

Facebook's half-hearted lifeline for a bleeding industry

It hardly needs rehashing that a steep decline in the business of journalism ranks among the many casualties that Facebook has inflicted on the public sphere. Starved of advertising revenue, financially stable news institutions are becoming increasingly rare. Local reporting has wilted, with the phrase 'news deserts' joining the vernacular to describe the approximately 1 300 US communities now deprived of it. In an analysis in [The Baffler](#), Jacob Silverman notes that patches of light exist amid a few billionaire-backed publications, like *The Wall Street Journal* and *The Washington Post*, remain in good standing, while *The New York Times* continues to be a pace-setter in a beleaguered field. 'That brings us back to Facebook, which, for the umpteenth time, has come up with a programme designed to save journalism – or at least delay its ignominious demise. But like nearly everything Facebook does, the initiative has the air of something hastily conceived and self-serving, throwing some money at a problem that's far more expansive than Facebook seems willing to admit.' The plan goes like this: Facebook will create a news tab in its main feed that will host content from familiar brand names like *The Washington Post* and *Bloomberg*. In return for licensing this content, Facebook will pay some kind of fee. **The amount may vary, but the highest number thrown around in early reporting has been \$3m, paid annually.** 'Having made obscene fortunes by cannibalising the news industry's advertising base and stealing its content, Google and Facebook now hope to earn back some goodwill with a few handouts.' Silverman says a more sensible programme would arguably depend on an even split in advertising revenue and not on a fee-based model that doesn't account for traffic or popularity. 'Facebook isn't alone in throwing money at the news industry and hoping something sticks. Together with Google and a range of think tanks and philanthropies, hundreds of millions of dollars are being poured into quixotic efforts to make a broken business model work.'