

Spain frets as Google promises to drop news service

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Updated: 12/15/2014 03:47:25 PM PST

MercuryNews.com

MOUNTAIN VIEW -- Google on Monday said it would deliver on its promise to shut down its Google News service in Spain on Tuesday as the country's newspaper lobby had second thoughts about irking the U.S. tech giant.

Google announced last week that it would remove all Spanish publishers from its global news index and pull the plug on Google News in Spain because of a new law nicknamed the "Google Tax."

The law, set to take effect in January, will force news aggregators to pay Spanish news publishers whenever they display snippets and link to news stories. Those who do not will be fined.

The Spanish Newspaper Publishers' Association had pushed for the stringent copyright rules that lawmakers passed this fall, but Monday the lobby group told The Spain Report, an online publication, that it wanted the Spanish government and European Union to intervene and persuade Google to keep the service.

While Google News is not as widely used in Spain as in the United States, losing the service will hurt readers and reduce Web traffic to Spanish news organizations, said Pipo Serrano, a journalist and professor at the University of Barcelona.

Many Spaniards are likely to be upset at their government, but probably not at Google, for the interference, Serrano said.

When it comes to the Internet, "the Spanish government doesn't know how to manage this," Serrano said. "Instead of realizing we are in a new era, a new time, we're trying to put patches on everything, trying to keep the old way working."

Users will still be able to search for Spain-originated news stories on Google's main search engine, just not on Google News, which uses a different algorithm.

Google has described its 13-year-old Google News service as a site that helps news organizations by sending users directly to the original source of the news they are searching for. It indexes content from 65,000 publishers in 30 languages, though the company will not say how many publishers and users it has in Spain.

"They're not acting as vultures, picking up everything to enrich their business," Serrano said. "The truth is that what Google does is just show the title, the abstract, then redirects people to the newspapers."

His perspective echoes what Richard Gingras, head of Google News, said in a statement last week announcing the shutdown.

"This new legislation requires every Spanish publication to charge services like Google News for showing even the smallest snippet from their publications, whether they want to or not," Gingras said. "As Google News itself makes no money (we do not show any advertising on the site) this new approach is simply not sustainable."

Though nicknamed the "Google Tax" because the new Spanish law targeted the giant U.S. search engine,

the copyright changes also met opposition from homegrown tech entrepreneurs such as Ricardo Galli, founder of Spanish social news website Menéame.

Galli in recent days used Twitter to mock the publishing lobby and his country's conservative Popular Party for passing the law, and has previously threatened to move his business to another country.

Publishers in Germany, France and Belgium have also fought Google to pay for linked content.

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