Not Worth Their Time"

Posted by: Aaron | October 02, 2010 at 04:57 PM

Re: Ad for t.v. show used as a fake front page--I was so upset I posted my thoughts about that on Facebook and Twitter. Ridiculous and tacky.

Posted by: Alicia | October 03, 2010 at 08:10 AM

I think that it shows how stupid many people are. They would likely not have picked up the paper if it was just about the gubernatorial debate. But, if there is a shooting, then they just have to have it.

Posted by: Tmiller | October 04, 2010 at 02:18 PM

Excuse me, but that WAS the "front page". The front page is, by definition, the page that's at the front. That page was in front, hence it was the "front page".

Not that fake news stories are acceptable anywhere else in a newspaper, of course...

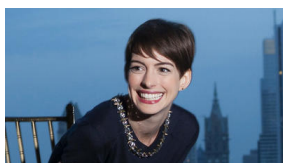
Posted by: Brett Bellmore | October 04, 2010 at 03:44 PM

When i read this i was like OMG and no one i asked about it have heard this even happening. LOL it was cool for a TV show. lighten up people, Just pull it out people and slow your breathing down. Keep up the great work LA TIMES!!!

PS.. Remember people we all are a for profit people. You don't work for free do you. And when you Volunteer you want a T-shirt they give you .

Posted by: Ben Nieves | October 06, 2010 at 06:05 AM

In Case You Missed It...



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