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## Ottawa*Watch* 287: Nuz Canada and the aggregators

By Lloyd Mackey

*News aggregation is “old hat” in 2022, but undeniably, it has led to difficulties in the financial viability of legitimate news gathering agencies – mainstream or specialty. Just this week there were sweeping cuts from the various newsrooms of CTV network. While not too much has been revealed officially, it appears that advertising revenue – or more specifically, the lack of it – has been a major factor.*

*Through the years, the concept of aggregating has been seen as a threat to the economic base of both print and electronic media. The growth of social media has added to that pressure, undoubtedly.*

Nuz Canada is the new kid on the block. And it bears checking out.

I was clued in to its existence a couple of weeks ago, before this group’s website, [www.nuzcanada.ca](http://www.nuzcanada.ca), was operational.

“Watch for it,” I was told by a seasoned Christian politico. As it happens, this person is known for his steady hand and nuanced encouragement of Christian involvement in The Hill’s complex and sometimes convoluted way of getting things done.

I have been surveying the site for over a week, now, since it became accessible.

*Nuz Canada* is, to use the technical term, a news aggregator. (In case you have not figured it out, Nuz is a “cutesy” and eye-catching way of suggesting that the main point of the site is to disseminate “news”.)

I leave it to Ottawa*Watch* readers to check for themselves. But first, just a couple of comments:

- The people at *Nuz Canada* are keeping a low profile, for now. The initiative has come from some younger, mostly Christian media-savvy people, backed and encouraged by a few more senior, sane and sensible types who are cautioning them not to get too narcissistic. Those more senior types have suggested that the product should be judged by its own intrinsic value, rather than on the personalities and reputations of the activists behind it. The argument goes that, in due time, and to the benefit of all, the project will be out in the open.
- The site, itself, suggests that Nuz Canada is “to provide a one stop news shop for Canadians who desire an efficient and effective means of accessing a variety of news perspectives.” My contact advised me that there is a secondary motive – to provide a means for news stories deemed to be understanding of and/or constructively critical of social and fiscal conservative perspectives, to get fair

exposure. The alternative, this person suggests, is the burying of such stories behind the walls of ridicule or bombast sometimes – but not by any means always – built by adversaries of the politically-right-leaning.

- There is another motive, judging by the topics under which the stories are filed. That is to see that faith-based stories that might meet either with a yawn or a blast from certain mainstream journalists, are given a previously unavailable platform.
- Then there is the nature of this new animal – that of an aggregator. Unlike QMI Agency, the embryonic setup under which Sun Media is expected to redress the political media coverage balance with a more conservative approach, this is pretty much a low budget affair, utilizing aggregation technology to tackle its task. It is this aspect that will be the topic of the rest of today's piece.

In its paper form, aggregation has been around for years. Several times a week, in my Press Gallery mail box, I receive a copy of *Quorum*. It is prepared by the Parliamentary Library staff to provide people around The Hill with a wide selection of stories of presumed interest to the bureaucracy and the political classes.

A few years ago, I became aware of a specifically evangelical Christian aggregator which was making use of then-new technology to “grab” stories from websites, rather than clipping them out of newspapers and magazines, as does *Quorum*. Known as [www.christianity.ca](http://www.christianity.ca), it has provided an excellent selection of stories and, in the process, likely enhanced the recognition of a number of online Christian – and mainstream – news and analysis services.

[www.christianity.ca](http://www.christianity.ca) is owned by the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada. The EFC quite correctly identifies itself as an “umbrella” organization, seeking to enhance communication and research, among other things, among Canada's several million evangelical Christians.

The idea of using technology to “grab” news items that are already presumably in the public domain raised some questions, at the time the EFC started its aggregator. Those questions related to whether the news services from which it was lifting, or the authors of the stories, should be compensated by the site.

The EFC has maintained successfully that its service actually drives people to the sites from which it has grabbed the material. Their spokespersons gently suggest that they are increasing the readership of these sites, and, thus, its revenue potential.

That is probably true, if the sites are actually able to figure out a way to attract new advertising revenue – a task that is, at times, frustratingly complex.

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I raise this subject as something on which participants in the new media might want to reflect.

When I was editor of what is now *BC Christian News*, close to three decades ago, I was often visited by people who were most anxious to work for us, as ad sales people, reporters or administrative support staffers. And they were willing to toil for free. They liked the ministry and wanted to help. And they were out of work and wanted to build their resumes.

Invariably, after a few months of yeoman service, these people would tell me that they need money to raise their kids, pay their mortgages or, even, prepare for retirement. If I could not pay them, they would have to move on into the less-spiritually-satisfying but more financially-rewarding world of the mainstream media.

The questions raised by my own past experience are fodder for thought in 2010. The news aggregators, the websites from which they grab and the writers labouring for those sites, will need to retain some sort of dialog, if the aggregators are to continue a valuable service.

In the short term, it is good that people can contribute their skills to an altruistic ministry or service. In the longer term, it is necessary to address the questions raised by the biblical concept that “a labourer is worthy of his/her hire.”

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