Christian Science Paper to End Daily Print Edition

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After a century of continuous publication, The Christian Science Monitor will abandon its weekday print edition and appear online only, its publisher announced Tuesday. The cost-cutting measure makes The Monitor the first national newspaper to largely give up on print.

The paper is currently published Monday through Friday, and will move to online only in April, although it will also introduce a weekend magazine. John Yemma, The Monitor's editor, said that moving to a Web focus will mean it can keep its eight foreign bureaus open.

"We have the luxury — the opportunity — of making a leap that most newspapers will have to make in the next five years," Mr. Yemma said.

The Monitor is an anomaly in journalism, a nonprofit financed by a church and delivered through the mail. But with seven Pulitzer Prizes and a reputation for thoughtful writing and strong international coverage, it long maintained an outsized influence in the publishing world, which declined as its circulation has slipped to 52,000, from a high of more than 220,000 in 1970.

In an industry that has been conducting layoffs, closing bureaus and shrinking the size of the product, The Monitor’s experiment will be closely tracked.

"Everybody’s talking about new models," Mr. Yemma said. "This is a new model."

Lou Ureneck, the chairman of the journalism department at Boston University, said that it was difficult to interpret
The new online focus will allow the paper to keep eight foreign bureaus open.

Before The Monitor, a handful of small papers had shifted away from print. This year, The Capital Times in Madison, Wis., went online only, and The Daily Telegram in Superior, Wis., announced it would publish online except for two days a week.

Dropping the print edition seems to tempt newspaper executives. At a recent conference held by the City University of New York’s journalism school, a group of publishing executives discussed what a cost-efficient newsroom should look like. They eventually settled on casting aside paper and starting fresh on the Web.

Still, said Ken Doctor, a newspaper analyst at Outsell Inc., most newspapers cannot give up paper. Print editions still bring in 92 percent of the overall revenue, according to the Newspaper Association of America.

“If that much revenue is tied up in the print product, if tomorrow these companies dropped those editions, they would have 90 percent less revenue,” Mr. Doctor said. While getting rid of costs like printing plants and delivery trucks would help a little, he said, it would not make up for the lost revenue.

Mr. Yemma said that print did bring in money at The Monitor, but most of that was from subscriptions, not advertising. Subscriptions account for about $9 million of The Monitor’s revenue, while print advertising makes up less than $1 million. Web revenue is about $1.3 million, he said. He is projecting that circulation revenue will drop, but he expects the magazine format will appeal to print advertisers. He is planning cuts, too.

Under the new system, reporters will be expected to file stories to the Web and update them a few times a day, and write longer pieces for the weekend magazine.

Mr. Yemma said he hoped to establish CSMonitor.com as an essential place for international news. The site now gets about three million page views a month, according to comScore, and Mr. Yemma said he wanted to increase that to 20 million to 30 million a month in the next five years. Even if he can fill the site only with remnant, cheap ads, he said, if visits grow as he is projecting, “that’s a sustainable model.”

The magazine, which will have an international focus, is meant to satisfy readers who are attached to print, Mr. Yemma said, but he said he did not expect it to be hugely profitable.

“We certainly know newsmagazines are cratering,” Mr. Yemma said. “We’re under no illusions about it being a growth vehicle.”

The Monitor was conceived as an alternative to the yellow journalism of the early 20th century. It is financed by the First Church of Christ, Scientist, in Boston through contributions and an endowment. The church wanted its publishing division to

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What the move meant for other newspapers, because The Monitor was nonprofit and most newspapers were not. But across the industry, news organizations “are going to simply have to be smaller organizations,” Mr. Ureneck said.

contributions and an endowment. The church wanted its publishing division to contribute to the church, and it plans to reduce its subsidy to about $4 million, from about $12 million, within five years. Mr. Yemma said he was worried about how subscribers would react.

Longtime readers "love coffee and a newspaper. So do I," Mr. Yemma said. "There's nothing like it. But everyone, sooner or later, is going to have to make the transition, and that's recognized."