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New Day barely dawned: here's why UK's latest paper closed after just two months

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Launched with optimism, closed with regret. Anthony Devlin / PA Wire/Press Association Images

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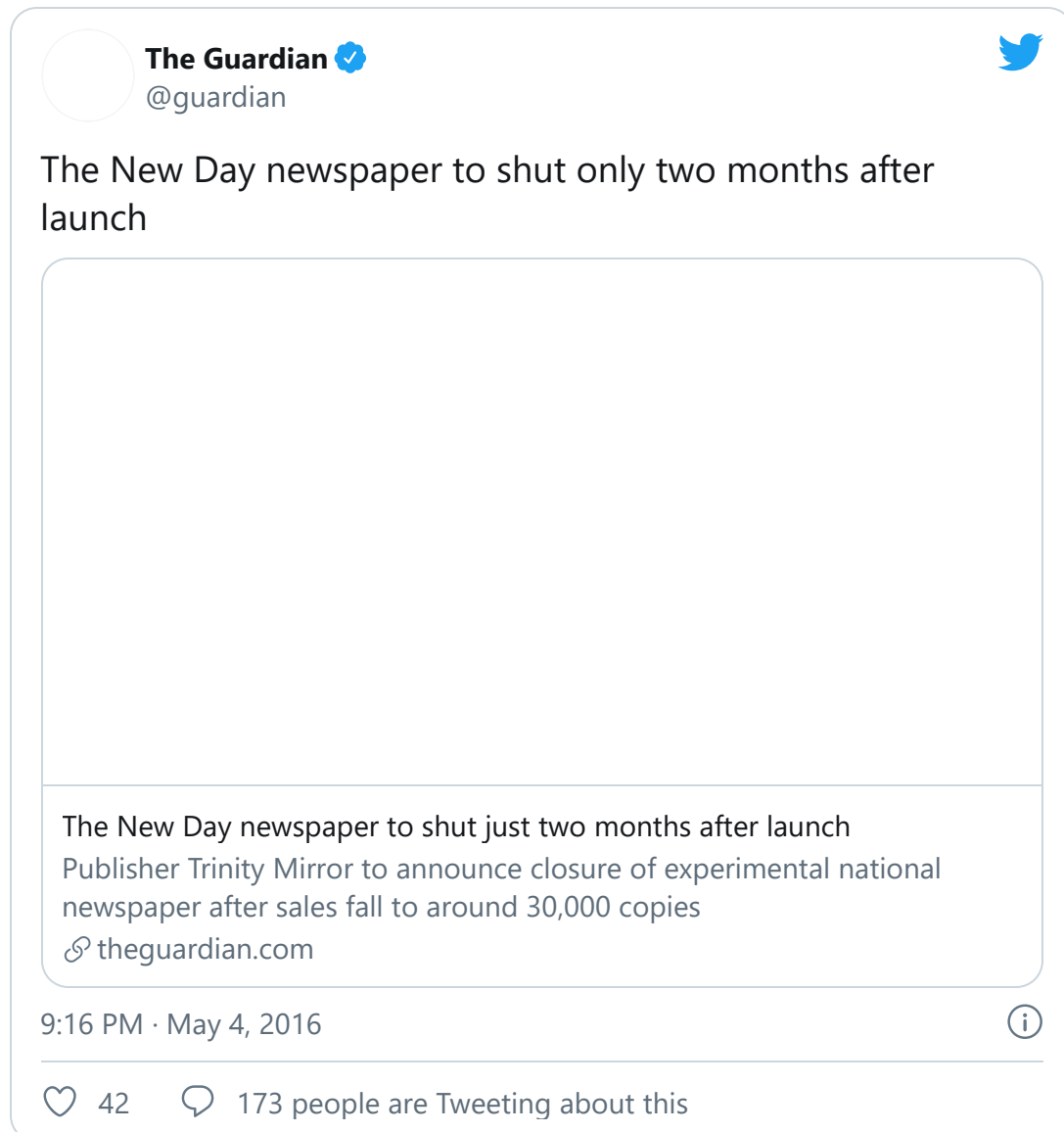
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So, barely two months – and 50 editions – since Trinity Mirror launched its bright new newspaper venture, The New Day, the company has announced its closure. Confirming widespread industry speculation – and the worst fears of the new paper's staff – the company issued a trading statement saying:

Although The New Day has received many supportive reviews and built a strong following on Facebook, the circulation for the title is below our expectations. As a result, we have decided to close the title on 6 May 2016. While disappointing, the launch and subsequent

closure have provided new insights into enhancing our newspapers and a number of these opportunities will be considered over time.

What an abrupt and sadly inevitable end to a project launched with great optimism and, whatever your views on the paper itself, a freshness of approach intended to challenge the cynicism and negativity of the conventional press. If you didn't like newspapers – then this was the paper for you.



The first (free) edition appeared on February 29 and as I wrote on this site it was vibrant, folksy, overwhelmingly upbeat and seemingly completely focused on a female audience. Its sports coverage was scant, there were no TV listings and editorially there was an emphasis on lifestyle and issues.

There was also the rather strange decision taken by the publishers of this “newspaper of the digital age” not to have a website or digital edition. And while this was partially rectified in late April, it did seem that this may have been a major gamble which could easily have deprived The New Day of a potential audience.

So here we are just ten weeks later. The hoped-for daily sales of 200,000 never materialised and the latest sales figures are understood to have dropped below 40,000.

Dark days for print

The closure is of course a major blow for all the journalists involved. The New Day editor, Alison Phillips, wrote on the paper's Facebook page of the "extraordinary" engagement with readers and the fact that there were clearly many people who loved the idea of a different kind of newspaper. Alas, as is also evidently the case, there were simply not that many of them willing to part with 25p for the first two weeks of sale and 50p thereafter.



And there, as if we didn't know it, is the rub. The New Day did not become financially viable quickly enough. Some experts, such as former FT media editor Raymond Snoddy suggest that the price hike from 25p to 50p was implemented far too early – that circulation and brand loyalty should have been built before that decision was taken. In The Guardian, Roy Greenslade wrote of a venture doomed to fail because the newspaper was launched on the cheap. It was bold in concept, but timid in execution. Did no one at Trinity Mirror, he asked, stop to wonder at the folly of trying to convince a target audience composed of people who dislike newspapers to buy a newspaper?

It must be remembered, as is the case for all newspaper publishers, that these are dark days for Trinity Mirror. As the closure of The New Day was announced, so too was the fact that print advertising revenues were down 19% with circulation revenue down 4.5% in the first four months of this year. The Financial Times reported an 18% drop in Trinity Mirror's pre-tax profit for 2015 to £67m and a 7% decline in revenues to £593m. According to the FT, the company's share price has fallen about 80% over the past decade.

It may be the case that it is this precarious situation that led Trinity Mirror to seriously underfund The New Day. This most ambitious of projects, in the most volatile of times, simply did not have the workforce or financial backing to make a long term bid for success. A very brief £5m advertising campaign in the days before its launch proved wholly inadequate and the 25 core staff involved in the day to day newsgathering and editing were reportedly either on secondment from the Mirror and Sunday Mirror or on short-term contracts.



Spare a thought for staff

Staff morale could hardly have been improved by initial industry reaction to the paper. Analysts thought the venture ill-conceived and veteran writers expressed scorn and ridicule. In the Spectator, Alexander Chancellor wrote that reading The New Day made him feel like throwing himself “on the bonfire”, reasoning that if it succeeded then it would mark the irreversible decline of newspapers.

So let’s spare a final thought for those journalists seeking to create and sustain something genuinely different in a familiar and troubled environment. Working with limited funds, seemingly hasty management and a general public evidently ever more unwilling to pay for newspapers, the project appeared from the first to be doomed to fail. It was therefore heartening to read the words of Alison Phillips this morning, whose optimism reflected the newspaper she so briefly edited:

I just hope all of those of us who’ve been involved in this escapade – readers, staff, advertisers, paperboys, papergirls ... never ever stop trying new things. Because that’s when we start dying.

To take Samuel Beckett: “Ever tried. Ever Failed. No matter. Try Again. Fail again. Fail better.”

Thanks for everything...



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