

Newspapers sales: summer romance turns to autumn despair?

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Sales went up for quite a few newspapers in August compared to July. It must have spread some sunshine during a wet summer for a few media executives. But look carefully at the yearly comparison with August and all the figures point downwards (with the exception of the cut-price Sun).

You can read my detailed [analysis](#) in today's [Guardian](#) newspaper but here's the gist of it:

The Sun's cut in price last month to 30p helped boost its sales in the holiday month. It makes the paper 10p cheaper nationally than the Daily Mirror, 20p cheaper than the Daily Mail and 5p cheaper than the Daily Star. It posted a 0.48% rise from July, but sales of 3,148,792 are down 0.29% year on year. However, comparing Sun sales over the last six months with the same period in 2007, circulation is actually up by 1.48% – the only national daily to record an increase by that measure.

The Mirror may feel pleased with a rise of 0.82% in sales in August, but not when it considers a year-on-year fall of 8.03% – a six-monthly decline of 5.6%. Similarly, Daily Star sales rose by a useful 1.76% in August, but were down 8.97% on the same month last year.

Not everyone saw August increases, with the Daily Mail falling 0.52%. However, its drop of 3.44% year on year is actually better than most. The result contrasts with a 1.8% rise in circulation in August at the Daily Express, but a six-month fall of 5.28%. Taking a look at the year-on-year figures for the Express, it has lost 78,827 sales – a massive drop of 9.53%.

Fewer Financial Times readers take their paper while on holiday and sales fell 1.42%, contributing to a six-month decline of 0.91%. But that result is still much better than the average decline for the quality-newspaper sector of 3.08%.

The Guardian cannot be happy with losing 1.58% in August, which contributed to a six-month slippage of 4.74%. Likewise, the Independent lost 2.23% in August compared to July, contributing to a 2.44% six-month reduction. Compare its sales in August with last year and it has slipped by just over 4%.

The Telegraph (0.28%) and the Times (0.12%) enjoyed small increases in August, although their six-month figures are in line with the overall quality sector fall of about 3% since this March. They are about 3% and 4% down respectively compared with August 2007.

The Sundays continue to fare much worse than dailys. However, there is a split between the quality and popular markets.

With the exception of the Sunday Mirror (-0.39%) and the Mail on Sunday (-1.3%), all the red tops and middle market Sunday papers put on sales in August. The News of the World keeps its place as the best-selling national with a 2.07% rise from July; the People was up 1.54%; and the Sunday Express stayed effectively static.

But again, look at the long-term figures and it is difficult to see much hope. The Sunday Express is actually down 16.93% from August 2007 and the People is 12.36% lower, too.

The quality Sundays did not even enjoy an August boost. The Observer was the worst performer, losing 4% of circulation from July, while the Independent on Sunday saw a 1.85% drop – both were around 7% down, year on year. Remove the Sunday's bulk sales and the number is a worrying 156,900.

The Sunday Telegraph (relaunched in full colour yesterday) and Sunday Times lost 0.14% and 0.23% respectively in August. Their sales were both about 3% down from last year – relatively healthy considering the overall Sunday market.

So what really happened in August? It feels as if there was an Olympic boost – and, of course, various papers tried price or other promotional tactics. It is possible that poor weather meant we were more likely to read a paper than go out and do something. We should also not rule out a big editorial effort by newsrooms straining to grab readers' attention and loose change. If you compare the current look of your newspaper to this time last year you cannot miss a riot of colour, for example.

But, while some sales increased in August, year-on-year figures are all down – with the happy exception of the Sun.

This autumn, the real battle resumes for survival. Newspapers are still making a lot of money and selling millions of copies. But after the glow of August fades, newspaper (and advertising) executives will recognise that the trend figures spell serious problems for some titles and significant concerns for the rest

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