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Oct 17, 2008

1.44 million read ST

Jump of 105,000 is the largest in at least two years and comes despite slowing growth overseas

By Chua Hian Hou



ST FILE PHOTO

ABOUT 1.44 million people read The Straits Times (ST) every day now - 105,000 more on a daily basis than last year.

It is the biggest jump in readership logged by Singapore's leading English daily in at least two years, and it comes at a time when newspapers around the world are fighting to keep their readers.

The Straits Times increased readership to 39 per cent, versus 37.9 per cent based on the 2006/07 Nielsen Media Index. This translates to a projected readership base of 1.44 million readers.

On a daily basis, this means ST cornered 39 per cent of Singapore consumers, up 1.1 percentage point from last year.

These figures come from the latest Nielsen Media Index, details of which were released yesterday, for the period of review between July last year and June.

The paper's editor, Mr Han Fook Kwang, said: 'It's very heartening to know that more people are reading us today. Like newspapers all over the world, ST operates in a very challenging environment, with so many sources of

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'To be able to gain new readers shows we must be doing something right in meeting the changing needs of our readership.'

The newspaper, published by mainboard-listed media group Singapore Press Holdings (SPH), continues to 'lead the pack' of local newspapers, the index said.

Today, the free newspaper published by MediaCorp, was a distant second, with less than half the numbers. SPH's Chinese morning daily Lianhe Zaobao took third place.

The Nielsen index's period of review coincided with the run-up to ST's revamp, when the newspaper was gearing itself up to put more resources into generating exclusive stories that would hit the spot with its readers.

The 163-year-old newspaper launched a new look and pagination in August, and along with that, relaunched its website and doubled its efforts to engage its readers online and offline.

The Straits Times' blogs were launched that month, along with online channel ST RazorTV - all efforts that Mr Han is banking on to keep the

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newspaper's lead.

During Nielsen's period of review, the Internet grew increasingly popular with Singaporeans, particularly the younger set, but viewership of free-to-air TV channels fell.

Nielsen executive director Rebecca Tan put this down to competition from online entertainment sources, cable television, and the newly introduced paid Internet TV offerings.

But despite the Internet's popularity, mainstream media outlets still emerged dominant in people's daily media diet.

In fact, three-quarters of those surveyed by Nielsen cited newspapers as their preferred news source.

This is unlikely to change any time soon, Ms Tan said, since the traditional media 'has always enjoyed a greater degree of public trust than the Internet'.

The Nielsen index showed that two in three people here turn to at least three media sources, primarily mainstream media, for news and entertainment.

A small club of 11 per cent, the so-called information junkies, make time for five sources of information - newspapers, TV, magazines, radio and the Internet. These media consumers typically earn more and are highly educated.

Among the less info-hungry, 22 per cent of those surveyed relied on two media sources, and 9 per cent, just one.

But with the Internet digging in, 'a sizeable proportion of the population now counts online activities as a permanent fixture in their daily media palette, along with newspaper reading and terrestrial television viewing', said Ms Tan.

There is thus an opportunity for traditional news media like ST to reach new segments of readers, she said.


ST's website, straitstimes.com, for example, reaches 3 per cent of Singaporeans. 'With the multimedia-savvy consumer these days, having an online presence is increasingly seen as a way to increase the touch points with one's audience,' Ms Tan added.

The index, now in its 40th year, polled more than 4,700 people aged 15 and up on their media consumption habits.

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