

Online news sites to require new individual licence from next month

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From 1 June, online news sites which report regularly on issues relating to Singapore - and have significant reach among readers here - will need an individual licence from the Media Development Authority (MDA).



This includes those that report an average of at least one article a week on Singapore news and current affairs over two months, and if they have at least 50,000 unique users from Singapore each month over two months.

Once they are individually licensed, these sites will each need to put up a performance bond of \$50,000.

MDA has identified 10 online news websites that will require the new individual licence.

They include channelnewsasia.com; todayonline.com; asiaone.com and sg.news.yahoo.com.

MDA says the changes will place online news sites on a regulatory framework that is more consistent with that of traditional news platforms that are already licensed.

Currently, the online news sites are automatically licensed as a class under the Broadcasting Act.

And they are already expected to moderate for "prohibited content" defined under the existing Internet Code of Practice.

The new licensing framework will provide more clarity on what MDA considers "prohibited content".

This includes content that undermines racial or religious harmony, or which offends good taste or decency.

And when notified by MDA, the news sites must remove such content within 24 hours.

MDA cites the increasing number of Singaporeans accessing news and current affairs on the Internet as one of the reasons for the change.

It will evaluate other online news sites and notify them when they are deemed to require an individual licence.



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SMU Assistant Professor of Law Eugene Tan agrees with the change given the potential impact of prohibited online content.

"I think we should always be mindful that online news platforms they do disseminate news a lot faster. I think the potential for harm is there. But certainly one hopes that MDA will adopt a light touch approach and that online news platforms will continue to exercise social responsibility not only in what they report but also in how they report."