[SK] Payment System for Web Content

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Jana Markechová
Markechova Law Offices

Slovak publishers have agreed on a common procedure for introducing a payment barrier for the readers of Slovak news websites as a condition for granting them access to a large amount of content from various competing media. The system, which enables paid online content and services, is called Piano and is aimed at reducing the barriers that currently discourage readers from paying for content.

The man behind the idea and also the head of the Piano project was formerly editor-in-chief and deputy director of Slovakia's largest broadsheet, and is now the co-founder of the Prague-based new media consulting company NextBig, which together with the company Etarget - a provider of online advertising - jointly owns the company Piano Media that operates the system. The premium-content payment service is open to newspapers, TV stations and online services and is used by most major Slovak news websites to put parts of their content behind a paywall. Under the respective system, paying for access will give readers content and perks in addition to financial news or specialist subjects including: comments on articles; exclusive access to newspaper articles the evening before they are available as print publication; expert forums and advertising services.

Since 2 May 2011 users are obliged to pay a fee in the amount of EUR 2.90 per month or EUR 0.99 per week for the relevant service after a two-week free trial. This is considered to be the main advantage for readers, since only one payment - which makes the full content of all engaged web pages available - is necessary in order to ensure access to any of the participating media sources. Publishers, on the other hand, might welcome the Piano system as a possibility of charging for sections and services that users would otherwise not be willing to pay for separately and thus as an instrument to increase their income.

According to a Mediaresearch survey internet users are not explicitly against paying for web content. The results of the relevant research show that more than half of the internet-using population would be willing to pay a fee in the amount of about EUR 3 per month in order to have unlimited access to added-value content on the key news websites in Slovakia. NextBig expects 0.8-1.5 percent of the Slovak internet-using population to become paying users in the next year. According to the latest data on the internet use in households, provided by the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic, it is possible to estimate that in the near future the number of internet users will reach four million; the aforesaid 0.8-1.5

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percent corresponds with 32-60 thousand internet users.

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