

MEDIA/PUBLISHING

Facebook, Australia come to agreement over news ban

February 23, 2021



Facebook plans to restore news pages to its platform in Australia. Image credit: Getty

By LUXURY DAILY NEWS SERVICE

U.S. technology giant Facebook has reached a deal with the Australian government after a nearly week-long suspension of news pages on the social media platform.

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Facebook removed a multitude of publication accounts from its platform last week after a new Australian legislation would require the social media company to pay for news and media content shared through its site. On Feb. 23, Australian government officials announced it would amend the legislation to include a new provision.

"After further discussions with the Australian government, we have come to an agreement that will allow us to support the publishers we choose to, including small and local publishers," said Campbell Brown, vice president of global news partnerships at Facebook, in a statement. "We're restoring news on Facebook in Australia in the coming days.

"Going forward, the government has clarified we will retain the ability to decide if news appears on Facebook so that we won't automatically be subject to a forced negotiation," she said. "It's always been our intention to support journalism in Australia and around the world, and we'll continue to invest in news globally and resist efforts by media conglomerates to advance regulatory frameworks that do not take account of the true value exchange between publishers and platforms like Facebook."

A new deal

The initial version of the legislation would have allowed media outlets to bargain individually or collectively with Facebook, and to enter binding arbitration if the parties could not reach an agreement.

Within this legislation, Facebook would not have been able to abuse its position by making complacent offers to news outlets for their content.



Vogue Australia Facebook page during the dispute. Image credit: Facebook

Some of the publications that were temporarily removed from Facebook last week include, but are not limited to: *The New York Times*, CNN, *Vogue Australia* and *Business Insider Australia*. Facebook also removed government health and safety accounts, such as: Department of Fire and Emergency Services, ACT Health and the Bureau of Meteorology.

The amended proposal, announced Tuesday, would require an additional round of negotiation with media companies before binding arbitration begins, as well as more acknowledgment of any deals Facebook reaches with publishers on its own. In return, Facebook plans to restore news pages to its platform.

The Australian government stated it would include a provision that must take into account whether a digital platform, such as Facebook or Google, has made a significant contribution to the sustainability of the Australian news industry through reaching such agreements with media businesses.

The social platform said it is satisfied with the changes, acknowledging that the legislation now addresses its main concerns.

Facebook has been in some hot water recently, as the United States Federal Trade Commission (FTC) sued the social media conglomerate in December for illegally maintaining its personal social networking monopoly through a years-long course of anticompetitive conduct.

After a lengthy investigation in cooperation with attorneys general of 46 states, the District of Columbia and Guam, the lawsuit accuses Facebook of engaging in a systematic strategy to eliminate threats to its monopoly through, but not limited to, the acquisition of rival platforms Instagram and WhatsApp. The FTC suggests that this course of conduct harms competition, leaves consumers with few choices for personal social networking and deprives digital marketers of the benefits of competition ([see story](#)).