The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

TV Launch Prompts Shakeup at Izvestia

By Irina Filatova

August 06, 2013



The Izvestia building in the center of Moscow.

The newspaper Izvestia — one of the oldest brands in Russia's media industry — is facing its second significant reshuffle in two years following an announcement Tuesday that it will transfer most of its news content to a new television channel set to debut later this year.

The publisher of Izvestia, News Media, will launch the television news channel as early as this fall, in a move that will allow the newspaper to focus on analytical articles, editor-in-chief of the newspaper Alexander Malyutin said.

Malyutin made the announcement on the day he returned to the editor's chair after a two-year absence.

The decision to separate analysis from news is the result of new realities in the media industry, where mounting competition from online resources is forcing the print media to look for unfilled niches, Malyutin said.

He pointed out, however, that the newspaper would not give up news coverage completely. Rather, the focus will be shifted to offer more investigative journalism.

The overhaul of the newspaper's editorial policy is "the right thing to do" amid the crisis cast on the traditional media by the rise of Internet competition, said Alexei Pankin, a media analyst and former opinion editor at Izvestia. To remain profitable, mass media should try any approach, although "nobody knows which of them will work out," he said.

Izvestia's editorial policy underwent a major shake-up in 2011 when News Media founder Aram Gabrelyanov decided to increase efficiency of the newspaper. That move resulted in massive layoffs, with more than a half of employees leaving the paper. The same year also saw the veteran newspaper, founded in 1917, move from its historical building on Pushkin Square.

Malyutin said he did not expect any significant staff changes this time.

"I don't foresee any layoffs," he said, adding that the company had yet to put together precise plans.

News Media — which is part of the National Media Group owned by Yury Kovalchuk, a close ally of President Vladimir Putin — is also a publisher of tabloids Zhizn and Tvoi Den and the news website LifeNews.

Plans to launch a 24-hour news channel were first voiced by Gabrelyanov in January. The kick-off was initially scheduled for May, he told RIA Novosti. The channel will broadcast on the LifeNews website, which will be relaunched, he said.

Alexander Potapov, the editor-in-chief at Izvestia who preceded Malyutin, will oversee the new TV channel.

Malyutin first took the editor's chair at Izvestia in 2011 but quit the following year, citing disagreements with Gabrelyanov over new editorial policy that involved integrating the newspaper with the LifeNews website.

The journalist said Tuesday that he decided to return because "the situation has changed." The editorial policy in 2011 was targeted at ramping up Izvestia's citation numbers, he said, adding that this goal was achieved earlier this year when the newspaper topped the list of the most cited print media compiled by Medialogia.

"Now we are entering a new stage," he said.

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Original url:
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2013/08/06/tv-launch-prompts-shakeup-at-izvestia-a26511