DistriPress

DistriPress Congress

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Save the date!

Welcome to the latest edition of the DistriPress newsletter.

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- **One wholesaler, two publishers:** the UK consolidation story
- **"People have never trusted social media less":** Ahead of Congress, Lindley Gooden on why trust is print's secret weapon

Germany's press distribution overhaul:

What international publishers need to know

Germany's press distribution system is undergoing its most significant restructuring in decades – one that will affect publishers, wholesalers, and international distributors operating in the market.

Germany's press wholesale market has long been characterised by a fragmented network of regional wholesalers – a structure that worked when print volumes were healthy, but has come under increasing strain as circulations have declined and operating costs have risen. By the mid-2020s, the economics of maintaining multiple competing wholesalers across the same regions were increasingly difficult to sustain.

The roots of the change go back to December 2025, when the Federal Cartel Office (FCO) intervened in consolidation plans put forward by FFF, the publisher-led initiative seeking to rationalise Germany's national wholesale network. In response, a separate body – the VMV – was formed to represent the interests of smaller and international publishers in the process. Here is where things stand.

A toleration, not an approval

In February, the FCO concluded its review of FFF's consolidation plans – and the outcome was not a straightforward green light. After requiring substantial changes to the original proposals, the FCO issued what amounts to a toleration of the plans rather than a formal approval.

A toleration leaves the FCO with a clear route back into the process; any future deviation from the agreed terms could reopen the case. The restructuring is proceeding, but under conditions, and under scrutiny.

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Termination notices and a phased timeline

Following the toleration, termination notices went to the eight wholesalers not selected to continue under the new structure, with transitions phased from March 2027 through to August 2027 depending on region. The end state is a single national wholesale structure: four system partners handling logistics in their respective areas, with a central body managing allocation. Full implementation is expected by early 2028.

Legal challenges under way

Since the toleration was issued, a series of court proceedings has tested the legal foundations of the restructuring, with mixed outcomes.

On 30 June, the Leipzig Regional Court issued a preliminary injunction preventing FFF publishers from terminating their supply relationship with one affected wholesaler. The court was the first to examine in detail whether the FFF model is permissible under competition law – and questioning whether the legal exemption protecting Germany's traditional Grosso system extends to FFF, which it treated as a new and separate structure. The ruling is provisional and applies only to the wholesaler in question; the underlying legal question will be decided in full proceedings, with a case before Hamburg's Regional Court now considered the most significant to watch.

A separate case before the Higher Regional Court in Düsseldorf produced a different result. On 30 July, the court rejected an application by wholesalers to compel the Federal Cartel Office to intervene and issue a prohibition order against FFF. The ruling attracted considerable attention in the industry, but the court made no finding on whether the FFF model is legal under competition law. That question remains open and is the subject of ongoing civil proceedings.

The restructuring continues on its planned timeline.

Travel point sales – airports and stations – are not affected by these changes. For many international titles, this is where the bulk of German sales already occurs.

What it means for publishers

The impact varies depending on where a publisher sits in the system. For FFF and the publishers backing the consolidation, the new structure is intended to create a more sustainable, unified wholesale network after years of fragmentation and declining margins across the sector.

For smaller, independent, and international publishers, the picture carries more uncertainty. New wholesalers taking over a region have no existing sales history for the titles within it – no data on volumes, retail relationships, or local demand, particularly for niche and international titles with smaller print runs.

Travel point sales – airports and stations – are not affected by these changes. For many international titles, this is where the bulk of sales already occurs, which may limit the practical impact for some publishers even as the wholesale landscape shifts elsewhere.

Smaller and international publishers continue to be represented in ongoing negotiations through the VMV.

Looking further ahead

Current discount structures are guaranteed until 2030. Beyond that point, a new cost model is expected to allocate real distribution costs more directly to publishers – a significant shift in principle, even though the details are not yet settled.

The restructuring remains live, with the Hamburg main proceedings now the critical case to watch. DistriPress will continue to monitor developments and update members as the picture becomes clearer.

Timeline: The story so far

- **December 2025:** FCO intervenes in FFF consolidation plans
- **February 2026:** FCO issues toleration
- **30 June 2026:** Leipzig Regional Court issues preliminary injunction
- **30 July 2026:** OLG Düsseldorf rejects application to force FCO intervention
- **March–August 2027:** Phased wholesaler transitions
- **Early 2028:** Full implementation expected
- **2030:** Current discount structures guaranteed until
- **TBC:** Hamburg Regional Court main proceedings

One wholesaler, two publishers:

The UK distribution market is consolidating

News UK and Associated Newspapers have both appointed Smiths News as their exclusive national wholesale partner. The deals mark a significant shift in how Britain's press supply chain is structured.

In June 2026, News UK – publisher of The Sun, The Times and The Sunday Times – announced that Smiths News would become its exclusive national wholesale distribution partner across Great Britain from July 2027, under a ten-year contract running to 2037.

The move was designed to simplify the wholesale structure, reduce duplication across the distribution network, and create a more economically sustainable model as print volumes decline and operating costs rise.

Shortly after, Associated Newspapers – publisher of the Daily Mail, The Mail on Sunday and The i – announced an equivalent deal, appointing Smiths News as its exclusive wholesale distributor across Great Britain from January 2028. Smiths News now holds contracts covering around 36% of the national newspapers and magazines market.

Industry observers described News UK's announcement as the first domino. The deals raise significant questions about the future role of InPost Newstrade, currently a major player in national newspaper and magazine distribution.

For members with questions about how these changes may affect their operations, get in touch.

Contact the DistriPress team

"They've never trusted it less":

The commercial case for physical media

At the DistriPress Annual Congress in Rotterdam this October, Lindley Gooden will make a case that as trust in digital media collapses, physical media stands to benefit commercially.

The talk is built around the argument that when digital trust collapses, physical media benefits. What's the data behind that?

Lindley Gooden: This idea grew from stories I heard while writing my book and is now driven by strong sentiment showing up in research into the mistrust of mainstream news. Studies from News Media Canada, Digiday, and Reuters are all pointing in the same direction – trust gaps opening up compared to social media. But the bottom line is this: people – particularly younger people – get their information from social media, but they've never trusted it less. They want media they can believe in, and are increasingly prepared to pay for print if that's where they can get it.

You describe the supply chain – publisher, printer, distributor, retailer – as "infrastructure for truth." What does that mean in practice for the people in the DistriPress room?
LG: Every part of the chain is responsible for a relationship with the consumer. The look, design, feel, buying process and overall product add a tangible sense of quality – and that pride shows a commitment to something substantial. In the talk, I'll put some numbers to the additional contribution made by everyone beyond the original storytelling. A well-made magazine can be likened to a vinyl album. And younger consumers still buy physical media when it means something special.

Anything you think will genuinely surprise delegates in Rotterdam?
LG: There's a research-based fork in the road where – after a specific period of time – trust and reputation become a clear commercial advantage over clickbait. That's what I'll be exploring in October.

Lindley Gooden speaks in the Print Forward session at the WAN-IFRA DistriPress Annual Congress, Rotterdam, 4–7 October 2026.

Register here

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