Washington Post, New York Times join forces

WASHINGTON, USA: Two arch rival US newspapers, the Washington Post and New York Times, agreed to work together to find ways to improve interaction with readers online.

Mozilla's Dan Sinker says current comment sections in online newspapers are terrible and he wants to change that. Image: Knight Foundation

With a grant from the Knight Foundation, the publications agreed to work with the group Mozilla "to build a new content and commenting platform that will allow audiences to more deeply engage with media coverage and help news organisations everywhere better manage user comments and contributions," a joint statement said.

The project aims to go beyond simple comments from readers, it will allow them to submit pictures or links, track discussions and manage their contributions and online identities.

"This isn't another commenting platform for publishers; it's a publishing platform for readers," said Greg Barber, Director of Digital News Projects at the Washington Post, recently bught by Amazon founder Jeff Bezos.

The system could be used by other news organisations as an alternative to proprietary software systems.

"The Web offers all sorts of new and exciting ways of engaging with communities far beyond the ubiquitous, and often terrible, comments sections at the bottom of articles," said Mozilla's Dan Sinker, Head of the Knight-Mozilla Open News initiative, who will lead the project.

New tools for newsrooms

"With this collaboration, we're bringing together top talent to build new tools for newsrooms to engage."

Marc Lavallee, Editor of Interactive News Technology at the New York Times, said the project "gives us the opportunity to create a flexible solution for our industry, one that can be thoughtfully woven into each publication's digital presence."

Marie Gilot of the Knight Foundation said it offers a way to get readers more engaged with news organisations, while allowing improved monitoring of comments.

"Commenting sections are often some of the worst corners of the Internet," she said in a blog post. "Vicious attacks and even racist and sexist language are routine, whether the commenters are anonymous or not."

Under the $3.89m grant, the system will be made available to all news organisations.

"A preliminary study of commenting systems funded by Knight this year found a lot of social good in comments," Gilot wrote.

The comments sections of newspapers contain vicious attacks, sexist and racist comments and that can be changed says Marie Gilot of the Knight Foundation. Image: Knight Foundation.

"Readers, researchers found, turn to comments for social cues on how to react to a story; they like reading contributions from experts in the comments; and they are more careful about their own comments if the comments are permanent and attributed to them," Gilot said.

Source: AFP via I-Net Bridge