

**Advertising The Star's falling circulation**  
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The Star's marketing team has unknowingly been putting out full-page advertisements of the newspaper's shrinking circulation numbers. Tiger pries into the inner workings of media auditing to hunt down dastardly acts of double counting.

It's not every day that Tiger comes across a story such as this: Like a deranged captive tiger turning against its handler, a seemingly innocuous indeed in self-promotion has unexpectedly turned around to bite the hand that feeds it.

Call it an own goal, a self-inflicted wound or a plan that backfired, all are equally embarrassing.

With its latest move, The Star's advertising team has only confirmed what most have been suspecting for years: The English daily's print circulation has been falling. And the ad team could not have presented the information in a clearer, in-your-face fashion

The Star's print circulation — basically the number of copies of the newspaper sold in a given day (excluding Sundays) — has seen a decline in recent years for a number of reasons. The first is the cannibalisation of its print business by its online news portal, The Star Online.

It doesn't help that when Star readers switch from print to online, they are also moving from the profit-making side to the loss-making side of the newspaper's publishing business.

Then there is the harder to prove opinion that readers have been abandoning The Star for its biased reporting. It is telling when the newspaper that used to be the go-to for political news saw its [readership numbers tumble](#) during the May 2013 general election.

Readers didn't just vanish. The public was ravenous for news, just not for The Star's version of events, and they turned to alternative news outlets such as Malaysiakini, which saw a huge spike in traffic to [4.3 million unique visits](#) on election night.

Now back to the shameless advertisement, bathed in red no less (*see above*). A colour auspicious for some, but not this time for the MCA-owned Star.

If Tiger were to be faced with the same predicament — falling circulation numbers and limp earnings — he would hang his head in shame and perhaps even go as far as to retire his stripes. But the last thing he would do is roar out loud for the world to know.

The Star has done just this. Quoting Audit Bureau of Circulations (ABC) numbers, the newspaper has just advertised its declining popularity.

Reading off the numbers for newspaper circulation in said advertisement and ignoring the ePaper circulation for reasons that will be explained later, Tiger sees circulation numbers shrinking slightly in the 18 months between January 2012 and June 2013, down by 1,204 copies/day to 289,362 copies/day to be exact.

If we start our comparison from July 2011, circulation has either been stagnant or increased only very slightly from 287,204 copies/day to 289,362 copies/day.

Back to the ePaper circulation numbers which Tiger saw necessary to leave out of the comparison.

A recent trick newspapers have been using to boost circulation and readership numbers is to package along with every ePaper (sometimes called tablet or digital replica) subscription, a free copy of the print edition. The Star calls this their 'bundle' package.

To put it simply, pay for a Star ePaper subscription and the print edition will be forced down your throat, even if the reason you switched to reading The Star on your tablet was to reduce paper use.

If you really insist on getting the ePaper only, then you are given the option, yes. But you will be charged in US dollars and after conversion will end up paying roughly the same price anyway. It's RM370 a year (at current exchange rates for US\$115) for just the ePaper against RM360 for the ePaper plus print subscription bundle. So why would anyone refuse the two-for-one bundle?

Really, the only reason the 'ePaper only' option is available, Tiger suspects, is for readers to get a hold of a copy of The Star outside the country.

What we get when the ABC adds up ePaper circulation numbers to print circulation numbers is essentially double counting.

In truth, ePaper circulation numbers don't matter at all, because every subscription to the ePaper is almost always accompanied by regular deliveries of the print version.

Newspapers have a clear incentive to inflate circulation and readership numbers to impress advertisers, but this latest trick, also played out by The Malay Mail won't fool Tiger.

GRRRRR!

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