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Ottawa, Quebec pull advertising, escalating showdown with Facebook and Instagram

'Facebook has decided to be unreasonable, irresponsible, and started blocking news'

Christopher Nardi

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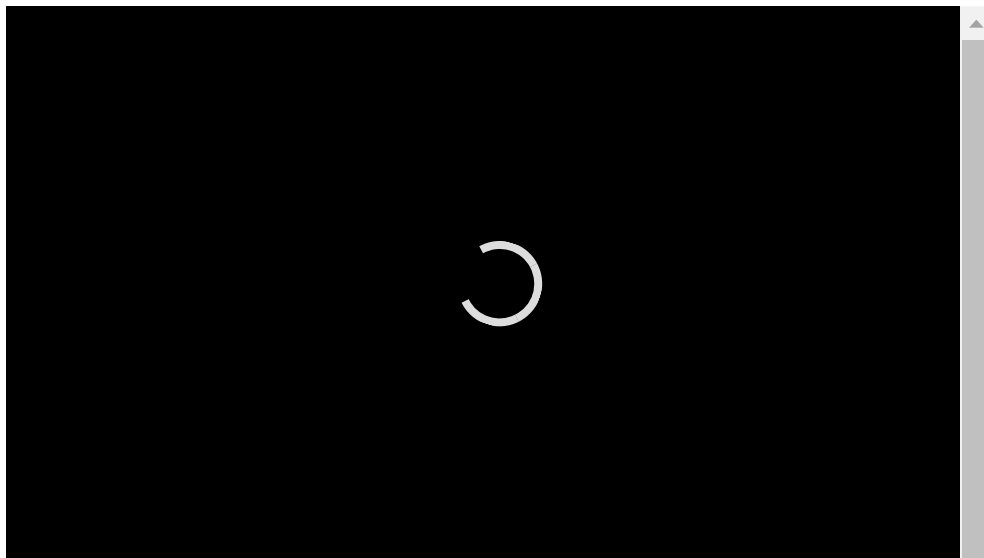
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Federal Heritage Minister Pablo Rodriguez at the Canadian Media Producers Association Prime Time conference in Ottawa, Feb. 2, 2023. PHOTO BY ADRIAN WYLD/THE CANADIAN PRESS

OTTAWA – The federal and Quebec governments will stop advertising on Meta-owned platforms Facebook and Instagram as the conflict between the company and Ottawa heats up over legislation that would force web giants to share revenues with news publishers.

STORY CONTINUES BELOW



“Facebook has decided to be unreasonable, irresponsible, and started blocking news,” Heritage Minister Pablo Rodriguez told reporters Wednesday flanked by Bloc Québécois MP Martin Champoux and NDP MP Peter Julian.

Shortly after, Quebec Premier François Legault announced his government would follow suite and stop advertising on Facebook “in solidarity with the media”. “No company is above the law,” he added on Twitter.

But the Liberal government’s decision does not extend to the party. Liberal Party of Canada spokesperson Parker Lund said in a statement that the party would continue to advertise on Meta-owned platforms. According to the company’s ad library, the party spent nearly \$15,000 on over 1,000 ads in the past month.

STORY CONTINUES BELOW

Rodriguez said his government was only targeting ads on Meta platforms and not those on Google because the former has refused to negotiate a deal to compensate news media companies for the use of their content.

“I consider that Google’s approach is responsible. They have specific requests and that’s normal, they’re a private company,” Rodriguez said.

“Meta, on the other side, is not talking to us,” he added. “They took a different approach and I don’t think it’s good for anyone; not for them, not for the government, not for Canadians.”

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[Trudeau accuses Meta of abandoning democratic 'responsibility' for walking away from Online News Act](#)

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The Online News Act, formerly known as Bill C-18, received royal assent on June 22. It would obligate Meta and Google to reach commercial deals with news publishers to share revenue for news stories that appear on their platforms (Postmedia, publisher of the National Post in favour of the legislation) once it comes into force within six months.

In response to the bill’s passing, Meta began blocking news content on its Facebook and Instagram platforms to certain users in recent weeks.

Google has said it will remove Canadian news links from its products when the act comes into force in around six months, but Rodriguez said he is optimistic that it won’t come to that.

“We’ve met both Google and Meta multiple times to better understand the concerns. We believe we have a path forward and we’re willing to continue talking with the platforms,” Rodriguez said. “We’re convinced what Google is asking at this moment can be done through regulations.”

STORY CONTINUES BELOW

According to its latest annual report on advertisement spending, the federal government spent over \$23 million on ads on Facebook and Instagram between 2020 and 2022, nearly triple what it spent on Twitter (\$6.7 million) or Snapchat (\$5 million).

On Wednesday, Quebec's largest media conglomerate Quebecor, which owns newspapers *Le Journal de Montréal* and *Le Journal de Québec* as well as TVA news stations, announced it was pulling advertising from Meta platforms as long as the company refused to host Canadian news links.

"In view of Meta's categorical refusal to enter into negotiations, Quebecor announces that effective immediately and until further notice, it is withdrawing all advertising by its subsidiaries and business units from Facebook and Instagram," the company said in an unattributed statement.

STORY CONTINUES BELOW

Cogeco, a Quebec-based radio operator, quickly followed suit.

Spokespeople for other media companies including Torstar, The Globe and Mail, Bell Media, Corus, Postmedia (which owns the National Post) and La Presse did not respond to questions about their advertising on Google and Meta platforms by deadline.

A spokesperson for CBC/Radio-Canada Leon Mar said only that the Crown corporation is "monitoring this situation and considering the options."

On Wednesday, CBC News Editor Brodie Fenlon wrote on his blog that he was among the users who had lost access to the CBC Instagram account as part of Meta's news blocking. Instead of news, he said, he was greeted with the message: "People in Canada can't see this content. In response to Canadian government legislation, news content can't be viewed in Canada."

The NDP confirmed Wednesday it would continue to buy ads on Facebook and Instagram, whereas the Bloc Québécois said it had cut its advertisements on Meta platforms at the end of June.

The Parliamentary Budget Officer has estimated that under the Online News Act, Google and Meta could end up funding more than 30 per cent of newsroom costs, just under \$330 million a year. But if Google and Meta remove news from their platforms, they will no longer be covered under the Online News Act.

With additional reporting by Anja Karadeglija