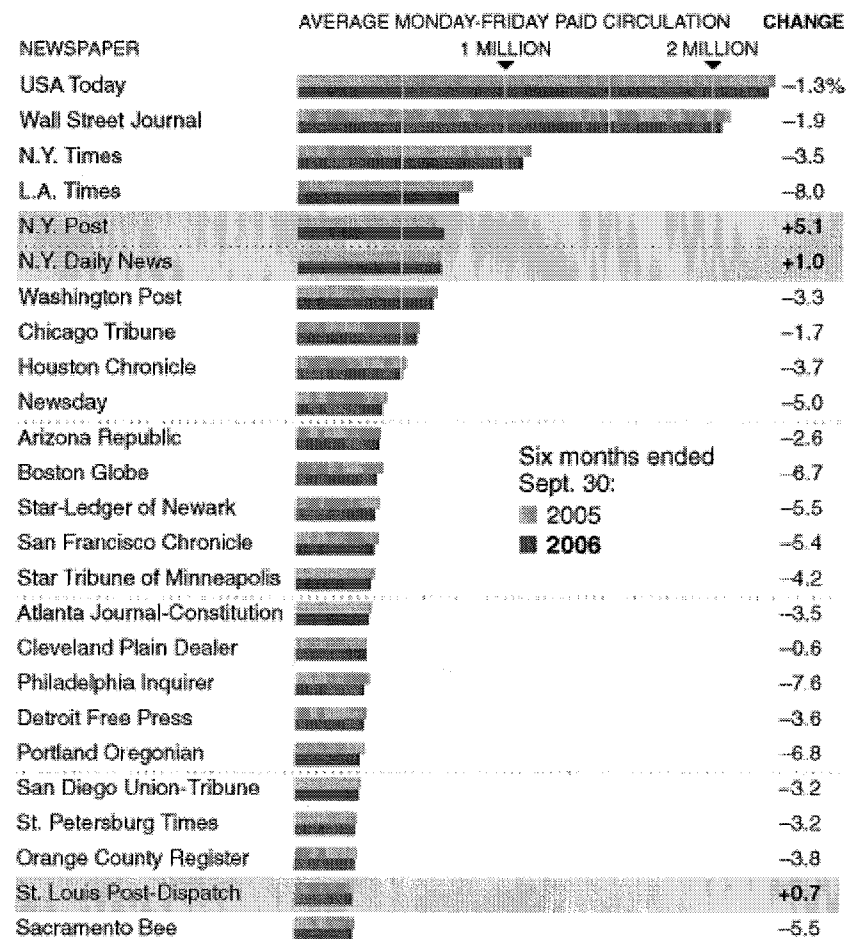


**The New York Times****October 31, 2006**

Most of the country's 25 largest daily newspapers reported lower circulation than a year earlier. Over all, the 2.8 percent drop was the largest in 15 years.



Sources: Audit Bureau of Circulations; Newspaper Association of America

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## Newspaper Circulation Falls Sharply

By **KATHARINE Q. SEELYE**

The circulation of the nation's daily newspapers plunged during the latest reporting period in one of the sharpest declines in recent history, according to data released yesterday. The slide continues a decades-long trend and adds to the woes of a mature industry already struggling with layoffs and facing the potential sale of some of its flagships.

Over all, average daily circulation dropped by 2.8 percent during the six-month period ended Sept. 30, compared with the period last year, according to an industry analysis of data released by the Audit Bureau of Circulations. Circulation for Sunday papers fell by 3.4 percent.

The figures appear to be the steepest in any comparable six-month period in at least 15 years. They come after the sale of the Knight Ridder newspapers this year and in the midst of a possible sale of the Tribune Company, whose assets include 11 newspapers. The circulation losses also follow recent sour earnings reports, raising questions about why anyone would want to buy a newspaper now.

The losses have accelerated as the industry tries to adjust to the steady migration of readers and advertisers to the Internet. Papers in major metropolitan areas, where more homes are wired for broadband, fared worse than those in smaller markets.

Newspaper executives also attribute some of the decline to deliberate strategies to eliminate so-called bulk sales to third-party sponsors that offer papers free in places like hotels. Advertisers view them as having little value because the readers getting them did not pay for them.

The Los Angeles Times lost 8 percent of its daily circulation and 6 percent on Sunday. The Boston Globe, owned by The New York Times Company, lost 6.7 percent of its daily circulation and almost 10 percent on Sunday.

The New York Times, one of the few big papers where circulation had held steady over the last few reporting periods, lost about 3.5 percent of its circulation both daily and Sunday. The Washington Post's declines were nearly the same. The Wall Street Journal's daily paper fell by less than 2 percent but its Weekend Edition, which comes out on Saturday, reported a 6.7 percent drop.

Circulation for about half the nation's dailies had dropped to 43.7 million, down 2.8 percent, for the six months ending in September, compared with the same period last year. Daily circulation for all of the nation's papers reached its peak in 1984, at 63.3 million. If the 2006 numbers accurately reflect the changes at all papers, said John P. Murray, vice president of circulation and marketing for the Newspaper Association of America, "this is the single largest decline in daily circulation we have seen since 1991."

Nonetheless, three billionaires in Los Angeles have said they are interested in buying The Los Angeles

She also said that like many other publishers, McClatchy was in the process of cutting back on third-party sales, "and until that's weaned out, the circulation numbers won't look so good."

One of the few increases in circulation was scored by The New York Post, which eked past its main rival, The Daily News, by about 10,000 copies and trumpeted the news on a giant billboard in Times Square.

Both papers reported increases in circulation, with the Post growing by 5.13 percent and the Daily News up 1 percent. Col Allan, editor of The Post, attributed the paper's increase to having a better sense of what readers want and having a sense of humor. He also said the Post had fewer bulk sales to third-party sponsors than the News.

Martin Dunn, editor of The Daily News, said in a statement that the Post had achieved its gains at great expense, by selling extra papers in Las Vegas and Los Angeles and giving them away free in New York. He said The Daily News was the leader in New York, "the place that counts."

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