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Absurd readership figures

Sun Media to sue Nielsen over false and misleading readership estimates

By: (Tue, 01 Mar 2011)

PETALING JAYA (March 1, 2011): Sun Media Corporation Sdn Bhd (SMC), the publisher of theSun, is commencing legal action against market research company The Nielsen Company (Malaysia) Sdn Bhd for publishing false and misleading readership estimates of the newspaper.

The action arises from SMC's concern that Nielsen had wrongly estimated only 131,000 daily readership for theSun (as reported in The Star on Feb 26) compared to theSun's independently audited daily circulation of 300,000 copies.

"Even with a daily circulation of 300,000 copies, we have not been able to satisfy the growing demand for our paper and there is still a long list of establishments waiting to be included in theSun's distribution list," said Sun Media managing director Chan Kien Sing.

The Audit Bureau of Circulations (ABC), which independently tracks and audits the distribution and circulation figures for various publications, has in fact published and affirmed theSun's daily circulation at 300,550 copies (Period: July 1, 2009 to June 30, 2010).

Publications	ABC audited copies (30 June 2010)*	Nielsen 2010 Readership estimates **	Nielsen Readership per copy	Readership per theSun's estimate
theSun	300,550	131,000	0.44	3.0 readers per copy = 900,000 readers
The Star	286,409	1,006,000	3.5	-
New Straits Times	109,341	236,000	2.2	-

Source: * Audit Bureau of Circulations Report (Dec 2010)

** The Star dated 26 Feb 2011

"Logic and basic common sense dictate that Nielsen's readership estimates for theSun cannot possibly be less than ABC's audited circulation figures. In fact, we estimate our daily readership numbers to be in the region of 900,000 (see table)," said Chan.

"We are absolutely certain that Nielsen's estimates are fundamentally flawed and erroneous. Nielsen's report was published recklessly and irresponsibly without proper and careful inquiry of the actual circulation figures and/or readership of theSun," he said in a statement.

"We have previously taken issue with the readership estimates published by Nielsen as we regard the numbers to be false, grossly underestimated and misleading," Chan said.

"We had engaged with Nielsen in the past to put forward our case in an attempt to convince Nielsen to

consider other relevant factors that will impact its research methodology and conclusion, and prove that its readership estimates of theSun are false and inaccurate.

"However, our efforts and engagement with Nielsen have been unsuccessful as Nielsen has completely and consistently disregarded SMC's views and input," he said.

Chan said SMC had cautioned Nielsen that its false and misleading readership estimates for theSun have seriously damaged SMC's business and trading reputation, and SMC has suffered substantial damages.

However, Nielsen has persistently estimated theSun's readership numbers wrongly.

"Whilst we fully appreciate that circulation numbers and readership estimates are different concepts, we believe it is Nielsen's obligation and responsibility to take into consideration other relevant empirical evidence, especially the ABC figures, when the estimates derived from random sampling surveys and theoretical extrapolation by Nielsen have resulted in such contradictory findings," Chan said.

"The significant discrepancy of about 50% lower between the Nielsen readership estimates and the ABC circulation numbers on theSun proves that Nielsen's methodology in determining readership data of theSun is fundamentally flawed and highly questionable.

"It is unacceptable and unprofessional for Nielsen to completely disregard audited circulation figures issued by a respected and professional body like ABC," he said.

As publisher of the ABC-affirmed largest circulation English language newspaper, SMC categorically rejects Nielsen's readership estimates on theSun.

"We urge readers, advertisers and industry stakeholders to question Nielsen's illogical and flawed findings," Chan said.

He said SMC will take all steps to defend its business and trading reputation and had instructed its lawyers to commence legal action against Nielsen and claim for substantial damages and other appropriate reliefs.

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